

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF A HUNGARIAN SOCIAL
MOVEMENT INTO A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION:
THE CASE OF MILLA**

By
Luca Szücs

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisors: prof. Dorit Geva
 prof. Jean-Louis Fabiani

Budapest, Hungary
2014

Abstract

In this thesis, I explore why and how one of the biggest social movements in the recent history of Hungary ceased to exist. Milla successfully mobilized masses against the right wing government between December 2010 and October 2012. As a result of its mobilizing capability against the right wing government and its influential brand, political actors wanted to make a coalition with Milla in order to channel its force in the formal political arena for the 2014 parliamentary elections. Through semi-structured interviews that I conducted with group members, I show how, in addition to external factors such as the emergence of political parties as alliances, the outcome of Milla was shaped by internal factors, such the malfunction of the organization, the lack of transparency in decision making process, the lack of clear conceptual vision and therefore strategy. My approach contributes to the understanding that internal and external factors are interdependent and mutually constitute each other; therefore it is impossible to study them separately in relation to the outcome of movements.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my two supervisors, Dorit Geva and Jean-Louis Fabiani, for their patience, helpful critique and moral support during my work on this thesis. Also, I would like to thank to Tom Rooney from the Center for Academic Writing for his useful comments on my writing. Last but not least, I would like to thank my interviewees who provided me with rich material for my research.

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Introduction

The story of Milla (One Million for the Freedom of Press in Hungary) is closely connected to and determined by the recent realignment of the political landscape in Hungary. The overwhelming victory of the mainstream rightist party of Hungary, Fidesz, in April 2010 largely reshaped the political field of the country both in terms of institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics. The triumph of this populist nationalist party was due to the voters' deep dissatisfaction with the eight-year governance and poor political performance of the previous government led by the coalition of the Socialist Party (MSZP) and the liberal party, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ). Fidesz gained two-thirds of mandates, enabling it to process rapid decision-making without consulting other political actors. Among many features, they fundamentally changed the public legal infrastructure, transformed the governing institutions, including judiciary, parliament, higher education, media, and the constitution was also rewritten. As a result of this sweeping victory over the oppositional parties, Fidesz drastically decreased the balance of power and the Prime Minister can act with full powers (Bozóki 2012).

The political agency of Fidesz triggered a series of demonstrations and protests under the first turnover of its governance. This was the moment when Milla appeared on the stage as a response to the media law that was introduced by the new government, rather hastily, in 2010. There are two main reasons that stand behind the sudden and incredible success of the early demonstrations that were organized by Milla: first, organizers of Milla made the perfect decision in terms of the topic- choice, since issues on media reforms, free press and censorship were always very sensitive questions that has had a long history in the political debates of the post-socialist transitional period (Bognár et al. 2013). Second, after the election, there was a void in the political terrain that institutionalized oppositional parties

could not fill; parties on the so -called left were in complete chaos due to their failures; therefore they were unable to participate with vigour and form a real and powerful opposition that could have responded to challenges of the government (Bognár et al. 2013). Moreover, the dominance of the old political elites over the political landscape for 20 years, the permanence of the bipolar political system – the alternation of the ‘left’ and ‘right’ governments – and the lack of political alternatives, triggered a considerable amount of dissatisfaction with mainstream politics in 2010 (Kaldor et. al 2012).

This was the political situation in 2010 in which the Milla emerged and became one of the most powerful actors in the opposition. After the election of 2010 and its consequent aftermath in the political scenario, dissatisfied citizens were not mobilized by oppositional political parties but instead by civil and grassroots organizations. Between January 2011 and October 2012 Milla had ten big protests, supported and contributed to seven others and organized eight different programs and events. After successfully mobilizing tens of thousands of people over two years, according to members’ accounts, there was a huge political pressure on Milla to channel their forces and adherents into the more institutionalized politics. In the summer of 2012, the previous Socialist Prime Minister, Gordon Bajnai decided to return to mainstream politics, though not as a member of the Socialist Party. Aiming to break the bipolar political field, he wanted to build up a strong oppositional coalition and to launch a so-called electoral movement – for which he wanted to gain the support of the Green Party (LMP) also – that could both counterweight the Socialist Party and overthrow the rightist government. Regarding the huge success and ostensible mass basis of Milla, Bajnai decided to announce his project under the banner and in the demonstration of Milla in October 2012. This request was approved by Milla under the conditions of joining the electoral movement. Bajnai accepted this condition, but in turn, he also brought the trade union movement Solidarity (Szolidaritás) into his project. Consequently, after the October 2012

demonstration, the coalition of Bajnai's foundation, Milla, and Solidarity was established and later on this was augmented by one faction of the Hungarian Green Party also. During 2013, under the banner of Together 2014 (Együtt 2014) they became a formal party in order to challenge and overthrow the Fidesz government in the election of 2014. During this formalization process, Milla ceased to exist as a movement and only the informal leader and a very few members of the organization entered into politics. Nevertheless, the attempt to challenge Fidesz was unsuccessful and the rightist government was re-elected in April 2014.

This brief summary about the political context and the story of Milla brings up the question: why and how did Milla cease to exist as a social movement? Can this outcome be regarded as the logical consequence of its decision to enter into politics? Or was it the result of the inner mechanism of the organization? I will examine these issues in my thesis, arguing that external and internal factors of the outcome are interdependent; therefore the functioning of Milla largely defined its outcome and the way the coalition was made with political alliances.

In Chapter 1, I outline the broader theoretical framework of my research, focusing on the 'outcome' discourse in the social movement research. Drawing on Marco Giugni's (1999) classification that divides the literature into two main clusters, external and internal debate, first I will deal with external factors of social movements' outcomes. As regards this, I will particularly concentrate on the relationship between social movements and political parties. Moreover, I will show how cultural approach contributes to the understanding of strategies and tactics. Afterwards, I will discuss the internal factors of social movements, including studies on social movement organizations and participatory democracy. Ultimately, I will linger on the previous studies on Milla. The literature review reflects on the structure of my interpretative chapters since later in this thesis I will focus on how Milla's political alliances were formed as well as discuss the organizational characteristics of the group.

In chapter 2, I will argue that my methodology was particularly suit to my research question since with the help of the thirteen semi-structured interviews that I conducted with group members I gained a rich material that allowed me to unfold the internal factors of the outcome in relation to external factors.

Chapter 3 and chapter 4 constitute the interpretative parts of the thesis. First, in the third chapter, I will show how the lack of conceptual vision and agreement on aims and strategies in Milla determined its fate. Moreover, I will represent that the lack of political agenda was disguised by the powerful brand of Milla. In the last section of this chapter, I will focus on the question of how coalition was formed between Milla and political organizations.

I will focus on internal factors in chapter 4 and I will show how both backgrounds and networks of members shaped the structure of the organization and strategies of movement. Moreover, I will point out that the malfunctioning organization largely defined the way Milla entered into politics and its outcome.

1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In my literature review, theories on social movements' outcomes will constitute the broader theoretical framework of my case study. Following the main studies on this topic, I will show how both internal and external factors contribute to certain outcomes of movements. As regards the latter one, I will focus on the relationship between political parties and movements. Afterwards I will argue for the importance of the analysis of culture in relation to the strategic and tactical choices of movements. The cultural approach will lead to the discussion of theories that deal with organizational aspects and decision making practices of social movements. In the last section of my literature review, I will offer a brief overview of the previous writings on Milla.

1.1 Outcomes

Several social movement scholars point out that research on the outcomes and consequences was a neglected terrain of the literature (e.g. Giugni 1998,1999; Kriesi 2004); however recent studies on the topic show that there has been a development in the research on this aspect of movements. (Amenta and Caren 2004; Giugni 2004; Earl 2004; Whittier 2004;).

In his systematic research (Giugni 1998, 1999) on the existing outcome literatures, Marco Giugni notes that the lack of studies on the topic relates to the fact that there was a shift in the discourse since previous theories concentrated on the failure or success of protests (Giugni 1999: 20). Giugni shows the limitations of this approach since it disregards the fact that there are various views on aims and goals within a movement that impedes to decide

whether a movement failed or succeeded (1999: 21). Also, dealing with the binary pairs of failure and success involves the danger of subjectivity since outcomes can be interpreted differently – as a success or as a failure – by movement participants or outsiders (1999: 21). In this respect, I find it crucial to examine how the outcome of Milla relates to the initial demands and aims as well as how these demands and aims have been altered by the time within the organization.

In his most recent essay on this issue, Giugni argues that success and failure aspects of movements are inseparable, they are “two sides of the same coin (...) it is a zero-sum game: movements either succeed or fail” (Giugni 2013). Regarding the outcome of Milla, it can be interpreted as failure since it is not just ceased to exist as a movement but it is also failed to displace the government; however Milla could mobilize huge masses that can be seen as a real success.

Classifying previous theories that are connected to the topic of outcomes, Giugni creates two distinct but overlapping groups of theories – the disruption/moderation debate and the internal/external debate (Giugni 1999: 16). Studies that relate to the first debate address the question of whether which social movement’s tactics are more efficient as regards to social change, the moderate or a disruptive one. Nevertheless, I will focus on studies that are grouped around the second, internal/external issue that refers to the question of whether internal or external factors have a more crucial influence on the outcomes of social movements (Giugni 1999: 18). In this respect, the latter question might also be placed in the larger sociological- theoretical frame of structure and agency.

The discussed literature has a tendency to overemphasize the significance of one or the other approach – the internal or the external one – or put those methodologies in opposition to each other. However, in my analysis on the outcome of Milla, I will argue that these factors can not be researched separately since internal and external factors mutually constitute each

other. Nevertheless, as a result of this separated approach of the social movement research, I will discuss the literatures on external and internal factors independently. Concerning the external factors, I will focus on the relationship between the political environment and social movements.

1.2 The Relationship between Social Movements and Political Parties

“Political process” and “political opportunity structure” theories play a crucial part in the analysis of the interplay between political context and social movements, and in the explanation of a movement’s outcomes. Alongside resource mobilization and framing processes, the political opportunity theories prevail in the social movement research; however, there is a definitional “sloppiness” around the term in the burgeoning literature, as Hanspeter Kriesi points it out (2004:68). In general, the political opportunity approach builds on the assumption that the “development of movements reflects, responds to, and sometimes alters the realities of politics and policy” (Meyer 2004: 139). In relation to the political opportunity approach, Giugni underlines the importance of the examination “the system of alliances and opponent and the structure of the state” (1998: 381).

Leaving behind the idea that social movements can be treated as independent entities from institutionalized politics or that they are “necessarily extrainstitutional” (Katzenstein 1998: 195 quoted in Goldstone 2003:1), Goldstone shows that social movements and institutionalized politics are closely intertwined and, in fact, social movements play a significant role in ‘normal politics’ (Goldstone 2003: 2). As Goldstone writes, the studies of

the volume of *States, Parties and Social Movements* represents that social movements and their agency enmeshes political parties and state institutions; in many cases political parties are evolved from movements or they are closely related to movements (Goldstone 2003: 2–4).

In this respect, I can point out the situation of the Hungarian green and ecological social movements and their relations to the Hungarian Green Party, Politics Can Be Different (LMP). In his study on the history of the green party, András Tóth (2013) shows that LMP has a long and shared history with social movements that goes back to the Socialist period, when ecologic – green circles emerged and functioned semi-illegally in the universities and colleges due to their oppositional activities (2013: 182). He explains that in the 1980s, one of the first, openly oppositional organizations was the Danube circle (Duna kör) that fought against the construction of the hydroelectric power plant in Bős-Nagymaros and succeeded launching the most significant mass protests before the collapse of socialism. As a result of permanent demonstrations the movement successfully defeated the planned construction, one of the first signs of the irrevocably weakening state party for the wider society (Tóth 2013: 182).

After the regime change, the Danube circle gave rise to several ecologic- green movements and organizations during the 1990s. Nevertheless, contrary to Western green movements that are mainly leftist in terms of political ideology, the Hungarian organizations had tended to be more conservative and therefore rightist in their political agenda as a result of their oppositional past and their struggle against the Socialist regime that was identified with the Left (Tóth 2013: 182–183). This political tendency has altered in the last ten years due to the accelerated neo-capitalist globalization and the emergence of a new generation without direct experiences of Socialism. During the 1990s, the green organizations became the most effective institutionalized civil organizations in Hungary, entailing strong lobby

activity in the polity. Moreover, their broadening network with other international political organizations contributed to their rising success (Tóth 2013: 184).

LMP was rooted in the Védegylet, one of the main green organizations of Hungary and became a party as a response to the political opportunity and the riots and upheaval around the year of 2006¹ and the neoliberal governance of the leftist coalition (Tóth 2013: 188–189). In 2010, the party got into the Parliament, though after two years, LMP had split up, and one faction joined the electoral movement – including Milla and Solidarity – led by Gordon Bajnai in order to challenge the government. Consequently, similarly to Goldstone's above mentioned thoughts, Bajnai also strongly counted on the support of social movements in his political project to challenge Fidesz.

The political channelling of movements by party politics is the focus of many researches; however, while the previous literature tends to explain it as a co-optation and regards it as a failure ([1977]1979), recent studies emphasize the alliance character of the relationship between social movements and political parties and interpret these relations as coalition and cooperation.

Writing about the demise of a protest, Piven and Cloward ([1977]1979) point out that political parties allied with elites tend to integrate the movements into the political field and “make efforts to channel the energies and angers of the protestors into more legitimate and less disruptive forms of political behaviour, in part by offering incentives to movement leaders or in other words, by co-opting them” (1979: 30).

Leaving behind the notion of co-optation notion, Paul Almeida writes about the “social movement partyism” and he presents well-functioning coalitions between oppositional political parties and social movements that has become a prevailing strategy in the recent

¹ The re-election of the Socialist-Liberal coalition (MSZP-SZDSZ) in 2006, its neoliberal governance, the start of the economic crisis, the austerity measures that were imposed on the population, the scandals around the previous socialist Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány and a general distrust toward the governing parties gave rise to massive and permanent right and far right demonstrations that took place before the parliament in Budapest for years.

years in Latin American politics in order to fight against neo-liberal policies (2010: 170). This brief overview demonstrates that building up alliances with formal political actors – as Milla also did – is a common phenomenon in the social movement literature.

The analysis of the interaction between social movements and their political environment entails the question of strategic and tactical choices of movements and of how these strategies are shaped by various conditions such as culture or internal factors, such as organization. These are the very questions that I will discuss in the following two sections.

1.3 Culture as a Strategy

Aside from political-structural factors, culture also plays a crucial role in the shaping of movements' strategies and therefore their outcomes. As Maney and others show, organisational form, targets, movement's goals and claims are defined by cultural factors (Maney et. al. 2012:15)

The cultural sociologist Ann Swidler's study (1986) contributes to the understanding of how goals are pursued in social movement organizations. Setting aside the Weberian and Parsonian approach that focuses on goals, rationale values and gives an end-focused sociological explanation of action (Swidler 1986: 274), Swidler argues for a cultural explanation that concentrates on the broader cultural 'assemblage' and strategies of an action (Swidler 1986: 277). She brings the 'poverty of culture' example into her argument and points out that poor people share the same values and preferences as middle class people; although, they lack certain skills, style and informal networks that are indispensable for the realization of their wishes. As Swidler explains it, they lack a cultural equipment, a 'tool kit' that makes people capable of constructing a line of action (1986:277). As she notes,

A culture is not a unified system that pushes action in a consistent direction. Rather, it is more like a "tool kit" or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action. Both individuals and groups know how to do different kinds of things in different circumstances (1986: 277).

Swidler's concept of 'tool kit' will be particularly crucial in the discussion of the brand making strategy of Milla and then how this became a hindrance to develop strategy in the long run. The notion of 'tool kit' also helps to understand the importance of the members' networks and backgrounds in the shaping of tactics and strategies.

Following Swidler's path, Francesca Polletta also emphasizes the significance of the analysis of culture in relation to activists' strategic decision making processes. Arguing against the notion that culture and strategy are opposed to each other, she claims that culture can be strategic also. Moreover, she adds that the sharp differentiation between culture and strategy misses the fact that "what counts as strategic is cultural" (Polletta 2012: 44). As she writes,

The culture that we use most is the culture that is familiar, that is part of the way we do things, conduct relationships, talk about politics, express emotions, and so on. The culture that matters is not free-floating, but rather anchored in familiar relationships, rules and routines (Polletta 2012: 45).

The cultural explanations play a significant role in the understanding of how strategies and tactics were made in Milla. However, the issues of culture and strategy are closely affiliated to the organizational factors of social movements' outcomes. I will examine this in more detail in the next section of the chapter.

1.4 Social Movement Organizations

The usage of the term social movement organization (SMO) is very widespread in the literature; however, there is no agreement on its meaning among social movement scholars

due to the diversity of organizational forms in which activists work (Della Porta and Diani [1999] 2006: 140). In a general sense, talking about social movement organizations, the literature distinguishes two broad clusters of terms: the first refers to an organization constituted by individual actors, while the second one interprets movement organization as a “complex system of connected, interdependent organizations” (Della Porta and Diani [1999] 2006: 139). Regarding Milla, I interpret the movement as a grassroots organization which is constituted by individual actors.

Early studies show that there has been a long debate on organizational forms in the social movement literature. Building on her experiences with feminist organizations in the 1960s and early 1970s, Jo Freeman unfolds the structural problems of these organizations and represents the misleading ideology of rejecting hierarchy and advocating participatory practices and their detrimental effects. She points out the impossibility of the existence of structureless group since she writes, “any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some fashion” ([1972] 2013: 232).

Gamson argues that successful groups have centralized, bureaucratized and hierarchical forms of organization (Gamson [1975] 1990: 91–103). As opposed to this, Piven and Cloward claim that informal and non- bureaucratic organizations are more effective in their struggle than formal ones ([1977] 1979: 21–22).

In their study on the social movement organizational literature, Elisabeth Clemens and Debra Minkoff (2004) point out that in recent decades, the hegemonic dominance of the resource mobilization discourse in the social movement research appropriated the concept of organization and regarded it as a “resource for, or tool of, social movement activists” (2004: 155). As opposed to Piven’ and Cloward’s anti-organization argument, the resource mobilization discourse supported a homogenous organization concept, namely “the more

organization, the better the prospect for mobilization and success” (Clemens and Minkoff 2004: 155).

The question of participatory democracy and direct democratic practices in movements has become the focus of recent research on social movement organizations. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani examine social movements in relation to organizational dilemmas and democratic practices, and illuminate how grassroots organizations, such as Milla, tend to prefer participatory models with weak formal structuration (Della Porta and Diani [1999] 2006: 149).

Aldon Morris and Suzanne Staggenborg scrutinize a neglected field of the organizational theories: the role of leadership in social movement organizations. As they argue: “leaders are critical to social movements: they inspire commitment, mobilize resources, create and recognize opportunities, devise strategies frame demands and influence outcomes” (2004: 171). The examination of leadership in relations to the culturally determined strategy and decision making processes is decidedly important in the case of Milla since it had a quite strong and charismatic leadership.

1.5 Previous Research on Milla

So far just a few studies have been written about Milla. In this regard, I should highlight Tamás György’s thought- provoking master thesis (2012) on the online activism and social media usage of Milla. His writing focuses on the following three main questions: how the participation in social movements is shaped by social networking sites, how Milla’s Facebook page functions as a ‘place’ for debates and how successful a tool it is in the organization of collective action both online and offline.

The next study about Milla was written by a journalist György Petőcz (2013) – and therefore a less academic piece – offers a chronological overview of the history of Milla through its events and demonstrations. According to Petőcz, the contradictions around Milla were more the result of the political context in which it emerged, rather than conceptual and organizational problems (2013: 293). In addition to this, I will argue that ‘contradictories’ around Milla and its outcome were determined by internal factors also.

In an unpublished conference paper (2013), Éva Bognár and others contextualize Milla with the so-called media wars of the 1990s and point out the importance of the issue of the free press in the political discourses of Hungary and therefore in the formation of Milla as well. The paper briefly touches upon the limits of the movement, mentioning that Milla was mainly based on a Budapest network and the background of members were mainly intellectual and academic. This prevented the movement from mobilizing more people or finding framings that might resonate in the wider Hungarian society.

In the process of applying social movement theoretical apparatus, I encountered several difficulties due to the fact that these theories are mainly built on the analysis of very different sorts of movements, such as lower class, civil rights, the so-called new social movements, or in recent times, on the Occupy movements. Kaldor and others (2012) also point out the limitations of conventional concepts and theories of social movements since “they imply a particular form of activism” (Kaldor et al. 2004: 2) therefore they introduce the term of subterranean politics in order to describe recent protests and demonstrations throughout Europe, including Milla. Comparing recent demonstrations in Italy, Germany, Spain, Hungary and London, they show that the main concern of these protests is with “process, accountability and transparency” (2012: 9); then they add that: “the most important finding that emerges from our project is that what is shared across different types of protests, actions, campaigns and initiatives is extensive frustration with formal politics as it is currently

practiced” (2012: 11). Accordingly, these were the very characteristics of Milla in the first two years of its functioning.

In conclusion, the overview of the relevant theories and previous literature on Milla reveals that social movement outcomes are both shaped by external and internal factors. The broader political environment, the system of alliances, and the role of culture and organizational factors largely define the way a movement develops and terminates. Building on the above delineated theories, the structure of the interpretative chapters will also reflect on the external and internal debate; therefore I will deal with the relationship between Milla and political organizations in the third chapter, while I will more focus on the organizational aspects in the fourth one. However, due to my methodological approach I will mainly unfold the outcome of Milla through the examination of internal factors. Nevertheless, my analysis will also illuminate that there is no sharp line between the two approaches – internal and external factors mutually constitute each other – therefore I will argue for a synthesis of the two perspective in a further research.

2. Methodology

My research question and methodology is largely shaped by my experiences in Milla. I was involved in the activity of Milla during the different stages of the movement; this gave me an enormous insight into how Milla as an organization functioned, including how decisions were made and how issues and frames were produced and to understand how these factors contributed to the outcome of Milla. Therefore this ‘retrospective participant observation’ helped me to capture specific crucial aspects of the mechanism of Milla by sociological terms.

My interpretative chapters (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) are based on the thirteen semi-structured interviews that I conducted in April 2014. The thirteen chosen respondents cover the broad range of voices, opinions and views that were present in the organization. The interviews were in-person, and an average of 1,5 – 2 hours. My questions are clustered in five groups: personal involvement, division of labour, group dynamics, about Milla and wishful thinking (see Appendix for the sample interview guide).

The first three clusters of questions allowed me to elaborate on the organizational aspects of Milla that I will mainly discuss in the fourth chapters. The topic of personal involvement shows that the structure of the group was shaped by pre-existing networks of group members. The analysis of networks also helped me to understand how Milla was embedded in a larger network, demonstrating the interdependence of internal and external factors of movements. Questions related to the division of labour and group dynamics allowed me to show the participatory democratic practices of Milla and to unfold the relationship between the division of labour and the participation in decision making processes, particularly the notion of “vote with your work”. In the third chapter, I will unfold mainly the results of

questions that relate to the cluster of ‘about Milla’, representing how aims and frames of Milla altered by the time and how political alliances were formed.

By the ‘wishful thinking’ section, I aimed to follow Giugni’s advice and I wanted to understand what could be learnt from the outcome of Milla. As Giugni notes, “knowing what went wrong and what we did wrong helps us do better the next time. The same wise old principle holds for the study of social movement outcomes. Both scholars and activists have a lot to learn from failed movement actions, particularly by comparing them with successful actions” (2013).

Ultimately, my position in the field allowed me to raise certain questions that I could not have done without my background and to gain a rich material through personal narratives of members. This method, I think, is particularly suits to the research question of the thesis and help to understand the interconnected nature of internal and external factors of movements’ outcomes.

3. An Overview of Milla

Between January 2011 and October 2012 Milla had ten big protests, supported and contributed to seven others and organized eight different programs and events. The largest demonstrations of Milla (with the attendance of tens of thousands of people) were always organized on the national holiday of the 1848 Revolution and on the occasion of the revolution against the Soviet occupation in October 1956. It is crucial to note that the story of Milla is closely related to the place where the main rallies took place, a big boulevard in the heart of Budapest with the symbolic name of Free Press. The success of Milla was significant because mobilizing such huge masses previously was the domain of the right and far right wing in Hungary (Rajacic 2007; Halmai 2011; Bognár et al. 2013).

Why did Milla cease to exist as a social movement and entered into formal politics if it could mobilize dissatisfied citizens successfully? How does this transformation relate to its frames, aims, political agenda and its liaisons with political alliances? These are the questions that I will examine in this chapter. In the first two subsections, I will briefly present Milla by mapping its self-definition, its changing aims and demands. Through an examination of the changing frames of Milla, I will also detect the transformations of its purposes from the designated ‘raising civil awareness’ idea to aiming to challenge the Orbán administration. Afterwards I will show how the well-built up Milla ‘brand’ contributed to the successful mobilizations of the movement but also how this powerful projection of the brand disguised the lack of a clear political agenda and strategy. Ultimately, in the last two subsections of this

chapter, I will deal with the shortage of conceptual coherence in Milla, and its relationship with political parties.

3.1. The frames and aims of Milla

On 15 January 2012, a day long team - building workshop took place in order to find answers to the burning questions of the identity and purpose of Milla. As the inner hand-out of the workshop says,

There are three reasons why we have to find out the identity of Milla. First, we should have to know the purpose of Milla if we are asked about it by the newspapers and the media. Second, it is important because of the recruitment – if someone wants join to us, he or she has to be informed about the aims of the organization. Third, the determination of the identity of Milla is indispensable for the creation of an integrated and well- functioning organization. Our agency has to be coherent. (Milla unpublished hand-out, 2012)

Although this meeting followed several similar attempts, Milla always lacked a clear and well-determined conceptual basis for an effective agency that largely determined its fate. Nevertheless, during the aforementioned brainstorming session, members were asked to think about keywords with which they could define what Milla is; people wrote on a board the following words:

loveable impotency, communication, platform, catalyser, media, opposition outside the parliament, anti-politics, social sensibility/responsibility, civil participation, civil yuppies, new voice, colourful, clarity, freedom, Budapest, activism, community, creativity, sexy, awesome, ideas, experimentation, social criticism, perplexity, debate, social online media, amateur

These keywords demonstrate the eclectic features and highlight the broader framework of Milla and its perpetually repeated civil character. During this period, the primary aim of Milla

was to fight against the demolition of the democracy and all sorts of anti-democratic decisions, to create a so-called civil platform that gives voice to democratic civil initiatives and other protest groups through its demonstrations; as well as to bring forth active citizens and public awareness. Alongside the demonstrations, through the Facebook page and thematic blogs, Milla wanted to channel critical information about Hungary. The very concept was that the strengthening civil society will form the main oppositional platform, from which new political parties will emerge and fight against the government.² As I wrote in the introduction, this conception was a response to the political opportunity of the post-election period between 2010 and 2011 when oppositional parties were not able to organize and challenge the government thus instead of them, Milla filled the void in the political field of the opposition. Moreover, they also wanted to function as a ‘watchdog’ (Petőcz 2013) or as the control of the power holders.

On the basis of the so-called twelve points – demands – of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution, Milla also worked out its own one as a demand-list for both the already existing and the future democratic parties. These is the following:

freedom of the press, freedom of religion, democratic elections, distribution of tax burdens, equal opportunities, independent jurisdiction, democratic legislature, transparency, labour rights, public education, sustainable development, deeper integration into the EU (English translation in Bognár 2013).

Consequently, these keywords and very eclectic ideas show that Milla was a multiple issue group with very general demands and aims and that liberal democratic theories were the closest to the agenda of Milla (Bognár 2013).

Creating a ‘platform’ for citizens and civil issues was symbolically achieved through the well-branded demonstrations and through the use of the social media site and various blogs. From an overview of ten big demonstrations that were held between January 2011 and

² In this respect it is crucial to note that the political career of the 4K! (Negyedik köztársaság – Fourth Republic) new leftist political party started on the stage of Milla, and it was due to the ‘platform’ of Milla that these politicians appeared in the public sphere for the first time.

October 2012, one can trace the shift that took place within the discourse of Milla. The first three demonstrations strictly concentrated on the new Media Law and on the issue of the free press, then the following ones clearly reflected on all sorts of problematic issues that governmental politics brought up; thus from a single-issue movement Milla became a multiple issue one and it turned into be the main oppositional protest movement against the government.

As a reaction to the neo-liberal social policy of the government and its nationalist populist and very homogeneous society-vision, Milla always stood for human rights and the rights of minorities, therefore representatives of Roma people, feminists, LMBTQ groups and homeless people – mainly in the form of NGOs – became permanent actors on the stage of Milla. As Tamás György shows, similarly to demonstrations the majority of the Facebook posts of Milla page (EMS) are categorized as “awareness or advocacy” posts (György 2012: 57). As I will demonstrate that in the fourth chapter with the examination of professional backgrounds of Milla members, the significant presence of these social topics both in the online and offline activity of Milla is related to the fact that Milla was deeply embedded in the NGOs networks in Hungary. As Petőcz writes, the embeddedness of Milla in the NGO world of Hungary made it a target of criticism both from the rightist and non-rightist circles.

These western types of NGOs were established in the 1990s and were concentrated in Budapest with resources that came from mainly the US. These NGOs worked with a small intellectual circle that was closely linked to the leftist and liberal political parties. Unfortunately the nice principle of the protection of human rights and the huge achievements of these organizations were often offended by the rightist wing due to their social background. Nevertheless, besides this, an ‘internal’ criticism also emerged against these NGOs due to their elitist and enlightening characteristics (Pöcze 2013: 300).

Therefore, the strongly civil guise of Milla was due to the significant presence of the NGOs and the embeddedness of Milla in NGO networks. However, it can be also related to the

phenomenon that in the so-called transitional period of Hungary the establishment of NGOs substituted (and perhaps constituted) the civil society (Dvornik 2013:128).

Movement activities, such as demonstrations, flash mobs, and also the use of social media site, shaped the ‘master frames’ of ‘strong civil society’, ‘democracy’ and the ‘raising civil-awareness’ that were resonant to the broader audience during the year of 2011 (Benford and Snow 2000: 619–620). The flexibility and inclusivity of the frames blurred the boundaries between different party political views and allowed disaffected people to join in the demonstrations. Moreover, these frames also enabled Milla to elevate the problems that became visible by the victory of Fidesz to a more abstract and universal level and to demand large scale structural changes. In 2011, demanding transparency and profound structural changes was a powerful tactic with which Milla could successfully mobilize people who were disappointed with formal politics.

Nevertheless, first and foremost, Milla was a protest movement, and the ultimate aim of both mobilized people in the demonstrations and members in the organization was to displace the government. Although Milla did not want to step into an institutionalized political path for a long time. As one of my respondents, Pál described, “Milla wanted to be a political organization without having political agenda and political alliances”. This ostensibly paradoxical situation and vague conception about the relationship with formal politics led to an increasing tension within Milla later on.

However, aside from the well-chosen frames and the political opportunity to which they effectively responded, the success of Milla particularly depended on the fact that it built up a highly influential brand and created a specific visual language around its Facebook page and its demonstrations.

3.2. Milla as a Brand

Referring to Milla as a brand was a recurring topic in my interviews and many of my informants think that the success of the movement was partly due to the fact that it functioned as a powerful brand. The reason is twofold: first, the informal leader was a so-called movement entrepreneur³ with huge experience in organizing demonstrations. Second, many members pursued artistic professions, for instance in the group there was a theatre director, media artists, hip-hop artists, a visual jockey and a poet, while some others came from the so-called creative industry. One of my respondents, Ivan, was particularly experienced with political campaigns since he made the campaign videos for the Socialist Party (MSZP) for eight years. Consequently the success of the demonstrations largely depended on their professional approach to the ‘genre’. In this regard, applying Polletta’s cultural approach and her formula of “what counts as strategic is cultural” (Polletta 2009: 44), it is discernable that the demonstrations and other activities of Milla were largely shaped by the cultural repertoires and ‘tool kits’ of members.

Consequently due to this expertise, the demonstrations were preceded by short, but impressive videos that were circulating on social media sites for two weeks with the function of mobilizing people for demonstrations. One of the most popular videos was a hip-hop song, entitled *Nem tetszik a rendszer*⁴ (*I don’t like the system*) that was made for the 23 October demonstration in 2011. The video became a real hit song immediately after it was released; as György’s research shows, within the first 12 hours, 3397 people shared the video (György

³ From the perspective of resource mobilization approach, the leader of the Milla might be also seen as a political or social movement entrepreneur “who mobilizes resources, and found organizations in response to incentives, risks and opportunities” (Aldon and Staggenborg, 2004: 173).

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSP81Che1X0> [last accessed 02 June 2014]

2012: 40). The song was also performed in the demonstration and as a result of it, the singer started to appear in the media, as the second spokesperson of Milla.

The demonstrations were also comprehended as shows or performances and they were directed by people with theatrical background. The speeches were carefully written, the appearance of music bands and poets on the stage became part of the repertoire of the demonstrations. Besides Milla, between 2011 and 2014, many other social movements emerged against the Orbán administration, and they started to use the same cultural repertoire for the mobilization. As one of my respondents, Gábor said, “we never wanted to monopolize the market of protests. The Milla more functioned as a resource; we always helped other protests groups with our expertise and we intended to channel our knowledge to this protest-network. In this respect, it is ironic that the CÖF⁵ (civil union – civil összefogás) learnt a lot from Milla.”

This professionalism largely contributed to the collective euphoric feeling of these events; however it was also misleading, since the well-established Milla brand disguised the lack of real strategies and agenda. As one of my respondents, Béla noted,

We did not have a particular political agenda beyond that the whole system and structure should be changed. The only content that we had was a typical social-liberal agenda: human rights, social sensibility toward inequalities, we were responsible for the Roma people (...) the newness was the way we organized the demonstrations, the advertisement, the public relations...it was new as an event, while the online and offline activism attracted many young people, that was refreshing. So the ‘wrapping’ was really innovative, but the content which was in the package...well, we didn’t have content.

⁵ The CÖF – it is a pseudo civil organization that is financially supported by the government – launched the pro-governmental marches called “Békemenet” (“Peace march”). The first one was held in January 2012 since then there were four other marches. The emergence of a counter ‘grassroots’ movement might be interpreted as an answer to Milla and other protests around the time.

<http://atlatszo.hu/2012/10/22/itt-a-civil-tamogatasok-listaja-a-kormany-mellett-demonstralni-meno/>

[last accessed 02 June 2014]

<http://bekemenetegyselet.hu/> [last accessed 02 June 2014]

[last

The main activity of Milla was to produce events rather than give political vision therefore the whole movement has a particularly strong event character.⁶⁶ Milla aimed to alter the fault-lines of the political landscape through its influential events without having real perspectives and clear agenda, putting the signet to its fate. János described this as follows:

Milla could mobilize many people; however, the problem is that these protests didn't become 'perspectival' because of the half-baked ideas that were behind it. If I want to be critical, I would say that these events and big demonstrations might be regarded as harmful ones since they pretended something energetic and positive happened, although the half-baked ideas behind these activities led to the end of Milla.

Consequently, due to the successful events and the strong brand, Milla became the main oppositional actor against the Orbán administration; although it lacked a real agenda and paradoxically it rejected to make politics in an institutionalized sense, triggering tensions both within the group and the public sphere. In the following section, I will unpack this conflict, with a focus on the relationship between civil Milla and formalized politics.

3.3. The relationship between 'political' and 'civil' spheres

People joined Milla with various expectations and aims in respect to the political role of the movement and its relationship with institutionalized politics. During my interviews it became clear that one part of the organization arrived with a clear purpose to link Milla up with political parties and unify their forces or to make a political party out of it. The other part of the group came with no explicit formal political intentions and argued always for a purely civil Milla. This conflict was expressed by Dániel as follows: “there were people who wanted to establish the intellectual background of Milla, while the only thing that others wanted to do

⁶⁶ Hereby I thank you for my supervisor, Prof. Dorit Geva to highlight and emphasize the event character of Milla.

was activism”. This division between members reflects the demarcation line between the so-called political and civil wing. Zsolt was related to the latter one and he recalled his memories about those days when he joined to Milla as the following:

It was a very frustrating period in terms of the political climate...and I thought that Milla was the movement that I always missed from Hungary. Instead of complaining about the political situation with my friends, I wanted to do something, I wanted to put my creative energies into this movement in order to revolt against this system, this government and against this apathy that prevails in the Hungarian society. And of course, the fact that I was close to the end of my university studies and that I had too much spare time also contributed to my desire for active participation. But I did not want to make formal politics or be an activist under political party conditions. If I had wanted to do such things, I would have joined the LMP in the very beginning since I had friends there.

This little extract doesn’t just show that the possibility of getting Milla ‘membership’ was largely determined by one’s class situation since time might be seen as a capital as well, but Zsolt’s account of his expectations about Milla also represents those voices in the group who didn’t intend to do anything other than activism, eschewing any relation to formal politics.

Contrary to this, Pál joined Milla with the clear purpose to mediate between oppositional politicians and Milla in order to create a broad and unified oppositional platform. While some others didn’t want to seclude Milla from institutionalized politics, they could not imagine a cooperation with the existing parties.

Gergő relates to the latter circle and from the very beginning he argued that Milla should become a party. As he told,

Milla was such a group that was equally critical with the Fidesz and the Socialist Party (MSZP), however, this kind of criticism could not appear in the mainstream publicity due to the fact that media became a highly politicized institution. The function of Milla was that it offered a public sphere for these people who could not have showed themselves in another way, but in this manner they demonstrated that there is a mass who is looking for its political representation. So I think it was a 100% political

project since there was a social group who didn't have a political representation; therefore it had to make its own political representation, so to become a party was indispensable.

As I showed in my literature review, the relationship between “institutionalized and non-institutionalized” politics is a recurring topic in the social movement literature (e.g. Goldstone 2003; Almeida 2010). Similarly, this debate was present in the group itself, since disputes about the nature of civil society, its role in social change as well as whether Milla should cooperate with formal politics perpetually emerged both in my conversation with members and also in the group meetings. The transformation of Milla shows that it moved from the pure “civil society” principle to the collaboration with political parties in order to challenge Fidesz.

It is noticeable that civil society is a widespread term, especially in the context of social movements; therefore, I think it is indispensable to touch upon it through Nany Fraser's study (1990) on public sphere that also focuses on its relationship with institutionalized politics. Fraser uses Habermas's concept of the “liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere” for the critical inquiry of the term in the contemporary democratic context (1990: 58). According to Fraser, making a sharp division between civil society and the state in a democratic setting stems from the original, bourgeois concept of the public sphere (1990: 74). In this regard, civil society means “the nexus of non-governmental associations that are neither economic nor administrative” (1990: 74) which absolutely fits the Milla's usage of the term in the first part of the functioning of the movement. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Fraser in her writing urges for the reconceptualization and the elimination of the sharp distinction between the two spheres in order to achieve an “inter-public coordination” and “political accountability” that are necessary for “a democratic and egalitarian society” (Fraser 1990: 76). Similarly, Milla understood that social change can't be achieved without

cooperation with institutionalized politics, leading the movement toward the decision to get involved to formal politics.

Moreover, it is also noteworthy that making distinction between civil politics and mainstream, institutionalized politics goes back to Max Weber and his essay on “Politics as a Vocation”, in which he differentiates ‘professional’ politicians from the ‘occasional’ politicians. Discussing the latter one, he writes that “we are all ‘occasional’ politicians when we cast our ballot or consummate a similar expression of intention, such as applauding or protesting in a ‘political’ meeting, or delivering a ‘political’ speech, etc.” (Weber [1948] 1991: 83).

One of my interviewees, Gábor also talked about the relationship between formal politics and civil politics, and argued that it was not paradoxical that Milla at some point decided to eliminate the dogmatic line that divides these two spheres and that was basically drawn by Milla itself. As he told

I never believed that on the one side there are the formal political structures, institutions that lead this country, and on the other side there are civil organizations, movements and that the two circles shouldn’t meet. I think the healthy situation is that when the formal politics follow and meets with the demands of civil society...So, there are two ways to achieve social change, first making revolution and riots and burning up everything or through entering into formalized politics and to gain the power in a legal way, that’s it. And there are many strategies and tactics for the second one.

The last sentence refers to Milla’s decision on the strategy to join the electoral movement led by Gordon Bajnai.

Nevertheless, other members, such as Ivan, argue that the power of Milla was that it challenged institutionalized politics ‘from outside’ and he claims that institutionalization took away the real potency of Milla. The seemingly paradoxical situation that Milla was a political protest movement which didn’t want to have political party alliances was reflected in the

group itself. As one of my respondents, Pál pointed out, “It is very interesting that there weren’t de facto political debates in this group. There were people who actively wanted to take part in public activities and to shape publicity although they didn’t like politics.”

The lack of coherent conception and consensual agreement on the relationship between Milla and political parties and the prevailing “civil populism” in the group, as one of my respondents, János put it, can be symbolically crystallized with the story of one of the fights within the group. János, one of the members of Milla, who was an ex-politician of Fidesz, then of the liberal party (SZDSZ), and who was also the author of the previous media law written in 1995, wanted to give a speech in the second demonstration of Milla against the new Media Law; however, the group didn’t approve of his idea and did not allow him onto the stage. Since he is an expert of media law and was a founder of Fidesz party, his speech would have been a powerful internal critique of the government and that would have undermined its credit. The main argument against his appearance on the stage was his political past (particularly in the liberal party that was in the governing position before the second Orbán administration). János’s story exposes both the incoherence around this question and the conceptual shifts from the pure civil movement to the cooperation with the previous Prime Minister, Gordon Bajnai.

However, the decision to make alliance with formal political organizations was also influenced by external factors, such as the political environment of Hungary in 2012. Many of my respondents point out that there was a big pressure on Milla from the outside to abandon its civil idea and to channel its power to formal politics as well as to make political alliances with parties in order to displace Fidesz. Although as Petőcz writes it, this demand and outside pressure was generated by Milla itself and its mobilizing capability (2013: 296–297). The increasing demand toward Milla also relates to the fact that Milla gradually started to deal with macro political issues in its demonstrations. This explicit political guise of Milla

alongside its strong brand increased the demands from the side of adherents toward them that provoked the change of its frames as well. The previous framing (civil society – civil control) did not “resonate” enough (Benford and Snow 2000: 619) nor was it effective in the sense that it didn’t meet with the requirements or expectations of many adherents and supporters. Therefore this frame was contested by a counter framing (Benford and Snow 2000: 626) that also contributed to the transformation of Milla. The altered situation and the increasing demands toward the movement deepened the tensions within the group around the political role of Milla. One of my interviewees, Gergő described this situation in the following way:

There was an extremely irresponsible doctrine in the group that goes like this: ‘we do not represent anyone, we are not responsible for anything; therefore no one can express any demands toward us’. But the thing is that society is not working in this way. If you stand out in a demonstration, in the public sphere, then you are in an interaction with people, and these interactions generate demands by their nature and have an effect on the people, in our case, this effect was the appearance of a certain requirement toward Milla. After a while, just going out to a demonstration is not enough. And it is just not true that we are not responsible for the tens of thousands that we mobilized.

As this account shows that, Milla not only successfully responded to the political context of Hungary by mobilizing masses, but also Milla itself produced a further ‘political opportunity’ for political parties.

Due to the fact that Milla became a powerful brand – which was not ‘tainted’ by its political past and had capabilities for mobilizing masses – political parties wanted to channel these forces to formal politics, or to use the technical term of social movement literature, political parties wanted to co-opt it. However, analysing the transformation of Milla from a purely civil movement to an explicitly political one, I prefer to critically apply this term since it suggests a distorted and one sided narrative in which ‘the bigger fish eats the little one’ and disregards the inner developments and debates within the movement that produce unpredictable outcomes as well. Therefore in the following section – similarly to recent

studies, such as Paul Almeida's piece (2010) – I will argue that the relationship between Milla and formal politics that was forming in 2012 might be categorized as coalition and alliance between the two sides.

3.4. Making political alliances

The voices that claimed Milla had to respond to the demands with political alternatives became louder in the group after the demonstration in March 2012; however there were fervent debates about which political parties Milla should make alliance with. From the very beginning, Milla had a highly critical stance toward both Fidesz and the previous leftist government and wanted to get over the bipolar – leftist/rightist – political field. The reason behind this rejection was that not just the governance of Fidesz dismantled the functioning liberal democracy of Hungary, but older social trends and dysfunctions were enlarged by the victory of Fidesz. As Peter Csigó notes,

The governance led by Vitor Orbán does not mean a discontinuity with the past politics; rather, in a political context in which Fidesz gained the majority of the votes, it is the logical result and enlargement of those tendencies that has been prevailing in the political life since the first Fidesz government (1998) and has been continued under the eight years long governance of the Left governance, and eventually these directions became much worse in the past few years. In the past 20 years, the political elite acted as a unified political class in the mistreatment of the domains of media politics, economics, legal infrastructure, governing institutions, electoral system that is largely contributed to the decay and malfunction of the democracy in Hungary (quoted in Petőcz 2013: 281).

As a result of this opinion, at that time, the idea of the establishment of a new, third pole was shaping in the public sphere that was regarded as a possible way to challenge the political

elite of both Fidesz and MSZP (Csigó 2012). This opinion was shared by several organizations, such as the trade union movement, Solidarity, the new-leftist party, 4K! (Fourth Republic – Negyedik köztársaság), Milla, Bajnai's foundation (Homeland and Progress – Haza és Haladás) and the green party, LMP (Petőcz 2013: 302).

During the spring and summer in 2012, negotiations started among these actors and Bajnai also decided to return to politics in order to build up an umbrella movement for the election of 2014 that he planned to announce on the stage of Milla, under the powerful and untouched brand. From my interviews I understood that Bajnai was regarded as a good candidate for this leadership role mainly due to the following three reasons: first, at that time, he was not related to any political parties, including MSZP. Second, his political character seemed to be consensual and acceptable for the wider society and last but not least he enjoyed the support of the financial elite.

In this alliance-idea, the LMP was regarded as the main actor; although the idea to make coalition with the previous Prime Minister divided the party and led to its splitting. The faction of the party that supported this alliance particularly urged Milla to let Bajnai appear on the stage since they hoped that they could make a coup within the LMP against the leadership in order to join the movement and displace the government.

As I wrote in the introduction of this thesis, Milla approved this request with the condition to join to this movement also. The decision – and the processes that run behind it – shows that it might be more fruitful to interpret the outcome of Milla as the result of both external and internal factors: both by the emergence of political alliances and internal dynamics and debates within Milla.

Therefore, the internal dynamics and organizational aspects of Milla also shaped the decisions that were made on political and conceptual issues. One of my respondents, János pointed out that, the decision to enter into politics was a reasonable idea in itself, although the

way it was worked out can not be separated from certain organizational problems within the group. As he told it, “It is not just an ‘aesthetical’ problem if the decision making process is not fair; in fact it disallows the group to find a good solution and mechanism but allows a few others, or in the worst situation it only allows one person, to decide on everything that increase the possibility of an error”.

In this case János referred to organizational problems and internal factors that also largely shaped the outcome of Milla. This is the topic that I will examine in the following chapter.

4. Milla as an Organization

4.1 Group Individuals and Networks

How people get involved in a social movement organizations and therefore to collective actions casts light on the whole structure and the outcomes of that movement. The examination of participation and recruitment processes in collective actions are the main research focus of the relational approaches, such as the social network approach in the social movement analysis (Della Porta and Diani [1998] 2006: 134; Diani and McAdam 2003).

In this chapter, first I will describe how people got involved in the group in order to show how pre-existing social networks and the ‘political and activist socialization’ of the members affect individual’s decisions to participate in a collective action (Della Porta and Diani [1998] 2006: 115). Also, I will show how these external factors such as backgrounds and social networks alongside internal factors such as organization and decision making processes shaped the frames, aims and agenda and therefore also the outcome of Milla.

The results of my interviews show that six out of thirteen respondents got involved to the organization through their direct friendships and relationships to Robert – the central figure and informal leader of Milla – while the rest of the interviewees joined the group through their friendships to other members of the organization or through their indirect relationships to Robert. The key position of Robert in the group – among multiple factors – was due to the fact that he launched the Milla and he also played a crucial role in the building up of the organization by inviting people to join the Milla. Therefore it was quite a closed

group in which social networks played a crucial role in the recruitment of Milla since members were involved to the organization mainly through personal contacts.

As some of my respondents highlighted, the question of the recruitment of ‘unknown’ people who expressed their wishes to join the organization was never solved despite the group’s self-proclaimed openness. The main argument against the involvement of people who fell out of the informal circles of the Milla – which I encountered many times during my fieldwork – was the paranoid fear of spies or ‘moles’ from other political organizations. This reasoning was related to the fact that after tense internal struggles within the group in the summer of 2011, one faction of the group separated from the Milla, and created a new organization under the name of *Egymillióan a Magyar Demokráciáért* (One Million People for the Hungarian Democracy) from which later on the *Szolidaritás* (Solidarity) movement grew out. As one of my respondents, Zsolt noted,

Basically, Milla as an organization was that closed that I felt myself special to get into the group with the help of one of my friends who knew Robert (...) so the way people got into the group was that there was a well-functioning network or an infrastructure, and the central figures of the group tried to involve friends and acquaintances; so basically the group was not constituted by random people on the basis of shared values, ideas and aims, as Milla proclaimed about itself; (...) it was more a group that came from a palpable network that was interconnected by certain shared interests.

The relative homogeneity of the group was invigorated by its high gender inequality: three out of 13 respondents were female and this accurately shows the gender composition of the group. Marianne, one of my respondents – who later on became a dominant member of the group – emphasized the difficulty of getting into the group as a woman:

It was always very strange for me that there were just a few women in Milla...it was a real struggle for a woman to become part of the group. If I had not known Béla, Márk or Attila – who were extremely active in the group at the time when I arrived – I would not have been included in the organization as a woman.

The gender inequality in Milla was a recurring topic in the group although there was no effort to develop a proper mechanism to recruit more women. This was closely related to the structural problems of the organization since not just the ‘getting into’ was harder for women, but also the ‘taking part’ in the group meetings. Both of my male and female respondents point out the harsh, brutal character of the debates that were predominated by men. As one of my respondents, Sára told me, “Milla could not create an inclusive space, especially not for women, despite that fact that it was said that it is an open group”. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the harshness of debates might be also related to the alcohol drinking customs of members since the meetings were held in a pub, in the downtown of Budapest.

The importance of social networks in the development of social movements and in the recruitment of members was already pointed out in Piven’ and Cloward’s early work ([1977] 1979). Writing about the social location of the insurgency of lower class movements, they mention that it emerges among those people ‘whose lives are rooted in some institutional context, who are in regular relationships with others in similar straits, who are best able to redefine their travails as the fault of their rulers and not of themselves, and are best able to join together in collective protest’ ([1977] 1979: 19). Similarly, Florence Passy interprets social networks as a necessary predisposition in order to take action (discussed in Della Porta [1998] 2006: 118-119). In this respect it is important to note that in making alliances with political organizations, Milla drew on its pre-existing networks since it had several ties with both LMP and Solidarity through personal contacts.

Getting involved to a social movement organization and in a collective action is not only facilitated by direct personal links to other group members, but also by previous experiences of collective action (Della Porta [1998] 2006: 118). Moreover, not just previous experiences, but also the broader cultural assemblage of individuals has an effect on their actions (Swidler 1986: 277). Therefore, it is indispensable to examine the political or activist

background of the group members as well, since this is also related to the civil-political conceptual conflict within the group that I have discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, members' background also shows that Milla was embedded in broader networks.

Six out of the thirteen respondents had some sort of relationships with governmental and oppositional political parties before joining Milla: one was a member of the Parliament for four years as a politician of the current government party, Fidesz, in the beginning of the 1990s, two of them have memberships in a political party, two members worked in political campaigns for parties and one of them had an activist past in a party. Moreover, seven of my interviewees shared history of professional and unprofessional activism. These experiences range from partaking in or launching little bottom up civil initiatives to working for well-established NGOs that in general deal with human rights issues, thus for instance Amnesty International, LMBTQ groups, or organizations that work with homeless people and refugees. Respondents who pursue professional careers in the human rights sector or NGO world constitute a subgroup in this circle.

In this respect, it is crucial to highlight that Robert, the informal leader of the group has been involved in several civil activities and launched approximately ten civil initiatives and organized a considerable amount of demonstrations in the past ten years. His civil career started when he founded the Kendermag (Hempseed – the organization struggled for the legalization of marijuana and for the decriminalization of the consumption of all drugs) in 2002. As a consequence of his previous studies in public relations, Robert had contacts in many newspapers and journals; also he had and an extended social network that he successfully activated when he launched the Kendermag. As he noted,

After a while, I could sell stories easily to journalists and since I have very strong communication skills and I was quite good in organizing events and demonstrations, also I established a very good relationship with the Police – that is very important if you regularly organize demonstrations – I became “famous” in the civil life in the

sense that many people came to me to help in organizing something, so this is the way I slowly became deeply embedded into the Hungarian civil sphere. When I made the Facebook page in December 2011, I did not do it with the purpose of making an oppositional movement, I just created that page and something big grew from it. Accordingly, Robert collaborated with a range of different NGOs and organizations – he built up the Roma Program of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union – so he had a long –term acquaintance with the civil sphere and he had already had some knowledge about how to make an organization and organize demonstrations when he launched the Facebook page of Milla. Although he claims that the movement just suddenly grew out of it, in fact, he successfully had drawn upon his contacts that he developed during his civil-career and recruited old peers from his other enterprises or convinced specific individuals with specific networks and skills to join Milla. Due to his “social capital” (Della Porta and Diani [1998] 2006: 117) and his cultural ‘tool kit’ as Swidler put it, Robert, as a social movement entrepreneur could successfully respond to the political opportunity that emerged in 2010 by the introduction of the new media law and connect people up to take collective action. I would emphasize the cultural approach in this respect, since if we have a look on Robert’s background, it became obvious that responding actively to a certain injustice was a routine for him, it was part of the ways he did things, as Polletta pointed out (Polletta 2009: 45).

Therefore, as I argued above, that backgrounds and the networks of the members largely defined the ‘civil-society’ frames of the demonstrations and the human rights issues that were addressed by Milla. Besides the shared political views, the role of social networks was also significant in the making of future political alliances. As I already mentioned, the Solidarity movement partly grew from Milla, while there were personal ties with LMP as well.

Milla was a closed organization which was deeply embedded in a broader, though in terms of political ideology, still quite limited network that also influenced the outcome of the

movement. One of my respondents, Zsolt pointed out the failure of Milla in terms of opening toward rightist voters and creating a real platform for both leftist and rightist people. As he noted,

I am not saying that everyone would have started to love each other, I am just saying that I believed that there has to be a union between the rightist and leftist intellectuals, where they could meet and start to talk to each other

Addressing conservative and right wing voters was part of its agenda to eliminate the bipolar political field, and to initiate conversation between the two wings. Nevertheless, the failure of this project was the logical consequence of a closed group.⁷

4.2. Decisions Making Processes and Democratic Practices in Milla

The relationship between social movements and democratization, or democratic theories is one of the most debated aspects of the social movement research. Similarly to other grassroots mobilizations, in the beginning, decisions were made on the basis of participatory democracy and direct democracy model in Milla. According to Della Porta and Diani's definition,

participatory democracy is empowered when, under conditions of equality, inclusiveness, and transparency, a communicative process based on reason (the strength of a good argument) is able to transform individual preferences and reach decisions oriented to the public good ([1998] 2006: 241).

Experimentation with various democratic practices that are different from representative democratic model was also crucial in Milla. Moreover the discourse about what democracy means and about the “systemic failures of democracy in Hungary” (Kaldor and Selchow 2012: 22) was permanent in the group and in the demonstrations as well that were organized by Milla.

⁷ Hence I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Jean-Louis Fabiani for drawing my attention to this causal relationship.

Regarding the decision making processes in Milla, it went as followings: issues that needed to be discussed and the questions on which decisions needed to be made were prepared and shared with group members before meeting days. Every member who came to a meeting could shape the final decision by his or her vote. Usually these meetings lasted very long and they were characterized by fervent and sometimes very heated debates on specific issues. Theoretically, members facilitated consensual practices in the meetings, meaning that that decisions had to be accepted by all the members. On several occasions, to curtail the length of the debates and to make the meetings more productive, possible solutions and answers were proposed by dominant members for questions that needed to be resolved. Nevertheless, in retrospect, most of my respondents heavily criticized the method of participatory democracy by claiming that without laying down clear and transparent structures participatory democracy left room for manipulation as well as endless and chaotic debates. It is worthy to mention that in my interviews, the most frequently used metaphors for the participatory democracy were the chaos, chaos management and chaos experiment.

One of my respondents, Mariann, described this in the following way:

Participatory democracy means that everyone talks and then votes. Although, issues were discussed in smaller, closed circles within the group all the time (...) these meetings were characterized by collective and vivid brainstorming, however, there was a great amount of manipulation as well.

The issue of manipulation in the decision making process was a recurring topic in my interviews. Verbal intimidation, ‘filibustering’, or just to make people tired of the long meetings were typical manipulating tactics in Milla. This was due to the fact that there was no clear structures or hierarchies laid down in the group, or to quote the title of Jo Freeman’s pivotal essay ([1972] 2013), the *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* characterized the group. Milla as a group was a typical example of this ‘structureless’ or ‘laissez faire’ principle. As Freeman writes it,

A "laissez faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez faire" society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. This hegemony can be so easily established because the idea of "structurelessness" does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones" (Freeman [1972] 2013: 232)

One of my respondents, Zsolt had very similar experiences, as he told,

Ostensibly all decisions were made by the votes of the majority, although the very different opinions were oppressed by dominant actors, since if there is no clear structure in a group, the unstructured majority of the group can be easily dominated by a smaller but influential circle where the power was concentrated. (Zsolt)

Disillusion with the participatory model went hand in hand with the emergence of various interpretations about the function of the democracy. As Iván noted,

The decisions were made by those people who were the closest to those positions in which decisions could have been made and had been made (...) There was a pseudo structure that was transgressed by everyone all the time... Many people voted about many things, but I think, this is not what democracy is about...probably democracy is about initiation, that many people initiate projects...I think the initiative aspect of the democracy is the determinant and not the decision making mechanism

These little interview extracts nicely show that how the idea of democracy, the decision making process and the question of the structure of the organization are closely intertwined.

Regarding the structural problems in Milla, it is a permanent question in the social movement research how to harmonize the participatory democratic model of grassroots movement organizations with the apparent presence of leadership (Della Porta and Diani [1998] 2006: 142). As Della Porta and Diani point out, the existing social movement literature "often reject the authority and hierarchy on principle, but this does not necessarily eliminate the need for leadership functions, such as coordination and public representation" (Della Porta and Diani [1998] 2006: 142).

The latter mentioned roles were filled by Robert, who was the informal, not legitimized, but collectively accepted leader of Milla. He gained authority from the fact that

he launched the movement, but his charisma, communicative and coordinating skills played a crucial role in it. Furthermore, he held the most important resources in his hands, such as the administrator rights of various online pages and press contacts, and last but not least: he was the public ‘face’ of Milla. Morris and Staggenborg (2004) point out that the notion of charismatic leader in social movement research is rooted in Weber’s theory of charismatic leadership. Weber deals with this issue and examines the very questions of why people obey the dominator and what are the inner justifications of the dominated (Weber [1948] 1998:78). According to Weber, one of the legitimations of domination is charismatic leadership. In this respect he characterizes the relation between the dominated and the dominator as follows: "absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of personal leadership” ([1948]1998: 79). Despite Weber’s use of the term, I refer to charisma as a personality type, a usage which is also prevalent in the social movement literature (Morris and Staggenborg 2004: 172).

Besides the participatory democracy model, a new decision making mechanism emerged in Milla that can be summarized as, “vote with your work”. The idea behind this motto was that a member could partake in the decision making process only if he or she had worked in the group on a regular basis. This idea was closely related to the fact that the access to resources and to ‘jobs’ were limited in the group as well as that various tasks didn’t rotate among the individuals. This entailed a high competition for the job positions within the group. The lack of tasks and resources engendered tensions between those who worked and therefore bore responsibilities and those who were only ‘jury’ and just voted and debated in the meetings. Moreover, having a job in the Milla had structural implications since it determined the positions of the members in the group. Usually this decision making ‘method’ was facilitated by those members who had their hands on the resources and jobs. One of my respondents, Iván, talked about this method in the following way,

The participatory democracy was bullshit, but meanwhile we realized that the best system was for people to ‘vote’ with their work, because in this way, we got a really qualitative result. With this participatory model they always made decisions that I precluded because they voted for a bullshit idea, and it didn’t matter that it was voted by the majority of the group since if something is bad then it is bad.

On 15 January 2012, in the aforementioned workshop, as a response to the difficulties and malfunction of the participatory democratic model and because of practical reasons, a structuration process was started by the election of an advisory board or council that counted seven members who had to be rotated periodically. First, the elected members had a veto in the group; therefore the main function of the council was to protect the shared values and issues of the group. Moreover, they also had the right to make decisions in ‘emergency’ situations. Despite the fact that the participatory model was also heavily criticized, according to many of my respondents, the emergence of the council was detrimental since it gave way to strong power centralization. As one of my respondents, Zsolt noted,

Ostensibly, the main duty of the council was to defend the issues and aims of Milla by vetoing in certain decisions, although if I want to describe this mechanism structurally, the significance of this step was only to protect the shared interest of the dominant actors who basically constituted the council. Furthermore, at some point, this council became a pro-active one, where members could not only veto, but they could also make decisions.

In this way, this council legitimized the informal elite circle of the group, which was a “small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part” (Freeman [1972] 2013:233). The elite members might be characterized by their social capital, their close personal relationship to the leader and their special professional and useful skills.

The role of the council in the group became highly debated when Milla decided to enter into formal politics and the negotiations were started with other oppositional actors in the spring and summer of 2012. Information about the development of the negotiations was

not accessible to the majority of the group therefore most of them could not partake in the process of the formation of the ideas about the future political career of Milla.

One of my respondents, János summarized this problem as follows,

When Milla was not in that risky situations and the main task was just to organize a huge demonstration, this organizational structure and decision making mechanism was still satisfactory. Nevertheless, at that moment, when the possibility of the political institutionalization emerged as a perspective, suddenly Milla was surrounded by traps, and the malfunction of the group became visible and palpable. Since the decision making process didn't function well in Milla – there was no guarantee in the mechanism that could control arbitrary decisions.

Referring back to the third chapter, this extract also shows that Milla's primary activity was to produce political events although it could not set a real political agenda or to offer a political vision due to mainly internal, organizational problems that I delineated above in this chapter.

The analysis of Milla as an organization reveals that external factors and political context are not given entities but constructed ones that are determined by internal debates and organizational dynamics also. The examination of pre-existing networks show that political alliances of Milla were shaped by the interplay between microstructural and macro structural factors. During my interviews, it became clear to me that the political path was just one option to follow among many others; therefore there was not an agreement on the existence of outside pressure that forced Milla to follow a political path officially. Rather, this pressure was only felt by those who were in the inner circles, who were in decision making positions.

Concluding Remarks

Focusing on the question of why and how Milla ceased to exist as a social movement when it encountered institutionalized politics, in this thesis I argued that the outcome of Milla is significantly influenced by internal factors; therefore it is indispensable to examine organizational characteristics and decision making practices of the movement beyond the analysis of external factors. My analysis is based on the semi-structured interviews that I conducted with 13 members of the organization therefore I unfolded these internal aspects through the personal narratives of respondents. This approach not just allowed me to offer a vivid picture of the movement but it also showed that the end of Milla can not be interpreted as the logical consequence of its decision to enter into formal politics since the emergence of electoral movement led by Gordon Bajnai was a coalition made by four organizations rather than a co-optation by political parties.

The relationship between civil society, social movements and formal politics is not just a permanent question of the sociological literature (e.g. Weber [1948] 1998) but it is also a very current topic of contemporary politics (Kaldor et al. 2012). The actuality of the issue can be epitomized by one of the most current cases, the Spanish Podemos party that evolved from the indignados movement and which recently gained five seats in the Spanish European elections with very similar agenda that Milla had.⁸

Regarding the relationship between Milla and formal political organizations, I argued for the importance of the analysis of microstructural processes and organizational aspects of

⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/27/podemos-citizen-politics-spain-elections-indignados-movement> [last accessed 11 June 2014]

the movement that illuminates how social networks, group dynamics, internal debates within the organization had a profound effect on the outcome. This research also revealed that framing process and strategies of Milla are products of both external factors, such as political environment, political opportunity structure and internal factors, such as social networks and backgrounds of members.

By the in-depth research of the organization, this thesis contributed to the better understanding of internal factors of social movements' outcomes. Moreover, pointing out the interconnected nature of these two factors, I showed the limitations of the existing approaches that deal with these problems separately.

Appendix

Sample Interview Guide

Personal Involvement

How and when did you become involved in Milla?

What was your purpose when you joined to Milla?

Have you ever been involved in other civil/activist or political movements before you joined to Milla? Do you have any connections with other civil or political organizations/parties?

What were your expectations from this movement when you joined to the Milla?

Division of Labour

What was your role/duty/task in the group?

Did you have any formal role in the group?

How formal was your role in the group?

How did your tasks/duties look like in practice?

Group Dynamics

How did you make decisions in the group?

Which members did make the decisions? (Who were the 'stakeholders'?)

What do you think in what extend decisions reflected the collective opinion of the group?

Who were the dominant actors of the group? And, why did they have dominant roles in the group?

How the Milla functioned as a group?

How did the group, and your relation to the group, changed after it became a political organization?

About the Milla

What did this movement address? What was Milla about? What did it mean to you?

How did aims and meaning of Milla change after it became a political organization?

How did Milla enter into politics?

Where did resources come from to Milla?

What were the key moments and the key events of Milla?

‘Wishful’ Thinking

In retrospective, if you would have the chance to go back in time and change something, would you do something differently?

If yes, what would you change and why?

What was Milla significant? What was its outcome?

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