UNIVERSITAS COMENIANA BRATISLAVENSIS
FACULTAS PHILOSOPHICA
Tomus 41 ETHNOLOGIA SLOVACA ET SLAVICA 2020

# RITUAL AND RELATEDNESS IN A COMMUNITY OF APUSENI MOUNTAINS, ROMANIA

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**Abstract**
*Kinship studies were the foundation of classical anthropology. Despite the changes that have occurred globally, kinship remains one of the major topics of research for anthropologists. Beyond social reorganization and transformations, kinship cannot be overlooked by any anthropologist who enters the field and begins to research a community. By providing an overview of the main family practices that surround marriage in a rural community, the article shows that marriage has been and continues to be the core of kin ties in Romania as it constitutes the main source of power for individuals participating in in horizontal relations, in their social environment. Drawing on a case study, I explore how marriage reconfigures relatedness in Romanian contemporary society. This article is the result of several years of fieldwork in a village community of the Apuseni Mountains, in Romania. In my endeavor, I used qualitative methods such as direct and participant observation, field notes and recorded in-depth interviews with key informants.*
**Keywords:** *kinship, marriage, practices, ritual, Romania*

In 2005, as I began my doctoral studies, I set out to do my fieldwork[1] in a village

[1] For this paper, I draw on the research I conducted in a Romanian village community as part of my doctoral studies completed in 2010 with a thesis on kinship, as well as on later research on the topic. My sustained interest in this research topic throughout the years materialized in 2018 in the form of a book I published in Romanian, *Relațiile de înrudire. Căsătoria – atitudini, practici și dinamici*, Cluj Napoca: Mega Publishing House, 2018.

community located in the Apuseni Mountains of Cluj County, Romania,[2] with the aim to research kinship. In order to understand the current state of kinship processes, particularly marriage, I conducted in-depth interviews and engaged in participant observation, thus opting for ethnographic fieldwork (the method of classic studies of kinship anthropology[3]) as it best suited my topic. Based on these qualitative methods and the inductive approach my working assumption at the end of the first stages of fieldwork was this: *Marriage has been, and continues to be, the core of kin ties in Romania as it constitutes the main source of power for individuals engaged in horizontal social connections, in their social environment.* As my ethnographic fieldwork has revealed, during significant rites of passage[4] in the life of a community, kinship continues to be activated in Romanian society by an apparently *invisible* structure, which is based on a claim of belonging to a "*neam*" structure. "*Neam*" (> kin) can refer to both one's family, and a looser type of kin grouping that involves more than marriage or blood relations. According to the views of the Romanian archaic society, you belong to the "*neam*" even in death.

## Introduction

By reviewing the available literature on my topic of choice, I first noticed that kinship studies were enjoying a revival in contemporary Western Anthropology, especially after researchers like Janet Carsten succeeded in reshaping the field in the early 1990s[5]. By contrast, in Romania, the subject of kinship was only just beginning

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[2] A rural locality located 60 km far from Cluj-Napoca, one of the most developed urban centers in the region of Transylvania. The village population is Romanian and Christian Orthodox. I developed the sample using the snowball method. My interviewees were mostly women, among them my key informants. This women-centered approach is justified by the perception that they are the active element of the kinship process; moreover, Kligman's (1981, p. 136) observation that women tend to play the prominent roles in life-cycle rituals also applies to the community in which I did my fieldwork. Although the men continue to be the representatives of the household in the public sphere, maintaining, strengthening and reconfiguring kinship relationships continues to be mainly the work of women. Most often, the women maintain the connection between close kin members, which makes them the most qualified to verbally reinforce the roles prescribed to individuals in certain events in the life of the community (weddings, funerals, etc.).

[3] See the foundational works of classical anthropology by L. Morgan, K. B. Malinowski, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, etc.

[4] Following van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967), threshold moments are those that mark the passage from one status to another in a society (birth, baptism, marriage, funeral), times characterized by liminality.

[5] Janet Carsten's (1997; 2000; 2004) works were a true inspiration. Her writings have helped me to understand how it is still possible to write about kinship in anthropology, and that kinship remains a challenging topic for those anthropologists who research it.

to gather interest from contemporary anthropologists. And yet, from a historical perspective, the Romanian school of Social Sciences had produced, over time, some remarkable works on kinship relations, *neam* structure, and family relations. Historically, the founding fathers of Romanian ethnology seemed to agree on one fact: that kinship and family life practices often intersect and are interdependent. However, while Romanian ethnologists dedicated many pages to family life cycle practices, kinship unfortunately did not receive a comparable treatment. Dumitru Caracostea (1948) was the first researcher to look at kinship relations as the basis of a typology of Romanian folklore, claiming not only that they structure society, but traditional art forms as well. The researcher also deplored the lack of preliminary research on kinship relations in Romanian traditional society. As Mihăilescu (2005) noted, there is a number of similarly notable contributions, such as: Xenia Costa-Foru's (1945), H. Henri Stahl's (1959), and Nicolae Constantinescu's (1987). To these works, all published before 1990, we must add Vasile Scurtu's unrivalled study (1966) that inventories Romanian kinship terminology and its etymology; unfortunately, no similar studies were written after 1990. There are, however, examples of Western researchers who studied Romanian kinship, most notably Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman.

In one of the chapters of her book, Verdery (1996, pp. 133-168) showed how the Law on Agricultural Land Resources that liquidated collective farms (Law 18/1991) turned property restitution in Transylvania into a very complex and flexible process. Under those given circumstances, the villagers used two ways to justify land ownership: *kinship* and land work. Their choice of kingship as argument raises a series of questions: How important is kinship in the village world? How exactly does kinship structure a village community? And how does it help in establishing local informal hierarchies? Which are the networks that it creates? When, in what context, and how are they used? Which are the most powerful networks—i.e., the oldest, the ones legitimated by this (unquestioned) belonging to the community that would, as a result, entitle people to own land according to "the law of the ancestors"? How do these kinship networks form and generate actions as systems of relations? And how cana twenty-first century village community, relying on these networks, continue to act as a social structure based on kinship relations?

Another rather accurate fresco of the Romanian kinship system came from Gail Kligman's 1988 study of the funeral ritual in a community in the Maramureș region. In her book, she made a comparative analysis of the past and the present social organization of the village. She looked at both the concept of *neam* and the structure of family relations, as well as the social relations that they entail, following the way the latter are configured by the notion and the types of *neam*: *neam drept/bun* (good/right family, i.e., belonging to an old, wealthy, propertied

family is perceived to bring with it a desirable heredity, as well as inherited virtues such as moral strength, honor, wisdom, hard work, good will, religiousness) or *neam slab/rău* (weak/bad family, i.e., roughly the opposite attributes of a good *neam*). Kligman dwells at length on the *nănaşi-fini* (godparents-godchildren) relationship and on the ways in which the dynamic of this relationship changed to reflect the transformations suffered by the traditional society under the influence of factors outside the community namely, the Communist political regime. Her discussion of the wedding and funeral rituals brings to the fore the same kinship relations in the form of the roles granted to family members in these rituals. In fact, kinship relations, the individuals' roles, the obligations and rights derived from them are always present in the background of her book. What is fascinating is how well the author has managed to capture how, despite repeated attempts by the socialist regime to suppress the power exercised through kinship relations in the social realm, kinship has remained a constant force shaping the local Romanian social organization.

To conclude, relatedness[6] and the study of relatedness in Romanian society are rarely discussed by anthropologists. Existing research, however, documents the significance relatedness has in Romanian contemporary society, as it does in others. As Carsten (2004, p. 6) noted, the family, with both its private and public dimensions, remains a topic of great concern in our contemporary societies, and Romanian society is no exception. Family and marriage are two very closely connected concepts for Romanians, and the wedding ritual emphasizes precisely the active role that the kin plays in the overall system of relatedness.

## Relatedness and marriage

In my endeavor, I started from observing, describing and analyzing the wedding ritual as an illustration of the ways in which kinship relations and the networks they create are produced, activated, reactivated and developed during events in which the social actors participate and are granted various roles, depending on the position they occupy in the kinship network. During my fieldwork in the Apuseni Mountains village community, I could see how different values and roles are attached to the family members depending on the moments/events evoked—and this is most observable by looking closely at these events. During family life

[6] Following Carsten (2000), when I refer to my own research experience, and not to that of a particular author, I use the term *relatedness* as she defined it in her writings, namely to emphasize the processual nature of relatedness, i.e., relatedness as being constantly (re)configured, (re) constructed, as D. Morgan would later define it in his works.

cycle events or rites of passage - birth, baptism, wedding, and funeral - kinship relations are much more visible, active, and easier to document. Even so, based on participant observation, I argue that kinship networks are best put to use when economic interests are involved, such as searching for a job or a cash loan, for example. As early as my first interviews, I noticed that kinship functions along the principles posited by Lévi-Strauss—consanguinity, affinity or descent—as they establish cousin-cousin, husband-wife, parent-child relations (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p. 46). At the same time, the community attaches a strong value to the principle of *descent* as defined by Radcliffe-Brown: it is often the case that, in order to be perceived as a full-fledged family, a married couple must bear a child.

An analysis of the wedding ritual also reveals that, for this community, relations between affines are more valuable than relations between cognates—as Lévi-Strauss noted, affine relationships constitute the basis of the dynamics of kinship. In traditional communities, kinship relations take the form of a permanent bond between people, of uninterrupted interpersonal relations, as they produce and maintain social cohesion and spiritual education—*kinship consciousness* is often more important than kinship itself. Social scientists were often inclined to claim that, in Romanian traditional society, blood relations trump spiritual/affine relations (Constatinescu, 1987). Based on my research data, I claim quite the opposite: in traditional communities (the Apuseni Mountains village being one) the latter are, most of the time, more used than the former. And this is the issue that I want to describe and discuss in this article. Affine kinship acquires particular significance in a village community, often being the main network that enables the accumulation of social capital by various social actors.

Through marriage, a new family is created: more than that, new networks are created, which will be used by the members that participate in them. In other words, upon joining a new family through marriage, a person also joins a new family network that both the person and his or her cognates and affines will be able to call upon and use to their advantage (from everyday life situations such as asking for help with agricultural work, to securing a good job through the family network, etc.). In such small rural communities, marriage brings together three extended families: the bride's, the groom's, and the marriage godparents'—godparents whose role will be to act as spiritual parents for the new married couple. The moment two people marry, the foundations of new alliances are set, alliances that will have numerous repercussions—suffice it to note the importance given to the kind of *neam* (good or bad) to which the parties involved in the contracting of the marriage belong. This echoes Lévi-Strauss' observation on how the new alliances created through marriage will function as the basis for new social networks connecting various households in the community—and in the creation of these social networks, the women play a crucial role.

A brief analysis of the terms employed by members of this particular community on the occasion of a marriage—terms which are not at all uncommon in the rest of the country (Șeuleanu, 1995, pp. 65-82)—can be useful to illustrate how, despite transformations in the traditional organization of village life, the wedding ritual continues to follow to this day the archaic model described by researchers such as S. Florea-Marian (1995 [1890]). For instance, when the groom's parents go to ask for the hand of the future bride in marriage, people say that they go to "*târg"*/"*târguială"* (>bargain). Today, the bargain is merely symbolic, but people still recall that not long ago,[7] the fathers of the future spouses (as heads of families) would negotiate the bridewealth. Often, if the fathers did not agree on the price, the marriage arrangement would fell through. The marriage could still go through if the young man and woman were determined "to follow their hearts" and eloped. However, this was seen as breaking the rule of the bargain. For the entire duration of the wedding—which begins with the wedding preparations, followed by the actual event, and yet another period after the event—the ensemble of actions is lexically expressed through a specific vocabulary historically rooted in the exceptional significance had by the wedding event in any traditional community: the exchange of words between the bride's and the groom's sides during the wedding ritual, or the terms employed to this day — *târg* (>the bargain), învoială (>the agreement), *darul miresei* (>the bride's gift) — , are only a few such elements still capturing this temporal depth.

At the same time, the courtship, the wedding and the period after the wedding are marked by ritual commensality: the families have meals together to strengthen/confirm the newly established alliances. This entire period of time is characterized by complex actions of *giving* and *receiving*. Based on reciprocity, it is often difficult to discern where the exchange begins and where it ends: starting with the wedding, the married couple must return the gifts they received, on various occasions, from the godparents, their respective families, as well as from other families that participated in the event. Marriage thus lays the basis for an alliance structured around the principle of *debt*, a debt that will last as long as the newly formed couple is alive. The gift thus appears as the one element that generates, affirms and maintains the bonds (Mauss, 2016 [1925]) in this type of social context. The principle according to which the ritual exchange of gifts both seals and produces kinship was also noted by researchers in various other contexts (Kipnis, 1997; Brandtstädter, 2003).

7 In the early 2000s.

## Marriage-ritual and relatedness

*Marriage constitutes the ideological basis of social and sexual relations, transforming them by restructuring identity and social action.* (Kligman, 1988, p. 74)

After an early setback that caused me to reorganize my research, I was indeed surprised to discover the vast material that my fieldwork could provide.[8] I was certain that the context of big life-cycle events—weddings, baptisms, funerals—would be a rich source of references to specific practices but I did not expect to find a kinship network so dense and active, very much still alive in the community I was studying. By going back to the field I gradually realized that I could focus on relatedness as generared through marriage, thus providing an account of the ways in which the relations that this type of relatedness entails are both active and dynamic processes in this Apuseni Mountains community.

Once I took this path, the entire scene of social life in this village community appeared to me somehow different from what studies based in rural areas had accustomed me to. I started to see each *event* through the lens of this social dynamics structured by exchange (of information, goods, visits, affection, etc.). Belonging to this kind of community seemed to mean, first and foremost, accepting certain obligations and rules, whose breach puts one at risk of being marginalized by the others, with reciprocity looming large at the back of each social action. Illustrative of that are remarks such as "I go to this wedding because they are my *neam* and, when the time comes, they too will go to my children's weddings". No gesture goes unnoticed, and all gestures are governed by reciprocity. The social network, which works as a channel for the performance of these exchanges, is usually built on kin, or neighbor relations — an extended type of kinship. I must mention here that, in the past, the bride and groom usually lived not far from each other, with spatial proximity as a guarantee that the land owned by both families will eventually be lumped together instead of fragmented; or simply as a manifestation of the principle that a neighbor is close enough to become your family but, at the same time, distant enough to avoid breaking the taboo of marrying a family member.[9]

[8] At the beginning of my fieldwork, my ambition was to write a monograph of the current kinship system in a rural community of the Apuseni Mountains. After a few months, I redefined my interest and focused my research instead on capturing how marriage, as a central component of kinship in Romanian society, manages to illustrate to a large extent the main attitudes, practices and dynamics of the kinship process.

[9] I refer here to the rule that one must not marry three-time (or less) removed cousins or the children of godparents, who, by marriage, become your close relatives, perceived as cognates, or siblings-in-law who become your affine; therefore, according to the social norm, two brothers shall not marry two sisters or two cousins.

Also, specific wedding ritual prescriptions were operating not long ago in order to publicly assert and sanction the *spiritual relatedness* established between godparents and their godchildren, on the one hand, and the alliance between parents-in-law, siblings-in-law, and the new married couple, on the other hand. The entire wedding was scripted so that the ritually prescribed interactions between the bride's family and the groom's family would help weave the new *social networks* around the couple: for instance, the groom's procession, made up usually of both cognates and affines, must take down the bride's *ruda*[10] before the bride comes out of the house. The people in the bride's procession are supposed to prevent this from happening or at least to delay it.

There is also an exchange of gifts between the bride's and the groom's family—the groom's aunts receive ştergare (ritual embroidered cloths) and his uncles *cămeşi* (shirts), whereas the godparents and the groom's sisters and parents receive ştergare, which they wear today draped over their necks until the church ceremony is over. The bride's mother is supposed to give the groom's mother a set of clothes, which the latter must then present in a ritual dance. Other exchanges are performed in the private space of the house: the bride's mother makes the bride's bed using linens prepared specifically for this occasion, linens that the future wife will take into her new home. This part of the ritual is preserved as such today, and the community perceives it as particularly shameful if the bride does not receive "the bed" (only a bedding set today). The monetary value of "the bed" is by no means great. This is why one must assume that it is rather linked to sexual initiation rituals or, to be more precise, to fertility rituals: the mother, a woman who has already born children, symbolically transmits her fertilizing power to her daughter, in the form of "the bed."

Another gesture that helps strengthen the new alliance happens after midnight in the wedding celebration, namely the braiding of the former bride's hair into a *conci* (bun) with *prime* (ribbons) made out of an old shirt that the new husband brings to the bride's house. The godmother takes the lead here as she braids the new wife's hair into a bun—dressed by her mother in the bridal attire, the young woman is dressed as a wife by her godmother. Indeed, the godmother is the person who, from now on, will protect her new godchild, accompany her to church, to the village dance. This is a role that the godmother will fulfill as long as she lives, since godparents are expected to take all their godchildren under their protecting wing. The godmother and the godfather are considered the married couple's spiritual parents. I should mention that in this particular community, the bride and groom

[10] A tall pole decorated by the bride's close family and placed next to the bride's gate. At predetermined time in the wedding ritual; the pole will be taken down by the groom's family, by way of signaling the symbolic conquering of the bride.

used to have only one set of godparents and not two as it is currently the practice. As a life-cycle event, the wedding marks the birth of a new family, therefore likened to a helpless baby whom the godparents would protect and guide. The young spouses become family to both the groom's and the bride's relatives, which brings with it the interdiction that their offspring should marry offspring born out of either family—the bride's or the groom's. The newlyweds' parents become *cuscri* (in-laws) to each other and to the couple's siblings, and the godparents become *cumetri* to the couple's siblings. In terms of the godchildren's obligations in relation to their godparents, the former was expected to visit the latter the next day after the wedding and bring food and drink with them; also, on the first Sunday after the wedding, the godchildren would have their godparents over *pă omenie* (to honor them with food and drink). As for the godparents, their obligation was to accompany their godchildren to the village dance during the six months after the wedding, or until the latter begot their first child; they would also accompany them to church.

As part of the wedding ritual the godfather accompanies the groom to take the bride from her home; they take her each by one arm and help her hop over the threshold. In other words, the bride was not supposed to step on the threshold. This short ritual sequence expresses very well the symbolism of the threshold in Romanian folk imaginary, as a place of passage—therefore potentially haunted by evil forces that could do harm to the future wife.[11] At the same time, the men, traditionally associated with positive forces, seem to be the only ones capable/invested with the power to protect her from such harm. Upon bringing the bride out of her home, the godparents receive ștergare that they will wear draped around their necks and take off only after their godchildren are wed.

The bridal procession is made up of at least three women (from the family or, if this is not possible, female neighbors) called upon to serve as *descântătoare* (enchantresses). Their role is to liven up the atmosphere with verses and humor. Often quite bawdy in the old times, the verses appear to have grown tamer these days, reflecting social changes such as marriages with people from towns and cities, with *vinituri* (people from outside the community), etc. There are few women left who still know how to play the part of enchantresses but, even under these circumstances, the rule that they should be family members is observed to the extent possible.

[11] The *threshold* and the *door* are two interconnected symbols, both pointing to the passage into a new stage of existence (Evseev, 1997, p. 368).

## Case study: Ana's[12] wedding

Ana is the daughter of one of my key female informants, and I've known her since she was basically a child. In 2007,[13] she was 21 years old and she was dating a "city boy" (from Cluj-Napoca) whom she had met at a party. The youngest of the family's children, Ana has a brother, the eldest, and a sister, the middle child. Neither of her older siblings was married or had any plans to marry any time soon.

Her mother, Ileana, became over time my key informant on issues related to village life and to some extent acted as a gatekeeper, granting me access to various moments in the life of the community. Ileana would be the first I would turn to for information about marriage in the village. The stories she recounted in the evening, as she milked the cow or cooked, helped me greatly to understand how things are organized in a community such as the one she belongs to. I listened to many stories about her life with her husband—she never called him "my husband" but "my man." She talked about how her parents, who had three more daughters, decided it was time to marry her off when she was barely sixteen. Shortly after they made the decision, they found a suitable young man, one of the sons in their neighbors' family. Ileana was asked if she agreed to "go after" (to marry in local parlance) Ghiţă a Fenului.[14] And she said yes. In fact, she didn't have much of an option—her parents' question was more of a formality, and even if she had answered no, it would have had no impact whatsoever on their decision to marry her off. Chaperoned by their mothers, the young man and woman went together to the village dance and, after a few weeks of getting to know each other a little bit, the parents set the date for *târguială* (the bargain). After prolonged negotiations, the parents reached an agreement, and their offspring were married. After that, as Ileana repeatedly told me, there was no going back – "if you get married, you stay married: it's very shameful to separate."

The time when the children are old enough to go out to the village disco and rumors start to spread about them dating someone is yet another privileged moment for studying the prominent place marriage holds in the village community. I will indeed illustrate the importance of marrying someone from a good *neam* with an episode from Ana's life, which occurred before her marriage. The protagonist of this episode was Ana's mother, Ileana.

[12] The actual names of the informants are changed to ensure their anonymity.

[13] The year I started doing fieldwork in this community.

[14] There is a practice in rural Romania to nickname a person after the name of the head of their family (father or husband). The person is known by the other villagers under this nickname and only rarely under his or her officially recorded name. Translator's Note: Here the nickname would translate word by word as 'Fenu's Ghiță,' i.e. 'Ghiță the son of Fenu.' For more examples and details see also Kligman (1988, p. 40).

As the youngest daughter, Ana gave up the idea of going to high school and, after graduating from secondary school, stayed in her parents' home, got a job at the village bar, and accepted that she would be the child to care for the parents. But then Ana met a boy from a neighboring village. He came from a family that didn't have a particularly good reputation. Raised by a single mother, the boy was known for being involved in various misdeeds in the area. Ileana told me how, after she found out who Ana was seeing, she asked around about him, and when she learnt what his "credentials" were, she did all she could to break them up. I tested her to see whether the argument of love could work and dissuade her from interfering in the girl's life. Ileana raised her eyebrows as she told me that her duty as a parent was to make sure that their daughter did not enter a *neam* worse than their own. In time, I came to realize that she could not accept that one of her children should marry someone from a *neam* not as good as theirs, that she expected the *neam* to be better than her own.

Desperate to put an end to the relationship, the mother sent her daughter back to school in the city. But this proved to be just a partial fix. The girl came back on school breaks and kept seeing the boy. When the daughter ran away from home, her mother brought her back. Exhausted by the constant fighting, the mother resorted to the emergency solution: bringing in the Orthodox priest—someone *must* have bewitched her daughter, she would explain to me. "Someone wanted to hurt her and put a spell on her[15] to like that boy, there can be no other explanation," Ileana would often say. Armed with a lot of patience and some money, Ileana went to see the priest renowned in the village as an expert in unbinding spells. She is convinced that it was the special religious rituals performed by this priest that set things right. In the middle of her relentless efforts to break the relationship, the mother ended up promising her daughter to buy her a car if she agreed to leave the "wrong boy." Clearly, the family income did not allow for such a purchase, but the mother managed to gather the money and grant her daughter's wish in the hope that this would keep her away from the boy. The financial sacrifice that the girl's family is willing to do to ensure the separation of the couple speaks of their determination to marry their daughter into a different *neam*. Just to be clear: Ana's mother did not actually meet the young man; she might have seen him once. Her judgment was almost entirely based on hearsay and her representation of what that boy's *neam* was like. A bad *neam* reputation in a village community brings with it the potential social isolation of the person, regardless of the person's actual character.

[15] For details on 'bewitching' and 'magically binding marriages' in Romanian society, see Tătăran, 2016.

And then there was a plot twist: Ana met a boy who came to visit from the city. From the start, they seemed inseparable and, less than two years later, they were making wedding plans. I was privy to the preparations in both families, listening every night to the conversations on how the marriage was to proceed. Ana was already preparing for the wedding when Ileana started wondering if it was right to marry off her youngest daughter first. To my question why would that be a problem, she answered that the practice of "starting the haystack from the bottom" (my informant's phrase) is not exactly common in the village. In my understanding, Ileana was trying to say that in marrying off Ana first, they had not followed the prescribed order of age (Ana had two older siblings who, according to the local rules of marriage, should have married before her), but there was nothing she could do to reestablish the "normal" order. She had to go through with the wedding, especially considering everything she had endured, how many priests she had visited to make sure that her daughter wouldn't marry the "wrong boy," the one before Alex (Ana's future husband). As the wedding date approached, things started to heat up. Ileana would tell me in every conversation how important the union of the children was. She would take her time explaining all the degrees of relatedness that the marriage would establish between her and the future son-in-law's family.

Another important moment in the timeline of the wedding preparations was when I found Ileana painting the fence that set apart a small vegetable plot on one side of her property. Sitting next to her, I encouraged her to tell me what news were there about the wedding. She was upset, there was some disagreement with her daughter's future mother-in-law, and she felt confused. How did she, the mother-in-law, expect that the religious wedding ceremony take place in Cluj-Napoca? When everybody knew that it must take place at the bride's church, my informant explained. Even more, the civil ceremony was also supposed to happen here in the village.

> How is she [her daughter's future mother-in-law] expecting me to bring all my relatives to Cluj-Napoca? What are we supposed to do there? For the reception, no problem. The place looks good, I saw it. But why also the village hall and the church [ceremonies]?

In other words, the conflict originated with Ileana's expectation that the entire wedding procession should cross the village on foot before reaching the church for the religious ceremony. Also, the wedding venue in the city was a canteen very much like the one they used in the village for the same purpose. However, having a Cluj-Napoca wedding venue on the invitation was (at least symbolic) proof that the daughter was marrying into a good family, which suited the mother very much. On the contrary, she was less pleased that the wedding seemed to get off course in a way that threatened to prevent her from displaying her own family's

wealth. But the conflict was settled in a few weeks' time, and I could see that by the improvement works they started doing on the house. They extended the porch and replaced the hardwood flooring traditionally used by mountain people in their homes with cheap laminate flooring bought from a large wholesale shop. Other changes ensued: the display cabinets in the main room were replaced with standard book shelves that readily accommodated the family's coffee and dinner sets. Two weeks later, the house was completely transformed, a far cry from the old 1970s style. In a later conversation with Ileana, I understood that all these changes were done to match the status of the groom's family. "How could we let them see that we didn't have laminate flooring but he [the groom] did?" I realized that, according to her logic, it didn't really matter what you owned, what you could afford or what made sense functionally in your life circumstances: what mattered was to match the wealth displayed by the other family.

Ana and Alex were married in the village. The civil ceremony took place at the village hall, but the wedding reception was held in the Cluj-Napoca canteen, the one Ileana was proud to have secured. The bride's guests included all her family's relatives and the persons who were "indebted" to her family. I asked my informant to tell me more about this "debt." It is very simple, she said: [the debt concerns] all the people whose weddings her family had attended or who are in some way related to them. To receive a wedding invitation from a person to whom you are "indebted" and not attend, or at the very least, send "the gift" is unacceptable. Please note that if in the past "the gift" was an object (bedding, kitchen utensils, etc.), today it consists of cash money. The gift is also called *cinstea miresei* (the bride's honor). Also note that, even if it would be much more convenient for people to simply send envelopes with cash and not actually attend, it is considered extremely offensive if someone who has a "debt" does not attend the actual wedding ceremony. One must have a serious reason for missing the event: mourning (after close relatives, and it should not exceed the six-week period after which it is deemed appropriate to attend a wedding, so long as one only partakes in the meal and not the dancing); a "debt" that trumps this one (a closer relative, for example); etc.

The impact of the wedding in the community speaks of the social standing of the bride and groom and of their respective families. Those who invite the entire village have very high social capital as they are kin with all the families in the community. The number of guests and, of course, the total amount of the cash gift are the two main ways to measure the success of a wedding event in this type of community. Interestingly, even if the amount of each cash gift is "called out"[16]

[16] The person who gathers the envelopes containing the cash gift for the newlyweds from the wedding guests is in charge of saying out loud the amount in each envelope.

during the wedding, people are not necessarily truthful about the total amount raised. This particular wedding was no exception: although they called out the cash gift given by each guest or family, the total amount that I heard after the wedding exceeded by as much as 20% the end sum of the individual cash gifts. The function of the gift here mirrors the logic of the gift as revealed by Mauss in his seminal work (2016 [1925]). This is a reciprocal exchange, so no one can claim to have made a profit from a wedding in the end. Sooner or later, each participant will have to repay the cash gift received—even to raise the amount if they can afford it. The logic of adding something on top of the gift received is still operating in these specific contexts. Another fixture of this exchange is that the closer the degree of relatedness with the bride and groom and their respective families, the higher the cash gift; and the other way around. Indeed, this follows the logic of the obligation, and the other wedding guests usually determine the amounts they will give based on how much the close relatives are giving. This reflects the more mercantile aspect of kinship, which seems to have become accentuated lately. By marrying into a good *neam*, you make sure to raise a larger amount of money at the "wedding feast." The relatives of the wealthier spouse will boost the average sum of the wedding cash gift.

After the wedding, the new married couple was expected to repay the godparents' gifts and to organize a meal after the wedding feast. In their first year of marriage, the young couple was kept under the strict surveillance by the entire village. Each visit they made to the girl's parents constituted an opportunity for the community to ask about news. Have they bought a house? Are they expecting a child? Ileana made sure that she kept everybody updated on the young couple's successes, thus creating an image of prosperity for them. This image would help them establish new alliances in the future, especially because young people are increasingly inclined to choose their marital godparents on the basis of wealth. The honor of godparenthood is sought out by individuals for its potential to expand their kinship network.

## On marriage and relatedness

Ana's wedding is very illustrative of how much tension there can be, during the wedding preparations, between the two families tied to each other by the young people's union. Once the marriage is ratified, the level of tension goes down, only to go up again when they count "the bride's honor," a time when one *neam* is likely to reveal its superiority over the other. This is where the two families come together and assess each other's resources (both economic and symbolic). There is probably no better time for them to display their entire stock of relatives. After the

wedding, the two spouses will maintain close relationships with only very few of these relatives. On the contrary, family relations will be called on every time the couple will need access to various resources. I claim that through marriage the kin network is expanded, and through incorporation into the new *neam*, the woman is usually the one to constitute the main link. In most cases, marriages follow this pattern: by incorporation into the new *neam*, the woman gains something, and the goal of her family is to marry her well, i.e. to ensure a higher status for her. Taking up a new name, the woman is the one who adds a new dimension to her identity. According to the social norms, the woman leaves her parents' house and moves in with her new family. A married woman will be buried alongside her husband in the cemetery, therefore joining her husband's relatives and not her own. In this connection, Kligman (1988, pp. 72-75) noted that because of the patriarchal social organization, the life of the woman is the one that changes significantly after the wedding as she depends on the men (father or husband) for her identity.

In Ana's family, I could see how, after the wedding, the new kin ties were also marked linguistically. All the new appellations resulting from the marriage were used sanctimoniously. "Mother-in-law," "father-in-law," "brother-in-law," "sister-in-law" were the terms that Ana's husband made sure to use every time he talked to his wife's parents or siblings. The proper use of terms certified the fact that the newly established relations followed the conventional social norms of respect and deference. Ileana could sometimes display "mother-in-law's behavior" (meaning she would act with some hostility towards her son-in-law, often setting up obstacles which, however, seemed symbolic rather than real), while Ana would make sure to protect her husband, the same way he would stand up for her in relation to his mother. The place where the new couple spent a particular holiday was often reason for a symbolic struggle. Ileana would always try to convince her daughter to spend the holidays with her and not with her in-laws. The young spouses would support each other in choosing with which family they would spend a given holiday, in order to alternate between the two families.

Through participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork, I aimed at building a case study descriptive for a process that I deemed central to the configuration of relatedness in Romanian society, namely marriage. The case study shows how the community defines its attitudes and practices based on kinship relations. At the same time, it illustrates the specific ways in which the kin network created by marriage governs the social life of the entire community and even produces hierarchies within it. In my endeavor, I started by claiming that in the community I studied, and by extension in the majority of Romanian village communities, social relations often overlap with kin relations and, as a result, a social actor who is member of a very dense kinship network will be equally active in the social sphere due to the considerable degree of overlap between the two types of relations.

The relations serve as a means of accumulating social capital further used to secure concrete or symbolic advantages, and an ever-stronger connection to social life.

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