

From 20th century weddings to quarantine weddings: Old and new approaches to analyzing rituals

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Abstract

Although ethnographic studies of marriage in 20th century Hungary have reckoned with the impact of socio-cultural transformations on getting married, nonetheless they primarily emphasized the normative aspects and permanence of the ritual; they stressed that marriage preserved “traditions”, or even that folk tradition acting as an ethno-folk-national “matrix” preserved and maintained the wedding rituals. Even if they touched upon the transformation of rituals, they primarily highlighted the modernization, simplification, fragmentation of the act of getting married and the marginalization of original meanings, traditional community norms, ideologies, and roles. Could this static and normative image depicting marriage not as a changing but rather as a decaying, diminished institution be in fact the result and consequence of an epistemological tradition, a methodological-theoretical focus that hides the process of the emergence of a new conception of marriage based on free choice, improvisation and on the idea of the individual breaking free of the yoke of normative traditions? The purpose of my paper is twofold. I will examine what the earlier Hungarian ethnographic studies understood by constancy, normativity, traditional or modern of wedding rituals. On the other hand, based on my current anthropological research (2019-2022, during the Covid-2019 pandemic) I will analyze the contemporary marriage rituals: and using the results of my research I also undertake a different kind of rereading of 20th century ethnographic descriptions. My paper based on the results of my digital anthropological research carried out between 2019 and 2022 (online questionnaires, digital ethnography, and in-depth interviews). I argue that the earlier Hungarian ethnographic approaches to weddings at the time may have been significantly influenced by prevailing Hungarian and international normative conceptualizations and theories of tradition and modernity.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic; marriage rituals; marriage transformations; meanings of tradition.

Introduction

In September 2019, I have started to study of the changing meanings, patterns, roles and functions of the marriage and weddings at multiple sites and in several social milieus in 21st century Hungary. For this reason, I have conducted ethnographic, cultural anthropological fieldwork in a Hungarian region. I am seeking to answer how the various global changes, and from 2020 the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, would be embodied in local patterns of weddings and what reactions, reflections, cultural, socio-economic responses would be provoked at the levels of the state, the wedding industry, cities and small communities, and the individual.

In parallel with my contemporary ethnographic research, I also started to review and overwrote the 20th and partly 19th century Hungarian and international anthropological and folkloristic literature on the topic of wedding rituals and the institute of marriage. First of all, I saw the need to do this because I wanted to see how the meanings of

contemporary weddings and marriages in general have changed, or whether they have changed at all, compared to what they were before. As part of my investigation was the processing of the currents of international and the few Hungarian sociological and anthropological literature on wedding in the 21st century, I was soon confronted with the problem that these works often adopted or even counterpointed previous findings with their own research without critical reflection and deconstructive intent. Generally, international, and partly domestic research compares 21st century marriages with the earlier, more permanent, normative, regulative, regulatory notion of tradition and ritual and the more liberal view of wedding and marriage, which has been loosened by modernization, and the socio-cultural changes that have been taking place since the second half of the 20th century, and in Hungary from the 1970s onwards. The comparison is made in two ways: either the present is placed in binary opposition to the recent past, or continuity is sought. Thus, the various theories of detraditionalization emphasize the peripherality of old, static, “regulatory traditions” linked to social institutions and kinship relations, the rise of individualism and with it the spread of agentialism and the spread of “pure relationships” based on sexual equality. Modern wedding practices have often been counterpointed by the social and economic interests that influenced earlier, older, “traditional” weddings (Giddens, 1991; Goode, 1963; Illouz, 2012). In other words, while “in the past” there were more common the arranged marriages (people getting married for financial or social reasons), today people marry for romantic love. Contrary to the theory of detraditionalization, there are also newer ideas that rehabilitate “traditions” and emphasize the “survival” of earlier marriage and wedding traditions. According to these, the structures that earlier “directly” regulated wedding and the “regulative traditions” that flowed through these had in the course of time receded into the background, weddings have never been as free and devoid of restrictions, there are, however, such “other”, “not declining” traditions that have been inherited from previous generations, the so-called “meaning-constitutive” traditions that are still alive (Carter & Duncan, 2017, 2018).

Thus, in contemporary approaches, the traditions that frame marriage and the institution of marriage, remain in one way or another metaphor of permanence and stability, just as the modern remains a metaphor for change and innovation (Anttonen, 2005, p. 31; Appadurai, 1996, pp. 2–3; Thompson, 1995, p. 91). The contemporary discourses on detraditionalization and post-traditionalism precisely reflect this academic dichotomy (Giddens, 1991) and are still reproducing it today. So previous studies, contemporary research and even every day, lay knowledge have emphasized the conservative and normative aspects of marriage and wedding ceremonies in the 20th century and the similarity and permanence of the rites. Marriage and weddings were seen as a bastion of tradition, legal folk costumes, traditional moral and ideologies, and thus of patriarchy. Even if the transformation of rituals was touched upon, the simplification and fragmentation of wedding practices and the eclipse of original meanings and traditional roles – e.g., the transformation into a “dramatic folk custom” – were emphasized. But did the wedding tradition really have such a stable position in the past and, if so, has it really faltered or has it really retained this stable position to some extent today?

When processing earlier 20th-century ethnographic findings and contemporary research, not to mention the process of inductive theory building that accompanied my own ethnographic research, I soon felt the need for critical deconstruction. I assumed that this static and normative, regulative tradition, not changing, but rather dying, simplifying image of wedding/marriage, is presumably the product of a specific scientific-historical tradition, a specific methodological-theoretical focus. In this direction, my thoughts were also guided by earlier historical works on 16th and 18th century weddings, which also did

not have a uniform and stable wedding tradition. Thus, for example, based on the studies of the historians Mária Péter (2008) and Péter András Szabó (2010), it seems that the rites and meanings of 16th-18th century weddings (at least the corpus they studied, such as the Transylvanian noble weddings) were no more complete or more elaborate than those of the 19th and 20th century. In fact, they may have retained much of the looser medieval customs – they were diverse, varied and fragmented in their own way (Péter, 2008, p. 72; Szabó, 2010). The traditional peasant wedding and the institution of marriage, regulated by religious-moral norms, as we know from the earlier ethnographic descriptions, could therefore be generally valid for a maximum of 150 years if it was valid at all.

The purpose of my paper is twofold. First, I will examine what the Hungarian ethnographic studies of the 20th century (with special emphasis on ethnographic texts and descriptions of the 1940s and 50s and the 70s) understood by traditional marriage and weddings, ideologies, and norms. I will look at this earlier research, methodological perspectives, intentions, and theoretical models that have led to the development of the well-known and clear-cut traditional image of Hungarian wedding rituals that we can learn from 20th century ethnographic research. On the other hand, based on my current anthropological research I will also analyze the contemporary marriage rituals and using the results of my current research I undertake a different kind of rereading of 20th century ethnographic descriptions.

Research Methods

The paper is part of a “multi-sited” cultural anthropological project. As originally planned, it was to include a large amount of “classical” anthropological fieldwork on transformations in decision-making about getting married and ways of conducting weddings. Due to the pandemic, I had to modify the direction and methodology of the research. My “new” digital anthropological research carried out between 2019 and 2022 (online questionnaires, digital ethnography, and in-depth interviews). In the course of my research I archived online and offline media news, legal and health regulations relating to getting married and divorces and the discourses in Facebook reflections on these among Hungarian-language wedding-organizing- and women’s chat-groups as well as among chat-groups bringing together experts on handling and managing credit.¹ I also made public several online questionnaires.² Mostly in 2020 and in the first half of 2021, I recorded 40 in-depth interviews with brides who were planning their weddings during Covid-19. Online fieldwork and online questionnaire-surveys were complemented by “actual” smaller-scale fieldwork. I primarily participated in wedding exhibitions where I conducted interviews, took photographs and made voice recordings. Based on the above, I examine what kinds of old-new interpretations of getting married have come into being, as well as what kinds of old-new practices have surfaced with regard to ritualization during the pandemic period.

¹ I was present in about a dozen groups, following most closely (daily) the four most active ones (the number of members in the groups varied between 2,500 and 250,000).

² February 1, 2020: *Marriage questionnaire* 1083 respondents; April 2, 2020: *Covid questionnaire* 490 respondents.

Results and Discussion

1. 20th century weddings in ethnographic descriptions: Permanence, uniformity, and fragmentations of rituals

First, I will speak on issues of the permanence, uniformity and the mandatory, set structure of weddings and marriage ideologies. I will look for the principles which have led to the establishment of this idea that has been arrived at several times, in several different ways. As I see it, all this can best be linked to the research agendas (intentions and tasks) researchers have set for themselves. The aim of all previous research on weddings was to discern, catalogue and describe a local, ethnic, national, or even international system of wedding *customs, order, deep structure, scenario, or even basic type*. The researcher's narrative primarily tried to reconstruct a *complex system*, the relationships of *signs and functions* that inseparably unite the elements of the wedding. In the course of analyzing ethnographic materials, I found that only the elements that appeared to be general, typical, and systematic were taken into consideration. The different variants, particularities-pluralities, were either left out of consideration or presented as additional elements, variants, or outliers. Studies in the 20th century analyzed mainly the ideal knowledge about weddings [knowledge about the ideal type of weddings?], rarely the practice. The wedding was explained in terms of its own meanings, or at times rounded out with the addition of the meanings and symbols of local, generic Hungarian *folk, national culture*, and sometimes contextualized or supplemented with meanings and symbols taken from (linguistically) related or neighboring peoples.

At other times, the analytical-interpretive models of the international literature on the anthropology of rituals were invoked for interpretation, in particular, the models of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, which are popularly used in analyzes of weddings as “rites of passage” (Balázs, 1994; Halász, 2015, p. 209; Melinda, 2019). For although the model also points to important processes of more universal validity, in its translation into practice it also has enclosed ethnographic description within a kind of autonomous interpretative framework – the various symbolic moments of status change – and a specific (time-space) structure.³

Also worth mentioning are the more universal interpretations of certain wedding accessories and objects (wedding costumes, food, games, decorative elements), or research interpretations specific to the national traditions of the discipline. Thus, for example, according to both Hungarian and international scholarship, the wedding cake (see Figure 1) became a sexual and fertility symbol (Balázs, 1994; Edit, 1981; Gordon et al., 1982; Molnár, 1958). Yet, as early as the late 1980s, Simon Charsley (2002), in *The Case of the Wedding Cake*, called for researchers to learn about and describe the interpretations of the communities they study, rather than their own and science's semiotic categories, because it may be that the pierced wedding cakes, which appear to be clearly sexual and fertility symbols, may mean something else, or nothing at all, to the locals.

³ for a general discussion, see Chapple-Coon (1942); Lewis, (2013); for marriage ceremonies, see Boden (Boden, 2003, p. 19); for a discussion, see Isański, (Isański, 2013, pp. 109–129).

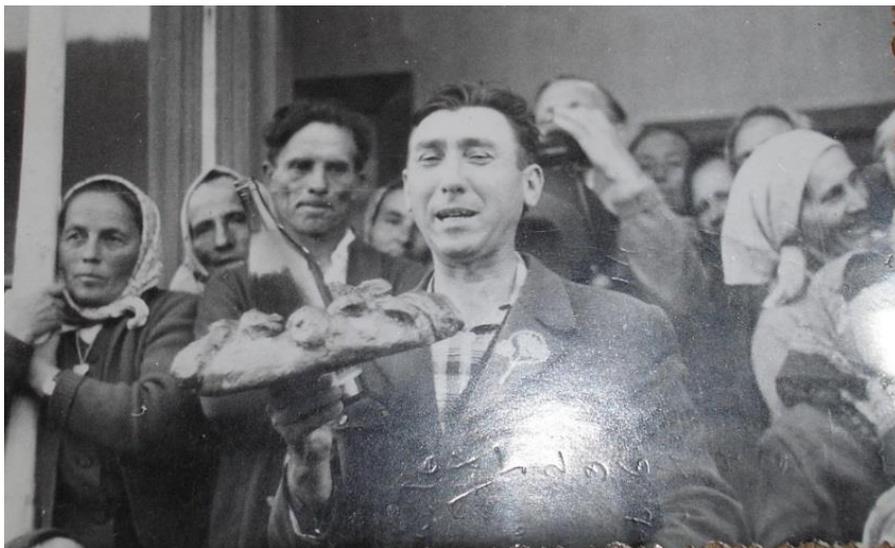


Figure 1 Wedding cake (Hungarian community, Romania, Ghimeș, 1980)
Source: Unknown photographer, reproduction by the author

It is also important to mention the principles of gathering information and the use of sources in earlier wedding studies. Thus, earlier they did not really consider the differences between wedding narratives told and the rituals that took place and were experienced and the discourses about them and their differing roles. It is well known that traditions (including weddings) recounted in narratives are influenced by a sort of reconstructive viewpoint. These narratives are often characterized by concealing change and variation, fragmentation, suppressing time (to prove the continuity of tradition), but, as we shall see, also by the opposing narrative strategy, the emphasis on change and rupture (Assmann, 2011). Looking at 20th century wedding studies, they appear to be coherent, complex texts, rich in elaborate detail. The wedding narratives are a mixture of the knowledge and memories of several generations, they are parallel and do not necessarily correspond to the plurality, variations, creative innovations and improvisations in actual wedding practices.

It may also have led to the static constructs of weddings by social scientists that besides wedding narratives they almost invariably included in their investigations the texts recited by groomsmen which are the least likely to reflect diversity and variability and thus tend to hide the existing multiplicity. Indeed, there are many works that purport to introduce the wedding customs of a particular settlement precisely by quoting the groomsmen's verses. The analysts treated groomsmen's texts primarily as ritual scripts or ritual texts – as narrative tradition interpreting and contextualizing the rites, or simply as illustrations. As some Hungarian folklorists pointed out the groomsmen's texts primarily have always represented an "ideal" of the patriarchal extended family "stylized as rustic" (Vilmos, 1991, pp. 52–53), an ideal that in many cases has always been, and still is, in opposition to socio-cultural reality, and only evokes an "earlier" situation of affairs?

Let us now turn briefly to the question of the simplification of wedding rites and meanings, the disappearance of traditional elements, the fragmentation of traditions. On the one hand, this, as I have already pointed out, can also manifest as a narrative strategy of our interlocutors. And as such, it can be interpreted primarily as a more critical response

to change, to generational differences – even to the differences between the wedding customs of the past, as frozen in the groomsmen’s texts, and those of the present. On the other hand, it is also related to the preservation, traditional, normative function attributed to the wedding by researchers, as discussed above. Many researchers have assumed that rituals, and folk customs, such as weddings, reflect the present of a village, its recent or distant past, and perhaps even? its prehistory. For this reason, a common aim of earlier wedding research has been to reconstruct not only the wedding ceremonies and their equivalents of the present, but also the past, which is still accessible through the memory of the informants, for example, the pre-collectivization, pre-war, or even the era of Hungarian conquest of the homeland at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries. Thus, certain elements of the wedding practices of contemporary culture were not primarily seen as part of the present culture but were survivals of an earlier *level of culture* (Bausinger, 2004, p. 10). There are also examples where the ancient, conquest-era origins of specific elements have been emphasized. At other times, because of the supposed, as yet unproven, genetic link between the former, conquest-era bride kidnappings and the respective wedding bargains, elopements, symbolic and actual payments (bride wealth, engagement gifts, wages?), which appear as irrefutable axioms in the wedding canon, many have not even investigated the specific roles and meanings of the practices and gestures involved. Or, it is precisely these old legal customs, with their *original* meanings, that have been used to explain the phenomena under study. They have therefore also assumed that the given elements of the wedding ceremony existed in the same or very similar forms at an earlier point in time, and that their present-day significance is derived precisely from this context – from their former meaning and function (Bausinger, 2004, p. 10).

It seems to me that, in addition to the above, 20th century understandings of the concept of tradition both in Hungarian and international wedding research has also, perhaps most significantly, influenced scientific interpretations. The concept of tradition then reflected a kind of vague historicity on the one hand, and on the other hand it also meant a conservative, regulative norm, a custom. So, the term tradition has had, and to some extent still has, a temporal and spatial dimension in relation to modernization. According to these studies, weddings preserved traditions, or it was the wedding that was preserved and maintained by folk tradition as an ethno-national “matrix”. At the same time, various socio-economic changes, such as modernization, have eroded and simplified the earlier “traditional” wedding rites and their traditional meanings. The international and Hungarian anthropological and ethnographic discourses on tradition in the 19th and 20th centuries have been influenced by Marx, Durkheim, Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Robert Redfield. For Marx (1975), tradition disappears with modernization, and it was he who first used the distinction between traditional and modern (when comparing Asian and Western government – comparing ancient, traditional, and modern systems). Durkheim (1893) also believed that with the spread of rationalism and urbanization, traditions were in decline, and Max Weber (1968) predicted the imminent end of peasant culture. According to Robert Redfield (1989) tradition inhibits change, growth, and creativity, it is irrational; or it is emotional and promotes internal solidarity. So, in my view, it is primarily this briefly described multifaceted approach to the concept of tradition that focused researcher’s attention and obscured the diversity and led to ignoring the permanently fragmented nature of the institution of marriage and weddings in the 20th century or even before, and therefore disregarding the real changes, the rearrangements of the function, role, and interpretation of weddings.

2. 21st century quarantine weddings: Plurality, diversity, innovations, and traditions

Ad what I learned about my current marriage research? The investigations and analyzes of the research are built on a kind of emic, “indigenous”, actor-centred, constructivist conception of tradition and modernity (Briggs, 1996; Hobswamb & Ranger, 1983; Keesing, 1989). Furthermore, I attempt to embed these emic interpretations and practices in the context of domestic society and culture and to show the effects of the various hegemonic discourses and contexts of marriage and weddings and the various representations marketed by the wedding industry. My results show that the practices and interpretations of marriage can differ on several way. While at the level of ideologies, the ideal of lifelong marriage or even “traditional” large weddings is often represented, the practice is reminiscent of Giddens' “pure relationship”, and with the regard of wedding organizing there is a plurality, and heterogeneity and a lot of small micro-wedding. While on the theoretical level, love marriages are more often praised and emphasized, the concrete motivations for marriage are a mixture of romantic emotions and practical, financial, or political reasons (Hull et al., 2010).

During Covid-19 I observed high level of plurality in the cases of wedding rites and two kinds of strategies in the course of the planning and re-planning of weddings: the rejection of traditions and, interrelated with this, the acceptance of innovations; and also that reorganization was justified by references to norms and traditions. The reinterpreted and modified traditions thus evoked were seen in a positive light; they functioned more as preferred patterns, norms, or models to be adapted (Handler & Linnekin, 1984, p. 281; Shanklin, 1981). The two strategies were not mutually exclusive, even in the case of a single wedding. The wedding practices most characteristic of the pandemic period came into being as a result of the distinctive intermingling of the two strategies: evocations of both innovation and tradition. Simple, puritanical weddings with few or only the strictly necessary number of participants at civil ceremonies, or so-called mini, micro-weddings, *minimonies*, elopements (lacking viable options, wedding providers advertised and proposed these too) – all have numerous international parallels. During the relaxation of the rules (primarily in late spring, summer, and early fall), large wedding receptions returned temporarily, but at the same time, smaller weddings remained popular. Weddings bringing together characteristics of small (personal) and big weddings have also become common – different features of the wedding are separated in time and functions, resulting in the holding of civil weddings early and putting off the (large) wedding reception until later.



Figure 2 Minimony wedding Advertising
Source: Worood (2023)

My own current research also shows less evidence of uniform functions and meanings of rites, and more evidence of plurality. As we saw, from the point of view of socio-cultural anthropology, for a long time the wedding primarily meant such a transitional phase that was set into motion by one of the most important rituals of any society – the rituals of getting married. These rituals partly bring an end to old relationships and partly initiate new ones by integrating a man and a woman into a legal, at times religious institution that may punish the actions of the couple in the future. The wedding meant a kind of transition from being betrothed to assuming the status of a married person (Keller-Drescher, 2014, pp. 37–38). The Hungarian ethnographic canon also emphasized the rite of passage aspect of getting married and defined it as a series of actions carried out for the sake of bringing about marriage as an institution (Györgyi, 1987, pp. 397–400). These earlier definitions and interpretations are less applicable or only partially applicable today. New definitions and interpretations are needed! My *Marriage questionnaire* (2020) shows that the transition, change in status staged through the wedding as a performative goal was not always present, more precisely it was not present in all aspects of the wedding complex at the level of lived experiences and of articulated ideals and expectations. Weddings, and especially certain aspects of weddings, were not only and exclusively organized for the sake of expressing (materially, emotionally), ensuring, and experiencing the event. Almost half of the respondents to the questionnaire (47.9%) marked the box that stated that they organized their wedding in order to “bring about marriage,” however, most at the same time also included other motivating factors such as celebrating love (66.1%), a smaller percentage (34.2%) also marked the desire to take vows, make a commitment and entertainment (28.2%). Many explained abandoning some of the par excellence rites of passage of weddings, for example that of the “preliminary” rite of the bride's farewell, by saying that the necessary transitions, transformations (e.g. the actual material, spatial transition) have already taken place in their lives, because for example the couple has been cohabiting for a long time, they have already purchased their joint home and therefore rituals bringing about transformation, transition or representing them would not have made too much sense:

We decided that taking leave of the parents will not be part of the script, my motto: why, we are not going anywhere anyway. We are 27 but we have been living together for 8 years, we moved to our joint home 3 months ago, so we are not even going to be leaving the nest at that time [...] (Facebook wedding organizing group, January 04, 2020).

The above narrative highlights precisely why there is no “leave-taking”: it would not have brought about and/or signaled a true transition, it would only have mimicked it, it would not have been a “genuine” ritual, merely theater, an empty performance. When I asked about the meanings and not the motivations of planning a wedding in the questionnaire less than half of the respondents, 42.5%, thought the wedding to be the true rite, the celebration (i.e., rite of passage) of transformation (the transformation of the relationship). The majority, 60.5% referred to getting married as a celebration of love, for 34.4% it meant a kind of sacrament or religious thing, 30.2% considered it to be the celebration of family and friends (10.9% family; 2.4% friends); 14.9% thought of it as an occasion for a performative presentation of their own history (as a couple) and of social successes (individuality, personalized celebration and ritualization characteristic of the couple). That is to say, if the transition had already taken place in reality, then according to the interpretations, the act of getting married was not necessarily a rite of passage, did not necessarily bring about or represent the transformation. However, the mere fact that

ex post facto people wish to celebrate their relationship, love, their act of getting married or their social success (e.g., through a commitment ceremony, second wedding) also makes it clear that we can only talk of a genuine transition (in the eyes of family, society, and the couple) if legitimate, beautiful, appropriate ritual also takes place.

If we break down the wedding complex and examine the individual occasions for getting married according to their significance and motivations, we see that during the pandemic (and presumably even earlier) at times, legal and/or economic factors that are important only to one of the members of the couple hasten the civil ceremony. For example, only one of the members of the couple attach importance to the civil ceremony for legal, economic reasons (i.e., being married is necessary for some reason), or the bride's religious motivations call for the Big Day and within that the church ceremony, or the couple's feelings and emotional motivation (e.g. romantic love) leads them to hold a civil ceremony (they are longing for marriage), or they organize the Big Day because of family/parental pressure. One of the most common arguments was that they were organizing a wedding reception because they were simply trying to have a good time, to enjoy themselves among friends and family, or that they would like to celebrate their successes as a couple. However, a civil ceremony conducted with two witnesses on a weekday may only serve to obtain a "piece of paper", to qualify for the favorable credit opportunities, but it may be a genuine representation of an increase in security, trust and solidarity and of a strengthening of the relationship, of raising the level of the commitment of the couple to a new height through a "veritable" or even "par excellence" rite of transition which is at the same time a legal rite. Along with the official civil ceremony, church ceremonies, wedding receptions or commitment ceremonies are also often interpreted as the real rituals of the act of getting married for religious, spiritual, or individual reasons that are specific to the relationship and for normative reasons as well. Through getting married those concerned could represent and reinforce as well as legitimate their existing relationship or could try to create something new from their life together thus far: the next level, the next steps to be taken together. We can see that the conceptualization and identification of the "real" ritual of getting married are manifold and changing, but in most cases, there has to be something that they deem to be "real".

Furthermore, it is important to realize that getting married (and the associated rituals and most important events) primarily is constructed from the couple's own personal, socially contextualized experiences and can primarily be interpreted from their (and their immediate family's) shared point of view. The relationship reaches a new (primarily individual) level by getting married: through the Big Day, through undergoing the (religious or civil) ceremonies entailed, signing the papers, but much more so through the promises, vows made to each other, the exchange of rings, the ceremonies, and the feast "shared" with others. What precisely this new level means also depends on the individual circumstances and "biography" of the relationship. It could mean moving in together (if earlier they lived apart), having a child (if they haven't already had one), buying an apartment or a house (if they didn't already own real estate), a stronger relationship (if they consider their relationship to be strengthened by getting married), legal union (if for example they were not declaring their taxes jointly earlier). Much depends on the prehistory of the particular relationship, and it is through the lens of this that getting married is interpreted by couples. Brides advise each other to start out from one's own relationship rather than from contemporary societal or genealogical (e.g., family) knowledge and experiences and this is what wedding providers call attention to, too.

Conclusion

So, based on earlier folkloristic studies we cannot really define what the “old” and traditional getting marriage rites might have been like, compared to which we perceive a shift. As we have seen, the normativity and static nature of 20th century weddings and marriages is likely to be partly a research construct. In my view, it is primarily this briefly described multifaceted research tradition, focused research gaze and conception of tradition that has obscured and ignored the diversity, if you like, the constant fragmented nature of weddings in the 20th century or before. And therefore, the real changes, the rearrangements of the function, the role and the interpretation of weddings were not taken into account. What is certain is that in the past both the rite and the institution may have been more regulated and bounded, and that in comparison there is presumably a great degree of freedom today. But we do not know the scale of the changes, the precise ways in which they have taken place, or the context in which they have occurred. That is why in my own research I am not primarily engaged in an “objective” research reconstruction of “old” and “new” / “traditional” and “modern”, nor in a reconstruction of the traditional, historical antecedents of marriage/marriage practices that are considered modern and innovative at the level of intentions and aesthetic interpretations, or in the actual urban, modern, global context of elements that are considered traditional, old, or perhaps rural. This comparison would be also useful, as Julia Carter and Simon Duncan (2018) have done in showing that contemporary British weddings, despite their individualized, individualistic intentions, have, by their normative nature, essentially “re-invented” the conformist, old, former, “traditional” marriages (I argue that we don't really know what they were). The same conclusion was reached by Katrina Kimport (2012), who argued that LGBTQ weddings in Los Angeles in the 2000s, despite their otherness, also re-invented the symbolism of traditional, heteronormative weddings. Kimport also noticed, however, that the subjective opinions of those involved have come a long way from this outsider research interpretation. Indeed, we also know from others that social actors are often “fighting” at individual and societal levels for the very ideal of “modern” marriage, radically different from their social practices (and their external interpretations of these practices), and for the alternative norms and values (e.g., equal rights, recognition) associated with these (Cleuziou & McBrien, 2021). I argue that the old-new, traditional, or even modern thematic are not necessarily relevant in the light of “objective” research criteria, but primarily in the light of “emic” interpretations, norms, and ideologies. In the case of the modern and the traditional, the distinction is treated as a discursive construct.

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