



The Double Wedding: A Social Drama in Two Acts¹

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Abstract. This paper analyses the marital ritual performed by a rural community, that of doubling the wedding reception one week after the first event was consumed. The socio-genesis and evolution of the “double wedding” are accounted for in terms of rational choice theory, especially through the notion of “intra-traditional rationality”, i.e. the instrumental manipulation of tradition in personal interest while retaining at the same time the legitimising factor of tradition. After describing the event and its historical evolution, the study makes a functional analysis through which the social functions, but also the dysfunctions, of the double wedding are identified. The double wedding is explained as being an innovation inspired by tradition, the primary function of which is a pecuniary one, its prime objective being the maximisation of the financial profit obtained at the wedding. One social dysfunction consists in the fact that the double wedding socially promotes a radical individualistic spirit, endangering the realisation of the “we-ness” envisioned as the ideal goal in marriage. Another dysfunction lies in the fact that the double wedding stimulates rivalry between the two organising families. Moreover, the paper analyses how the double wedding perpetuates and consolidates the masculine domination through ranking “the groom’s wedding” in front and above “the bride’s wedding”, the latter being clearly subordinated to the former, in terms of both chronological priority and symbolic importance.

Keywords: anthropology of marriage; ethnographic research; qualitative research; marriage ceremony; sociological consciousness

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The academic community, despite its inherent critical effervescence, is nevertheless a *sui generis* moral community. I wish to pay my moral debts to Petru Iluț, Cristina Tîrhaș, Laura Nistor, Cristina Gheorghe, and to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable criticisms.

Prologue: reflections on the strangeness of the “normality” of the human social world

Human social reality has a deeply duplicitous nature: on the one hand, due to familiarity and repeated systematic exposure, the socialised individual perceives the social world that surrounds him as plainly self-evident, is in no need of extra explanation; as a matter of fact, by internalising his social world, it becomes taken for granted as an unquestionable natural reality. However, brought under the sociological investigative loupe, what was previously hidden under the cloak of normality betrays its question-begging features. Seen by a “socio[anthropo]logical eye” (Bauman and May 2001), the reality accepted as unproblematic by the layman who inhabits it becomes a difficult-to-decrypt enigma. Therefore, by mounting sociological lenses on top of the optics used by the normally unreflective social actor we get a profoundly altered visualisation of reality, in which the normal and the uncontroversial cease to be taken for granted and are being seriously called into question. In this regard, sociology performs the function of problematising what common sense is willing to take as self-evident. As such, sociological thinking suspects the unsuspected, brings into question the unquestionable, and simultaneously throws doubt on all that is taken as constitutive to common sense. Following this continuous and methodical harassment of common sense (*doxa*) by the problematising sociological spirit (*sociological episteme*), the normality previously accepted as self-obvious turns into an almost totally different enigmatic reality.

The socio(anthropo)logist, as a temporary inhabitant of the social reality that s/he transforms into his/her object of study, is subject to a *double and contradictory socialisation*: first and foremost as social actor in the world of everyday life, and then as social inquirer of the reality to which s/he belongs. The individual, first socialised as ordinary social actor, and later “sociologised” as professional inquirer of the society that hosts him, can solve the tension thus activated in two qualitatively different ways: a) through *cognitive-behavioural compartmentalisation*, i.e. by clearly separating inside his consciousness the sociological activity from the actions undertaken as social agent. Keeping them in hermetically sealed chambers prevents the triggering of cognitive dissonance due to the collision of the common sense conceptions with the sociological ones; b) by an *alteration of consciousness*, so that the sociological thought, once started, cannot be deactivated not even in the most intimate or ordinary moments that do not require a reflective and dubitative stance.

This “sociologisation of common sense” (i.e. the sociological socialisation performed through sociological training of thought) means that the former naïve inhabitant of social reality, previously endowed only with the standard dose of

conventional wisdom provided by common sense, suffers a radical cognitive change by becoming an insatiable inquisitor into the social realm, now equipped with a sociologically interrogative and dubitative outlook as a replacement for what E. Husserl called “the natural attitude” towards the world.

As P. Berger (1963) pointed out half a century ago in his seductive *Invitation to Sociology*, the sociological enterprise is both an attempt to objectively understand social reality and a form of consciousness. *Tout court*, sociology is both science and conscience. For those who take the option of cognitive-behavioural compartmentalisation, sociological thinking is but an accessory, and therefore dispensable, cognitive module that can easily be put to rest in ordinary (non-sociological) social situations. In contrast, for the class of individuals sociologically socialised (a category in which I include myself) suspending or temporary interrupting the functioning of the “sociological module” is not possible, since in their case a genuine alteration of consciousness took place. This alteration of consciousness involves the acquisition of a special sensitivity (i.e. “the sociological consciousness”) that lies in the ability to objectivise the social phenomena in which you find yourself as an ordinary actor, together with the tendency to think the social world in terms of the sociological schemata internalised during the phase of disciplinary socialisation. Thus, assimilating a sociological consciousness opens new perspectives on social reality from angles foreign and refused to common sense, enabling theoretically abstract thinking couched in sociological categories, which involves identifying and conceptualising the macroscopic factors that condition human existence.

Stupefaction becomes the new natural attitude of the social researcher. S/he is now experiencing a sensation of perplexity given by the discovery that the social world and all the practices contained within it, despite all their familiarity and intimacy, are not what they seem to be at first glance. Following P. Berger again, I adhere to his epistemological precept that “the first wisdom of sociology is this – things are not what they seem” (1963, 23). The mystery of social reality can be penetrated only after a prolonged process of initiation, a process completed by assimilating the sociological consciousness that enables the formerly naïve citizen of the democratic republic of common sense to see through the crust that protects from viewing the inner working mechanism producing social reality.

The compartmentalisers (i.e. those individuals who, although they underwent the process of sociological socialisation, continue to live in two interpretative worlds, or in two different “provinces of meaning” (Schütz 1962): the commonsense world governed by practical consciousness and the world of the theoretical sense accessible via the sociological consciousness) automatically shut off their sociological thought as soon as they cognitively leave the theoretical universe. Shutting down their sociological module, the compartmentalisers are able to enter easily into the role of ordinary social actors. Instead, the integralists

(let us call by this term those sociologists who cannot compartmentalise their social experience into two different interpretative frameworks) do not short-circuit their sociological thinking not even in their most intimate and ordinary social situations. The individuals forming this species of sociologists manifest an irrepressible proclivity to process the entire sequence of events that they are experiencing in their social existence through the theoretical schemata with which they have disciplined their thought.

Unjustified verbosity flagrantly transgresses the academic norm of “expressive parsimony”, i.e. language economy in stating theoretical formulations. All this long introduction was meant to prepare the ground for what follows shortly: a socio-anthropological study on a bizarre marital practice (bizarre, of course, only for the uninitiated outsiders, but perfectly natural for its practitioners). Being personally involved in this social event, and finding myself caught in the middle of a strange collective ritual, I was able to subject this intriguing event to a socio-anthropological analysis, precisely due to that sociological consciousness permanently activated which I have described *in extenso* in the lines above.

Socio-anthropology of marriage and marriage rituals: general theoretical considerations

The institution of marriage, due to its structural universality across human cultures (with the possible exception of the much discussed Nayar case, discovered by K. Gough [1952]) combined with an utmost diversity of concrete empirical embodiments, never ceased to exert an almost magical fascination on anthropological imagination. Contributing to this high esteem bestowed upon marriage there has also been the acute awareness regarding the importance of the functions performed by the institution of marriage in bolstering the architectonics of social systems. Ensuring the critical junction in the transition from childhood to adulthood, marriage has been universally regarded as marking a state of crisis in human biography. In most cultures, passing through the initiation rite of marriage individuals access a new status within the prestige order of their community. As a reaction to the state of crisis arisen in the lives of individuals, marriage has been wrapped in intricate systems of social rituals and shrouded in multiple layers of meaning. The criticality of the marital event is thus treated with a “socio-cultural balsam” to relieve and support the individuals in their passage through this critical stage that stays in the way of their full human becoming.

Marriage, even more than the gift, is a “total social fact” (Mauss 1966 [1925]). Hardly could one find a phenomenon the effects of which reverberate throughout the whole socio-cultural system and affect so many structural patterns of society.

Marriage is thus a serious candidate for the title of total social fact, since it satisfies with flying colours the definitional requirements imposed by M. Mauss (1966, 76): “phenomena [that] are at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological and so on.” The social institution of marriage definitely covers all these different aspects that are constitutive to a total social fact. The pervasive consequential effects of marriage are all the more visible in non-industrial societies, where the very biological reproduction of society must pass through the filter of the total institution of marriage. Since the biological reproduction of society (i.e. the replacement of the deceased members of the society with new ones) constitutes the decisive “functional prerequisite” of any social system (Aberle et al. 1950), marriage appears as a socio-cultural institutional arrangement evolved to organise this crucial process for the survival of society while maintaining social (and sexual) order.

Besides its ritual-symbolic burden, marriage is essentially a social transaction with broad economic consequences. Explicitly arranged or left at the mercy of the latent forces of homogamy, whose operation of on-par matchmaking is as efficient as it is unintended, marriages have historically played the prominent role of conserving property and wealth. The economic factor is intrinsic to marriage. This is why friendship (which, unlike marriage, is not a vehicle of property) was never the subject of judicial attention and legal codification. Given these brief considerations, this paper aims to provide a socio-anthropological analysis of the double wedding that would elucidate both the symbolic and the financial economy of this strange marital pattern.

Anthropology, by the very nature of its object of study, has gained the reputation of being a cultural curiosity collector. Despite the universality of the institution of marriage as an “anthropological constant” crossing all human cultures, its surface manifestations cover a spectrum of stunning diversity. The structural unity of marriage does not prevent its ritual incarnation into a myriad of forms, some of them of the more bizarre, at least for an anthropologically untrained eye. This is the case of the “ghost marriage”, whereof the available anthropological documentation reveals that it has been or continues to be practiced only in five societies throughout history: the Nuer and Atuot populations in southern Sudan, in ancient Greece, by the Chinese Singaporeans, and in post-war contemporary Japan (Schwartz 2010). Even though diversity also prevails in this rare form of marriage, the common denominator of “ghost marriage(s)” is that a symbolic or fictive wedding is organised in which a woman is married to the spirit of a deceased man. Ghost marriage reaches perhaps the highest degree of strangeness in the eyes of outsiders. Even though it certainly doesn’t achieve the same threshold of cultural eccentricity as the ghost marriage, the “double wedding” nevertheless contains an exotic element compared with the socially accepted wedding pattern in Romanian society. What needs to be stressed one more time

is the fact that all this strangeness is entirely natural to insiders. Marrying a ghost, as well as doubling a wedding, seems perfectly reasonable to people socialised in these cultural traditions. Indeed, as the old saying goes, “this is how (marital) things work” for these people and there is nothing strange about it. Or so they think. That being said, by examining the socio-genesis and functionality of the double wedding, this paper complements, with a modest contribution, the collection of cultural curiosities catalogued by the anthropological community.

Methodological disclosures

Before moving to the description of the marital ritual which forms the social phenomenon investigated in this article, I will assign the next segment of the text to some methodological considerations. More precisely, the next section will describe the method employed in this study, namely observant participation, understood as derivative of the more classical participant observation – the anthropological method by definition. Also in this section, the essential characteristics of informal interviewing will be highlighted, especially as a complementary method of observant participation.

Observant participation and informal interview: the weapons of an incognito researcher

Practiced by an incognito researcher infiltrated amidst the phenomenon under analysis, the methods of observant participation and informal interview become “unobtrusive methods” (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest 1966) that do not arouse the suspicion of co-participants. As a kind of invisible methodology, they do not trigger the undesired reactivity of the subjects by putting them *en garde* regarding the fact that they are being studied and thus modifying their behaviour in accordance with social desirability. Resorting to these “subterranean” methods that go undetected by the sensible sensors of the social actors, the astute social inquirer neutralises the risk of causing researcher bias.

But seen from an ethical perspective, these non-reactive methods can raise a number of moral questions. From an excess of ethical pudicity, a morally sensible critic could protest vehemently against the practice of deceiving the subjects and abusing the trust offered by these unsuspecting social partners. My ethical position regarding this possible critique is the following: I distinguish between absolute and relative ethics (Zimbardo 2007, 231–238). Absolute ethics assumes an invariable and intolerant moral code, which prohibits any action that has negative consequences for human beings. Judged in such an uncompromising moral framework, this study is reprehensible as highly immoral, since the

researcher concealed his scientific identity, and thus indirectly misled the social actors who took him to be one of their one. In contrast, relative ethics gives up the moral rigidity of the absolute ethics and follows a utilitarian ethical model. Instead of holding tightly to intransigent moral ideals, the utilitarian ethical doctrine suggests making a pragmatic calculation between the troubles caused and the epistemic wins. Of course, relativity is not complete: no scientific discovery can justify human suffering. Not to mention the crimes perpetrated in the name of science (for instance, the Nazi experiments on prisoners in extermination camps), which are totally and irrevocably reprehensible, inclusively from the position of relative ethics. My option is for a *relative ethics with an absolute threshold*, which allows for a minor coefficient of immorality in exchange for substantial social-scientific discoveries. However, the absolute threshold categorically proscribes scientific research, no matter how relevant and fruitful it will turn out to be if human suffering reaches a certain degree of dangerousness that would threaten the physical and psychological integrity of individuals. In the light of such ethical conceptions, this study, although based on implicitly deceiving individuals, did not cause them any injury (physical, psychological, or of any other nature). With one notable exception: the findings of the study could generate embarrassment by exposing an explicit economic rationality disguised under the cloak of tradition, a camouflage that entails the denial of an obvious pecuniary interest.

Without insisting on a detailed description of the method of observation, suffice it to say that its form varies as a function of the degree of systematisation with which it is practiced: from *spontaneous observation* to which, more or less consciously, all social actors endowed with a functional sensorial apparatus resort in their daily lives; passing through *impressionistic observation*, practiced intentionally but in an unsystematic manner in order to superficially understand a life situation; and finally, *scientific observation*, systematically used in order to describe and/or explain social/natural phenomena (Ilut 1997). Without discrediting the value of the spontaneous and impressionistic forms of observation, especially in the realm of everyday life, the epistemic superiority of scientific observation must be strongly emphasised, the pre-eminence of which over its common sense counterparts resides precisely in its systematic character.

Depending on the dosage between observation and participation, four different species can be obtained: a) *complete participation*, which sacrifices observation for the total immersion into the social practice; in this case, the observational act is greatly minimised, being possible only as retrospective observation, i.e. trying to analytically reconstruct the lived experience in order to understand it in socio-anthropological terms; b) *observant participation*, in which the emphasis is on participation, while observation is conditioned by and subordinate to the role of active participant; c) *participant observation*, in which the accent falls on the observational component, where the participation makes possible and

facilitates observation; d) *complete observation*, that occurs from the outside of the phenomenon and does not require from the part of researchers to enter into the roles of the observed actors in order to fully grasp from an emic position their intricate web of beliefs, meanings, and practices (Iluț 1997, 80). Although participant observation appears to be the optimal combination, it fails to neutralise what we might call the “strangeness effect”, i.e. the awareness by both the community studied and the researcher himself of the fact that the latter is an intruder, an outsider who participates in the social life with an instrumental purpose in mind. Even if this awareness is bracketed during the social practices, it does not cease to hover menacingly above the researcher’s dubious status, constantly reminding the participating artificiality of the provisorily accepted stranger. Instead, observant participation, performed undercover, as a nonreactive method eliminates the barrier between native and researcher. The major challenge of observant participation for the researcher is to find a way to infiltrate into the community that he wants to study without raising any suspicion. Once infiltrated, he must behave in such a way that his scientific identity is not betrayed by manifesting an exaggerated curiosity, while his gnoseological intentions must be carefully occluded from public suspicion.

This socio-anthropological study is founded upon observant participation, since, as a participant, I was part of the phenomenon under study (i.e. the marital ritual), acting the social role of sponsor for the couple (more exactly, I and my spouse were sponsors for the bride, since the groom had his own pair of sponsors).

Armed with the method of observant participation, which gave me a privileged perspective on the phenomenon under scrutiny from an inside angle but which also subordinated my observations to the officially assigned role that I had to perform within the collective ritual, I resorted to informal interviews disguised as natural conversations on the wedding subject. The interview guidelines that I followed were as informal as the interviews themselves. More exactly, I tried to intervene and direct the spontaneous conversations between participants as well as the seemingly spontaneous ones (but actually triggered by me) in research purposes towards addressing the research questions that motivated my socio-anthropological inquiry: What is going on here? How is the event socially organised? In what respect does the ritual differ from the typical marital process? Why does it differ from the typical one? What are the reasons that favoured the institutionalisation of this socio-cultural practice? What are the individual and social consequences generated by this social ritual? What social functions (and possible dysfunctions) are fulfilled by this event both at the individual and societal level?

The double wedding: a social play in two acts

The social event that aroused my socio(anthropo)logical imagination is a marriage ritual performed in a rural community, namely in Sânmiclăuș (Bethlenszentmiklós), a village geographically localised in the vicinity of Blaj, Alba County, Romania. The ethnic composition of the community is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Ethnic composition of Sânmiclăuș, Alba County, in the year 2002

Total	Hungarians	Romanians	Romani	Germans
1451	920	350	177	4

Source: Varga (2008)

Statistical data show a demographic domination of the Hungarian population, but it should be mentioned that at least regarding the Romanian and Hungarian communities there are no impermeable ethnic barriers. Both of them are relatively open ethnic communities, this fact explaining the shared commonality of the marital practice studied in this paper, which is performed similarly in both ethnic groups. In terms of religious confession there is an even more pronounced heterogeneity, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Confessional structure of Sânmiclăuș, Alba County, in the year 2002

Orthodox	Greek Catholic	Roman Catholic	Reformed	Lutheran	Unitarian	Other confession
500	29	8	513	2	379	20

Source: Varga (2008)

Neither religion nor ethnicity explains the particularity of the double wedding since this ritual is practiced by both ethnic communities irrespective of religious affiliation. The phenomenon's peculiarity resides, as we shall see, in the secular sphere of the wedding ceremony and not in the realm of religious ritual.

In the following lines I intend to produce a succinct "thin description" (in opposition to what C. Geertz [1973] called "thick description", performed by anthropologists who are over-concerned with minute details, but who regularly miss the big picture) that would paint an impressionistic picture rendered in thick strokes rather than a painfully detailed painting. My methodological zero-order belief (Bem 1970) that stands behind this choice is that not capturing the finest details of a social practice is of particular interest but abstracting the essential features of the phenomenon that will facilitate its understanding. This research does not aim at description, but targets at being understanding and also offers explanation (i.e. the Weberian *Verstehen*). For this reason, what I consider

to be insignificant details (those that find no place in the explanation) will be set aside so as not to load the account with irrelevant information.

The marital ritual as practice in Sânmiclăuș does not differ in any respect from the typical Romanian marriage ritual, with one crucial exception: it is being repeated. More specifically, instead of having a single festive ceremony organised to celebrate the newly officiated marriage, there are two such receptions, with the second being performed one week after the first one, in the same location, mostly with the same guests as before, with the same music, and so on. It would be tempting to say that the wedding festive ceremony is repeated in a situation of *ceteris paribus*, the only variable being time, everything else being kept constant.

The double wedding at Sânmiclăuș is a pattern of marital ceremony unique to Romania. In terms of its geographical localisation, the double wedding is practiced within a radius of several miles around its epicentre represented by the village of Sânmiclăuș. Being a fairly recent socio-cultural development, the evolution of which has both been constrained and fostered by local tradition (as it will be shown subsequently), this phenomenon has not been the subject of previous research. In effect, this paper is the first to address it.

Marriage, a possible socio-cultural universal, is the social institution through which the wedding couple symbolically signs a double contract: a) an intra-conjugal contract between the spouses, and b) a social contract between spouses and society, a contract that certifies their union and sanctions the sexual intercourse between the two. Typically, in modern Western societies, the ceremonial sequence follows a three-step linear algorithm: i) the civil ceremony, by which the state authority officially recognises the legitimacy of the relation and confers legal status upon it; ii) the religious ceremony, by which the civil contract between the parties is being completed before divinity; iii) the social event of celebrating the newly married couple, a multifunctional social practice whose decisive function is financial in nature. The event that is being repeated in the wedding at Sânmiclăuș is the third sequence, i.e. the collective celebration of the bridal couple (namely, the wedding reception organised after the civil and religious ceremonies are over).

The whimsicality that incites an explanation is that the wedding is being doubled even if both bride and groom are from the same village. In technical anthropological terms, even when the rules of endogamy are respected, the wedding party is still repeated in the same location one week later. In general, as a tolerated deviation from the prevailing social norm regarding the organisation of the marital ritual (i.e. one civil ceremony, one religious wedding, one party), it is acceptable for a wedding to be held twice, in different locations, when the partners are from distant geographical regions, since organising a single event would raise numerous logistical problems. This is not the case of the marriage at Sânmiclăuș. Despite the fact that both bride and groom are fellow villagers, the “double” is basically identical to the original in most respects.

Another anomaly (of course, from the sociocentric perspective of a viewer formed in a different culture) is indicated by the language used to characterise the two similar events: the first is called “the groom’s wedding”, while the second is considered to be “the bride’s wedding”. The names of these events suggest who the organisers are: the groom’s wedding is orchestrated by his family, while the bride’s wedding falls within the responsibility of her own family. The temporal ordering of these two events betrays an implicit patriarchalism and an inherent androcentrism that chronologically ranks their deployment, since the groom’s wedding has temporal precedence over the bride’s wedding, the latter being the “double” performance. Moreover, the local tradition prescribes that the conditioning ceremonies (i.e. the civil and the religious ceremonies, which are prerequisites for the party thereafter) to be held on the day of the groom’s wedding. The bride’s wedding, which can be understood as the-deprived-of-the-official-pomp-replica-event, is implicitly downgraded as a second order wedding feast, inferior to the groom’s wedding. Far from being an idiosyncratic feature of the wedding at Sânmiclăuș, male domination is a universal characteristic of both past and contemporary society, revealing a masculine ideology embedded within the logic of marriage, even though the official rhetoric, in modern and especially in postmodern times, insists upon gender equality. It is relevant to mention that the woman is the one who is expected to take the man’s name (but even if there are legal alternatives to the traditional practice of adopting the husband’s surname, the reverse would be seen as dishonour for the male; as such, it is a purely hypothetical option that is practically inconceivable). Moreover, the husband’s name appears first on the marriage certificate, and he is also the first of the two being addressed within the civil ceremony. Not to mention, the religious ceremony can rightly be interpreted from a feminist standpoint (but also from a secular equalitarianist perspective) as a programmatically designed ritual of female degradation.

Chronologically, the sequence of events in terms of which the groom’s wedding is organised obeys the following pattern: a) the extended families gather at the residences of the groom and bride respectively; b) the groom’s cortege made up of his extended family moves *à pied* to the bride’s house (crossing the village fulfils the social function of publicly displaying the event and by that attracting the collective attention of the community); c) once arrived, the bride is being presented to the bridegroom, after which the two retinues merge following the farewell ritual performed by the wedding Master of ceremonies (*vornicul* or *starostele nunții* in Romanian); d) the joint wedding convoy now goes to the town hall; e) after the civil wedding ceremony is completed, the procession moves towards the bride’s church for officiating the religious ceremony; f) once all the official tasks are completed, the cortege goes to the cultural house for the wedding reception; here and now is the moment and place of socially celebrating the newly contracted marriage.

Compared to this schedule of events, the bride's wedding, organised with one-week delay, obstinately repeats the original script, with two exceptions: the state and the church (considering that their mission is already completed) no longer participate in the re-enactment of the original event. Hence, in the absence of the partnership with these two institutions, the event unfolds in this sequence: a) the extended families gather at the residences of the groom and bride respectively; b) the groom's cortege made up of his extended family moves *à pied* to the bride's house (crossing the village fulfils the social function of publicly re-displaying the event and by that re-attracting the collective attention of the community); c) once arrived, the bride is being presented to the bridegroom, after which the two retinues merge following the farewell ritual performed by the wedding Master of ceremonies; d) the cortege goes straight to the cultural house for the wedding reception; here and now (again) are the moment and place of socially celebrating the (by now not so) newly contracted marriage.

The participants in the two wedding receptions are roughly the same. However, in addition to the common pool of guests attending both parties, there is a minority of "naïve" participants, made up of relatives or friends of only one of the grooms, who do not belong to the community, and who attend to only one wedding reception assuming that they are participating to *the* wedding. In fact, these "cultural outsiders" participate to only one of the two weddings, but because of the sociocognitive schema they have internalised (transposable in the sentence: one marriage requires a single wedding reception), they do not even suspect that they are attending to half of the show. The difference between outsiders and insiders relies in the fact that the former think the wedding in the singular, while the latter think it in the plural, as a social play in two acts.

Some details that round out the picture are indeed necessary: manifest during the entire unfolding of the event, an intergenerational fault line could be observed, a division clearly visible in the pattern formed by how participants occupied space. Both in church, during the celebration of religious ceremony, and in the spatial distribution of the guests at the wedding reception held at the cultural house, sharp gender segregation could also be found. This sexual segregation was less accentuated regarding the young people, who were spatially distributed in an amalgamated formula. Summing up, it can be stated that there exists a *double crossed segregation*, combining age and gender criteria: the elders were totally segregated – men on one side of the table, women, invariably, on the other side. Adults were semi-segregated, and even if they did not adopt the dividing purism of their parents, a clear segregationist pattern could still be easily recognised. On the other hand, the youths did not follow the model of their predecessors, mixing in between without paying respect to any sexual criteria of spatial distribution. The first conclusion that emerges is that there is no intergenerational sociocognitive reproduction since the segregationist model

provided by the elders is only partially taken up by the active adults, while the youth completely ignores it. At least so it seems at first glance; an alternative explanation may consist in the fact that ageing entails an ever more pronounced segregation, as these roles along with their separating prescriptions are available only for the elderly. If this is correct, it is expected from the adults that with the passage of time they will enter into the role of the elders and by this assume the prescription of strict sexual separation in public places.

Consistently, with what I stated in the first part of the essay on stupefaction as the natural attitude of the social inquirer endowed with a permanently activated sociological consciousness, I expressed my cognitive perplexity regarding the phenomenon of sexual segregation, wondering about the cause that produces this sociocultural practice. The explanation that I am advancing acknowledges the influence of the church on structuring the sociocognitive schema used by people for socially positioning themselves within a public space. The standard traditional spatial distribution in the church during the religious service is based on the pattern of sexual segregation: men on one side of the church nave, women on the other side, without any gender crisscrossing (the doctrinal reasons for this strict separation are related to the lower ontological status accorded to women in theological thought, whose spatial distance from men is necessary in order to prevent the symbolic pollution of men). Through repeated exposure, individuals have internalised this pattern of positioning as the only “right” one, this model being replicated also in other non-religious social situations. In other words, the segregationist pattern of ecclesiastical positioning that was internalised during repeated exposure to religious service is being replicated in all similar public situations.

Doubling the wedding: a traditionalistic innovation

By participating in three such events (or more correctly, by participating in one wedding and a half, since I attended to a complete double wedding and also to another groom’s wedding), in two of them benefiting from the privileged position of being the sponsor for the bride, I was anxious to understand the genesis of the phenomenon, the social functions it performs, and also the possible dysfunctions that it generates within the community.

The common sense epistemic strategy that I used in the first part of my research consisted in questioning local people in order to elucidate the reason why the marriage ritual is being repeated. This (naïve) strategy is based on the “simple and persistent belief that knowledge about people is available simply by asking. We ask people about themselves, and they tell us” (Kellehear 1993, 1). If this were the case, social and human sciences should have been long ago overtaken the natural sciences in terms of scientificity, since the latter do not have the advantage

of directly interpellating their subjects through language. However, if stars and molecules don't speak, they certainly do not lie either. Not the same can be said about people (Iluț 2011 – personal communication). From an epistemological point of view, credulously accepting the “explanations” delivered by the subjects equates to disqualifying sociology, since it implies raising popular wisdom on the epistemic rank of sociological knowledge. Equalising sociological knowledge with common sense makes the former not only redundant, but also unnecessary. This is why social research cannot afford to rely entirely on the declarations collected from ordinary social agents (as some exulted qualitativists propose).

The official response provided by the locals questioned the doubleness of the marriage ritual referring to the lack of a space large enough to accommodate all guests. Due to this “objective” reason, the pragmatic solution was to split the wedding into two separate events: one for the groom's guests, the other for the bride's guests. But alas, invoking the space deficit as a material necessity for splitting the wedding is, of course, a puerile reason, since the guests are largely the same. In addition, small weddings, which do not require large space, also follow the same pattern of double wedding, although they are not conditioned by the smallness of the cultural house, which can accommodate up to 400 guests. Clearly, the explanation is quite another.

“The social world is accumulated history” (Bourdieu 1986). The present reality is the product of the past (“What's past is prologue”, as Shakespeare famously put it). To understand the current practice of the double marriage, a historical foray aiming to trace both the genesis and the evolutionary path followed by the phenomenon under analysis is necessary. Elders recount that in their time the marriage tradition also stipulated the holding of two events, but unlike today, these events were simultaneously held in two different places. The two events involved an explicit hierarchy: the main event was held in a public space, in which the bridal couple was being celebrated by the community. The secondary event was being held at the bride's house, in her absence. Attending to the latter were the relatives and the close family of the bride, who remained there and continued the party after the groom and his cortege took the bride from her residence, prolonging this event into a parallel mini-feast continuing *in absentia* of the bride. Over time, the previous temporal simultaneity and geographic differentiation (the specific features of the original tradition) were reversed, giving nowadays temporal succession and geographical identity. That is to say, at present time, the two events succeed each other at an interval of one week, being organised in the same space (the cultural house of the village). Over the years, a relative equalisation of the two events in terms of their social importance was realised: if in the past the reception held by the bride's family had a clearly peripheral place in the wedding's social economy, currently it claims equality (although, as I have argued, the “bride's wedding” continues to be dominated and eclipsed by the “groom's wedding”).

The emergence of the double wedding can be explained by the norm of reciprocity that is being intransigently practiced by the local community. Wedding celebration, in addition to the role of publicly affirming the newly contracted marriage between the two protagonists, fulfils the economic function of collecting the debts placed by the couple's parents by participating at prior weddings. A financial analysis reveals that wedding, as a social practice, is caught in a continuous cycle of gifts and counter-gifts, being a community event that masks the financial function of the wedding, that of a *pre-capitalist credit institution*. Wedding is thus a credit institution disguised under the festive pomp of celebrating the union of the couple. Another latent function performed by the wedding is an integrative one.

Another latent function performed by the wedding consists in promoting moral and social integration, keeping the community together through reproducing the indebtedness between families. Every financial gift offered, far from being a purely symbolic gift, consists in making a future debt that normatively implies receiving an equal counter-gift when the moment asks for it. The norm of reciprocity, which is a cultural universal, is practiced intransigently within this community because the families invited to the wedding reception are indebted to both the bride's and groom's families (in the case of an endogamous marriage). Thus, for redeeming the two debts, two separate events are being organised. If this is so, then the common sense question arises: Why aren't the two debts merged into a single one which would be offered at a single wedding reception? The answer to this question, suggested to me by a marginal native, is "because guests are not willing to pay the double price for a single meal!" This surprisingly frank answer requires some elaboration. In the case of an exogamous marriage, the guests redeem their debts only towards the family that is organising the wedding, which rewards them by offering a meal in return. In the case of endogamous marriages, offering the financial gift by merging the two debts into a single one would mean receiving in exchange a single meal. From this social behaviour it can be concluded the rationality of the social actors, who tend to interpret any action in terms of transactions involving costs and benefits. But the same example also reveals the limited (or quite defective) rationality of social actors that do not include all data into analysis, ending their ration by performing an illusory self-advantageous calculation. Illusory, because the "price" paid for the meal is much higher than its proper value since it includes the historical debts that have to be redeemed. Disregarding this fact, the guests who refuse to pay twice for a single meal fool themselves, forcing at the same time the families of the grooms to hold two separate events in order to maximise their income. Ultimately, however, the higher profit goes to the grooms, and the consistent losses are on the guests. The only consolation may consist in the certainty that the norm of reciprocity, in its full intransigence, will also work for them when the time comes, a time in which they will fully take advantage of "how (marriage) things work".

The double wedding is an inventive means of maximising profit on the ground that two wedding receptions are more profitable than one alone. By analogy with the functioning of the banking system, this practice can be interpreted as a method of obtaining a larger credit, even if it automatically also involves contracting a more substantial debt. Once institutionalised through repetition, the practitioners of the double wedding forget its original genesis and it becomes ossified into tradition.

The double wedding is thus a “traditionalistic innovation” in the sense that it is an innovation within tradition, through which social actors, accepting the formal prescriptions of tradition, manipulate the tradition in their own interest. M. Weber (1978, 24–26) postulated the typology of social action as being composed of: a) instrumentally rational social action (*zweckrational*), which implies choosing the most appropriate means to achieve certain goals, i.e. means–goal optimization; b) value-rational social action (*wertrational*), which refers to rational actions conditioned by an ethical, aesthetic, religious, etc. code, regardless of its pragmatic usefulness or chances of success; c) affective social action, i.e. action determined by the emotional state of the social agent; d) traditional social action, which is determined by “ingrained habituation” (Weber 1978, 25). Without any intention of revising the classic Weberian taxonomy of the ideal types of social action, I dare to suggest a fifth type derived from combining instrumentality and traditionality: e) intra-traditional rational action.

By the concept of intra-traditional rationality I am referring to the type of rationally instrumental social action conditioned by the traditional framework within which it is carried out, but which does not strictly mean the *ad litteram* compliance with tradition. Tradition becomes both a constraint and a resource for the rationally interested social actor. His/her rationality manifests within and through this traditional frame of reference. The duality of tradition consists in the coercion that it exerts, on the one hand, and in facilitating the action taken within it, on the other hand. Far from paying blind obedience to tradition’s normative prescriptions, intra-traditional rationality operates by manipulating tradition in its own advantage without renouncing to invoke tradition as the ultimate authority legitimising social action. Precisely because of that, intra-traditional rationality is not a purely instrumental rationality that ignores the postulates of tradition, but a rationality that accepts tradition, yet uses it and even subverts it in order to reach its instrumental interest.

The introduction of the concept of intra-traditional rationality (which could be equally called instrumental-traditional rationality) is pragmatically and theoretically justified by the need of developing a concept capable of accounting for the phenomenon of the double wedding. Its introduction is not motivated solely by the desire of conceptual invention, which would signal the manifestation of what could be called Parsons’ syndrome, named in honour of the

great sociological theorist Talcott Parsons, a syndrome revealed in the tendency to theorise without any empirical footing.²

One of the most hazardous assumptions in social sciences is the rationality postulate (Abbott 2004), which consists in accepting the premise that the social actor is rational in his/her behaviour, an assumption underpinning the entire rational choice paradigm. Despite the successful results that have been generated by accepting this postulate (which introduced the possibility of mathematically formalising social behaviour), the harsh criticism it has attracted revealed its artificiality. The wave of criticism oriented against the rationality principle forced its defenders to abandon the idea of pure rationality, retaining instead the much diluted notion of limited rationality. In order to explain the phenomenon of double wedding, I will adopt in my analysis the principle of rationality, but not in its improbable form of a purely instrumental rationality, but of traditionally embedded rationality, i.e. rationality conditioned by the tradition within which it operates (“intra-traditional rationality”).

One of the starkest defenders of the conception of individual as *homo oeconomicus* whose behaviour is governed by (a limited) rationality even in his religious affairs is R. Stark (1999). According to this view, individuals are religion consumers, whose choices in matters of sacredness are taken after comparing the perceived benefits with perceived costs. At the foundation of rational choice theory lies the postulate that people seek to maximise their profits while minimising losses – in the transactions one initiates with divinity as well. The corollary of this axiomatic proposition is that individuals will be motivated to exercise their rationality in order to “cheat” by disregarding the terms of the exchange in order to maximise their utility. For instance, in some religions, the terms of the exchange between believers and divinity stipulate the obligation from the part of the believers to sacrifice various animals in the name of the god(s). Anthropological studies revealed that the Nuer people, for example, developed an ingenious stratagem that consists in replacing the sacrificial ox requested by the formal ritual with a simple cucumber, symbolically transfigured into the mighty animal-offering given to divinity. R. Firth (cf. Stark 1999, 278) rightly observes that replacing the ox with a much cheaper substitute is the most economical way to meet your ritualistic obligations. We can speak of a real “sacrificial economy”, in which individuals comply with the formal rules, but nevertheless are finding unorthodox solutions to pay their debts: the animal offering, much too precious to be sacrificed, is being replaced by a cheaper surrogate. This innovative practice that nevertheless respects the ritual, by which individuals accept the formal terms of the transaction but resort to ingenious subterfuges in order to minimise their financial losses, remarkably exemplifies what I have previously called

2 In the acknowledgement section of *The Social System*, T. Parsons (1951) confesses his theorising proclivity by characterising himself as an “incurable theorist”.

“intra-traditional rationality”. The social agent essentially tries to act rationally in the framework allowed by the tradition into which s/he is embedded, even if the assumptions on which the tradition is grounded aren’t exactly rational or transparent to him/her.

If the trick used by the Nuer is a method of loss minimisation in their transactions with divine powers, the Sânmiclăuș people resort to double wedding as a means of profit maximisation.

The social (dys)functions performed by the double wedding

In general, marriage fulfils the integrative function of acting as social glue by which the community is held together, since the iterative practice of gift and counter-gift ensures the reproduction of the relations of obligation between families. Moreover, I have also argued that marriage acts as a pre-capitalist credit institution being the functional equivalent of the modern bank: the amount credited at your own wedding is to be returned in instalments to the descendants of your guests, who in their turn will have obligations towards their guests’ offsprings, and so on, thereby guaranteeing a socio-financial link between the living and the dead.

Specifically, the double wedding, as practiced in the Sânmiclăuș community, performs a series of additional social functions. First, the double character of the wedding plays the role of *status setting* within the community. The doubleness of the wedding allows direct social comparison, almost in experimental conditions, between the two events, since they are organised in the same conditions. Thus, it becomes possible to comparatively evaluate the pomp of each of the two events (considering the common pool of guests attending to both wedding receptions). Moreover, the amount of the financial gift is separately accounted (for each wedding reception in part) so that the two sums accumulated can be directly compared afterwards. It can be said that the wedding organisers work with a double-entry bookkeeping system, in the sense that the accounting of each wedding is kept apart from the other. By converting the amount of pecuniary gifts received in social prestige, the wedding functions as a *mechanism of inter-family ranking*, since the amount of monetary gifts determines the honourability attributed by community to each organising family.

Adopting the language of Mertonian functionalism (Merton 1968), it can be said that the manifest function of the double wedding, although denied and hushed under the festive splendour, is a purely pecuniary one. The latent social function is that of status regulation, which is accomplished by ranking families

in terms of their social respectability indicated by the amount of the financial gifts received at the wedding reception(s).

But these intra-traditional innovations also generate unanticipated consequences (to use another of Merton's (1936) collection of classic terms), inducing social dysfunctions within the community that cannot be ignored. The main generator of social tension is the radical individualism lurking inside the Sânmiclăuș community, probably due to Protestantism, which dominates the religious sphere in the local community. The radicalism of the individualism can be detected by analysing the names given to the events: the wedding is not understood as a common event, but as two separate events, i.e. "the groom's wedding", and "the bride's wedding". Because of this conception, the classical idea of union is in danger of perversion, since it is almost impossible to shift from individualistic thinking to a collective sentiment of "we-ness" (or to develop the sense of oneness). Moreover, radical individualism is also indicated by the custom that the bride and the groom have to have their own separate pair of sponsors. This custom perpetuates the egocentric thinking and hinders the establishment of a shared cognitive orientation. A second factor that may cause social dysfunctions is given by the double structure of the wedding, which is responsible for creating rivalry between the organising families who found themselves in a situation of direct comparison in front of the wide audience represented by the local community. Thus, the bipartite structure of the wedding is responsible for the mounting inter-family conflict. The function of status regulation enhances the conflict, making the families caught in this social game become aware that their reputation is at stake, and by this, motivating them to try to beat the rival family in the game of social distinction.

Conclusions: "the debunking motif" of socio-anthropology

The circle started at the beginning of this article can now be closed by readdressing the intellectual function of the socio(anthropo)logy of infiltrating beyond the reaching point of the common sense's gnoseologic capacities. Society presents itself to the untrained eye as a façade (Berger 1963, 30), and in order to identify its inner workings it is necessary to inspect the backstage mechanisms supporting it. Incorporated into the socio(anthropo)logical procedure of researching reality is a *debunking motif* (ibid.), which does not reside in the psychological make-up of the researcher, but in the scientific methodology itself. Deeply immersed into social reality (in this regard being on situational par with the ordinary knower), the socio-anthropologist can epistemologically transgress his or her social imprisonment by resorting to a special conceptual grid of understanding social reality. The epistemic superiority of this interpretative framework over the one used by naïve

agents is given by the special form of social consciousness developed as a result of his or her prolonged ritual of socio-anthropological initiation. This study is the product of exercising an inquisitive attitude characterised by its refusal to take for granted the strange dimension of human social reality.

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