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Maintaining momentum: Tempospatial orientations among members of the Hungarian Momentum Movement Party towards a new political morale

STUDIA I ANALIZY

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Abstract: *Providing insight in political reality and morale beyond increasingly illiberal governments in CEE, this paper offers an ethnographic perspective on democratic opposition during the process of de-democratisation. Analysing the motivation and purpose of being politically active based on a limited group of members of the Hungarian Momentum Movement Party, it highlights how relating to past, present and future as well as other Hungarian parties and the West they strive to realise a '21st century European normality'.*

Introduction

In 1989, Hungary was one of the first states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to break with Soviet influence and transition to Western liberal democracy and capitalism before joining the European Union (EU) in 2004¹. However, since Viktor Orbán was elected prime minister in 2010, the country has attracted much scholarly attention examining

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¹ Z. Pogátsa, *Hungary: From Star Transition Student to Backsliding Member State*, «Journal of Contemporary European Research» 2009, No 5:4.

“democratic backsliding”², “caesarean politics”³ or “de-democratisation”⁴. For some time now, Hungary, Poland, and to a lesser degree also the other Visegrád states, have been at odds with other EU stakeholders. While Orbán’s Fidesz⁵ has been able to secure an absolute majority of the parliamentary seats in national elections since 2010, the pro-democratic and pro-EU opposition in Hungary has been forming and re-forming⁶.

In 2015, following Orbán’s confirmation as prime minister in 2014, a group of university students formed a new political movement, Momentum Mozgalom⁷, which garnered national attention and sympathy with their 2017 NOLimpia campaign. The campaign was aimed at preventing pointless spending of public money as well as new opportunities for illicit money flows and, in this, led to the withdrawal of Budapest’s application for the 2024 Summer Olympics⁸. In the campaign’s aftermath, Momentum became a party but although its poll numbers continuously improved from 1.8% in January 2018, they failed to enter national parliament in 2018 receiving 3% of the vote⁹. In the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections, then, Momentum became the third strongest party in Hungary with 9.9% of the vote, securing two seats in the EP. Following this success, Momentum’s national poll average climbed from just over 5% to 9% (July 2019), nearly 11% (December 2019), and 12% (July 2020)¹⁰. When Momentum joined the cooperation of the six major opposition parties “Egységben Magyarországért”¹¹ in December 2020, to jointly run against Orbán’s Fidesz in the 2022 parliamentary elections,

² A. Holeschm, A. Kyriazi, *Democratic backsliding in the European Union: the role of the Hungarian-Polish coalition*, «East European Politics» 2022, No 38:1.

³ R. Sata and I.P. Karolewski, *Caesarean politics in Hungary and Poland*, «East European Politics» 2019, No 36:2.

⁴ M. Bogaards, *De-democratization in Hungary: diffusely defective democracy*, «Democratization» 2018, No 25:8.

⁵ Fialat Demokraták Szövetsége, Eng. “Alliance of Young Democrats”.

⁶ P. Krasztev, J. Van Til (eds.), *The Hungarian Patient. Social Opposition to an Illiberal Democracy*, Central European University Press 2015.

⁷ Eng. “Momentum Movement”; hereinafter: Momentum.

⁸ Momentum Mozgalom, *A Momentumról*, <https://momentum.hu/a-momentumrol/>.

⁹ Europe Elects, *Hungary*, <https://europeelects.eu/hungary/>.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Eng. “United for Hungary”; Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP), Eng. “Hungarian Socialist Party”; Demokratikus Koalíció (DK), Eng. “Democratic Coalition”; Magyarország Zöld Pártja (LMP), Eng. “Hungary’s Green Party”; Párbeszéd Magyarországért, Eng. “Dialogue for Hungary”; Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom, Eng. “Movement for a better Hungary”; Momentum Mozgalom.

the party polled 11.6% and had been the second strongest opposition party since July 2019¹². In the elections on April 3rd, 2022, the united opposition received about 35% of the vote, failing to remove Orbán as prime minister as well as to break Fidesz's two-thirds parliamentary majority. Nevertheless, Momentum entered national parliament for the first time, now holding 10 of 199 parliamentary seats. In the end of April 2022, depending on the polling institute, polls place the party at 8% or 9% which makes it the strongest or second strongest opposition party¹³.

Mainly, the party is made up of well-educated 'millennials' born after or shortly before the system change in 1989. In terms of political orientation and goals their website states:

"We want a democratic, modern, proud, confident and successful Hungary, where the nation is united, everyone has the same rights, performance is valued, everyone is given equal opportunities and where those in need are not left alone. We are building a European 21st century Hungary that is not divided by ideological struggles but held together by common goals. Where it is good to live, where it is worth working. To do all this, it is essential to stop the demolition of democracy, to eradicate corruption and to put an end to the diversion of EU money into private pockets"¹⁴.

From September 2020, I accompanied Momentum for a period of field research in Budapest and Online to provide insight into the complex political realities people in increasingly authoritarian postsocialist countries in Europe face today. Throughout my research I found Momentum members' reality to be shaped by an in-betweenness: in-between *East* and *West*, Orbán and the EU, autocracy and democracy, party and movement, old and new politics. Approaching this in-betweenness in an analytical manner, I expected to find it shaped by Hungary's past as a Soviet satellite on the one side and the party members' diversity in terms of political ideologies – ranging from conservative and economic-liberal to left-liberal, social democracy and left-wing – on the other.

Instead, I found Momentum members to be distinctly future-oriented and not only orienting in time but also in space. Therefore, applying the temporal/futural orientations *expectation*, *anticipation* and *hope* as conceptualised by Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight in *The Anthropology*

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ @EuropeElects, *Hungary*, <https://twitter.com/EuropeElects/status/1524812070553899009>, <https://twitter.com/EuropeElects/status/1524811827514941441>.

¹⁴ Ibidem (own translation).

of the Future, I outline how Momentum members are motivated by the past thirty years to aim for a future of '21st century European normality'. I highlight how in their political activity they relate to past, present and future as well as other Hungarian parties and *the West* and how this structures their aspiration and realisation of a new, transformed political morale in Hungary rather than an ideology struggle within the party. In this, instead of putting forward an analysis of each of the binaries listed above, this paper provides insight into the broader dynamics shaping them.

While the issue of *democratic backsliding* and *de-democratisation* gained prominence within the political sciences during recent years, the perspectives provided largely focus on the analysis of state institutions and the outline or quantification of systemic changes and adjustments¹⁵. Therefore, drawing on the body of academic writing on 'normality' and transformation in postsocialist Europe¹⁶, this paper aims to start filling the insight gap concerning democratic opposition during the process of *de-democratisation* and provide in-depth ethnographic insight into the complex dynamics of political reality and morale beyond increasingly illiberal governments in Central and Eastern Europe.

The first part of this paper provides a brief note on methodology followed by an outline of a conceptual perspective introducing *liminality*, a common anthropological conceptualisation of in-betweenness, as well as Theodore Schatzki's practice theoretical approach of the *timespace of human activity*. The main part, then, presents an ethnographic analysis building upon this conceptual perspective considering Momentum members' orientation in time and space and in-between different 'normalities' and realities, ultimately exploring the momentum of Momentum. Finally, in the conclusion I briefly outline the bottom line of my findings and place their significance in a national and regional context before pro-

¹⁵ E.g., Z. Pogátsa, *Hungary: From Star Transition Student to Backsliding Member State*, «Journal of Contemporary European Research» 2009, No 5:4; A. Holesch, A. Kyriazi, *Democratic backsliding in the European Union: the role of the Hungarian-Polish coalition*, «East European Politics» 2022, No 38:1; R. Sata, I.P. Karolewski, *Caesarean politics in Hungary and Poland*, «East European Politics» 2019, No 36:2; M. Bogaards, *De-democratization in Hungary: diffusely defective democracy*, «Democratization» 2018, No 25:8.

¹⁶ E.g., S. Rausing, *Re-constructing the 'Normal': Identity and the Consumption of Western Goods in Estonia*, [in:] R. Mandel, C. Humphrey (eds.), *Markets and Moralities*, Berg 2002; K. Fehérvári, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary*, Indiana University Press 2013; M. Nadkarni, *Remains of Socialism: Memory and the Futures of the Past in Postsocialist Hungary*, Cornell University Press 2020.

viding starting points for further research to broaden as well as deepen the insight.

***Being There* during a global pandemic: notes on methodology**

Confronted with the challenge of carrying out ethnographic research in times of a global pandemic, *Being There* as the central tenet of ethnography required flexibility and reconceptualisation. My *Being There* entailed living in Budapest, walking its streets, watching its people, seeing its billboards and advertising pillars while following Momentum's social media accounts as well as state propaganda media. These modes created an undergirding layer of insight that was topped with instances of participant observation joining chapter meetings, group meetings, street campaigning and protests (when the pandemic situation allowed it), in-depth talks with a friend who is a Momentum member (informal interviews), and 25 extensive formal interviews (semi-structured, with one to four persons, conducted either online or outside). Despite facing limitations by not being able to partake in the everyday life of Momentum members and not physically meet for most of the time, these modes of *Being There* still allowed me "to grasp the native's point of view, his [*her] relation to life, to realize his [*her] vision of his [*her] world"¹⁷ far beyond than what would have been possible during a research conducted remotely and detached from the place.

In connecting with research participants, I heavily relied on the snowball principle. As a result, the group of about thirty interlocutors this paper is based on mostly consists of Budapest-based Momentum members actively involved in party activities as well as their direct contacts which included members working and studying in the UK, Germany, France and Belgium. In this, it is worth mentioning that the party enjoys active membership predominantly in Hungary's urban centres, especially Budapest, and that there are party chapters in more than ten major European cities. Consequently, my interlocutors are not all acquainted with each other and largely do not belong to the same party chapters. Drawing on insights from this group of engaged people allowed me to

¹⁷ B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea*, Taylor & Francis 2005 [1922]. Direct quote adjusted by square brackets to include all genders.

investigate in detail the party's drive or in other words its momentum (hun. *lendület*, ger. *Schwung*).

Orienting in time and space: a conceptual perspective

Theodore Schatzki defines practices as “open-ended, spatial-temporal sets of organised doings and sayings [of something]” and differentiates between activity and action with the former being the event of doing/saying something and the latter the achievement of it¹⁸. He outlines the event of human activity to come with a past, present and future dimension that he calls timespace. This timespace of human activity accounts for acting amid entities (present) towards a way of being (future) departing from a motivating state of affairs (past)¹⁹. Thus, while navigating an *Umwelt* comprised of entities the person acts amid, with and towards, an acting person is stretched out between an end that is the future, and a motivating state of affairs that is the past²⁰. This reminds of “a moment in and out of time” and “in and out of secular structure”²¹, a quote describing the state of liminality.

In anthropological thought, liminality is a common conceptualisation of in-betweenness. The concept was first introduced by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 who proposed liminality as an analytical category in his theorisation of rites of passage. In his work *The Rites of Passage* van Gennep shows how in-between the phase of separation from one state/status/space and the phase of aggregation to another, there is a phase of liminality²². Victor Turner outlined that “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial”²³. Furthermore, Turner added to the understanding of liminality with the concepts of antistructure and *communitas* describing the latter to be the condition of an uninstitutionalised “open society”²⁴. Significantly, Mark Peterson cau-

¹⁸ T.R. Schatzki, *Social Change in A Material World*, Routledge 2019, p. 28.

¹⁹ T.R. Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity. On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*, Lexington Books 2010, p. xii/29.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

²¹ V. Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, Aldine Transaction 2011, p. 96.

²² A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, The University of Chicago Press 1960.

²³ V. Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, Aldine Transaction 2011, p. 95ff.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 370.

tions against understanding antistructure as a literal reversal or upending of social structure but rather as a situation in which the common rules and logics governing political, social, and economic life do not apply anymore²⁵. He describes the 2011 Maidan at Tahir square in Cairo as an experience of antistructure and *communitas* accounting for an “intense feeling of community, social equality, solidarity, and togetherness” and liberation “from conformity to general norms”²⁶.

Meanwhile, Schatzki also provides a collective dimension of the timespace of human activity suggesting that people proceed in common and shared activity timespaces “by virtue of carrying on the same practices amid the same entities”²⁷. Understanding practices as inherently teleological and motivated, this socially interwoven net of activity timespaces comprises of practices that are organised by a common teleoaffective structure. Schatzki describes the latter to be “acceptable or enjoined end-project-action combinations”²⁸ that I understand to be the structuring baseline of meaningful collective agency. Taking place in a common timespace, activities then might be part of different projects, but are, in the end, motivated by the goal of reaching a certain state of affairs.

Making use of these conceptualisations, the following analysis will explore the momentum of Momentum considering how in their activity its members relate to past, present and future as well as *the West* and other Hungarian parties and politicians.

The momentum of Momentum: an ethnographic analysis

Expecting normality – expecting utopia?

One of my interlocutors, Tom²⁹, a university student in the UK, said that he wants to build a country, where he does not need to care so much about parties and politics all the time because anything would be good enough. In response, Felix, also a university student in the UK,

²⁵ M.A. Peterson, *In Search of Anti-Structure: The Meaning of Tahrir Square in Egypt's ongoing Social Drama*, [in:] A. Horvath, B. Thomassen, H. Wydra (eds.), *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, Berghahn Books 2015, p. 170.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

²⁷ T.R. Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity. On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*, Lexington Books 2010, p. 50.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ All names were changed and deliberately not replaced with Hungarian names.

said that was utopian, but Tom maintained “the UK has it”. This orientation towards a, as Felix called it, “Western European style democracy” resonates with the body of anthropological writing on ‘normality’ in the context of postsocialist transformation. Maya Nadkarni’s observation that ‘normality’ is connected to being able to take things for granted as safe, secure, trustworthy and predictable especially resonates in Tom’s “utopia”³⁰.

Similar to Nadkarni’s observation, Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight state that “expectation is one of the primary ways in which we define ‘normal life’”. Expecting means planning and trusting the future to happen in a certain way: the way we expect it to, based on past experiences³¹.

Kristina Fehérváry conducting research in postsocialist Hungary and Sigrid Rausing conducting research in post-Soviet Estonia respectively provide accounts of ‘normality’ as an imaginary of what would or should have been “if history had followed a ‘normal’ course”³² (Fehérváry 2013, 45) “uninterrupted by the Soviet takeover” (Rausing 2002, 140)³³. However, as the following outline based on fieldnotes from September and November 2020 suggests, I found Momentum members not so much struggling with Hungary’s socialist past as a Soviet satellite but rather with the postsocialist present in which reality does not live up to the expectations they attach to a democratically constituted country and EU member state.

I had joined a couple of TizenX³⁴ members in a bar and shots of *kevert*, a pink-coloured, sweet liqueur, were ordered. Maria, a university student in Budapest, said that *kevert* means mixture and that it is basically all alcohol waste mixed. She further explained that it is a remnant from socialist times when people made extra money selling it on the black market. Everyone agreed that having shots of *kevert* is part of being TizenX. I suggest this perception and consumption of *kevert* to be an indicator of how for the generation born into postsocialist Hungary, the

³⁰ M. Nadkarni, *Remains of Socialism: Memory and the Futures of the Past in Postsocialist Hungary*, Cornell University Press 2020, p. 174.

³¹ R. Bryant, D.M. Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future*, Cambridge University Press 2019, p. 50f.

³² S. Rausing, *Re-constructing the ‘Normal’: Identity and the Consumption of Western Goods in Estonia*, [in:] R. Mandel, C. Humphrey (eds.), *Markets and Moralities*, Berg 2002, p. 45.

³³ K. Fehérváry, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary*, Indiana University Press 2013, p. 140.

³⁴ Momentum’s youth wing.

past of autocratic socialism is an integral and accepted part of history. In this, crony, autocratic politics are expected of Hungary's 20th century past but not its 21st century present. Thus, I argue, rather than the past socialist dictatorship, the thirty years and counting of failed transitioning to democracy are being considered 'abnormal'.

Moreover, Maria had made it a habit to fill me in on the latest turns in Hungarian politics leading with a casual "by the way" insinuating these being every day matters nevertheless knowing them to be of interest to me. "By the way, today Fidesz's main EU politician [József Szájer] resigned from his political career, just like that. But no way there's not more to this." Eventually, she filled me in that "by the way" Szájer, being one of Fidesz's most vocal anti-LGBTQ politicians, was caught breaching Covid measures on a gay orgy in Brussels. Later, she sent me a Belgian newspaper article outlining how Szájer had tried to escape out of a window, naked, with a backpack full of drugs. Throughout our conversations she raged but also laughed about it. At some point she said "Yeah, this is Hungarian politics" expressing a sense of routine dealing with the situation. While the development of the affair had not caught her by surprise, her reaction uncovered not just expectations based on her experience with Hungarian politics but also expectations towards what I propose to call a timely '21st century European normality'³⁵. This indicates a sense of being caught in-between the routine of "by the way" and "this is Hungarian politics" and maintaining an awareness for the opposite: this should not be our 'normal' after all. Here echoes not just what Nadkarni calls a frustrated orientation towards the future but even more so a frustrated orientation towards past futures, in other words "what I should *already* have"³⁶.

Orienting not only in time but also in space, Momentum members ground their expectations not only in looking back at past reality and 'normality' but also in considering reality and 'normality' in Western Europe. In this, I argue, contemporary Hungarian reality becomes a suspension of an expected present and (possibly also) future of '21st century European normality'.

³⁵ This is not to argue that there is no lying, corruption and power abuse in '21st century Europe' nor to suggest a supremacy of '21st century European politics' or it meaning 'the end of history'.

³⁶ M. Nadkarni, *Remains of Socialism: Memory and the Futures of the Past in Postsocialist Hungary*, Cornell University Press 2020, p. 3.

A new generation anticipating a new political morale

“Hungarian politics and the reputation of making politics is so corrupted in Hungary. Having a new political movement that is so clear and fresh and young and creditable was a really new thing for us. Finally, there was a group to join where you could be politically active and have an impact. And challenging the Olympic Games was a big deal, like nobody could challenge Fidesz at that point, not even parties in the parliament. But we could actually do that by being on the streets and campaigning on the streets, talking to people, something no party did before.” – Katharina.

Momentum’s 2017 NOlimpia campaign provided people with the opportunity to act upon their thoughts and concerns. It created a new space that resulted in a political community of a new generation approaching politics in a new way. Momentum members do not only aim to suspend the rules and logics currently governing political activity in Hungary but also for Momentum’s political activity to take place outside/beyond these rules and logics. Thus, following Peterson³⁷, in a political antistructure separated from the space where doing politics is automatically associated with corruption and cronyism.

With the success of NOlimpia, Momentum is seen to have challenged Fidesz, something, as Katharina said, no one had managed to do since 2010. Moreover, they mobilised civil society, an institution, according to several interlocutors, poorly developed and difficult to activate in Hungary. Finally, in a political landscape dominated by old people and, as recent CEU graduate Samuel called it, “previous century politics”, this time, young people successfully took the lead. Thus, I argue, from its on-set Momentum has been operating in a liminal space, breaking boundaries by not accepting living an untimely (past) present, however, not (yet) living the future they feel they should already have.

Samuel told me “We [Momentum] are done with the previous century politics what Orbán basically offers” implying movement towards a ‘contemporary century politics’. Stef Jansen draws on work by Ghassan Hage when outlining that a viable life requires a sense of “going somewhere”, an imagined mobility³⁸. Writing about residents of an apart-

³⁷ M.A. Peterson, *In Search of Anti-Structure: The Meaning of Tahrir Square in Egypt’s ongoing Social Drama*, [in:] A. Horvath, B. Thomassen, H. Wydra (eds.), *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, Berghahn Books 2015, p. 170.

³⁸ S. Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime. ‘Normal Lives’ and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex*, Berghahn Books 2015, p. 160.

ment block in Sarajevo, he identifies that “As opposed to ‘normal lives’, which would entail spatiotemporal forward movement, it was living in a waiting room”³⁹. With regards to Momentum’s differentiation from the other parties and current politics brought forward by all interlocutors and an emphasis on taking credible action, I contend that being part of Momentum provides this sense of “going somewhere”, this sense of spatiotemporal forward movement.

In this, an important part of Momentum’s understanding of self is that it was initiated and continues to be dominated by people born into Hungary’s democratic transitioning, thus free from first-hand experiences of autocratic one-party ‘normality’. I suggest that, in this, being a “generational party”, something several interlocutors mentioned, means more than just an association of people who are about the same age. Rather, it signifies the kind of political morale Momentum members stand up for and the political community they establish: first and foremost, pro-democratic and pro-EU and, in this, fresh, cosmopolitan, and with momentum.

TizenX members Maria, Alex and Oscar emphasised that unlike the old parties, people are part of Momentum not for gaining a career, but for “changing the country”. Moreover, Samuel explained that being founded against Fidesz already provides you with “a clear set of morals” because “we’re against everything that’s rotten in Fidesz”. I argue that the morale Momentum members aspire is based on shared ideas about political practice that stand against the current practices and morale in Hungarian politics. In this, following Schatzki, I find Momentum members to proceed in shared timespaces and their activity to be organised by a teleoaffective structure aligned to finally living ‘21st century European normality’ and, thus, a timely transformation of political morale in Hungary.

Bryant and Knight write that “anticipation is [...] the act of looking forward that also pulls me in the direction of the future and prepares the groundwork for that future to occur”⁴⁰. I propose that Momentum members’ activity organised by the aim for a new political morale and, in this, detached from the current rules and logics of doing politics, anticipates this new morale providing a concrete and (almost) tangible future, thereby fostering the sense of forward movement outlined above.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 185.

⁴⁰ R. Bryant, D.M. Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future*, Cambridge University Press 2019, p. 28.

Keeping on hoping: balancing the real and the ideal

“We don’t know exactly how to do it, it’s not that we have the golden bullet that will solve every problem Hungary faces. But we aspire – Momentum will build a functioning society. So, there is hope, there is at least hope.” – Tom

During the past decade, increasing parts of the Hungarian opposition acknowledged that due to repeated adjustments to the electoral system, the only chance to win elections against Fidesz is to cooperate and present one common candidate in each constituency as well as for the prime minister position. Previously, Momentum had opposed getting involved with the other opposition parties. However, for the 2022 national elections – and before then in individual cases for the 2019 local elections – Momentum joined forces with the other opposition parties. While all interlocutors considered joining the cooperation a necessity, none of them considered it ideal for the party.

Bryant and Knight define hope, something not just Tom but most interlocutors spoke of, as a futural momentum “that attempts to pull certain potentialities into actuality [...] [and] emerges in the gap between the potential and the actual, between matter and its not-yet form”⁴¹. To keep hoping that 2022 will be a milestone in transforming political morale and moving towards ‘21st century European normality’, Momentum members needed to be idealistic and pragmatic at the same time.

Simon, who volunteered his professional skills to Momentum in the run-up to the 2022 elections, told me that “a lot of Momentum people swallowed this very, very hard” and some even left the party because this was not what they had signed up for. He himself, however, saw it as a purely pragmatic choice that does not come with giving up principles because the party’s goal continues to be changing how politics are done. Others pointed out that Momentum’s then-president András Fekete-Györ, who had previously attracted attention by stating “Gyurcsány⁴² should fuck off” and putting up a graffiti saying “MSZP equals Fidesz”, now entering a collaboration with Gyurcsány and MSZP is not conducive to credibility. Oscar added that “we’re gonna really have to balance between fighting Fidesz and also doing this fighting with the opposition

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 134.

⁴² Ferenc Gyurcsány is a former prime minister (2004–2009) and MSZP party chairman (2007–2009). His second term as PM was overshadowed by major corruption scandals paving the way for Orbán’s return to office in 2010. In the following Gyurcsány founded DK.

parties.” Meanwhile, Lea, living and working in Western Europe, told me that after initially having strong doubts, she saw how in the 2019 municipal elections the coordination resulted in a success for the opposition in Budapest: “Even by having some municipalities there is a little bit more room for freedom. After I realised that, I understood that they were right, and this is really the way forward.”

While, as Tom said, Momentum does not have “the golden bullet that will solve every problem Hungary faces”, refusing to enter into cooperation with the other opposition parties would have meant political oblivion and entering Jansen’s “waiting room”⁴³, already giving up on hope for the 2022 parliamentary elections. Thus, I argue, balancing the real and the ideal and, in this, cooperating with the other opposition parties, allowed Momentum members to keep hoping for electoral change in 2022.

Maintaining momentum

I suggest the momentum of Momentum, allowing its members to not only expect but hope for and anticipate ‘21st century European normality’ in Hungary, to consist of the fragile pairing of a sense of tempospatial forward movement (requiring credible action in the transformation of political morale) with a continued state of liminality (requiring detachment from the common rules and logics of politics). While these may be considered two sides of the same coin, they are still difficult to maintain at the same time when participating in current politics might as well be the only way of accomplishing a change in and transformation of these current politics in the democratic fashion Momentum stands up for. Taking into account the insights outlined so far, additional fieldnotes from Election Day 2022 in Budapest and conversations with two interlocutors following the elections as well as findings from Momentum’s post-election social media activities, the following considers what the outcome of the elections means for the party, its members and their political activity as well as its momentum.

As a result of the elections which did not bring the electoral change hoped for, Momentum entered national parliament for the first time. On party social media channels it was announced that the Momentum frac-

⁴³ S. Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime. ‘Normal Lives’ and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex*, Berghahn Books 2015, p. 185.

tion will not serve as “Fidesz’s alibi opposition” [own translation] and boycott the constituting session of parliament⁴⁴. Instead, they will follow the lead of parliamentarians like Ákos Hadróczy⁴⁵ in facing Fidesz’s supermajority by making use of their MP privileges for extra-parliamentary opposition work⁴⁶. In this, Momentum’s political activity keeps taking place detached from the common rules and logics of Hungarian politics that continue to be inherently tainted with endemic corruption, cronyism and increasing autocratisation. Thus, I argue that the party continues to operate in a political antistructure, in other words a liminal space.

However, unlike after the 2018 elections, there were no major demonstrations on election day or in its aftermath. This suggests a sense of powerlessness and loss of hope for change that Maria boiled down to “all cards have been played”. In this, she referred to the long-fostered cooperation of the opposition parties which was considered to be the ultimate ace against Fidesz’s electoral supremacy.

Meanwhile, Momentum’s public communication remained fierce and militant. On party social media channels slogans like “we do not give up our freedom” and “we will continue to fight for the dream of a European, Western Hungary” dominated the narrative asking people to join Momentum and the fight ahead⁴⁷. Moreover, then-president of Momentum Anna Donáth has been engaging in in-depth analysis of the defeat of the opposition and put forward seven action points. Among other she outlined that an alternative to the system needs to be created outside of the system and that instead of reducing itself to being against Fidesz/Orbán, the opposition needs to focus on building and communicating its own political vision considering the needs and demands of Hungarian people across the country and social situations⁴⁸.

Looking ahead, it remains to be seen whether Momentum’s presentation (and implementation) of an action plan based on the analysis of past

⁴⁴ E.g., Facebook, *Momentum Mozgalom*, <https://www.facebook.com/momentum.mozgalom> (9.04.2022).

⁴⁵ Ákos Hadróczy has been part of Fidesz (2004–2013) and of LMP (2014–2018). In 2016 he became a MP and remained an independent member after leaving LMP in 2018. Following the 2022 elections he became part of the new Momentum fraction.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ E.g., Instagram, *Momentum Mozgalom*, <https://www.instagram.com/momentummozgalom/> (11.04.2022).

⁴⁸ Magyar Hang, *Donáth Anna: 7 pontban a jövőről*, https://hang.hu/publicisztika/donath-anna-7-pontban-a-jovorol-139530?fbclid=IwAR0WyLr1jdw6jxuH27JgMSQ_Dmr3dA8F-Q-OVevUcvpewDH3mrccaxF-2Lk (14.04.2022).

mistakes will suffice to continue providing people, especially the young, well-educated urban elite, with a sense of tempospatial forward movement. While people continue to be motivated by the past thirty years to aim for a future of '21st century European normality', the inability of the joined opposition to break Fidesz's two thirds majority might lead to a loss of hope and a changed teleoaffective structure organising people's activity. Leaving Hungary rather than staying and fighting for change might become a more prominent "acceptable or enjoined end-project-action combination"⁴⁹ to achieve living in '21st century European normality'. Thus, if Momentum (and the opposition as a whole) fails to maintain momentum and, in this, to continue to transform people's mere expectation of a timely '21st century European normality' into hope and anticipation that Hungarian reality is on its way there, Hungary will most likely see a sharp increase in brain drain towards *the West*.

Concluding remarks

Carefully outlining the challenges Momentum and its members face, this paper offers an important perspective on the challenges and crisis of democratic opposition movements in CEE. Being based on only a small number of Momentum members it can neither be considered representative of the party as a whole, nor of the democratic opposition in Hungary or the entire region. However, it provides in-depth insight into the dynamics of motivation and purpose shaping political activity and momentum among an engaged and future-oriented post-89 generation continuing to live in a crony and increasingly autocratic political environment.

Crucially, the outcome of the 2022 parliamentary elections allows Momentum to continue operating with a certain detachment from the common rules of politics and the endemically corrupt political establishment and, thus, to persistently provide people who want to take action with a platform to do so. However, if Momentum (and Egységben Magyarorszáért) loses momentum and, in this, the ability to provide hope for a timely transformation of politics, increasing numbers of people will give up on fighting for '21st century European normality' in

⁴⁹ T.R. Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity. On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*, Lexington Books 2010, p. 50.

Hungary and – instead of being stuck in what Jansen described to be a waiting room – find it elsewhere.

Throughout this paper, I outline a tension field of past, present and future and idealism and pragmatism that informs the teleoaffective structure organising people's activities in dealing with the political situation. In this, drawing on the body of literature on 'normality' and transformation in postsocialist Europe, my analysis highlights the significance of the ability to hope for and anticipate a long-expected 'normality'.

Finally, given the limited scope of data this paper is based on, it would be of interest for future research to deepen the insight concerning Hungary and Momentum by considering the perspective of less engaged people who are on the periphery rather than the core of the democratic opposition's political activity. Furthermore, it would be of added value to broaden the insight and explore the dynamics of motivation and purpose in political activity among democratic opposition movements under increasingly autocratic regimes beyond Hungary and CEE, possibly also conducting multi-sided fieldwork to provide comparative insight.

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