

## COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAMES: THE CASE OF A LOCAL ANTI-REFUGEE CAMP MOVEMENT IN HUNGARY\*

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During the summer of 2015 an unprecedented number of refugees entered Europe, many of them taking a route that crossed Hungary. The impact of the events reached a number of spheres, such as regulation, policy making, domestic and international politics, where the securitization of migration has become a prominent reaction. At the same time, effects have also reached extra-institutional spheres, such as the emergence of a number of social movements reacting to the situation. These emergent movements raise a number of theoretically puzzling questions. This case study examines how a local social movement in Martonfa—opposing the building of a refugee camp and the arrival of refugees—developed during the summer of 2015. The aim of the research is to unpack the effects of a perceived threat to this local community. The movement ceased its activities after 50 days when the government withdrew its plans to build a refugee camp in the small village of Martonfa. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the effects of the social movement on the local community reach beyond this period. The paper first provides a possible theoretical framework for the analysis of such a movement. Then, the methodology of the research is explained. The findings of the research explain how the previously defined theoretical model can be applied to empirical data. Finally, a number of conclusions are drawn. When constructing the movement's diagnostic frame, it is not the problem of the refugee but that of democratic decision-making that is heavily emphasized. In line with this, the prognostic action frame contains very few details regarding possible solutions or strategies to tackle the issue. The motivational frame centers on "calling to arms" possible allies and partners.

### Introduction

During the summer of 2015 an unprecedented number of refugees entered Europe, many of them taking a route that crossed Hungary. The impact of the events reached a number of spheres, such as regulation, policy making, domestic and international politics, where the securitization of migration has become a prominent reaction. At the same time, effects have also reached extra-institutional spheres, such as the emergence of a number of social movements reacting to the situation. These emergent movements raise a number of theoretically puzzling questions.

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The case study below examines how a local social movement, which opposed the building of a refugee camp and the arrival of refugees, developed during the course of the refugee crisis that unfolded in Hungary in the summer of 2015. The aim of the research is to unpack the effects of a perceived threat to this local community. The local social movement that emerged in Southern Hungary called *Tiltakozás a martonfai-pécsi menekülttábor ellen* (Tiltakozás a martonfai-pécsi menekülttábor ellen, 2015), lasted for approximately 50 days. It began on August 1, when locals from Martonfa, a village of 200 inhabitants, woke up one morning only to realize that the government had announced the placement of a refugee camp on the Martonfa shooting range, without consulting the mayor of the village about it. On the very same day a Facebook group was established and contentious activities began offline. Most importantly, a group of locals “occupied” the shooting range for 50 days, putting up tents and spending days and nights on the location. Other events—demonstrations, petitions, forums—were also organized, often with the aim of creating alliances and partnerships with a range of actors, most notably Pécs, a city and regional center near Martonfa. The movement ceased its activities after 50 days when the government withdrew its plans to build the refugee camp in the small village. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the effects of the social movement on the local community reach beyond this period.

The present paper first provides a possible theoretical framework for the analysis of such a movement. The methodology of the research is then explained. The findings of the research explain how the previously defined theoretical model can be applied to empirical data. Finally, a number of conclusions are drawn.

## Literature

The approach the present paper applies the perspective of social movement theory to a local anti-refugee camp movement. Traditionally, within the scholarly literature on social movements, two distinct approaches have developed (Crossley, 2002): the first is often associated with American authors and applies a structural approach to social movements and includes theories such as rational choice theory (Olson, 1965), resource mobilization theory (Jenkins, 1983), relative deprivation theory (Morrison, 1971), structural strain theory (Agnew, 1987), and political process theory (Tarrow, 1994). The second strand is more associated with European authors and emphasises cultural aspects of social movements: academic discussion here revolves around questions of identity within a movement (Melucci, 1995), questions of framing (Benford & Snow, 2000) and issues of values, such as new social movements theory (Touraine, 1985). The aim of the present study is to apply the latter—cultural rather than structural—approach to the case of Martonfa, as examining the discourse of a movement is more fitting to such a theoretical stance. Within this approach, I focus on questions of framing in order to analyse how the members’ perspectives, understanding of the situation and messages developed over the course of time.

In the field of social movements, framing theories (Benford & Snow, 2000), influenced primarily by Goffman’s famous concept (1974), are used to understand the ways in which social movements and social movement actors create and use meaning, or how events and ideas are framed. In the study of social movements collective action frames are used to bring people together and incite them to action.

One way to conceptualize the above is to differentiate between three types of collective action frames, namely diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). As Benford and Snow explain, diagnostic framing means that a problem needs to be identified by the movement. Such diagnostic frames often include a so-called injustice frame. Prognostic framing refers to the articulation of a proposed solution or at least strategic planning. Proposed solutions need to fall in line with the habits and ideologies of the movement. Finally, motivational framing provides a “call to arms” to participants, potential participants, and allies (Benford & Snow, 2000).

A precondition for successful movement action concerns both creating meaning within these frames and creating consistency between the three frames. The case study examines how these frames are filled with meaning and how inconsistencies within the frames are handled. While not central to the argument of the present paper, I also tentatively ask what the limitations of such a framing approach to social movements are.

## Methodology

The case study below is part of a broader research project that aims at comparing a number of local social movements that emerged against refugee camps throughout Hungary: in Balassagyarmat, Martonfa, Szentgotthárd, and Körmend. This broader research consists of both offline fieldwork and content analysis of the online activities of the movements. The present paper, however, has a more limited ambition, namely the examination of the knowledge, discourse and activities produced by the Martonfa movement in its Facebook group.

Posts within the Facebook group are analyzed utilizing thematic analysis. Thus, one Facebook post is one unit of analysis. A total of 287 Facebook-posts were analysed—no posts were excluded from the process. The steps of thematic analysis follow those outlined by Braun and Clark (2006):

1. immersing oneself in the data;
2. generating initial codes;
3. searching for themes;
4. reviewing themes;
5. defining and naming themes.

The methodology of the present research follows these steps—and also relies on the concept of collective action frames when searching, reviewing and defining its themes. The findings follow this logic, introducing the different collective action frames—diagnostic, prognostic and motivational—and the themes they contain.

Digital methods carry with them a number of difficulties that needed to be addressed during the analysis. While they cannot be recounted in full detail here, it should be mentioned that data reduction and coding necessarily leads to loss of data in terms of losing the original context of discussions and the natural flow of the discourse. A more significant problem arising during analysis is the question of generalizability: to both a population and a theory. Therefore, significant limitations to the present study exist: it should be borne in mind that analyses of digital contents are suitable for exploratory research but should optimally be supplemented with other methods, such as fieldwork or on-site interviews.

## Context

During the summer of 2015 the issue of refugees arriving to the European Union, and especially Hungary, became central on the political agenda. For a number of interrelated reasons, the number of refugees heading towards Europe and choosing the so-called Balkan route in this direction had been growing steadily in the previous years, and increased rather sharply in 2015. While the details and explanations of this increase are beyond the scope of this paper, a characteristic of this drastic change was that Hungary became an important transit-point for most refugees, the majority of whom passed through the country toward Western Europe.

In order to understand the Hungarian context of the refugee crisis the role of the Hungarian government cannot be overlooked. While the governing party's (Fidesz) popularity is left unchallenged by opposition parties both in the polls and the voting booths, two important factors shaped the refugee-discourse in the Hungarian public. First, a number of interim scandals during the second half of 2014 caused a sharp but nevertheless temporary decline in Fidesz' popularity. This explains the government's political agenda-setting strategy in which external threats and enemies became central elements. Second, this strategy in fact preceded the so-called refugee crisis. Following the terrorist attacks against Charlie Hebdo offices an estimated two million people took to the streets of Paris on January 11, 2015. Among them was Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, who took the opportunity to offer his interpretation of the events in an interview: "We should not look at economic migration as if it had any use, because it only brings trouble and threats to European people.... Therefore, immigration must be stopped. That's the Hungarian stance... Hungary will not become a target destination for immigrants," he said. "We will not allow it, at least as long as I am Prime Minister and as long as this government is in power." ("Hungary PM Orbán," 2015)

Orbán's words were echoed by a number of state officials and members of the governing party. The applied frame was very clear from the beginning: there are no refugees escaping the horrors of war, only economic migrants who jeopardize our jobs, our culture, and the so-called 'Hungarian way of life'. A number of political and communications tools were applied to reinforce this message. The government set up a working group to handle the immigrant question ("Most aztán tényleg," 2015), followed by a debate in the Hungarian parliament about the issue. This was followed by a so-called 'national consultation' in April, where each Hungarian voter received a questionnaire from the Prime Minister, including questions that asked: "Do you agree that mistaken immigra-

tion policies contribute to the spread of terrorism?” A month after this the government announced a major billboard campaign with three basic messages: “If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our culture!”; “If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our laws!”; and “If you come to Hungary, you can’t take away our jobs!” Given that the language of the billboards was Hungarian and they were mostly placed within Budapest, it can be presumed the target audience of the campaign was Hungarian voters and not the migrants themselves. A couple of days after this announcement the government also declared its plans to build a fence on the Hungarian-Serbian border (Reuters, 2015b).

The government’s offensive was not without its effects. According to a poll conducted in June, a majority of Hungarians agreed with the billboard-campaign’s statements (“Századvég: Az embereknek tetszik,” 2015). The findings of another opinion poll (“Csúcson az idegenellenesség,” 2015) showed that xenophobic sentiments had reached a record high, whereby 46% of those questioned stated that they wouldn’t allow anyone asking for refuge into the country—the highest level since 1992. Because negative sentiments in communication are usually stronger in changing attitudes these messages were more dominant in the anti-refugee campaign. Orban, however, also provided a more positive vision of Hungary, where homogeneity began to appear as a virtue and competitive advantage.

It is against this backdrop of political discourse and the very presence of refugees that the events detailed below took place. On July 31, 2015, a government regulation was published and announced by the government spokesperson, concerning the establishment of two temporary reception centers in Martonfa (Baranya county) and Sormás (Zala county). As the government ranked the building of these centers “investments of key importance for the national economy” their construction was deemed exempt from local consultation or notification procedures. This provided the legal justification for the government to bypass consultation with the political leaders or locals of Martonfa. This, however, created a paradoxical situation: while on the one hand the government was strongly invested in fear-mongering against refugees, the local objection against the reception center went against their goals.

## Findings

### *Chronology of events*

Before engaging in a detailed analysis of the messages and discourses of the anti-refugee camp movement at Martonfa, it is useful to look at the events as they unfolded from the perspective of the movement. The table below (Table 1) gives a short summary of this chronology.

Table 1: Chronology of events

July 31	The government appoints the Martonfa refugee camp sans consultation
August 1	The Facebook page is set up An open letter to the Prime Minister from the mayor of Martonfa Demonstrations in Martonfa and Pécs
August 2	Forum – decision about camping in the shooting field
August 3	Online petition
August 4	Townhall meeting in Martonfa
August 5	Letter to the Minister of Interior from the mayor of Pécsvárad
August 6	Demonstration (traffic obstruction)
August 7	Demonstration in Pécs
August 8	Motorcycle demonstration Concert in the shooting field
August 9	Offline petition
August 10	Pro-Martonfa demonstration in Nagykanizsa Helsinki Committee & Menedék [NGOs] visit Martonfa
August 11	Cooperation with the movement against the NATO radar station in Pécs
August 13	Demonstration in Martonfa (traffic obstruction)
August 14	Demonstration in Pécs
August 23	Open-air religious service led by Lóránd Hegedűs
August 24	Residential forum in Hird
August 26	Car/motorcycle demonstration in Pécsvárad
August 27	Road-blockade in Pécsvárad
August 28	Demonstration in Pécs
August 29	Residential meeting in Martonfa
September 4	Demonstration in Pécs (traffic disturbance)
September 6	March in Pécs
September 9	Jobbik demonstration in Pécs
September 10	Residential forum in Hosszúhetény
September 11	Pécs town hall meeting on migration
September 12	Demonstration in Pécs (traffic obstruction)
September 15	Government announces the cancellation of refugee camp in Martonfa
September 19	Family day in the shooting field
September 20	The demonstrators leave the shooting field

## *Diagnostic frames*

With regard to the diagnostic frame, an analytically useful distinction is to differentiate between various threads of the problem, namely the discourses on refugees, on the village, and finally on the political context.

Two aspects stand out when members of the group discuss refugees: that of cultural incompatibility and that of deservingness. Many posts and comments refer to refugees as people who are not compatible with European, “civilized” ways of living:

The refugee shelter in Vámoszabadi is full of dirt. It would be naive to believe that our fate would be different, if the refugee camp would be built here... (August 2)

Not a single cigarette was thrown away in the Martonfa shooting range in the past 1,5 months. Compare this with what [amount of litter] the migrants left behind in a couple of days... (September 14)

When discussing the case of Petra László, the journalist who famously kicked a refugee, the members come up with different gender norms of Europeans and Muslims as an argument against the victim:

The poor soccer coach, that dirty migrant left behind his wife and daughters and only brought his son along, he can go f..k himself. He's like the other Muslims, women and daughters mean nothing to them, they only use them as servants... (September 14)

The second refugee-related aspect, that of deservingness, is summarized in great detail in the comment below:

1. After months of walking and struggling, would anyone be in as good shape as these migrants?
2. Having walked and suffered thousands of kms would anyone be in the mood to run away from policemen?
3. Why are some migrants hiding their faces?
4. If they are running away from war and hunger, how come that they have hundreds or thousands of dollars and euros to pay for trafficking?
5. They can also afford smartphones and GPS...
6. I've just seen it on TV, a guy in Szabadka was walking around in such a nice white T-shirt, it was straight from the laundry...
7. The other day I saw pictures of migrants, armed with designer shoes, clothes, jewelry... How did they pay for these? They are running away from poverty... (August 3)

Part of the diagnostic frame is positioning the village as unique and as typical at the same time. The first is necessary in order to argue why it is especially unsuitable to host a refugee camp in comparison with other locations. This is done by referring to both quantitative (i.e., size of the village) and qualitative arguments.

“Baranya county [the administrative region Martonfa belongs to] is the second most densely populated region of the country. There is no military or border patrol securing the borders. If [the refugees] hide in the Mecsek forest, these intruders will never be found.” (August 1)

The facts: 2200 people live in Martonfa, we have 5 streets, a grocery and a pub. The village lacks a sewer system. We don’t have any railroads; the motorway is 30 kms away. The region lacks the language and other skills needed to host refugees. The competitive advantage of Martonfa is based on local agriculture – the guarding of the lands however is not secured. (August 2)

At the same time, however, the discursive construction of the diagnosis also has to resonate with wider audiences in order to win allies and partners for the case, which explains the need for more universal argumentation.

I hope that you are aware that this is not only about Martonfa. Do you realize that if they can force this on us without consultation, then this can happen to any place, at any time? (August 1)

To bridge the gap between the two strands of argumentation, the Martonfa movement posits itself as the watch-guard of the nation. This is best captured in the main motto of the movement: “Martonfa today – the whole country tomorrow!”.

Finally, the political contextualization of the question emphasises democratic decision-making—or rather the lack thereof. Throughout the discussions the fact that the government never negotiated with locals or the mayor of Martonfa but instead announced its decision without consulting them is heavily stressed. This focus on unilateral decision-making facilitates the connection between claims of specificity and universality and between the different constituencies: locals of Martonfa and those of the wider region. While the case of Martonfa is special, this could happen to anyone.

In Slovakia, they hold a referendum on the reopening of the Bős refugee camp. In Hungary they decide without consultations, anti-democratically, and the village affected has to learn from the press that the decision has already been made without asking them. (August 2)

Democracy is over in Hungary... The time of dictatorship has come. (August 3)

We see that in their diagnosis of the problem members of the group stress that the “figure of the refugee” is culturally incompatible, and at the same time question whether those arriving are refugees at all. Location is central to the diagnosis: Martonfa is special in certain aspects, which is why it is unsuitable to host a refugee camp. Nevertheless, it is also similar to other places in Hungary. The latter part of the diagnosis is essential in order to embed the objection in a wider national context and win supporters beyond the local base. That the decision was made without consulting the locals and is therefore undemocratic is crucial to the diagnosis. In its attempts to

build a wider coalition including a range of locations and a range of political actors, this factor serves as a lowest common denominator to glue together these actors.

### *Prognostic frames*

The prognostic frame serves to offer possible solutions to the problem in question, the arrival of refugees in our case. Interestingly, there is a significant lack of discussion related to possible solutions. The question is often handled with the tools of irony. A popular meme shared and liked by many people reads:

Martonfa doesn't want migrants! The Pancho Arena is large enough to host 3.500 people, the average audience size in Felcsút is 1.089 – do you have any more questions? (August 4)

The above quote refers to Felcsút, the hometown of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, where a huge soccer stadium was famously built to host games of Orbán's favourite sport.

Further ironic solutions offered are to move refugees to the Gypsy ghetto of Miskolc—a town in North-Eastern Hungary—or to “make life harder for Auntie Merkel” by “pushing” the refugees further west.

Notably, there are very few members who believe that the solution would be to send the refugees back home—pointing to the fact that members of the movement do not question the fact of war, but rather their own role in sharing its burdens.

In terms of what the prognosis for the locals and the social movement is, members believe that a wide coalition and persistent action would be the solution: that through their efforts they can first convince the government to consult with them and second, that this consultation would lead to the cancellation of the plans. The movement in its discourse is keen to look for clues in national and international politics about how the situation unfolds and therefore welcomes the plans of the government to build a fence on the Serbian-Hungarian border.

### *Motivational frames*

The motivational frame can be summed up with the motto created by the movement: “Keep on Martonfa, wake up Pécs!” Therefore, the motivational calls, event descriptions and mobilization slogans most significantly aim at a target group larger than the inhabitants of Martonfa, i.e., locals of the region, most notably the residents of the large nearby city of Pécs. This is in line with the action repertoire of the group where numerous events are organized not in Martonfa but in Pécs instead.

Let's meet at 5 and go to Pécs's Széchenyi Square afterwards so that they too can see how democracy works today! (August 1)

Wake up Pécs! This issue is much more significant than the internet tax was! Where are you?... (September 4)

We have a growing number of programs: we have programs organized by civilians and programs organized by political parties alike. Everyone can find something that fits their preference. Now we especially speak to those in Pécs: hiding from your problems and ignorance are the worst possible choices, so we ask everyone to get informed!... (September 7)

## Epilogue

Three months after the cancellation of the government's plan to place a refugee camp in Martonfa and after weeks of inactivity within the group, the movement announced a year-closing event: a commemoration walk to the shooting range:

The Martonfa folk is small but strong. Dear All! The core members of the Martonfa campers plan to start a tradition by meeting on the last day of the year at 1 p.m. in front of the Martonfa church, from where we will walk together to our wonderful shooting range in order to 1. commemorate our struggle and praise the heavens for our success in defending our village 2. meet each other and talk for a little bit... (December 29)

The cancellation of the plan is celebrated and remembered as the victory of the locals and also forms the basis of a strengthened and renewed local identity: Martonfa-ness means something different at the end of the year compared to before, as a result of the social movement.

## Conclusion

The above summary cannot give a full account of the discourse of the movement—nor can its findings be easily generalized. Nevertheless, they do point to a number of conclusions. We see that the action repertoire of the movement contains a wide variety of activities and stays colorful and rather intensive throughout the whole period. The actions undertaken are non-violent and stay within legal limits. This might be understood in terms of the wider goals of the movement, where alliance-building is central to members. The action repertoire contains mostly offline activities, while the role of social media and Facebook in particular is the promotion and documentation of the events. There are a number of messages that are central to the collective action frame constructed by the movement. While xenophobia is indeed present in this action frame, it is not central, and dehumanization of the refugees doesn't take place. The action frame stresses that Martonfa is unsuitable: the village is small and lacks proper infrastructure for the hosting of refugees. The village intends to resonate by appealing to the interests of surrounding villages as well. It is not only a coalition of villages but an alliance of

different political backgrounds that becomes paramount: movements on the left, even pro-refugee NGO-s, are addressed by the members. This wide coalition partly explains why the refugees are not central to the diagnosis: the “democracy-frame” connects most actors in the field. The conclusion of the story brings about a sense of achievement—while the movement didn’t solve the problem, the events strengthened members’ internal solidarity and identity.

When constructing the movement’s diagnostic frame, it is not the problem of the refugee but that of democratic decision-making that is heavily emphasized. In line with this, the prognostic action frame contains very few details regarding possible solutions or strategies to tackle the refugee issue. The motivational frame centers on “calling to arms” possible allies and partners. This points to at least two broader conclusions. First, it seems that the movement—because of the small size of the village—intends to balance its lack of power by using online tools to address possible allies. This need to widen the constituency drives the aim to create frames that resonate with the wider public. Second, regarding the structural-cultural divide in social movement scholarship, the above findings reinforce that a cultural approach—framing theory—in itself is insufficient to explain strategies of the movement, as these are often driven by the resources available, or in this case the lack thereof. Therefore, connecting structural approaches—the investigation of resources for example—could enrich and add to knowledge of cultural approaches in social movement studies, even if they focus on discourse itself.

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