Symbolic Traces of Communist Legacy in Post-Socialist Hungary

Experiences of a Generation That Lived during the Socialist Era

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CHAPTER 1

Globalized Bonds: Gift Exchange, Liminality, and Embodiment

The exhaust fumes from the airplanes always makes me feel a bit nauseous, but it is also the exciting, nervous, and uncomfortable experience of traveling, in particular the difficulty of lugging an extra bag through security, that makes my jaw clench and the temples on my head tight and damp with sweat. Most of my belongings fit in the smaller carry on bag, but I am a courier of small gifts and packages for my immigrant friends' families back in Hungary hence I am obligated to maneuver this heavy large bag from the US through airports, through customs, through crowds, on subways to their mother's homes in Budapest. These gifts represent the lives and spirits of my immigrant friends as they strive to connect to loved ones far away with tangible packages. By delivering these packages, I symbolically represent the émigré child set in the context of globalization and a post-socialist society. Gift giving persists as a form of exchange that forms human bonds despite the rise of the capitalist economy and despite the conditions of post-socialist Hungary today.

Gift exchange across borders during the communist era often illustrated socio-political divisions between émigrés who may have fled the country illegally as *disszidált* or defectors, as well as the few who had the privileged ability to cross borders without State restrictions. Szabella néni (b. 1925), a remarkable woman, who at the age of 85 started using a computer to continue her intellectual and scholarly writing, described her ability to move freely across borders during the communist era while colleagues in her Italian university were unable to return to Hungary as they had left the country illegally. Hers is a rare story, as few were able to obtain the illusive "blue" passport that allowed easy passage to countries outside the communist system. Several Hungarian intellectuals became political refugees following the 1956 revolution, and Szabella, who could easily return, was given the task to transport gifts for her émigré colleagues to their families back in Hungary. "My bags were full of oranges," she laughed. Though each person gave her personal packages to transport they all asked her to carry oranges from Italy back to Hungary.

Social ties between family members are often linked through systems of gift exchange through which, postsocialism, people recreate past practices to adapt to new social obligations and bonds. Though émigré family members existed during the Socialist era, with the collapse of communism communication links

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across borders have become easier, and like the past, it is not so much the thing being given but rather a piece of the émigré experience given to family back home to maintain connections and social bonds, such as the Italian oranges from the Hungarian emigrants in Italy. Globalization bridges cultures together in a new way, yet past traditions of hospitality and gift exchange persist in a new form. Human bonds made through the exchange of packages existed during the socialist period and continues today postsocialism.

Since 1994 I began going to Hungary forming connections with people defying fragmented boundaries. I befriended a group of Hungarian immigrants in Los Angeles – some staying illegally with long expired tourists visas feared that going home to Hungary would prevent their return to America. With each trip back to Hungary they would fill my suitcases with seemingly simple gifts of "American" chocolate, coffee and handwritten notes for their parents – in most cases this meant widowed senior women. As hospitality is very important in Hungary, a quick stop to drop off gifts was not possible – I had to sit, eat, and talk with these elderly women who often lived alone. I began to realize that these gifts were not simply forms of reciprocity between my US research group and me, but instead I had become a human conduit that stretched a bond between emigrant child and mother. On my return to the US, Hungarian mothers would ask me to bring gifts for their children – "Hungarian" chocolate, or simple foods and products not found in the US. As our Globalized world creates elastic boundaries, as familial bonds extend across continents, Anthropology can become a liminal threshold to create textured understandings of space and time as they connect to power, memory and identity. This chapter draws on several experiences with different people but focuses primarily on one illustrative family who I have befriended over the past 20 years: Lea (b. 1963) and her mother Albertina néni (b. 1939). Postsocialism allows for new understandings of time and space as illustrated through the practice of gift giving. As an anthropologist who travels back and forth from the US to Hungary on a fairly regular basis I became a physical stand in for the absent émigré child and an embodied conflation of time and space linking two people together.

The point I want to make is that gift exchange creates social bonds and while during the socialist period it may have reflected the socio-political conditions of that time, today the practice persists, yet now reflects conditions related to a post-socialist society and themes of globalization. After presenting a descriptive representative example of a typical gift exchange for textual analysis, the following chapter addresses how trans global gift exchange (1) creates transnational social obligation (2) creates a liminal space that bonds people together, blurring understandings of the nation state, and (3) illustrates an embodiment of the social production of space much like time space compression.

1 Background: Who are the Mothers Left Behind?

I started going to Hungary in 1994 to conduct person-centered interviews with Hungarian emigrants to the US and then return migrants in 1996. As I got to know Hungarians in America, they would entrust me with gifts to bring to their loved ones back in Hungary. As a consequence I gained rapport with the mothers of my informants still in Hungary. As this was an incidental consequence of my other research on migrants and constructions of identity, this chapter was based on field notes, informal interviews and participant observation. I am using pseudonyms that my informants selected for themselves.

The women left behind are typically widows who live alone such as Albertina néni who lost her husband in 1986 due to a liver condition. Women tend to live until 80, outliving men by 6 years (OECD, 2013). Albertina, a petit woman with short straight peppered hair laughs easily in a quiet subdued way. Her daughter, much like her mother, has a petit frame, but in contrast has a strong forceful spirit as if she wants to defy her size with a "don't mess with me" attitude. Due to Lea's precarious US immigration status, she did not obtain the ability to travel back to Hungary until 2002 but Lea paid for her mother to come to the US three times. Since 2002 when Lea obtained US citizenship she has traveled back to Hungary several times. They maintain a strong bond in part by several hours of telephone chatter at least once a week. Though Lea is unable to see her mother on a regular basis, her younger brother who now lives in Germany is able to check in on her more often. Recently Lea paid for a computer, and asked her brother to set up "Skype" so they can now see each other when they talk, yet, Albertina néni, uncomfortable with computers, must rely on one of Lea's friends to stop bye to help her mother turn on the "Skype." Occasionally Albertina visits relatives who live in the outskirts of the city but they are not part of her daily social life. Today she lives alone in a two room flat in Budapest surviving on her deceased husband's pension.

2 Descriptive Example as Text

I am the type of traveler that panics over the pre-travel plans – packing, organizing travel documents and paperwork, etc. Hence the night before my very early Monday morning flight when Lea called to say she was coming by to drop off some things to deliver, I was not pleased. Though I enjoy Lea's visits and I enjoy delivering things to family back in Hungary, this late night visit simply added to my pre-travel stress. As is customary in Hungary, one cannot simply drop off the goods and run, as hospitality is an important Hungarian

cultural practice which entails socializing for at least a couple of hours. Of course I could not say "no" as this practice for delivering things to Hungary has become so customary that I bought an especially large suitcase just for carrying gifts. Gabriella (b. 1961), whom I typically only see before I travel to Hungary, came by last week to drop off some cash and a letter for her father. I suggested she could mail me a check and I could take cash for her, but she insisted on coming in person despite the five-hour drive. "A nice small item, easy to pack," I thought to myself. Aida, on behalf of her husband, Tom (b. 1955), came with some American chocolate she bought at the 99c Store, Victoria's secret perfume, and a note from their daughter Bianca (b. 2001). The money and chocolate were for Tom's mother who lives in a convalescent home, and the perfume and note were for his great Aunt. They came Saturday afternoon for lunch with time to chat as they traveled two hours in traffic just to get here. Everything fit into a medium sized gift bag. Now Lea, who gets here in 30 minutes from her apartment, arrives at 9 PM with two large bags, one for her mother and the other from her roommate Viktor to take to his mother. Viktor's gift included a heavy-duty doorknob with lock, several DVDs he had burned (with detailed instructions on how to play them), an aluminum can of coffee, some photos and a letter. Lea brought a heavy cooking pot, among other things. But it was the pot that was reeling in my head to myself "oh no, how is this going to fit? Will my bag be too heavy?" Of course, I smiled politely, said "no problem" and offered her a glass of wine. I had hoped to be in bed by 10 PM for my early flight the next morning, but this was not going to happen.

Once in Hungary I space out the visits throughout my time there. When I first started going to Hungary in 1993 people tended to drop bye for visits unannounced. Some reasoned that it was because not everyone had a telephone because in the state socialist system, it could take five years before one could get a phone installed. Now, most everyone has a home-line and or a cell phone, so I called Lea's mother Albertina to set up a good time to meet. Most visits entail drinking something, usually coffee, and having something small to eat such as a bowl of soup or some homemade pastries. When I arrive at Albertina néni's house, much to my embarrassment, she has set a lovely table in the middle of the room with her best crystal glasses, various cookies, fruit, pretzel sticks, and a variety of drinks: juice, wine, a sweet fruit aperitif. She wants to prepare a fish as well but I manage to convince her that this is more than enough. I know she lives on a limited income and I am touched by her generosity. In addition to dropping off the gifts from her daughter we have idle conversation to catch-up, I look at old photographs of Lea preserved in the glass cabinet, Albertina explains the context of the images and eventually talks

of her future plans to visit the US next year. It is a pleasant rather uneventful visit. Of course, even after visiting for several hours, she tries to insist I stay longer, that I should eat more, even though she has not eaten a thing herself. After two months, as I prepare to return to the US, Albertina calls to have me deliver some things for her daughter: a bag of Hungarian candy, a book of crossword puzzles, some dry instant soup, and twenty small cans of liver. These were not cans of expensive goose Pâté but rather the more inexpensive pork liver. I personally do not like liver but more importantly I was worried about carrying the small but collectively heavy cans. Little did I know, it was not the weight of the cans that would be a problem, but the US border control interrogated me on the type of meat they contained. Apparently you cannot transport certain meat items to the US even if they are in a can. The border control did not speak Hungarian, but was placated by my answer "pork" liver.

3 Analysis

How has anthropology become a liminal threshold that creates new understandings of space and time? As an anthropologist who travels back and forth from the US to Hungary on a fairly regular basis I became a physical stand-in for the absent émigré child and an embodied conflation of time and space linking two people together through the process of gift exchange. The transportation of the gifts illustrates the conflation of space and time, as the child, represented in the gift, crosses spatial and cultural borders.

The passing of gifts from the émigré child for me to deliver to their mothers, in addition to the hospitality given by these mothers to me, builds social bonds and obligations, but the gift itself also symbolically reflects the essence of the gift giver. An economic system within a particular society deals with the production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services, but it can also be a way to create social connections and influence. According to Marcel Mauss (1990[1967]) a gift economy is a type of economic system where there may be an overt or implied anticipation of a return gift. Mauss argues there are three obligations associated with the gift: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate (Mauss, 1990, p. 39) and in the process social bonds are created that can symbolically be linked to *oneself*.

> If one gives things and returns them, it is because one is giving and returning 'respects' – we still say 'courtesies'. Yet it is also because by giving one is giving *oneself*, and if one gives *oneself*, it is because one 'owes' *oneself* – one's person and one's goods – to others.
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> MAUSS, 1990, p. 46

The gift, the object given, represents the identity of the person giving the object. The object bears the identity of the gift giver, and hence by accepting this object, you are receiving the person. Mauss suggests that the people involved in a relationship of gift exchange are obligated to receive and give gifts in culturally appropriate ways. Gifts can entail what Mauss says is an obligation to accept. "By accepting it one knows that one is committing oneself. A gift is received 'with a burden attached'" (Mauss, 1990, p. 41). Gift exchange can be competitive, antagonistic, or manipulated for personal gain, but as Mauss suggests gift exchange can be used as a means to build ties between individuals and groups of people.

4 Power of Giving: Traditions of Hospitality as a Form of Gift and Social Bonding

Hospitality and the sharing of food, particularly among elderly women, can be an expression of authority, satisfaction, and identity. There are generational differences in terms of hospitality, though the younger generation still practices hospitality; elderly women take it to another level, sometimes seeming to exceed their limited means. I went to Gabi néni's house (b. 1931) with the intent to watch and film her making homemade rétes (strudel), but by the time I arrived she had already baked eight rétes so I would have something to eat when I came in. Luckily, she had two more to make, so I was able to watch the incredible process of stretching and pulling a small lump of dough into a paper thin sheet over the kitchen table to be filled with home preserved sour cherries and freshly ground poppy seeds, though she chastised me as she would have preferred that I sat in the living room to eat more rétes. Truth be told, she made so many because she knew when her grandchildren heard she was making rétes, they would come by for their share. Her ability to make these delicious pastries and her ability to share these with others filled her with much pride and satisfaction, but also created and maintained social ties with family.

An elderly woman's hospitality is an act of giving that can be a form of gift exchange and influence. Albertina néni's generous sharing of food is culturally common in Hungary, and it expresses appreciation, perhaps for my delivering her daughter's gift, but also obligation. Mauss says "It is in the nature of food to be shared out. Not to share it with others is 'to kill its essence', it is to destroy it both for oneself and for others. This is the interpretation, both materialist and idealist, that Brahmanism has given to charity and hospitality" (Mauss, 1990, p. 57). I have been invited to many peoples' homes, and been served food before, but she went out of her way to present a beautiful array of foods

presented in her best serving ware, and this to some extent embarrassed me as I did not feel worthy, I now felt even more obligated to spend time with her, and now indebted. Not only does sharing food create a bond but there must be an element of trust, as anything can be put in the food. Mauss warns that an enemy could potentially poison:

> The gift is therefore at one and same time what should be done. What should be received, and yet what is dangerous to take. This is because the thing that is given itself forges a bilateral, irrevocable bond, above all when it consists of food. The recipient is dependent upon the anger of the donor, and each is even dependent on the other. Thus one must not eat in the home of one's enemy.
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> MAUSS, 1990, p. 59

Food then, can create bonds, but also an element of faith, that the food shared will not harm, or on a more benign level, that it will taste good.

Hospitality and sharing food is a gift that creates obligations, but can also give power to the giver. In Carole Counihan's discussion of food she states "It occurs not through force and the ability to deny but through the obligations created by giving, and through the influence wielded in that act of giving" (Counihan, The Anthropology of Food and Body, 1999, p. 46). Having special skills of acquiring, preparing, and serving food, as well as the ability to create social obligations in the form of reciprocity can empower. This complements Sahlins understanding of the gift:

> The gift is alliance, solidarity, communion – in brief, peace, the great virtue that earlier philosophers, Hobbes notably, had discovered in the State. But the originality and the verity of Mauss was exactly that he refused the discourse in political terms. The first consent is not to authority or even to unity. It would be too literal an interpretation of the older contract theory to discover its verification in nascent institutions of chieftainship. The primitive analogue of social contract is not the State, but the gift. The gift is the primitive way of achieving the peace that in civil society is secured by the State.
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> SAHLINS, 1977, p. 84

Gifts are political, they are social, they are personal, but often the common element is the manner in which they build ties with people. Leah and Albertina néni are beholden to me for delivering the gift, Leah and Albertina are beholden

to each other for exchanging gifts, and I am beholden to Albertina néni for her hospitality.

The gift creates solidarity that can bring people together, particularly in times of strife. This was especially evident in the socialist period when women were perceived as "heroes" for their ability to find food in stores that were short on supplies, to endure long lines, to prepare food in tight spaces, and provide the appearance of abundance through generous hospitality (Ries, 1997). Dale Platz looks at Armenia during the Socialist period and how the urban environment became very industrialized and very populated leading to food and housing shortages. This led to relying on your relatives and neighbors to assist one another in acquiring goods and services. Networks of exchange developed between people – (I stand in line and shop for you, you bring me bread, etc.). One's family, their kinship network became in integral part of their Armenian identity. They linked their reliance on family to traditional beliefs about kinship and to the traditional extended family. Hospitality and visiting emphasized time spent sharing food with friends, neighbors, and family and created social obligations through exchange (Platz, 2003, pp. 121–122; Patico, 2002). These were skills of women, and in many cases the retired women who had the extra time to assist in the acquisition and preparation of food.

The market economy has lessened the value of networks of exchange. The younger generation today relies more on an understanding of a Capitalist society. A person born in 1989, as Communism fell in Hungary, would be 25 years old and these young adults rely on a capitalist way of exchange more than their grandparents' socially responsible networks of exchange. Patico says "Consumer goods that were scarce and difficult to obtain in the Soviet era have become readily available to urban Russians with enough cash in hand. As a result, social networking activities that were key to the fulfillment of individual's and families consumer needs and desires have become largely obsolete, especially those referred colloquially in Russian as *blat*: roughly, the use of social connections to obtain commodities, services or other privileges" (Patico, 2002, p. 346). Capitalist individualism, particularly in terms of acquiring food resources, is part of a newer way of doing things. Patico goes on to suggest:

> In post-socialist market environment, by contrast, cash – rather than contacts – is the asset most needed in order to gain access to goods and thus to maintain standards of living perceived as decent, respectable, and desirable. At the same time, certain forms of gift-giving as well as reciprocal exchanges of 'favors of access' continue to be integral to the conduct of everyday social life, characterizing friendly interpersonal relations as

> well as some institutional and private arenas where privileged access and variable qualities of service are at stake.
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> PATICO, 2002, p. 346

In Hungary, these interpersonal networks of exchange are still useful to elderly women who lack the cash to gain access to goods.

Today in Hungary elderly women stick together through social obligations. The core of the gift is the element of sociability. Sahlins states:

> All the exchanges, that is to say, must bear in their material design some political burden of reconciliation. Or, as the Bushman said, "The worse thing is not giving presents. If people do not like each other but one gives a gift and the other must accept, this brings a peace between them. We give what we have. That is the way we live together." And from this comes in turn all the basic principles of an economics properly anthropological [. . .] that every exchange, as it embodies some coefficient of sociability, cannot be understood in its material terms apart from its social terms.
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> SAHLINS, 1977, p. 95

"Bushman" refers to the Kung San of the Kalahari desert, a traditional hunter gatherer society in which gift exchange or reciprocity serves to facilitate their egalitarian society, but also distribute resources as a form of survival strategy (Lee, 2006). As Sahlin's suggests, using this example, exchange is not simply about the material item exchanged but the social relations it creates. Caldwell observes: "Shoppers who purchase imported berries and mushrooms in gourmet supermarkets may purchase convenience and a sense of anonymity, but they also bypass the social networks and personal stories that are invested in jars of home-made preserves and pickles made by one's friends and relatives" (Caldwell, 2002, p. 314). They visit one another and exchange food hence building forms of reciprocity sometimes necessary for those reliant on scarce resources. If I go to Ica néni's house and not eat two or three servings she gets irritated, "Nem finom?" ("Don't you like it? Is it not tasty?") It is as if I am personally insulting her as her food represents who she is. On a typical visit I may bring flowers, and I may be asked to do a simple favor, such as buy a battery for her radio, or help her to bring up some potatoes from her storage container in the basement. Going to Ica néni's house to eat soup, is more than the act of eating, it creates social obligations. To some extent my transporting Lea's gift to her mother creates a social obligation to me, yet her mother Albertina néni's extreme hospitality, not only "repaid" her debt to me but also now made me indebted to her.

5 Gift Exchange Creates Transnational Social Obligation

Why not simply mail items back to Hungary? On the one hand, the mail system is unpredictable and things often get lost. I have mailed Christmas cards from the US that do not arrive until Spring. Gyuszi sent mangos to his mother that arrived in Hungary quickly but sat at the postal office for a month, and only when the fruit flies started to swirl around the package, did they bother to tell Ica néni to come down to pick it up as it had been sitting there for a month. The good thing is she actually received the package, for often packages never make it to their final destination and this may be why you cannot insure a package sent from the US to Hungary. On the other hand, delivering items through a third person is a way to link people together through social obligation and is part of a long-standing tradition of hospitality common during the socialist period, as Szabella néni's story of transporting oranges from Italy indicates.

The personal and cultural practice of gift exchange transcends boundaries and mirrors discussions of globalization. What is missing from arguments about the nation state is the role of personal cultural and economic forms of exchange, such as the gift exchange. Steger says "Pronouncing the rise of a borderless world, hyperglobalizers seek to convince the public that globalization inevitably involves the decline of bounded territory as a meaningful concept for understanding political and social change" (Steger, 2009, p. 63). Gift exchange is a practice that highlights borders, in that people may not easily be able to move across them due to visa or political constraints, but gift exchange also highlights a "borderless world" as symbolic representations of the individual can be transported across borders forming personal bonds despite geographic distances.

Transmitting a gift from the US to Hungary creates social obligation blurring the boundaries of Nation State. From a Western perspective we may see a gift as a simple nice gesture, but in Marcel Mauss classic work, *The Gift*, he looks at how gift exchange can be used as means to build ties between individuals and groups of people. Gift exchange can be competitive, antagonistic, or manipulated for personal gain. He explores forms of reciprocity and gift exchange among small-scale societies to suggest there is a type of gift economy where there may be an explicit or implied expectation of a return gift. If someone accepts a gift he/she may be accepting an implied contract of obligation to reciprocate. Exchange links actors to each other and to objects. People involved in a relationship of gift exchange are obligated to receive and give gifts in culturally appropriate ways. Lea sends gifts to her mother in Hungary, and when I return to the US, Albertina néni sends gifts back to her

daughter hence maintaining a connection through gift exchange. These gifts move across borders and create a feeling of social obligation.

Though parent and child are separated in two different countries, the international gift exchange creates social obligation not only between the gift giver and recipient, but also the transporter of the gift because as I transport the gifts I become part of the gift exchange process. I must obey the cultural rules of social hospitality to spend time with the recipient and in the process, I feel a sense of moral duty to the parent I visit. When I visit Albertina néni to deliver Lea's gifts, I know I will be spending several hours with her. When her daughter Lea wanted her mother to come to the US, I escorted Albertina néni to the travel agent and I wrote a letter of invitation to help her to obtain the air ticket and visa. In return, I receive the warmth of hospitality in a foreign country and as an Anthropologist I gain insight into Hungarian culture. I become the transport by which the social obligation takes place.

6 Gift Exchange Creates Liminal Space That Bonds

The gift from émigré child to mother at home creates social bonds across borders based on reciprocal exchange. Lea was part of my initial person-centered interviews exploring the migrant experience and constructions of identity. Albertina néni has influenced another project I am doing aimed at recording the life stories of elder women in order to understand the impact of change, to build on theories related to identity, time and space. Through the years I have established strong rapport and friendship with these women in part facilitated through these informal gift exchanges. The gift giving process as a part of reciprocal exchange may serve to strengthen existing relationships, such as the relationship between mother and child, but it may also serve to form new relationships, such as the tie between me as the anthropologist and my informants in both the US and Hungary. Lee Cronk in "Reciprocity and the Power of Giving" furthers Mauss's argument to suggest that a gift may have "strings attached" that entail implied meanings (Cronk, 2006). There may be cultural "ethics" related to gift giving that are different in different societies – as illustrated in the article by Richard Lee "Christmas in the Kalahari" (Lee, 2006). The Hxaro exchange of the Kung San builds relationships. Though they pay attention to the type of items exchanged they do not strongly calculate the items' values. The importance lies in continuing the exchange back and forth between people and no one should achieve greater status or ego because of it. Belittling the gift of the ox diminishes the expectation of return and enforces humility – so no one has greater status than another. As infa-

mously quoted in Lee's article, a Dobe Ju'hoansi man stated, "We don't trade things we trade with people." Cronk's discussion of the Trobriand Islands further illustrates bonds created between peoples. Shell necklaces (soulava) are traded clockwise whereas the armbands (mwali) are traded counter clockwise. The value of the shell necklace is based on who owned the piece before (it has no monetary value) and the exchange or repayment may take months or years. The point is to build connections with your trade partners. Being the person who transports the goods I occupy a liminal space that connects me to the bond between mother and émigré child.

As a go-between mother and child in a sense I occupy the threshold that links the two and create bonds. Evoking Victor Turner's concept of liminality and communitas helps explain the in-between state that I feel as I transport goods from child to mother (Turner, 2008).

> Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or "transition" are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying "threshold in Latin), and aggregation. The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more, and by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and "structural" type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions.
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> TURNER, 2008, p. 327

I am the "passenger" the go-between that links the two together, and in the transformative process must learn to conform to the obligations in "accordance with certain customary norms" (Turner, 2008, p. 327). Victor Turner emphasizes the connection of rites of passage with society itself. He conducted fieldwork in central Africa where at puberty both men and women undergo ritual activities in order to mark their initiation into adulthood. Turner believed these rites of passage negate normal rules and the social hierarchy of society and emphasize instead the bonds between people, which enable society to exist. He called this "communitas" – or anti-structure. When in this liminal phase, Turner said the

world appears to be ambiguous – you are neither here nor there. Participants are betwixt and between their former position and the new position in which they are moving. It is chaotic – the world you knew is destroyed. The phase is often accompanied by either the suspension, or reversal, of everyday social values and there is a sense of danger being enacted. Though I would not say that I experience any real danger while traveling between the US and Hungary, the airport travel experience can be very stressful. Not only do I have pre-travel tensions, but occasionally experience uncomfortable moments during the process of traveling. The seats are too small, a baby wails throughout the flight, the airplane food upsets my stomach, my bags are sometimes delayed or lost, and I experience jet lag. And as mentioned earlier, I was hassled by the security guards at the airport over a bag of canned pork liver. As I leave the US I shed my comfortable identity as American to become the foreigner, or as the Hungarians put it, *külföldi*, the person not from here, or stranger. "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by the law, custom, concentration, and ceremonial. As such; their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions" (Turner, 2008, p. 327). Once going through the liminal phase, however, the passenger assumes a new identity as part of the community, what Turner refers to as "communitas (328)." While in Hungary I am a different person as the language and cultural differences transform my behavior and way of thinking. As an outsider I appreciate the offer of hospitality and bonding. People who share the experience of the rite of passage experience "communitas" hence connecting individuals with society. In the context of the gift exchange, a sense of communal bonding occurs from the gift sender (Lea), the gift bearer (me the anthropologist in between), and gift recipient (Albertina Néni), yet despite these social connections that stretch across physical borders, a form of "communitas" is established creating new social identities and bonds.

7 Embodying the Liminal Threshold of Time and Space

As I embody the émigré child I participate in conflation of time and space that allows a communal bond despite the distance between the US and Hungary. Connecting people through gift exchange creates shared identity despite distant borders. Collective identity can be linked to locality in terms of community or society, yet the spatial boundaries are not necessarily clear. A community is often understood as entailing "a sense of common identity and characteristics" and as describing existing or alternative sets of relationships

(Williams, 1985, pp. 75–76). Anthropologists have often determined communities to be bounded sets of people whose beliefs, religions, customs, language, culture, etc. could be spatially outlined by the edges of the village, by the outlines on a map. However, as research has shifted to urban environments where sub-communities need to be creatively defined, and as transmigrants maintain ties between two or more places, it has been increasingly difficult to draw clear outlines. Consequently, even though a community may not have clear spatial boundaries, common ties in terms of personal, cultural, or historical connections can create a collective identity void of concrete boundaries. Localities and communities are fluid, contradictory, and conflicting (Revill, 1993, p. 120).

Gift exchange can be part of the production of space. Lefebvre suggests the production of space gives understanding to the everyday experience of space. He suggests there are three primary concepts in the production of space: 1) spatial practice or perceived space, 2) representations of space or conceived space, and 3) representational or lived space (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–39). He wants to breakaway from binary theories to positional categories, in order to emphasize the contradictions in space (39). Community needs to be understood as members and outsiders perceive it, as maps, policies, scientists and politics represent it and as lived space associates it with signs and symbols. Exchanging gifts is part of the lived space as it symbolizes a connection with others.

Transporting gifts between Hungary and the US symbolically represents a conflation of time and space that connects people who live in different countries. David Harvey's time-space compression gives understanding to this process of bonding that defies borders. Distance is no longer significant with rapid plane travel. Technologies give the illusion of compressed time and space. The postmodern condition impacts everyday life and creates the possibility for ties that transcend space and time (Harvey, 1989). Globalization puts strains on the Nation State as boundaries between countries become blurred. Though parent and child may communicate long distance by phone, Internet, or mail, the physical transportation of gifts via the air flight and personal delivery creates a visceral connection between peoples.

8 Gift Exchange Highlights an Embodiment of the Social Production of Space

The transportation of gifts across borders highlights a social production of space bounded by a connection of people where I embody the absent child. The gift I carry represents the identity of the émigré child. Marcel Mauss suggests that the gift, the object given, bears the identity of the giver. It is a

reflection of the person giving the object. My transnational deliveries allow me to embody the absent child. To embody something is to give a physical form to the intangible. Phenomenology, a philosophical inquiry of the perceived conscious experience rather than how things actually are, the objectively real, is one way to explain this transnational embodiment. Mauss further suggests that the recipient receives the gift, but also receives the gift giver. The object bears the identity of the gift giver, and hence by accepting this object, you are receiving the person. The mother accepts the gift and therefore receives her child. However, the child is absent, hence she receives me as a representation of the émigré child.

As the transporter of the gifts I embody the absent child. As a link between child and mother I bring "sight" – the ability to see the distant child. The mother left behind is unable to see an absent émigré child whose appearance may change over the months and perhaps years. Often I am asked to transport photographs or pictures. For Viktor's mother I help to set up equipment and show a video so his mother can "see" him. In the case of Lea and her mother, her son set up a computer and helps her to view photographs that Lea sends her. More recently the son has helped her Skype with Lea so they can see one another while they chat. In many cases however, elderly women don't have computers and have difficulty understanding how they work. On my visits however I am a living breathing person she can see rather than a distant image on a computer or a photograph. There is a difference between a living being in front of you and an image, much like the difference between live theater and an image on a movie screen. Both are performances, but there is a more connective experience when there is someone in front of you who you can actually see and potentially touch. I connect the mother to child through "sound" as she is able to hear what I say. Though often mothers talk to their children with the phone, I bring a personal voice. Often my visits are filled with questions about the child in the US. Communicating in person creates a more visceral experience than communicating by phone or Internet. Often the conversation turns to the absent child, what they are doing, to share common stories. Distance denies the ability to touch. Letters, or objects that are given are something that touches the owner and hand delivered they have more meaning. One can buy chocolate and coffee in Hungary, but it is not the same as the chocolate and coffee that the child sent as it represents his or her identity far in the United States. The absentee child can't taste or smell the mother's cooking, but in some respects their hospitality allows me to be a stand-in on their behalf. In addition food is transported back and forth creating a tangible bond through taste and consumption.

9 Conclusion

Post-socialist society allows for a liminal threshold that creates new understandings of space and time. As an anthropologist who travels back and forth from the US to Hungary on a fairly regular basis I became a physical stand in for the absent émigré child and an embodied conflation of time and space linking two people together. Transmitting a gift from the US to Hungary creates social obligation. Though parent and child are in two separate countries, the international gift exchange creates social obligation not only between the gift giver and recipient, but also the transporter of the gift. The gift giving process as a part of reciprocal exchange may serve to strengthen existing relationships, such as the relationship between mother and child, but it may also serve to form new relationships, such as the tie between me as the anthropologist and my informants in both the US and Hungary. As a go-between mother and child in a sense I occupy the threshold that links the two and create bonds, and in the context of the gift exchange, a sense of communal bonding occurs between gift sender, gift recipient, and gift bearer. The gift I carry represents the identity of the émigré child, and as the transporter of this gift I embody the absent child. By embodying the émigré child I participate in a conflation of time and space that allows a communal bond despite the distance between the US and Hungary. Connecting people through gift exchange creates a shared identity despite distant borders. Gift exchange can be part of the production of space and transporting gifts between Hungary and the US symbolically represents a conflation of time and space that connects people who live in different countries. A simple gesture of transporting simple items creates important ties for a mother at home, for the émigré child, and the anthropologist.

The practice of gift giving, hospitality, and social obligations prevalent during the Socialist area as strategies to obtain limited goods and form personal bonds carries over to post-socialist Hungary impacted now by globalization. The following chapter explores this theme more thoroughly through the perspective of food procurement strategies.