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Ritualization of Ethno-Nationalism

A Textual Analysis of a Hungarian Corpus Christi Procession

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Abstract. – Observing a Corpus Christi procession in postsocialist Hungary, this article uses a textual analysis to explore how the ritual mirrors postsocialist trends that affirm Hungarian identity. The article serves to both document an interesting ritual procession but also view it in light of growing ethno-nationalism that both unites a community yet also shows exclusion of others. It is like a mirror at a microcosmic level that reflects a kind of ritualization of ethno-nationalism. *[Postsocialist Hungary, ritual procession, textual analysis, identity, catholicism]*

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Today is "Úrnapja," the day of the Corpus Christi procession, the Sunday two weeks after "Pünkösd" (Pentecost/Whitsuntide). On regular Sundays one might find a paltry group of elderly women in church attendance, today, however, the church overflows with young and old, neighbors and outsiders attracted to this beautiful celebration. After the mass in the church, they will all walk on the petal path to each of the four altars to honor the Holy Eucharist, representing Christ's Last Supper when he offered bread as his body, and wine as his blood. Just as a Navajo sandpainting is tediously and methodically constructed grain by grain, the flower path at the Corpus Christi procession in Budafok (Hungary) is constructed petal by petal, and just as the ephemeral sand designs must be destroyed after the ritual healing, the parishioners must destroy the petal path as they walk over it – despite the labor-intensive community project to build it. Just as the individual petals come together to form intricate designs, individual people come together to put on and participate in this event. On the one hand, Úrnapja is a Catholic ritual that serves to unite religious believers, however, this event also illuminates social conditions in postsocialist Hungarian society that illustrate growing disparities. The following article serves to document an interesting ritual practice and view it as text in which to discuss the complicated way rituals can affirm a bonding cultural identity, yet also serve to highlight issues of social segregation. It is like a mirror at a microcosmic level that reflects a kind of ritualization of ethno-nationalism. Surfacing from this analysis reveals generational divides particularly as an older generation who lived through the Communist era has had to adjust to a changing society. Though postsocialist Hungary has had to rebuild a national identity, it may be at the expense of potentially excluding those not deemed part of their nation building.

On my first visits to Hungary in 1994, I was surprised that religion had managed to endure despite Soviet disdain. Located in Central Europe, Hungary converted to Christianity in A.D. 1000 under King Stephen I, also known as King Saint Stephen (Hungarian: Szent István király). Later the Ottoman Turks occupied the country, and later still Hungary became part of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. Following World War II, Communist rule pre-

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vailed until 1989 when Hungary began transitioning to a free market economy. Hungary joined NATO in 1999, and the EU in 2004. The Catholic faith has remained constant in Hungary, however, it has undergone some changes since 1989. Though the Communist system officially denounced religious practices, today the church has much greater freedoms. The socialist regime confiscated church property, but after 1989, these were offered back to the church, causing some disgruntled confusion by the occupants who were forced to move out. Individuals have more religious freedoms. Though the Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Jewish faiths remain the more popular religious denominations, after 1989, Hungary has become open territory for missionaries of all types. For example, now there are Baptists, Pentecostal, and Jehovah's Witnesses, and growing interest in Scientology, Buddhism, and Hare Krishna. This article results from fieldwork in Hungary since 1993, participant observation, and person-centered interviews conducted in 2011 and 2012. I focus on a Corpus Christi procession, referred to as "Úrnapja" in Hungarian, as practiced in Budafok a district in Budapest.

Religion plays an important role in postsocialist Hungary as people grapple with societal changes (Froese 2001). On the one hand, the importance of describing rituals lies in part in documenting and recording the event for future reference, but also to see it within the current context as a reflection of issues related to the sociocultural context. After a brief discussion by what I mean by a textual analysis, this article will look at postsocialist change via ritual expression as a way to understand underlying expressions of ethno-nationalism that have spiked since the fall of Communism.

Textual Analysis

I am looking at social engagements or actions as a form of social text in which to view sociocultural context. By textual analysis I mean there is an element of interpretation of the underlying meaning of what may appear on the surface as one looks at the content of the ritual for key words or key images that are repeated, or cultural patterns. For example, Clifford Geertz suggests the Balinese cockfight is like a ritual because it reflects the values of the society, and "to treat the cockfight as a text is to bring out a feature of it (in my opinion, the central feature of it) that treating it as a rite or a pastime, the two obvious alternatives, would tend to obscure: its use of emotion for cognitive ends," and the person who attends the event learns "what his culture's ethos and his private sensibility (or, anyway, certain aspects of them) look like when spelled out externally in a collective text; that the two are near enough alike to be articulated in the symbolics of a single such text" (Geertz 1972: 27). Furthermore, he suggests the ritual enables the participant to read and reread it like a text (1972: 28),

> … he grows familiar with it and what it has to say to him, much as the attentive listener to string quartets or the absorbed viewer of still lifes grows slowly more familiar with them in a way which opens his subjectivity to himself.
>
> Yet, because – in another of those paradoxes, along with painted feelings and unconsequenced acts, which haunt aesthetics – that subjectivity does not properly exist until it is thus organized, art forms generate and regenerate the very subjectivity they pretend only to display. Quartets, still lifes, and cockfights are not merely reflections of a preexisting sensibility analogically represented; they are positive agents in the creation and maintenance of such a sensibility.

This form of textual analysis serves to look at the presentation of the ritual to understand the underlying ways the event provides insight into society. One descriptive account of the ritual can be analyzed like text, to understand the underlying meanings to interpret broader cultural issues. As such, I will be looking at the Corpus Christi ritual as a social text in which to view Hungarian society.

Public rituals as "text" can reveal rhetorical and symbolic aspects of political transformation. Susan Gal looks at the reburial of the famous Hungarian musician and folklorist Béla Bartók from New York City back to his homeland Hungary. She argues the rhetoric behind the arguments to move the body reflect the sociopolitical context at the time. She states (1991: 441 f.):

> The exegesis of Bartók's funeral fits into a broad category of anthropological analysis – the study of events – that has taken many forms. Perhaps its currently most familiar version is the reading of events as "texts" that can be decoded to reveal the cultural systems in which they occur. But, as critics of this approach have pointed out, an event is not necessarily best understood as the reflection of existing social structures or as the exemplification of a coherent cultural system … In the kind of social events I examine here, multiple cultural claims emerge; far from being static reflections of a unified system, such events are the means by which some groups make contingent attempts to shore up a social order, in response to attempts by others to dismantle it.

Public ritual such as Bartók's funeral, she argues, can provide venues for looking at political rhetoric and discourse. The event does not simply project an image of a unified society, but rather complicates

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negotiations for assertions of power and national identity to reabsorb counter narratives into the hegemonic discourse. Defining a Hungarian national identity following the collapse of Communism continues to be a contentious issue. Like Gal suggests, my reading of the ritual as text does not necessarily provide one static unified meaning but rather various contested issues.

The Corpus Christi ritual illuminates many paradoxes in present-day Hungary. It brings together the community and it also shows social differences. It is an indication of religious continuity and also social change. The ritual itself expresses important issues in Hungary today – a need for collective identity coupled with increasing societal inequities. Through discrete social practices people symbolically display a way to deal with power and change. After a description of the Corpus Christi ritual itself, this article uses the ritual as a text for analysis, to ponder the role of ritual in reflecting ethno-nationalist tensions of community bonding and exclusion.

The Corpus Christi Procession: Úrnapja

The origins of the Corpus Christi celebration are attributed to a nun named Juliana of Liège who had a vision of the church while looking at a full moon with a dark spot. Juliana was a "beguine" who lived in a female community devoted to poverty, prayer, and good works. Over 20 years the vision of the moon with this dark spot troubled her until she had a vision from Christ suggesting this absence was due to a lack of a feast of the Eucharist. This compelled her to push for a special celebration of the Eucharist, and in 1246 Bishop Robert ordered the celebration to be held the Thursday after Trinity Sunday (Bálint 1937: 107; Rubin 1990: 16).

Past versions of the ritual share some similarities to the present celebrations yet reflect societal beliefs and practices of the era. Bálint suggests that in Hungary's medieval era people believed sanctifying the power of the Holy Eucharist would dispel evil and harm and might stave away natural disasters and provide a bountiful harvest. Bálint found data from 1412 verifying the procession occurred in Buda, which included mystery games linked to Bible scenes. The ceremonies could include candles, procession relics, crosses, pictures, and flowers. In some versions workers guilds would march with their own flags, such as tailors, furriers, shoemakers, and butchers. In other versions poems might be read at each of the four stations, but Bálint contends that he is uncertain if this was a traditional practice or individual initiative. He describes accounts in Szeged, the third largest city in Hungary situated near the southern border near the Tisza River, where believers would carry flowers, grass, and green branches, and families might carry wreaths or flowers grown from their own lands. After going through the procession these flowers were now believed to have been blessed with special abilities. For example, bathing in a bath made from a wreath from this procesion could cure sleeplessness. A cooked birch plant from the procession could be smeared on the joints of those inflicted with gout. Thyme given to a cow would improve the milk and protect from hexing; the Lord's holy green branches might protect from lightening striking the house; wood chippings from the procession might cure toothache (Bálint 1937: 107–109).

Many believe the Swabian population brought the celebration that included intricate flowered paths to Hungary, when they emigrated from Germany during the late 17th century, early 18th century (Horváth, Vidra, and Fox 2011; Bálint 1937: 107–109). Swabian peasants who specialized in agriculture came from other parts of the Habsburg Empire and were put as colonizers in various parts of the country (Isaac 1950; Sólyom 2014). The flowered paths used in the Budafok celebration today reflect this heritage.

Religious Oppression during the Socialist Era and Its Impact on Úrnapja

During the Socialist era (1949–1989) Communist oppression hindered religious expression and this impacted an older generation's experience. In a life history with Mónika néni (b. 1935) she said that in her youth there had been great religious processions, she recalls her mother traveling 30 kilometers on foot as an act of penance with a procession that carried a statue of Mary. She remembers celebrating Úrnapja: "This was every year, and for us it was a big holiday. The little church had a procession. Well, after the war we still had it a few times, but after it stopped, they didn't have the procession, they stopped doing it." After the war, particularly during the Stalinist era (1949–1956) under the strict Mátyás Rákosi regime, religious oppression heightened. After the 1956 revolution, restrictions lessened in what has been deemed "Goulash Communism" particularly the Kádár era in which János Kádár, who was a Hungarian communist leader, presided over the country from 1956–1988. Later in the 1950s, Mónika néni remarks, "We always went, we had baptisms also, we also went to church. They never bothered us. There were some who didn't go

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because of their work. For us it wasn't this way, we went, they never bothered us. The children also went, and there was catechism. Then, at that time, there were no religious schools." Though the Catholic schools were closed since the Rákosi era in an attempt to separate the church from the state, after 1956 restrictions lessened so that the government did not bother people who practiced their faith. Yet, there were those who might not go to church "because of their work," and most likely because of their connections to the Socialist Party. Gyuszi (b. 1956) explains that if someone was part of the Socialist Party, he might attend a church in a different neighborhood to avoid confrontation or conflict. Mónika néni went on to explain "[b]ut now they do not prohibit it," meaning that since 1989 the government no longer oppresses church expression and, as Tomka (2011) suggests, it has become a public actor again.

An older generations' experience with Communist oppression, particularly in terms of religion, may have also encouraged a uniform identity in resistance to it. Tomka suggests (2009: 34):

> The party-state opposed joint action and community creation, prohibited autonomous movements and organizations, persecuted independent gatherings and religious parish life. It deprived individuals of the possibility of alternatives, of initiatives, of independent decisions, of progress in individualization. The official state ideology stressed a single truth and a single vision of human and social fulfillment, under the leadership of a single party. Communism was the antithesis of human and social modernization. On the other hand the resistance against communist centralism united people into one opposition.

Though Communism, he argues, discredited previous identities, resistance to Communism united disparate identities. In a life history interview I conducted with Lujza (b. 1934) she describes that she attended "Tremontrei Papi Gimnázium," a Catholic high school in Budafok and while in her third year the government took over the religious schools and nationalized them and changed the school system. Lujza learned Latin in school, but when asked, she said she also had to take Russian classes. "Yes, that Russian, that no one learned, no one in the world." "Why did they not learn Russian," I asked, to which she responded: "I do not know, maybe because they already hated the Russians, they bring this from home, that idea of those 'rotten Russians,' so the children did not want to learn it. The whole country hated the Russians. No one, no child studied Russian." Her remarks illustrate how resistance to Communism created a form of group bonding. In addition, her childhood experience shows the impact of societal change, in particular how it impacted the church education system.

Though religion persisted during the Communist era in a somewhat covert way, after socialism people were allowed to more freely express their religious beliefs. Miklós Tomka gives an overview of religious change in postcommunism to reflect on changing attitudes and beliefs to illustrate the complexity of similarities and differences within Eastern and Central Europe (2011). He states, "[b]efore 1945, religion had been one of the *main pillars of the societal order and the state*, but under the Communist era it was *persecuted* and pushed to the private sphere. Since 1989, it has resumed to be a *public actor* whose precise role, however, has not been finalized yet" (2010: 1). He looks at the importance of the historical political context to trace religious change.

There are generational differences between an older generation who experienced the Communist era, yet also generational differences among the youth who have grown up during the transition period after 1989. Gergely Rosta (2010) traces the changing religiosity of youth in three phases in 2000, 2004, and 2008 to suggest that there are generational differences based on different historical political contexts, particularly as religious upbringing is more tolerated in postcommunist society. Though there had been an increased interest in religion immediately following 1989, it has since waned for the younger generation. Rosta states, "[t]hough declining, religiosity is still characteristic to some extent for the majority of younger generations in Hungary. But what is true for the adult population is still more true for the youth: religion is predominantly private, individually defined and distant from churches. Non-Christian faiths are equally represented in these private worldviews as traditional Christian elements" (2010: 65). Though changing perspectives continue regarding youth connection to the church, the elderly still maintain stronger ties.

Hence there can be generational differences in perceptions and attitudes toward religion, as well as generational differences of experiences as adapting to cultural change can be more stressful to an older generation, than a younger one oblivious to its difficulties. Anthony Wallace suggests, that during times of societal uncertainty, such as during the postsocialist transition, there may be added incentive to rely on past traditions to make sense, and to cope with societal confusion (1956). The following describes a Corpus Christi procession as a text in which to explore how the changing sociocultural context impacts understandings of cultural identity as reflected in a ritual that brings together a community creating boundaries that exclude.

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A Postsocialist Corpus Christi Procession in Budafok

The use of intricate decorated flower and grass paths for the Corpus Christi processions occur in numerous places in Germany; in Italy they construct "Infiorata" where people decorate the streets of, e.g., Norcia and Bolsena, with a path of flowers. There are also examples of flower paths and altars in Spain (e.g., Tossa de Mar) as well as in Poland, such as, for example, in the village of Spycimierz. The flower path tradition occurs in several areas in Hungary including Csömör, Mogyoród, Budaörs, Törökbálint, Budakeszi, as well as Budafok.

Typically in May or June, two weeks after Pünkösd (Pentecost/Whitsuntide) the people of the St. Lipót Church in Budafok hold a procession to honor the Eucharist, which through transubstantiation the devout believe the bread and wine transform into Christ's body and blood. Budafok, belonging to District XXII of Budapest, lies in the southwestern Buda side of the city bordered by the Danube. Known for its winemaking history, it also marks an area linked to Swabian heritage. Some settled in the Budafok region of Budapest, and some descendants exist today who still identify as Swabian. Though the use of the flowered paths in Hungary perhaps originated within the Swabian tradition, the celebration today includes the local community not simply those of German heritage. Despite being tied to a particular community, as a microcosm of the society, one can still gain cultural insights. After a description of the event, I will look at the ritual as text to use as a springboard for discussion of societal issues related to reconstructing identity postsocialism and the double-edged role of ethno-nationalism to unite yet divide.

I encircled the route where the parishioners would be walking in a few hours carefully stepping around the intricate patterns of crosses, hearts, and fish that led the way on a carpet made of cut grass and flowers. Some elderly women clutching plastic bags filled with flower petals were bent over adding their personal touches to the petal carpet. Several tables adorned with flowers, and religious statues or crosses were set up as altars along the path. As I admired one especially beautiful altar, a woman proudly proclaimed that her grandmother decorated an altar every year. At another stop before the procession, a woman sat at the altar to make sure no one would steal the red velvet curtains decorated with flowers and statues that she has lent for the display. The neighbors at several houses along the way have put up candles and bouquets of flowers in their windows.

Officially, this procession publicly affirms the Catholic faith by honoring the real existence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist as symbolized in the bread as his body and the wine as his blood, yet it also reflects Hungarian national identity. The people of the community have labored over an amazingly stunning carpet of flowers since late last night for the 9:00 A.M. procession. First, there is a layer of fresh cut grass as a base, then flower petals. Rose petals of different hues and colors make various designs like a fragrant stained glass window. Some designs are simple patterns such as circles and triangles, while others have specific religious motifs – such as the Eucharist signified by a wineglass with bread, or a fish, or a cross. Occasionally, the flowers depict symbolic representations of the Hungarian nation such as the coat of arms, the patriotic colors of red, white, and green, or the Hungarian Byzantine-style crown with its distinctive bent cross.

Normally few people attend church, but today the church bulges with several hundred parishioners. Though the sun shines pleasantly outside, people inside the church for the service use makeshift fans to cool the unbearable heat caused from the packed crowds. Flowers also decorate the interior of the church, as well as Hungarian flags. On a normal Sunday, mostly single elderly women barely fill the first two pews, yet today all ages, men, women, and families barely fit into the church. Two years ago, I had attended Úrnapja at another church in the Buda hills, but there were not as many people because two weeks prior to the event some youths vandalized the Christian statues in the garden that they use in their procession. It was on the local news and apparently may have discouraged people from attending. After Communion starts I wait outside for the procession to begin. I see a number of other people just arriving, prudently skipping the overcrowded mass and just coming for the outside procession.

The procession begins with a very specific order. Six men carry out a fabric tent supported by six sticks and wait for members of the procession to walk through. First walk the altar boys and altar girls. The head altar boy, a tall 15-year-old redhead dressed in a long white robe, carries a huge cross on a long pole. Though it is located far from their home, this young man and his parents attend this Gothic church regularly because they like its physical beauty. His father grew up in the neighborhood and they often pick up by car his father's mother who still resides here. This community event fills with neighbors and friends whose families have known each other for generations, yet it also attracts many outsiders due to the spectacular display of flowers and the grand ritual procession. Notice-

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ably absent, however, are recent African and Chinese immigrants.

Several altar boys swing lanterns attached to a long chain causing sage-incensed smoke to trail in the air, next comes the priest under the canopy carrying a monstrance looking like a special box containing the Holy Sacrament Eucharist. The six men start to carry the tent over the priest. A number of flower children, boys and girls under the age of 10, carry baskets filled with petals that they scatter on the ground. Then comes a group of youth scouts – boys and girls from the age of 13–20 who look like boy scouts – green short sleeved shirts, red handkerchiefs around their necks, and a scout-like hat. This religious Christian scout group started in 1989; otherwise you might mistake them for the Socialist youth groups who also wore red handkerchiefs around their necks. The singers with microphones follow the scouts. The head altar boy tells me that the parish brought in a very special priest just to "sing" this mass. Last comes the congregation – a mob of people that trample the flowered path.

There are four stations along the procession where the priest stops and says a prayer. The procession winds around the local streets near St. Lipót Church by starting on Magdolna utca a few steps south from the church's entrance and then makes a sharp turn right to head northwest on Kölcsey utca and then veers left towards the west on Péter-Pál utca. At each stop along this route community members set up tables as altars with little statues and flower decorations. The priest stops at each of the altars. At the first station he reads a passage from the gospel of Matthew, at the second stop he reads a passage from the gospel of Mark, at the third a passage from Luke, and at the fourth a passage from John. At each stop the special singing priest sings a hymn and a Eucharist Benediction is given – the consecrated host (the bread symbolizing the body of Christ) is held up and the priest gives a blessing to the community. At another Úrnapja celebration I observed in the year 2010 in the Buda hills the blessings were more specific – a blessing for the aged, for invalids, and children. Though one might find a standard practice to the ritual, such as the flowered carpet and four altar stations along the procession, there is variation depending on which church, which neighborhood, and certainly which year the ritual takes place.

Along with this orderly procession follows a disorderly crowd. As we begin the procession there is a drunken fellow on the side of the road who is upset that we are walking on the flower carpet. He said that he and his neighbors had been up since 5:00 A.M. making the flower path only now to see it destroyed by the procession. Some people (mostly the older women) gather up the flowers from the path because they are now considered blessed as the priest has walked on them. There is a general belief that these flowers have now become sacred. After the priest left the first altar, the woman who made the altar now hands out bouquets of flowers that she had pinned to a white cloth behind the altar. Though the people in the front of the procession have moved onto the next altar, a horde of old women remain frenziedly grabbing for these small bouquets of flowers. One of the houses toward the end of the procession had put up some candles and white flowers in the window and after the main procession walks by, I notice people actually reaching through the open windows and grabbing the flowers from the vases. An upset woman yells and creates a scene because she believes no one gave her flowers due to racism because she is a Gypsy. Everyone continues down the road and returns to the church for the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Soon the service is over. Afterwards in front of the church offices next to the church three priests can be heard arguing over who has the best *házi pálinka* (an illegally brewed homemade fruit brandy) at home.

This procession reflects both community bonds yet also ambiguities and uncertainties. It is an example of power, resistance, and constructions of identity. The ritual reveals themes such as a need for collective identity coupled with increasing societal inequities. The following explores the ways in which ritual can create social integration, yet at the same time ritual can highlight societal disparities.

Ritualization of Ethno-Nationalism

Nationalistic behavior becomes ingrained in rituals as both a way to create cultural traditions that unite communities, and by doing so, to reflect omission of those not deemed part of the community. During the Socialist era in Hungary nationalist practices were downplayed to encourage allegiance to the state system, and this included religious practices and rituals. Now postcommunism there has been a need to reinvent Hungarian national identity, yet this has also raised nationalist based prejudices. Forming identity complicates rather than simplifies, as there may be a diversity of ways people deal with adversities (Rouse 1995). The Prime Minister Viktor Orbán urged the country to establish Hungarian identity after being suppressed during the Communist era. He stated:

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> … after the Second World War, we gradually faded to grey, becoming just one more country among the unfortunate, occupied Socialist states of Eastern Europe. We can best see how grey we had become by taking a quick look around us. … We can see it in the type of buildings, the type of material culture and in what we were able to create in the era of our recent past. Then came the 1970s, which may be encapsulated by the decade's concepts of the "happiest barracks" and "goulash Communism." That is the condition we were in when we arrived at the 1990s, at the time when there was an attempt to change systems; … ever since then we have been looking for, we have been trying somehow to express properly, to sum up exactly, what it means to be Hungarian, what exactly we are and what exactly our ambitions and aims are. This image, however, is emerging only very slowly from the pieces of the mosaic (of history), which we have occasionally managed to clutch on to. Yet history does not normally grant more than ten years of respite. We have slowly but surely used up this time, and if we ourselves cannot produce an image that gets straight to the heart of what we are, if we cannot produce an image that both captures the essence (of the Hungarian nation) and is convincing, then others will produce it in our stead (quoted in Kostolányi 2000).

One way national identity can be expressed is through its rituals. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) talked about "invented traditions," so that traditions that seem original to the culture, that may express its "authentic" cultural identity, may actually be more recent inventions. In some cases, he claims, prior traditional practices could be "modified, ritualized and institutionalized for the new national purposes" (Hobsbawm 1983: 6). Reclaiming a religious "tradition" suppressed during the Communist era can be one way to reassert Hungarian identity. Though certainly Hungary has a need to construct cultural identity, growing nationalism can both bring people together yet incite social division. The subsequent section will look at how ritual can reflect cultural traditions that aid nation building.

Ritual as Reflection of Culture Can Serve towards Nation-Building

The Corpus Christi festival in Hungary can be viewed as a microcosm of society that both reflects aspects of the social order and teaches attendees about their culture. Though the church may instate a religious practice, it can become adapted to reflect what is distinct about that particular culture, such as Eric Wolf's discussion of the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe actually being molded through syncretism to fit a pre-Christian belief in a moon goddess named Tonantzin. The indigenous Mexican population saw the Virgin Mary in terms of their animistic moon goddess hence reinterpreting to fit their own societal beliefs (Wolf 2008). Clifford Geertz suggests ritual is both "a model of and a model for" society, so that the ritual reflects the worldview and cultural values, yet also teaches and informs that worldview and value. He states: "[C]ulture patterns have an intrinsic double aspect: they give meaning, that is, objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves" (Geertz 2008: 61). In this respect, the ritual can symbolically represent the cultural worldview of the society, but also at the same time society learns its cultural worldview from it. Though various countries celebrate the Corpus Christi festival, in each country it has been altered to fit their cultural values and traditions, and hence the people who attend the ritual also come to learn not just the values of the tradition, but their own country's worldview. In South America, for example, the celebration includes cultural elements specific to their society, such as huge cartoonish effigies, South American music, and dance.[1] The Hungarian nation has a historical connection with Catholicism as King Saint Stephen, the first King of Hungary, brought religion to Hungary in 1001, receiving the Holy Crown from the Pope. Hungarian national symbols often depict St. Stephen's Byzantine crown on flags and on currency. The Hungarian National Museum had displayed the crown and orb until 2000 when it was moved to the Parliament building. Nationalist symbols such as the Hungarian flag, patriotic colors, and crown decorated the church and flowered path of the Corpus Christi ritual. The Corpus Christi celebration in Hungary may be linked to Swabian tradition, but it too now reflects something distinctly Hungarian.

Following the societal shift in 1989 from a Communist-based society to a market-based one has led to a renewed interest in religion, as people grappled with societal change and pondered new ways to define cultural and national identity. Just as ritual can come to fit the cultural worldview, it also indicates the sociopolitical context at the time, particularly if that society undergoes societal change. Most of the regular parishioners at St. Lipót Church in Budafok are elderly women, and these senior women have been especially vulnerable to the changes after the demise of socialism. There are a disproportionate number of elderly women in the population, and many of these are reliant on an increasingly dwin-

1 Armengou (1968); Caillavet (1997); Ferrer i Soler I Anguera I Llaurado (1964); Garrido Atienza (1990); Lleo Cañal (1980); Murlà i Giralt (1984); Noyes (2003); Zaruma Quizhpilema (1994).

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dling pension. As state-run welfare programs of the socialist era are slowly collapsing with the shift to a market-based system, these senior citizens desperately try to get by. Anthony Wallace argues that during these periods people may turn to past rituals to make sense of societal uncertainty. He states (1956: 265):

> A revitalization movement is defined as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture. Revitalization is thus, from a cultural standpoint, a special kind of culture change phenomenon: the persons involved in the process of revitalization must perceive their culture, or some major areas of it, as a system (whether accurately or not); they must feel that this cultural system is unsatisfactory; and they must innovate not merely discrete items, but a new cultural system, specifying new relationships as well as, in some cases, new traits … [and in response to an abrupt change a] … new plan is put into effect by the participants in the movement.

New fears have arisen as unfamiliar religions have infiltrated from the West. Whereas the younger generation seems eager to explore new spiritual beliefs, the older generation feels concerned. Hungary's aging population, the oldest in Eastern Europe, is an issue of growing anxiety particularly in terms of the health care, and pension systems.[2] From a cultural standpoint, growing generational divides also mark differences in perception particularly for an older population who may have experience with World War II and the Communist era, whereas a younger generation may not. Furthermore, there can be marked experiences of ageism as the elderly adapt to a different type of society from their youth. Several of my interviewees have commented how they were unjustly fired from their jobs simply to make way for younger employees, and obtaining new jobs has been difficult, forcing them to make do with their limited pensions.

During the Communist era in Hungary, many Hungarian rituals were either replaced with state holidays that promoted the Communist agenda, and/or the Hungarian rituals were if not discouraged, they might be outlawed. The Communist system dissuaded religion as one means to gain state authority, and with the fall of Communism, people's renewed freedom spiked interest in reviving religious practices as a way to reclaim past identity and perhaps deal with the uncertainties of societal change. These rituals can serve to unite a community and society.

2 Velkoff 1992); Burns and Cekota (2002); Veira-Ramos and Bukodi (2011).

Ritual Like Nationalism Bonds Communities

Following the fall of Communism, Hungarians have had to rebuild a sense of national identity, to reconstruct a belief in society rather than resistance to it, and rituals are a way to achieve this end. Ritual serves to attach the individual to society; it is a form of social integration that brings a community together. Victor Turner argues that an experience of heightened sociality during the ritual creates a sense of bonding or "communitas" that integrates people together. An individual is bound to a sacred community of individuals (Turner 2008). The ritual takes place in a marked period of time and space other than everyday practices. It is a physical space surrounding the church grounded in history and tradition – it is a perceived, conceived and representational space that constructs a sense of group identity (Lefebvre 1992: 38 f.). At this special place and moment a collective identity in the form of the congregation is created. Tomka suggests that religion not only signifies societal context but plays a vital role in Eastern-Central European transformation. "It is interesting to note (1) how a previously hidden social dimension manifests itself and becomes tangible; (2) how religious attitudes, the groups of faithful and the organizations of churches transform during social changes; and (3) what role religiosity has in human behavior" (Tomka 2010: 15). The following explores more thoroughly this process of bonding the group together through shared belief and through shared experience.

As each parishioner consumes Christ, and carries him within, this symbolically creates a communal bond that unites the congregation with the church under the shared belief in Christ as embodied in the Eucharist. As Durkheim suggests, rituals are a part of religious phenomena, and to understand the ritual one has to understand the belief behind it. He states: "Religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are particular modes of action. Between these two categories of phenomena lies all that separates thinking from doing," and, furthermore "only after having defined the belief can we define the rite" (2008: 40). The Eucharist as a key summarizing symbol expresses in an emotionally powerful way what Catholicism means to its believers (Ortner 2008). By eating the bread and drinking the wine, true believers perceive they are really consuming the body and blood of Christ, hence the parishioner physically and symbolically becomes a part of the church. This bread, referred to as the "Holy Sacrament," or "Eucharist," symbolically evokes images of the Last

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Supper when Jesus ate his last meal with his disciples before his Crucifixion and today represents a symbolic communion with Christ and God and an affirmation of Jesus dying for the sins of humankind.

For the true believers, however, the Eucharist is not simply a symbol but mystically embodies the essence of Christ, so that Christ himself is present within the Holy Sacrament, and to eat it is to have spiritual communion with him (Stravinskas 1998: 409; Pope Paul VI 1965). The bread or "host" is sacrificed so that the parishioner consumes the embodiment of Christ, making the digested Christ a physical part of the parishioner's body. Mary Douglas argues "The word for 'body' has multiple references as microcosm for the temple and for God's universe. We have also to take into account the interchangeability in the Bible of words for spiritual and material food, bread and flesh, wine, blood, life and soul" (1999: 210). Bread offerings, she argues, had a history in the Bible before the Eucharist, and "the habit of analogical thinking was deeply ingrained in the language of religion, metaphors of cosmos and body were highly developed" (223). The Úrnapja procession intends to reaffirm the faithful and unite the congregation and it also symbolically brings together the community through shared understandings and belief.

Rituals, such as Úrnapja, often serve as a means to create communal bonds through shared experience. Victor Turner talks about rituals as marking distinctions between structure and anti-structure, as the ritual liminal phase is outside the normal "structure" of society, yet teaches and informs the participants to bond to society through "communitas." Though Úrnapja is not a rite of passage that marks transitions of identity or status, it does entail the "liminal" quality of ritual as participants walk outside their normal lives and society onto a path of flowers that transforms them spiritually as they bond to Christ through the Holy Sacrament. The flower road becomes a liminal sacred pathway where both human and holy persons interact. The procession creates a temporary social space and an ephemeral art form that links the sacred and profane by fusing the local and spiritual. At this space and time, the individual is connected to the church and the community, or as Victor Turner prefers to say "communitas." He suggests that there are two interrelated and altering models: one of a structured society marking social positions and the other seen during the liminal period of the ritual of an unstructured society where the marked structures of social difference become blurred to a "relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders. I prefer the Latin term 'communitas' to 'community,' to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an 'area of common living'" (Turner 2008: 328). Rather than use the word "community," he prefers to stress the social bonds made during this process, much like the Úrnapja ritual creates social relationships among the participants as long time parishioners, neighbors as well as strangers from all different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, come together for the ritual ceremony.

Religion during the Communist era provided unity in opposition to oppression, and postcommunism religion provided unity as a way to develop identity. Tomka talks about the role of religion and constructions of identity. He suggests Christianity encourages forms of community and can serve to bring disparate groups together.

> After the collapse of communism and with the disintegration of the previous unifying systems, societies entered modernity swiftly which include the process of individualization and self determination. All these led to fundamental identity crisis. With its promise of coherent values, religion has become a strong force. The social impact of different religious groups, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestants, and Islam are different. Reconciliation has to begin with the healing of the wounded identities (Tomka 2009: 31; abstract).

The ritual enactment of Corpus Christi reflects societal context and symbolically unifies the community as an expression of discontent but also as a means to create understandings of identity.

The celebration of the Eucharist on Úrnapja marks a special ritual occasion that brings people together. As an occasion to look and to be seen, people dress in more formal attire than during an average church service. People that rarely attend church come for the procession. The spectacular display of flowers along with special hymns is out of the ordinary and certainly attracts attendance. Some people skip the mass entirely and only participate in the actual procession. Some people attend to watch their loved ones participate in the event, from the altar boys and girls to the scouts and flower children, snapping commemorative photographs. Like Turner suggests, though the general society has structured hierarchies, during the ritual there is a "communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of ritual elders" in what he terms "communitas" (Turner 2008: 328). Many people from outside the community, myself included, come to witness this special procession. Though I am not a devout follower, I am, like others,

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attracted to the beautiful fragrant flower paths, the inspiring singing and chanting, and the ritual itself.

The ritual in essence is a performance that gives the illusion of group cohesion, however, different people experience the ritual differently, as symbols are read from different perspectives. Bourdieu (1990: 108) states that:

> [R]itual manifestations are also representations, theatrical performances, shows, that stage and present the whole group, which is thus constituted as the spectator of a visible representation of what is not so much a representation of the natural and social world, a "world-view", as a practical, tacit relationship to the things of the world. Officialization is the process whereby the group (or those who dominate it) teaches itself and masks from itself its own truth, binds itself by a public profession which sanctions and imposes what it utters, tacitly defining the limits of the thinkable and the unthinkable and so contributing to the maintenance of the social order from which it derives its power.

The orderly portrayal of the Úrnapja procession, with its flower carpet, marching of priests and altar boys, hymns, and scriptures are part of the performance. This performance attracts the community to participate and admire.

The community comes together to build the flower path and altars. It takes a lot of organization and planning to build the procession route. The community blocks off the streets from cars the night before so that the people living in the area can clean the streets and assemble the flower path. Thousands of flower petals are needed to make the designs, yet flowers are perishable. People gathered these petals from personal gardens and brought them to the area and though there is a regular group of people who assemble the path every year, anyone can participate by adding their own petals. On the morning before the procession, I still saw older women with plastic bags filled with petals from their gardens, each of these women carefully adding their own personal petals to the overall design of the path. Because so many people personally contribute to the construction of this event, they feel a personal pride and connection to it, yet there are forms of hegemony and social inequity. Though ritual may bring some together, it may also exclude others not perceived as part of the culture.

Ritual Like Nationalism Can Highlight Societal Tensions and Segregation

Ritual can reflect societal status as well as inequalities (Geertz 1972). If magic and witchcraft exist to explain unfortunate events (Evans-Pritchard 1976), religious ritual exists because it fills a void not provided by other sources. A ritual is a reflection of society and according to Weber and Durkheim can reinforce societal rules. Geertz argues that a ritual can "render ordinary everyday experience comprehensible" (1973: 443) and can reflect social hierarchies and status. Ritual can symbolically be a source of domination and integration. While it may incorporate members into proper social groups, it also may exclude those deemed not proper (Schwartz and Merten 1975). The group cohesion of the parishioners serves to reinforce differences.

Religious bonding through ritual practice can be associated with cultural identity that may entail cultural boundaries. Barth sees ethnic identity in terms of the boundaries that define it. He is not as interested in the cultural aspects within a group, but rather the dividing lines that distinguish one group from another. In particular, Barth looks at cultural diacritics such as clothing, language, life style, and basic value orientations that can symbolically mark distinctions between groups (Barth 1969). Some approaches to identity incorporate emic and etic constructions of identity that link collective identity to culture.[3] Barbara Myerhoff explored how religious identity can become part of one's identity by growing up around it. She says that "Jewish comes up in you from the roots" to suggest one's daily activities and practices can ingrain religious values in one's sense of self. One elder woman in her study had dementia and though she had difficulty with most daily activities she still remembered ritual practice because it became part of who she was (Myerhoff 1978). Wilkie (1977) highlights the capacity for diverse individuals to form group identity as a response or alternative to a dominant force; however, he does little to discuss power itself or the independent agent. Chong suggested that second-generation immigrants held onto religion because social marginalization can make the church a place of belonging and identity (1998). Such approaches highlight identity in terms of collective culture, yet there can be problems when groups decide who can and cannot be included.

Though the Hungarian version of the ritual does not overtly parody the celebration, there is a carnivalesque element to it that reveals societal tensions. Bakhtin (1984) suggests that rituals such as the Corpus Christi celebration can reveal underlying societal tensions while at the same time creating societal bonds. In medieval France and Spain, there was an unofficial parody of the Corpus Christi, that Bakhtin (1984: 229 f.) says

3 Cohen (1978); Berreman (1975); Lockwood (1981).

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may appear at first sight as sacrilegious as it is unexpected. However, the history of this feast in France, as well as in other countries, especially Spain, proves that extremely free, grotesque images of the body were quite usual on these occasions and were consecrated by tradition. It can be said that the grotesque body prevailed in the popular marketplace aspect of this celebration and created its specific atmosphere. Thus, for instance, traditional representations of this grotesque body participated in the procession, which included a monster combining cosmic, animal, and human features, "the Babylonian harlot" astride the monster, as well as giants (traditionally symbolizing the great body), negroes and moors (a grotesque deviation from the bodily norm), and a group of youngsters performing folk dances (like the quasi indecent Spanish sarabande). It was only after these grotesque figures had marched by that the clergy made its appearance, carrying the host.

Bakhtin argues that popular festive forms such as the Corpus Christi festival that appear hostile or in this case sacrilegious reveal an ambivalent character of carnivalesque (1984: 248 s.). While on the one hand the ritual suspends societal tensions as peoples of all types participate, the ritual also can mock these tensions. Bakhtin says, "The carnivalesque crowd in the marketplace or in the streets is not merely a crowd. It is the people as a whole, but organized *in their own way*, the way of the people. It is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of the festivity" (255). Ironically, he further states, "Carnival with all its images, indecencies, and curses affirms the people's immortal, indestructible character" (256). The drunken man yelling at parishioners for walking on the path, and the priests talking about homemade brandy mirror the society's problem with alcoholism that some argue has risen under societal strain. The elderly women stuffing the used rose pedals in their pockets and grabbing flowers out of their neighbors windows suggest the neediness of these women whose economic strains have encouraged aggressive tactics for procuring resources (Pope Fischer 2010). And the Gypsy woman claiming racism mirrors the growing nationalism that has heightened racism. All illustrate societal ambiguities and tensions, yet at the same time the event brought them all together "suspended for the time of the festivity" (Bakhtin 1984: 255).

The Úrnapja procession is an indication of continuity yet also social change, as it reveals current issues in postsocialist Hungary. Since the fall of Communism, the Hungarian society shifted to a capitalist market-based society and political system, and this shift affects the society on many levels. The ceremony also reveals social desperation in society as a result of the current changes. Growing disparities between people prevails in postsocialist Hungary as seen in increasing crime and vandalism (West 2002). Alcoholism, an ongoing problem in Hungary, indicates social unrest. The drunken observer at the procession, not to mention the priests' discussion of *házi pálinka* exemplifies this prevalent problem (Elékes 2014). These changes have been disorienting and to some degree disappointing. As a reflection of society, the following will look at ways the ritual can give a glimpse of societal issues related to social exclusion particularly in term of race.

The ritual inclusion of the community excluded other members of the society revealing the social disparities between ethnic groups. The CIA census of Hungary lists ethnic groups as Hungarian 85.6%, Roma 3.2%, German 1.9%, other 2.6%, unspecified 14.1% (CIA 2015). This data, however, is somewhat misleading as there are a number of minority groups that may be officially "Hungarian" yet have ethnic and cultural ties such as Germans, Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Greek, Armenians, Poles, Bulgarians, Romanians as well as Jewish affiliations (Horvath, Vidra, and Fox 2011: 12–15). The new postsocialist society includes immigrants from nearby border regions, yet they also share common East European cultural ties plus many can claim to be a traditional ethnic minority. Many in fact are "ethnic" Hungarians from Romania who are already familiar with the language and culture as they classify themselves as Hungarian. Ioana Rusu argues that Hungary's pattern in postcommunist era is unique in that most of the migrants are *ethnic* Hungarians living outside its borders. These are people who identify as "Hungarian," but due to the Treaty of Trianon after World War I, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory forcing these Hungarians to became "ethnic" Hungarians living outside Hungary's borders. However, among these postsocialist immigrants are people from further afield regions such as Africa, South America, Afghanistan, and China. The highest number of immigrants includes ethnic Hungarians and Chinese and West Africans (Nyíri 2005: 660; Rusu 2011: 165). Absent from the procession were the new ethnic groups – the Chinese and African immigrants. Chinese immigrants mostly live in Pest, and probably would not venture to the Buda hills for this Hungarian tradition. Africans as well tend to stay more closely tied to the urban center. Though in general Chinese and African immigrants do not tend to come to Budafok, I think their absence from this ritual event does highlight a general theme of social segregation.

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As Turner suggests, rituals can integrate people from different social backgrounds to form "communitas" and though this can include racial and ethnic inclusion, the Corpus Christi procession in Budafok tends to be predominately "White." At many New York parades celebrating ethnic heritage, all types of people come to watch and participate. At a recent Saint Patrick's Day Parade in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, the focus celebrated Irish heritage and there were members from the wider New York community both watching and marching in the parade. A local Muslim community group marched, along with the local high school ROTC band filled with peoples of all races, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. One did not have to be Irish, nor a part of the local community to celebrate. Though in Budafok, the Úrnapja procession does attract people from outside the immediate neighborhood, one does not see an ethnically diverse crowd. Still the lack of diversity and cultural intermingling in the event does highlight issues of tolerance and exclusion in Hungary, where Arabs, Chinese, and Roma ranked at the bottom of the list (Horvath, Vidra, and Fox 2011: 18).

The ritual entails exclusion and powerfully reinforces distinctions between groups particularly in regards to the Roma community. Racism towards Gypsies has increased after the fall of socialism. The one visible Gypsy woman present publicly displayed her feelings of racism in an emotional outburst, as no one would allow her to have the blessed flowers after the procession. After 1989, the Roma have tried to identify themselves as an ethnic group and promote political affiliations, but also increased social conflicts.

> It is painful merely to list the more important events that affected the Roma, one of the first being the 1992 "ethnic war" in Kétegyháza, near the Romanian border and recent events in Gyöngyöspata, a village just west of Gyöngyös, where paramilitary organisations terrorized the local Roma. Objective assessments of social prejudice now have a history going back half a century, and little difference is demonstrable between what people thought of the Roma at the very beginning of that period and what they think now, or how they verbalized their beliefs, their antipathies, and everything they acquired in the course of their education in the widest sense of the term. Differences show up however, in the tendency for options and prejudices to turn into action, in the manifestation of overt and brutish racism (Szuhay 2011: 102).

Péter Szuhay traces "The Plight of Hungary's Roma" from 1893 to modern times to show how Gypsies were often restricted to marginal areas and suffered from unemployment and racist attack.

Is the Úrnapja ritual an expression of Hungarian culture and by extension nationalism that excludes those not deemed "Hungarian" such as Roma, Chinese, and Africans? National identity can be a construction influenced by issues of power and memory. Anderson describes nationalism in terms of a cultural construction. He perceives the nation as a cultural community "imagined" by people who believe they are part of a group. The nation "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1991: 6 s.). Though there may be an imagined perception of nationhood, in reality a society may have inequities. By extension, Bhabha (1994) perceives the nation as a cultural depiction that can serve as a means for subordination. Nationalism as experienced in history can be informed by the politics of memory both at the group and individual level (Tamanoi 1998). The inclusion of some and exclusion of others can be related to nationalist identity.

Can there be alternatives to identity that are more inclusive? Ruth Behar (2009) uses a "self reflexive approach" to question her own identity as Jewish Cuban-American. Is she Cuban? Is she a Latina? Is she Jewish? Is identity linked to blood and descent or a legacy of experience? She starts with a personal story about being rejected from a Chicana/Latina classroom because she was not "Latina" enough for the students. Behar takes an alternative look at Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities":

> I cannot help feeling that these young women were almost desperate in their desire for purity and certainty in the construction of their identity. Maybe they were responding subliminally to the growing onslaught of hybridity. They were fiercely trying to hold on to and validate their identities through traditional means – circling wagons, denying entry to outsiders. Using that strategy gives you the advantage of keeping your history (and your sense of pride and pain) undiluted. But is that the only way? (2009: 262).
>
> To acknowledge that identities and cultures are mixed, impure, and miscegenated in complex and ever changing ways is truly revolutionary for our scholarship (2009: 263).

She challenges fixed notions of identity and questions identity "boundaries" that entail inclusion and exclusion to suggest more flexible definitions of identity – a wider circle of "we." At this point, the Corpus Christi ritual does incorporate some, yet perhaps should bond a wider circle of "we."

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Conclusion

The Corpus Christi procession reenacts what it means to be Hungarian. During the Communist era the state suppressed religious and Hungarian identity, and an identity emerged within a culture of resistance to the state. Postcommunism opened up the ability to redefine identity and to search for what it means to be Hungarian and though nationalism supports patriotism and assertions of cultural identity, it can also heighten tensions against groups that do not fit this ideal model. The Corpus Christi ritual serves to bring together a group of people during a period of societal disorganization and ambiguity. In present-day Hungary there is a need for group affiliation and this ritual unites the faithful, and more broadly the community. It symbolically unites diverse individuals during a brief moment in time and space. Ritual in this regard though creating *communitas* can also illustrate social differences, as some are not easily incorporated into the group. The image of a unified Hungarian group that the ritual provides powerfully masks social difference and inequities. The order of the flower designs counters the disorder of everyday life.

Though the Corpus Christi procession described illustrates simply one community's celebration, a celebration that was different last year, and will be different the next, I have argued that social engagements or actions are a form of social text that provide a springboard for discussion of power and change in a society grappling with issues of identity. Religious symbolism unites the congregation under a common Catholic faith. Religion persists, as there is a continuous need for a collective identity. Underneath this beautiful display of flowers are the ugly tensions of social inequities and societal divisions. A ritualization of ethno-nationalism emerges from the ephemeral flowered path.

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