

MOGY

A VESSEL OF RITUAL IN POST-SOCIALIST HUNGARY

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During the last five years, the calendar of Hungarian festivals has turned upside down. Along with the well-known rock festivals for the young (e.g., the Sziget festival), attended by hundreds of thousands every summer, a new type of cultural festival is gaining tremendous popularity in Hungary. The National Assembly of Hungarians (MOGY) is a patriotic/nationalist three-day event that attracts every segment of the Hungarian population, from teenagers to older generations.

Keywords: national identity, bricolage religiosity, patriotism, invented tradition

V zadnjih petih letih se je koledar madžarskih festivalov obrnil na glavo. Skupaj z znanimi rokarskimi festivali za mlade, npr. »Sziget«, ki vsako poletje privabljajo tisoče, na Madžarskem postaja izredno priljubljen tudi nov tip kulturnega festivala. »Nacionalno združenje Madžarov« (MOGY) je patriotski/nacionalističen tridnevni dogodek, ki privablja vse segmente madžarske populacije, od najstnikov do starejših generacij.

Ključne besede: narodna identiteta, brikolažna religioznost, patriotizem, izumljena tradicija

There are a relatively large number of Hungarian studies on invented traditions constructed in contemporary culture, mainly to appeal to tourists. These studies, which apply a multidisciplinary approach, investigate increasingly popularized festivals that eventually lose their novel or exotic character. The focal points of the festivals usually build on local (assumed or real) heritage, and therefore the festivals are strongly connected with the idea of authenticity (Bendix 1997) and have become successful (Sziijártó 2000)—or, due to their unfavorable geographic/economic situation, lack of mass-media and internet communication channels, and superficial adaptation of the festival's content into local identity construction, some of these festivals eventually lost their attraction and devolved into local events (Pusztai 2003). The accelerated transformations of the post-communist, late modern cultural medium are resulting in continuous newly invented traditions (Hobsbawn 1983) and connected rituals. Among the changing accelerating circumstances of our times, these new festivals are increasingly tied to authenticity manifested in identity construction and the concept of “unchangingness.”

Several terminological problems arise in relation to festivals that define themselves as the bearers of authentic values. Is it possible to apply the terms “heritage” and “cultural heritage” to phenomena that may not have existed or when there is no information on their true forms? What is the result of longing for authenticity if the original object of longing can only be constructed but not justified or proven? All of these questions and the analysis are even more complicated by the fact that the participants in the ritual and various mass media products and those that reject the festival based on ideological grounds have different interpretations of the festivals' cultural/ideological claims. Whereas the first group has a

positive attitude related to manifestations of patriotism or civil religiosity, the second group views the phenomenon with attitudes ranging from the delusion of romantic nationalism to chauvinism. Amid such circumstances, scholarly investigation of the phenomenon is especially important, independent of political attitudes.

This study analyzes the media representation of the National Assembly of Hungarians (*Magyarok Országos Gyűlése*, MOGY), a national/cultural/heritage-preservation event that has attracted hundreds of thousands of people annually since it began in 2008. In addition, I compare the media representation with the participants' motivation and experience of the event. What are the similarities and differences between the two? How is MOGY represented or defined in the mass media by the organizers? Does it coincide with the participants' definitions? Are the instruments and medium of a ritual labeled "traditional" what they seem to be, or a construction deriving from a post-socialist identity crisis? The answers to these questions will not only facilitate understanding of the media representation, but will also illuminate the nationalism of Hungarians living in a post-socialist situation of continuous identity-construction.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF HUNGARIANS (MOGY)

MOGY was held for the "long-term survival of the nation" in 2009 for the first time in Kunszentmiklós-Böszötrpuszta by a non-governmental organization (Alliance of Hungarians) founded in November 2008. The goal of the organizers was to create the greatest social, cultural, and heritage-preservation event with a market for Hungarian products; an occasion where "in addition to informal entertainment, it provides an ideal place for all who would like to relive the community-forming power of the community, for whom our cultural heritage matters, who are interested in learning more about our history, and for whom the future of our nation is important."¹ The first MOGY in 2009 attracted about 180,000 people, and in 2011 the number was about 140,000. The number of visitors is rather significant considering the remote location of the festival.

THE ATTRACTION OF GLOCALITY

The idea that the news and events of contemporary society are generated by the tools of mass communication has been overtly emphasized, but this seems to be disproved by the information and communication development of past years. According to this view, an event can primarily become attractive to society through its successful self-representation in the mass media. It can become a well-known news item, and it can contribute to the generation of new creations and electronic folklore (Dégh 1994) if it is widely broadcast through the mass media.

¹ <http://www.magyarokszovetsege.hu/content/az-oroszag-legnagyobb-szabadteri-talalkozojat-szervezi-boesztoerpusztan-magyarok-szoevetsege>

In today's "super-mediatized" web age, these views might be disproven. A good example is provided by the case study of MOGY. With its sudden success, MOGY became the most popular and one of the greatest festivals in Hungary without the aid of the mass media. As one interviewee stated:

The greatest problem, and at the same time a hurtful one as well, is that no TV channels and no printed papers even announced the existence of the festival. It was as if we didn't exist. In our own homeland, the authorities and their alliance do not notice us. This fact degrades our human dignity. A significant proportion of our compatriots also do not know about us, which is unfair and disturbing We should recognize that we, the Hungarians—as opposed to other groups—are the “aboriginals” of the Carpathian basin. We feel that the leaders of this country disfavor us. They do not even respect us. Our difference, our way of looking at certain issues from a different angle, is unwanted. We are no one in our country, we are excluded. We look around and do not find our place in our homeland.²

In the age of social networks and community portals, once again the bottom-up organizations—actions at an individual level—play a more significant role. There is a difference, however, in comparison to the folklorization process of earlier times: the dissemination and preventive community censorship occurs in a sudden wave through the communication channels of the internet and its forums. The popularity of the event cannot simply be explained by the opportunities offered by the internet, but instead by deeper social, cultural, and economic processes that are all present in the festival's self-representation.

The self-advertisement of the festival contains the following elements:

- This is an event organized by volunteers;
- It is the biggest free festival in Hungary;
- This is a festival where Hungarian people can enjoy their traditions, customs, past, present, plans for the future, and real selves;
- Only Hungarian artifacts and values of Hungarian culture can be seen;
- One of the most important aims of the event is to gather people that care about values that embrace all Hungarians.

All of these elements are synthesized by the motto of the festival: “The faith and suffering of our ancestors created and held our homeland. Come to Böszörcpuszta to see and hear what the past was like and what the future holds. Our national unity, the Fraternity of Hungarians, calls upon you to do this.”

As is evident from the description above, the development of the event is an obvious consequence of the ever-increasing crisis in the construction of identity in contemporary Hungarian society. The plural value system that appeared after the fall of the communist system, the expansion of conflicting canons, the breakdown of the social care system, the

² All of the interviews were conducted during the 2010 MOGY festival.

strengthening of individualism, freedom of religion, and at the same time the rejection of institutional churches can all be traced behind the commercial aspects.

This transformation of society can also be traced in the character of the programs. The three-day-event offers several hundred programs for the visitors. The organizers emphasize localness, the importance of local rootedness, and special local cultural features, and therefore all of the counties in Hungary are represented by various performers and programs. The three stages offer a continuous program all day long with poetry, folk songs, and patriotic rock bands. There are also dance venues, archery, horsemanship, and *baranta* martial arts performances. In addition to the staged performances, there are a rich variety of talks about culture, history, and business, a spectacular handicrafts fair, and religious or spiritual events.

EVENTS

All of the events at MOGY are basically organized around the idea of Hungarian national identity. The representations of broadly interpreted Hungarian cultural heritage (e.g., the handicrafts fair), the emphasis on certain real or imagined periods of Hungarian history (e.g. history talks, martial arts shows, and sacred rituals), and talks about possible ways for Hungary to be self-sufficient are also aimed at strengthening national identity.

The analysis of the battle reenactment and historical martial arts show does not substantially answer the research question that is at the focal point of this study because it provides a stereotypical representation of the image of the nomadic Hungarian in a theatrical form often used in historical presentations for tourists in which horseman, Hussars, and *baranta* practitioners are also mingled among the reenactors, which again emphasizes the syncretic character of the festival.

The organizers describe the vendors at the handicrafts fair as manufactures of traditional historical costumes; however, the actual market supply reveals a much more complex picture. Indeed, several items of traditional costumes related to folk culture are displayed (e.g., leather sandals, boots, and the folk dress of a particular ethnic or regional group), but most of the artifacts only look Hungarian-like and were never an organic part of Hungarian folk culture (such as the white linen clothing, felt hats, or most of the decorative motifs).

The characteristic features of the style include authentic folk motifs derived from Hungarian folk decoration (mainly flower motifs) mingling together with certain elements of Hungarian mythology and pre-Christian arts. A good example for the revitalization of pre-Christian religious objects is shaman drums. A large proportion of these shaman drums are decorated with symbols (e.g., the Turul bird) that are completely the opposite of the original ritualistic decoration. National and political symbols (the double cross, the Holy Crown of Hungary, a map of Greater Hungary) are also often represented on these objects.

These ornaments not only bear aesthetic characteristics, but also articulate a prominent ideological basis.

The analysis of the symbols themselves without their context should simply result in the symbolic manifestation of national identity in a material dimension. However, taking into

consideration the semiotic circumstances—where and how these symbols appear, who buys objects decorated with these symbols and why, and when and how they are used—a deeper connotation emerges. This can be seen in the use of ancient Hungarian runes, which signify much more than just the revitalization of the long-forgotten traditional writing. Certainly it has nothing to do with traditionalism when it appears on T-shirts together with irredentist symbols or on wooden plates shaped like the map of Greater Hungary, and city name plates written in runes refer not only to the history of the given settlement (Povedák 2012). Similarly, the history talks and the selection of books published by “national publishers” also reinterpret given periods of Hungarian history mostly by ambivalently interpreted, self-taught researchers. The common link between them is the prophetic role of the Hungarians (Hammond 1980), the motif of the chosen nation of God, and through various myths of origins (Szilágyi 2012) this leads to the operation of nationalism as a religion.

The events of the sacral space can be analyzed from different perspectives. First, the complexity of events and the significant number of traditional churches and religious-like organizations present makes it necessary. Based on the program’s vocabulary, language use, and interviews with the organizers, MOGY seems to be an event that reflects Christian values, but it bears rather syncretic religious characteristics. However, the traditional Christian denominations have come forward with events; the Reformed Church is especially active and also celebrates church services and weddings. In 2010 a short pilgrimage was even organized by one of the well-known prominent participants of the festival to the feast of the neighboring chapel, where Balázs Bábel, the Roman Catholic bishop of the Kalocsa Diocese celebrated the liturgy. The Christian image is also strengthened by the fact that MOGY is organized around the Feast of the Assumption (15 August) and the religious center of the event is organized around the “Tent of the Seven Blessed Women” with a double cross on top of the tent. However, looking beyond the symbolic dimension, one can trace ambivalence towards contemporary Hungarian vernacular Christianity.

Originally the organizers wanted to name the “Tent of the Seven Blessed Women” the “Chapel of the Seven Blessed Women,” but because of an objection from Archbishop Balázs Bábel it was changed from “chapel” to “tent.” The background of the conflict can best be analyzed on the basis of the official interpretation of the symbols by the builders:

The Chapel of the Seven Blessed Women will be built next to the Tree of Life at Kunszentmiklós-Böszötrpuszta for the National Assembly. ... The blessed women will be represented on seven organic trees. The trees stand in a circle, creating a center, where the eighth tree stands with the double cross (ONE) on its top. The Sun and the Moon on the two sides of the gate greets the entrants. The chapel will be erected in the sacred, curative center of the territory of the Assembly.³

³ <http://magyarokszovetsege.hu/content/hetboldogasszony-kapolna-boesztoerpusztan>



Figure 1. The Tent of the Seven-Blessed Women. Kunszentmiklós-Bösztörpuszta 2010. (Photos by I. Povedák)



Figure 2. The Replica of the Holy Crown in the tent. Kunszentmiklós-Bösztörpuszta 2010.

It is a prevalent view among the members of the complex subculture analyzed in this study to regard the Holy Crown as a transcendent object that is the personification of the nation and the Hungarian homeland. Esoteric influences created a view that the Holy Crown has an energy that is closely connected with the fate of the nation. The crown and the double cross also represent the unity of the nation and homeland, and that the nation is indivisible. Therefore, these symbols imply an additional irredentist message: rejection of the Treaty of Trianon.

The symbolism of the tent is clearly syncretic at first sight. The figure of the Blessed Women, the tree of life, the Holy Crown, and the double cross are side-by-side in the nomadic tent and its name is a reference to the Virgin Mary. It should be mentioned that the double cross here is not only a Christian symbol, but also an ancient Hungarian rune meaning “one,” referring to the one god and the one and indivisible country.⁴

Moreover, taking into consideration that the personified center and the term “curative territory” are not associated with Christianity, a mingling of differing religious canons can be clearly seen. This is emphasized by the rituals at the sacred place.

First, the ritual fires at sunrise and sunset are lit next to the tent framing all of the festival days. Second, the two most important sacral rituals are the Holy Crown ceremony and the Assumption of Mary. During the Holy Crown ceremony, a replica of the Holy Crown is carried to the middle of the tent by *baranta* soldiers, members of the Holy Crown Equestrian Order, and groups of participants wearing traditional-like clothes.

⁴ This interpretation says that the double cross in the Hungarian coat of arms has a similar meaning and has no Christian content.



Figure 3. Reinterpreted Shamanic drum. Kunszentmiklós-Böszörcpuszta 2010.

The other central sacral ritual of the festival is the “Blessed women’s walk through the land,” represented by women dressed in folk-style white costumes.

The festival starts near the “Tent of the Seven Blessed Women” with welcoming the Newborn Light with Csángó folk hymns to the Virgin Mary when the Sun wakes up Following the midday ringing of the bells—at the peak of the Light—we create a tableau with the help of the visitors. At this point the visitors themselves also become active parts of the ritual because they represent the borders of Mary’s land. The delegates from various regions dressed in folk costumes, carrying the flags of their settlements, become the body of the nation. Women dressed in festive folk costumes connect with each other and walk through the Carpathian home. The female power walking around is accompanied by folk hymns to the Mother God and by the prayers of our historical heroes. After the Blessed Women of our Heavenly Queen gather in the middle of the day, at 12:48 pm, literally dressed in the Sun in the brightest Light, they enter the Tent of the Seven Blessed Woman escorted by the unified singing of all participants. This homecoming represents the Assumption of Mary and the fact that our ancestors always returned under the protective mantle of our Blessed Women, to the land of Mary.⁵

⁵ <http://magyarokszovetsege.hu/>

Although the Blessed Woman, the land of Mary, the Assumption of Mary, and the protective mantel of the Virgin Mary are part of Christian tradition, mainly Roman Catholic tradition, the participants in the rituals did not even know the most popular Roman Catholic hymn, “Our Blessed Mother,” which had to be sung at the sacred peak of the ritual.

It is worth investigating which phenomena are written with capitals and personified. The result is a typical ethnic-specific bricolage religiosity in which certain objects of nature (the Sun, the Light) are transcendent beings alongside Mary (Jesus is never mentioned!) the Mother God (not the mother of God), the Blessed Women, and the personified ethnic spaces of Hungarian civil religiosity. This religious bricolage is especially interesting because the organizers identify themselves as Christians and had several contacts with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church.

Strengthening the bricolage feature, several “traditional therapists,” especially osteopaths, and a Hungarian yoga tent can be visited at the sacred place.

The religious characteristics of the festival are emphasized by news that “a multitude of flags greeted the *pilgrims* arriving on horseback” or the parallelism with Şumuleu Ciuc (Hung. *Csíksomlyó*), the most visited Hungarian pilgrimage site. “Csíksomlyó and Bösztörpuszta . . . the mountain and the plain . . . two places that every Hungarian has to visit! It can not only be believed here, but seen that Hungary was, is, and will be—for us.”⁶

MOTIVATIONS

Based on the face-to-face and electronic interviews, it is possible to compare the festival’s official site with the lived experience of the participants. The informants indicated what they had experienced during the three days of MOGY and why the event was significant. The answers can be categorized according to the following thematic focal points. Most of the participants experience an “experience of home,” meeting ideal or typical Hungarian people and receiving only love from them.

The experience of home:

Feels like we returned home. Like 200,000 people returned home at once.

Finally, I don’t see grayish-green TV-watching zombies with dripping noses all around.

We didn’t want to come back home because that’s where we really feel at home . . . it was great, an amazing feeling to meet such great people . . .

The experience of desired Hungarianness (“Hungarian Paradise”)

Everyone here is wearing Hungarian dress and behaves well, in a Hungarian way; they don’t litter, don’t get drunk, don’t throw away their cigarette butts Even the slouching people straighten up here and draw themselves up so they look tall and proud. You hear folk music from the loudspeakers

⁶ <http://magyarokszovetsege.hu/>

. . . and the children and the well-trained puli dogs [a Hungarian herding breed] can run around freely here.

Bösztörpuszta becomes the middle of the world, or at least the heart of the Carpathian basin, where Hungarians dare to be Hungarians; they smile, they are open-hearted, kind, friendly and altruistic—as the Almighty created them.

If I am a Hungarian, at this event it is normal to act like a Hungarian in Hungary. I experienced no prejudice for belonging to the Hungarian culture. For three days I could freely and proudly be what I am. Therefore, it meant freedom for us. A miracle that lasts for three days every year.

Happiness and love

I expected love and I received it. That's all I got: whoever loves Hungarian culture loves me.

In addition to these feelings of comfort, informants often projected the phenomenon into a transcendent sphere. In some cases, this was indicated by a rare phenomenon of nature (rainbow, a double halo around the sun, or a sunbeam glinting in the shape of a double cross), which showed the chosen character of the event by God or some other transcendent being.

I regard this place as a small heaven, I would never miss out on it.

God Bless!

Did everybody see that the Creator as “Double Sun” showing us that He is still with us? . . .

REPLY TO THE COMMENT: I'm uploading my photo now because I even saw a double cross on the sky!

In other cases, the aforementioned “sacred character of the nation” can be observed, when participants are grateful to the “God of the Hungarians” for the ritual in which the nation—similar to the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage—can demonstrate “the sacred miracle of pan-Hungarian togetherness.” In addition, the widespread “gender character” of lived religiosity with a strong emphasis on women’s central role during religious rituals, on the Goddess figure, can also be observed. In this case, this means the reinterpretation of the figure of the Blessed Women into an ancient Hungarian Mother God.

Bösztörpuszta and the Tent have risen up to the Sky by the faith of the people.

BÖSZTÖRPUSZTA was the miracle . . . and I thank the God of the Hungarians that I could take part in it. ☺

The National Assembly of Hungarians complements the cohesive, pan-Hungarian sacred miracles of the rising soul, the Pentecost pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó.

On the day of the Assumption of Mary in the Tent of the Seven Blessed Women we demonstrated how the Goddess function, which is thousands of years old, is still alive in Hungarian national traditions.

CONCLUSION

Finally, I interpret the phenomenon. First, it is clearly a compensational ritual for the tragedies of modern Hungarian history, including the mutilation of the kingdom at Trianon, the lost world wars, the beaten-down revolution, Soviet oppression, and the semi-successful change of the regime. These failures resulted in a nation with an injured identity that had to find a remedy for its wounds. It is also important that all of these tragedies were suppressed under the communist dictatorship, which resulted in the rebirth of the problems. Moreover, it must be emphasized that globalization, the sudden influx of western mass culture, the EU connection, and Chinese economic expansion have also had effects. Of course, all of these effects can be observed in many post-socialist countries where glocalization—a counter-effect of globalization—is also present.

However, in Hungary the phenomenon is uniquely rich in its components. Both the reinvented symbols of interwar irredentism and new invented traditions are also present. The most emphatic elements are the reinterpretation of certain periods of Hungarian history and certain national historical symbols. Even the idea of authentic cultural heritage has been redefined by the leaders of these movements.

The symbols of Hungary disappeared, and objects of cultural heritage appeared in tourism brochures: stereotypical elements such as horses, the *puszta* landscape, red peppers, Hungarian wines, and folk customs. These were replaced with elements such as the miracle stag or the Turul bird related to the earliest golden age of Hungarian history, the mythical settlement of the Hungarians. At the same time, historical heroes, the best-known figures of Hungarian folk culture (King Matthias, Ferenc Rákóczi, or Lajos Kossuth) are practically absent.

Usually the reminiscences of the distant pre-Christian era (up to the tenth to eleventh centuries) are emphasized as Hungarian “cultural heritage” (the motifs of archaeological finds are used as decorative ornaments). The memory and heritage of later ages also appear, but with less emphasis.

As has been emphasized by others regarding “selective tradition” (Ben-Amos 1984: 115), the selection of what constitutes tradition is always made up in the present, and the content of the past is modified and redefined according to modern significance (Linnekin 1983: 241). In this way, tradition can be interpreted as a needs-based construction (Bendix 1997: 212).

To make all of this much more complicated, this cultural reinvention process is closely connected to a bricolage religiosity that has components from Christianity, esotericism, and ancient Hungarian paganism all at the same time, but tries to seem to be Christian. An interesting paradoxical situation is that most participants in this bricolage religious movement are against the institutional Christian churches but they emphasize their Christian identity.

The question remains: is this a Christian festival, as the organizers state, or a pagan, anti-Christian one, as the opponents think? Is it authentic, where traditional Hungarian costumes and artifacts can be purchased? Or it is just an “as-if ritual” that only seems to be something? In my opinion, this is the biggest bottom-up mass movement of contemporary vernacular nationalism and vernacular Catholicism in Hungary, but it remains a simulacrum that wants to be a traditional, Christian, Hungarian, anti-globalization, anti-mass civilization festival, but in reality this is only a desire. Moreover, the identity construction itself based on these rituals also remains invented and constructed.

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FESTIVALI NACIONALNEGA ZDRUŽENJA MADŽAROV (MOGY). RITUALI
V POSOCIALISTIČNI MADŽARSKI

V zadnjih petih letih se je koledar madžarskih festivalov obrnil na glavo. Skupaj z znanimi rokerskimi festivali za mlade, npr. »Sziget«, ki vsako poletje privabljajo tisoče, na Madžarskem postaja izredno priljubljen tudi nov tip kulturnega festivala. »Nacionalno združenje Madžarov« (MOGY) je patriotski/nacionalističen tridnevni dogodek, ki privablja vse starostne skupine madžarske populacije, od najstnikov do starejših generacij. Za festival so značilni patriotizem, revitalizacija madžarske »ljudske kulture«, anti-globalizacija, anti-komunizem, ideologija nazaj-k-naravi, religioznost in hkrati proticerkvena drža.

V razpravi se avtor sprašuje, ali ti patriotski festivali resnično predstavljajo avtentično madžarsko kulturo ali zaželeno in izumljeno; ali njihova materialna/simbolična kultura predstavlja resnično madžarsko ljudsko kulturo ali alternativno »masovno kulturo« in katere vrste ritualov so v času festivalov predstavljene pod imenom »madžarski tradicionalni rituali«.

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