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Modernization of weddings in Fizeșu-Gherlii

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Keywords: rite of passage; distancing, separation and aggregation rites; nuptial customs; interbellic period; socialist period; collectivization; traditional peasant wedding; everyday wedding; rite; celebration; family customs; statute; rite structures, tradition and modernization; magic ritual functions; modernization procedures; international migration; individualism; global models; private space; public space; family ties; social ties; ritual clothing and objects; de-ritualization, secularization; institutionalization; wedding gastronomy; gift system; interethnic weddings, shoutings, orations, wedding songs

Abstract

The wedding, as an object of ethnographic research, is a very current theme and subject because we can see the stages of change that have taken place from past to present day. Fizeșu-Gherlii is situated in Cluj county and, as an ethnographic region, belongs to the Transylvanian Plain. The first chapter of the paper focuses on presenting the place where the data was collected.

In my doctoral thesis I analyzed the modernization of the traditional wedding in Fizeșu-Gherlii between 1930-2017. I would like to mention that very few scientific, ethnographic and anthropological results have been achieved and published about the rites of passage in the Plain of Transylvania up until the recent period. Based on field and archival research, I studied major changes in nuptial habits in three important periods. The memory of the elderly includes only the period after 1930, this being the reason the first investigated stage begins in 1930, the inter-war period, and ends in 1960, around the forced collectivization. The second (socialist) period dates back to 1989. Finally, the third identified stage begins in 1990 and continues until present day, that is until 2017. In my work I thoroughly analyzed the connections between the rites of passage of the wedding with the political, social, economic and cultural activities between 1930 and 2017.

Data collection (Chapter 2) was conducted in several ways. The most important information was gathered through the participatory method of village weddings, being in close proximity to the field studied since childhood. Based on this knowledge, I tried to know and understand the custom of the wedding in detail, paying great attention to those differences that took place during the wedding ceremony in the researched periods. For this purpose I have recorded several interviews with the “village elders”, with those people who still remember the traditional Hungarian wedding in Fizeșu-Gherlii. In order to see the differences in time, I have also interviewed the younger generation in the village. In addition to the interviews and the actual participation at the weddings, I considered it very important to research the marriage data records kept in the church archives of the village, since they contain very important information: the age, occupation of the bride and groom, their place of birth and the exact date of the wedding. This last one made it possible for me to

calculate how many marriages took place each year, at what age were marriages usually celebrated, how often were marriages mixed, etc. Also, with the help of the data collected from registers I was able to compare the 1930s wedding with contemporary ones. The photographs and films provided by the interviewees have brought valuable insight into the work. With the help of these I could compare, for example, the clothes of the bride and groom at certain sequences of the rituals, the objects used during the wedding, etc.

The research's objectives (Chapter 3) are based primarily on the nuance of the rite term, which comes from Arnold van Gennep. In 1909, he presented for the first time the role of the rites of passage, in the structure where he identified three important inner stages: rites of separation, liminality and incorporation. In the paper I present that this structure was modernized after World War II by sociologists and anthropologists as Victor Turner and Edmund Leach, who emphasized the most important role of the rites of passage: to adapt the subjects to their new status. The dissertation redefines the current specialty terminology: custom, rite, feast, family habits, liminality, structures, rite structure, tradition and modernization, changes in the structure and functions of the rites.

The main objective of the paper is to present the changes made in the wedding ritual of the Hungarian ethnics in Fizeșu-Gherlii. After defining the rites of passage and after the identification of operative scientific notions related to the wedding, I have analyzed the modernization of these customs, their connection with the major economic, social and cultural changes.

I rely mostly on the specialized Hungarian bibliography, but the work is also open to Romanian and international literature in this field. The fourth chapter of the paper analyzes those scientific directions, which, from the point of view of the research, have been exploited. I report critically to the results of Hungarian folklorist Dr. Balázs Lajos, who made a comprehensive synthesis of Sândominic, Ciuc county weddings, and then a new monograph about the role of desire in the wedding. In the dissertation, I relied primarily on the results of Finnish folklorists, who analyzed the rites of passage into a more complex socio-cultural context. I mention that in my dissertation I have analyzed in depth the Hungarian, Romanian and European literature related to the researched theme.

In the next chapter of the paper, namely chapter 5, research methods are presented. The paper compares the change of elements of the wedding ritual in the three researched periods, taking into account the notions of time, space, roles, objects, symbolic animals, clothing, gastronomy, material basis, sexuality, feelings, texts, photographs, movies and cultural interferences.

Chapter 6 contains the presentation of the three weddings: traditional, communist and contemporary weddings through the years. The first analyzed period is between 1930-1960, when the village communities were not yet destroyed, when the social and cultural norms of these local

communities influenced the structure and elements of the wedding. Then, the work presents the wedding characteristics of the socialist period, when the land no longer represented any value in everyday life or in the construction of the social status of a family or person. In the third, post-socialist period mass international migration, mobility, major changes in daily communication, deep articulations of individualism, American or Western European models have profoundly restructured the traditional culture and wedding customs of Fizeșu-Gherlii.

Chapter 7 compares these three weddings and is devoted to the concrete analysis of the dynamics of the wedding structure during the three aforementioned periods. Here I present the ritual elements before the wedding, during the wedding and after the celebration has taken place. The important elements in differentiating the three periods appear as themes in the 13 subchapters: scenarios, place, time, roles, body techniques, institutions, objects, gastronomy, material basis, sexuality, the importance of feelings, texts, photographs, wedding movies and cultural interference.

In the summary of the paper (chapter 8), I have identified the major changes that have been made, based on my own research; while chapter 9 contains the theses of research:

1. In the first period all events took place mainly in the family's private space, only the religious ritual took place in the church of the bride. In the second stage the ritual distances itself from the private space, moving mainly to the village's cultural home, to a public space. In the third stage the wedding takes place in a restaurant or an event hall, which in theory are public places, but are reserved only for the participants. These changes reflect in fact the individualization of the society of Fizeșu-Gherlii.
2. In the first stage, the wedding takes place especially weekdays in order not to disrupt the Sunday religious service, especially during periods less busy with agricultural work. In the socialist era the religious wedding is moved to Saturdays and Sundays, when those employed in different enterprises had spare time to attend. In the third period it takes place especially during long weekends, regardless of agricultural work. Overall, the wedding gradually departs from both the agricultural and community life in the village.
3. Ritual roles in the first period were well encoded, blended organically with family and local social ties. In organizing the wedding especially parents and godparents have played a key role. During the second stage the young couple, the bride and groom get a gradually more significant role in organizing the event. Finally, in the third period, both the parents and the local community lose their organizational role and almost all items are prepared by specialists, as paid services: restaurants, organizers of various events, cameramen, photographers, orchestras, etc.
4. The paper presents documented changes which took place in preparing the bride and groom's body, major changes in the role of clothing and ritual objects. It is a self-evident

conclusion that in fact those ritual elements lose their basic meanings or disappear entirely which, in the first two periods have had spiritual, ritual and magical functions. Thus, the denomination, designation, secularization and gradual institutionalization of the events takes place.

5. I present the changes which occurred in the wedding gastronomy. In the first period mainly basic foods were produced, collected from villager's households and prepared in the family's space by the relatives of the young couple. In the socialist era, a certain part of basic foods were bought, procured by special methods from the public space; while in the third period there are exotic dishes prepared by chefs, based on Western or American models.
6. In the paper I also analyze the economic and financial aspect of the wedding. During the first period, between the 1930s and 1960s the gifts were mostly practical, while money becomes especially important after the loss of holdings. Finally, in the post-socialist period using the money gifted impressive family houses are bought, holidays are being organized to exotic destinations. However, with the help of these donations new ritual communities are built, based on this money-giving system.
7. A subchapter is devoted to interethnic relationships, marriages and weddings. I prove that in this village interethnic marriages were restricted by parents, but after 1989, after the democratization of the region's life, international migration, marriages in the region are liberalized and the weddings are mainly determined by global models known from abroad, films or the internet.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that, theoretically, Arnold van Gennep's model is not operative, valid today for the proper analysis and interpretation of weddings. The three segments (separation, distancing, incorporation) are often structured in a different order, some elements (especially the magical ones) disappear, others are invented and implemented by young people or specialists. The wedding quickly loses its magic-religious-spiritual charge, it is organized as an individual project and not by following collective models.

After the list of bibliographical works in chapter 10, the annexes (chapter 11) contain quantitative data gathered from archival research from the matrimonial books of the reformed church in the village. Following, I present the nominal list of partners with whom the interviews were conducted. I also publish those texts (songs, orations and shoutings) that I have collected from oral and written sources, as well as the texts of the interviews made in the field. The photographs at the end of the work are of considerable document value, as I make reference to them at several points in the paper.