

TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY WEDDING CUSTOMS IN MONTENEGRO VALUES AND IDENTITY CHANGES

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The article highlights the importance of rituals as significant elements of cultural identity. Among a variety of rituals in Montenegrin society and culture, we focus here on the ritual practices related to the organization of the wedding ceremony, including all its following phases and rituals. To comprehensively approach the relevance of wedding rituals and examine their meaning, we have compared traditional (patriarchal) and modern wedding practices, analyzing the value orientation that permeates traditional practices at different levels of social and cultural transformations. Two ethnographic sketches illustrate traditional and contemporary wedding rituals. Keywords: ritual practices, traditional wedding practices, patriarchal culture, collectivist and individualist value orientation, socialization, internalization of social reality

V članku je obravnavan pomen ritualov kot pomembnih elementov kulturne identitete. Iz množice ritualov v črnogorski družbi in kulturi se osredinja na poročni obred, z vsemi fazami in obredi, ki ga spremljajo. Da bil celoviteje osvetljen njihov pomen, so predstavljeni s poudarkom na primerjavi tradicionalnih (patriarhalnih) in sodobnih poročnih praks ter analizo vrednot, ki jih prežemajo na različnih ravneh družbenih in kulturnih sprememb. Tradicionalni in sodobni poročni ritual ponazarjata etnografski skici.

Ključne besede: ritualne prakse, tradicijske poročne prakse, patriarhalna kultura, kolektivistična in individualistična vrednostna orientacija, socializacija, internalizacija družbene realnosti

INTRODUCTION

Our research addresses and interprets ritualized wedding practices from the perspective of two social and historical orders, the traditional (patriarchal) and the contemporary (modern), providing scholarly relevance and significance in this context.

Striving to systematically analyze the traditional (patriarchal) and modern social orders, we look into the social circumstances that shaped their emergence. In societies that had been extensively exposed to wars, as is the case with Montenegrin society, the high mortality rate of the male population was an evident factor of the social fabric, resulting in a social climate that was crucial for the cultivation of rooted patriarchal values. The circumstances thus created led to the kind of social relations in which a male figure was of utmost significance to society and the community. Svetlana Zečević finds the roots of segregation in a patriarchal society and in the values it extracts and promotes, in the vertical and horizontal¹ dimensions of the division of labor, according to which the category

¹ The author explains the vertical gender dimension in the field of work through division of labor. Thus, better-paid jobs are identified with men, who are oriented toward decision-making positions which proportionally increases their social power. Domestic work, on the other hand, is identified with women. The horizontal gender dimension is associated with the same jobs, valued differently in favor of men (Zečević, 2008).

“male” is linked to the sphere of production, and the category “female” is associated with the sphere of reproduction (Zečević, 2008, according to Rakonjac, 2020). A social organization conceptualized this way represents an authentic image of Montenegro, whose structures contain elements of traditional patriarchy.

The spirit of the family commune was present in Montenegrin society for a long time, with a clearly defined value system dictating a strict hierarchy of relationships and positions within this hierarchy. All this manifested itself in diverse types of social practices; this paper will mainly analyze the customs of wedding practices as a significant determinant of the cultural identity of Montenegro. The phrase “Montenegrin cultural identity” in our research refers to Montenegrins and Serbs, i.e., the orthodox population living in Montenegro (72.07%). Unlike the Constitution from 1992, which defined Montenegro as the national state of the Montenegrin people, the Constitution from 2007 (the last one) defines Montenegro as a civic state in which the bearer of sovereignty is the “citizen with Montenegrin citizenship.” The preamble of the Constitution stipulates that “Montenegro is inhabited by Montenegrins, Serbs, Bosniacs, Albanians, Muslims, Croats, and others committed to democratic and civic Montenegro.” The Constitution, therefore, does not define Montenegro as a national state of the Montenegrins – it is the “multinational state” or “national neutrality” (Stojanović: 2021, 94) that is set as one of its basic principles. Of course, all residents of Montenegro with Montenegrin citizenship are Montenegrins: even if they are not part of the Montenegrin people, they are Montenegrins according to their civic identity – and their demonym is *Montenegrins*. In other words, all Montenegrins as citizens of Montenegro do not belong to the majority of Montenegrin people. Namely, Serbs, Bosniaks, Albanians, Muslims, Croats... are members of ethnic groups in Montenegro, united with the Montenegrin people by the demonym *Montenegrins*.²

CUSTOMS AND VALUES

It is essential to consider their theoretical definitions to operationalize concepts such as social practice, values, and customs. Therefore, we begin with the terms *customs* and *values*. As a stable form of social practice, customs determine social relations. At the same time, they are both the expression and codification of those relations, meaning that acts and “norms” constantly interact.

“A traditional rule, once established, is characterized above all by the absence of awareness of purpose and reasons for which it exists” (Koković, 1997: 210). Despite the lack of formal norms that frame a specific behavior reflecting inherited practices, customs have their fixed place in the social consciousness concerning manners of conduct defined

² These data are part of a paper (ready for publication) “The Names of the Balkan Peoples and the Names of the Inhabitants of the Balkan Countries in Lexicography (using the example of the Dictionary of Montenegrin National and Literary Language)” by Sanja Šubarić.

by standard models. This is especially true for communities whose value system has long been influenced by the traditional value system. There, values correspond to the customary structure, which supports and maintains the customary practice.

Values are not the objective property of things and processes, but an objective social consensus is formed around them. The agreement on specific vital values is a basis for the mutual understanding of individuals as social actors, which is also reflected in the regularity and predictability of social conduct. (Matić, 1990: 519)

For the analytical focus of the paper, it is crucial to draw a parallel between collectivist and individualist value orientations that define the relationship between the individual and the collective. The collectivist value orientation, typical of a patriarchal social system, is characterized by the shared responsibility for the fate of the individual, the collective being a family, a fraternity, a tribe, a family community, or a society as a whole. In contrast to the collectivist value orientation, the individualist orientation shifts responsibility into the orbit of an individual's life trajectory (Hofstede, 2011). Therefore, we can note the presence of divergent value orientations in different time perspectives.

The changes from the end of the 19th century onwards contributed significantly to the disappearance of the wedding practice characteristic of the patriarchal society. We find the beginnings of these changes in the field of education – the opening of the Girls' Institute in Cetinje in 1869. With their inclusion in the education process, girls could publicly display their intellectual potential, which led to a liberation from the pressures exerted by the patriarchal social order for centuries. Another social moment of this type is related to the formal and legal equality process of men and women, decisively highlighted in the General Property Code for the Principality of Montenegro of 1888. Article 13 of the Code clearly emphasizes this:

Likewise, physical and social differences between people do not violate equality of property or property rights in general, as this equality is the same for men and women, the old and young, the healthy and the sick. (Bogišić, 1898: 5)

All social activism in the fields of education, law, the labor market, and cultural exchange contributed to the emancipation of men and women and the gradual disappearance of the habits characteristic of the patriarchal society.

Collectivism, which also appeared again and again in the period of socialism, dominates in a patriarchal social system with certain transformations. The rise of individualism marks the end of the 20th century, characterizing the 21st century as a value that collides with the collectivist value orientation, thus creating in synergy a new form of a value pattern in Montenegrin culture, adopting the model of democratically developed countries. According to Ronald Inglehart, the transition from traditional to industrial society is characterized

by economic growth and the dominance of material values. In addition to the importance which he attaches to social and economic development, Inglehart does not neglect the cultural characteristics of a particular social environment (Pavlović, 2009). Regardless of the level of social development, the culture inherited by a particular society constitutes the basis for social action.

The research aims to analyze the degree of persistence of wedding folk customs from the past or their metamorphosis and to determine how the traditional customs or their elements are manifested in modern social frameworks. The background for analyzing and comparing wedding customs in traditional and contemporary society are socio-cultural factors that have led to the disappearance of customs and the emergence of new forms of customary practices arising through the democratization and modernization of society.

CUSTOMS AS PART OF MONTENEGRIN CULTURAL IDENTITY

Customs represent a form of social practice permanently manifested in culture and create basic or narrative patterns of cultural content. In this context, theoretical discourse explains the role and significance of wedding folk customs and corresponding values in the social and cultural context of Montenegro. A large percentage of Montenegrin respondents with different national identities (Montenegrin, Serb, Croatian, Muslim/Bosniak) agreed that Montenegrin society and culture are recognized by their customs, regardless of their being practiced or just surviving at the level of narration and memory. For a more detailed analysis of the problem, we have considered the results of the research conducted in 2017 for Miomirka Lučić's dissertation *Value Foundation of Cultural Identity in the Post-Socialist Period in Montenegro*. Data obtained from the study show that folk customs, as an integral part of intangible culture, are of great importance for respondents of different nationalities living on the territory of Montenegro. This opinion is shared by 85.1% of Croats, 75% of Muslims / Bosniaks, 72.1% of Montenegrins, and 67.1% of Serbs. To explain the importance attributed by respondents to customs as part of cultural identity, we draw on Giddens' explanation of tradition, which includes folk customs:

Tradition is a mode of integrating the reflexive monitoring of action with the timespace organisation of the community. It is a means of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of past, present and future, these in turn being structured by recurrent social practices. (Giddens, 1998: 37)

The content of folk customs from the past is thus retained within the framework of a narrative or a rare practice, but their structure constitutes the cultural core and the basis for the formation of new social rules and practices.

The usual practice of the patriarchal worldview implied transmission between generations – the passing of a clearly defined system of values and norms from generation to generation. In cases of outliers, any opposition to such a pattern of socialization would be condemned by all members of the community (male and female). Andrija Jovičević's excerpt confirms this in the section on the education of girls:

At the age of ten to twelve, girls begin to avoid playing with boys and their company; at this time, they begin to recognize the difference between masculine and feminine. Girls start feeling awkward in front of boys and refuse to associate with them. Mothers instruct them to do so, and fathers warn their children's mothers to do so if necessary. As shame develops, so does chastity. The mother teaches her daughter to learn what is decent or indecent, honorable and chaste, instructing her to conduct herself honorably. (Jovičević, 1901: 86–87)

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann used the term “internalization of reality” for such a social process. The authors claim that the concept is to be sought during primary socialization, in which internalization of a particular system of values takes place and becomes an integral part of the personality structure. Regardless of the changes that develop as a consequence of personality maturation, the world of values interiorized in the primary socialization phase remains a lasting and consistent part of the personality structure (Berger, Luckmann, 1966: 119–137).

WEDDING RITUALS

As a critical moment for every man and woman in Montenegrin culture, the wedding ceremony is accompanied by numerous rituals that have their symbolic basis in different contexts. In the patriarchal social context, the act of marrying was not determined by the will of the people being married. Marriages used to be negotiated by the parents of the future spouses, and the reputation of the families from which the prospective bride and groom emerged was critical. Therefore, the will of the spouses was completely subordinate in this part of their life trajectory, which was a crucial moment in their shared life experience.

Two acts can be discerned from the complex customary structure of the wedding ceremony. Both acts are listed as a generalized description of the traditional model related to the following:

1. the proposal brought by the engagement, which ends with the girl being taken from the parental home;
2. the wedding guests bring the girl to the groom's house as the final act of the religious wedding ceremony (Radulov, 2012: 176).

THE BETROTHAL

The bridegroom's father or brother most often participated in proposing marriage. One of the injunctions was to present themselves as they are: "You see me, I see you, so if you may consider me a family friend, give me your daughter to be my son's wife" (Radulov, 2012). The girl's father was not obliged to respond immediately, but he usually did so after a few days, and the response could be either positive or negative. If he decided not to give up his daughter, the answer was as follows: "The girl is not ready. I cannot give her to anyone this year because she is still crazy" (Radulov, 2012: 176). To protect the reputation of both families, the negative response to the proposal was perceived as an imperative secret that no one but those present was allowed to know. This example reveals the dominance of the collective will. At the same time, the free will, deliberation, and, above all, the emotional state of the individual whose fate was being decided was subordinated. In the case of an affirmative response, or the consent of the bride's father to give his daughter, the groom's brothers, cousins and friends gathered to make the proposal official and to celebrate the favorable decision. This facilitated all future activities in preparation for the wedding act. According to the usual protocol, the proposal is followed by the act of betrothal.

In the past, among the Montenegrins, betrothal was secured by a given word, while the ring or money represented only a symbolic attribute. When the word is given, the betrothed's father goes with a relative or another of his sons to the girl's home with a bottle of *rakija* [a traditional alcoholic drink]. There, they are greeted by the girl's relatives, who welcome them cordially and give them a bottle of *rakija* as a sign of family friendship. The girl then goes out to meet her father-in-law and kisses his hand, while he usually gives her money, called a ring. Now the engagement is confirmed, and the girl receives a ring. (Radulov, 2012: 176)

As the folk saying goes: "*Rakija* drained, girl obtained" (Rovinski, 1994: 187).

After the girl has been given a ring, the wedding date is negotiated, and the number of wedding guests who shall come to collect the girl is determined. All representatives of the husband's relatives (*svatovi*) have fixed roles; the wedding procession cannot be realized without the elder wedding guest, two brothers-in-law, the firstborn, the banner-bearer, the best man, and the duke.

The older wedding guest was selected by his reputation and wisdom, and often it was the groom's uncle or a prominent close relative of his; brothers-in-law were the groom's brothers or first cousins or other close relatives, the first being the brother-in-law guarding the girl; the duke being a close relative, the firstborn being the bridegroom's maternal uncle, the banner-bearer the son-in-law of the

family, the best man having been previously selected by the bridegroom's father.
(Radulov, 2012: 176)

The act of betrothal is still present in Montenegrin culture, but the way it manifests itself has transformed significantly. In this segment, as in many others, change is noticeable in customary practice and the transition from collective value orientations to individual ones. This is confirmed by the fact that future spouses now decide on the engagement as wilful agents.

THE WEDDING

The wedding ritual in patriarchal Montenegrin society is accompanied by wedding guests picking up the bride and announcing the following celebrations by firing guns in the air. The announcement by gunshot is explained or justified by the fact that people in the past had no other way of spreading the wedding news. "When the wedding guests approach the bride's house, they send the bearer of good news, or two men sometimes, to fire guns in the air to announce the arrival of the wedding procession" (Radulov, 2012: 177). Loud noises alert the wider surroundings to events of particular importance for human life. They can be related to different circumstances, which is still the case (in sports, in traffic, in carnival rituals). Furthermore, in the past, noise was an apotropaic way to ward off evil spirits and impure forces, believed in by the people with a traditional way of thinking. However, despite the modernization of the 21st century, that particular ritual segment is still an indispensable part of the wedding ceremony in Montenegrin culture today.

Regardless of the different eras, the bride represents a figure expected to present herself in the full splendor of her physical appearance. However, in the past, the bride's beautiful appearance often embellished a depressed emotional state. Some of the reasons for the bride's emotional distress during the wedding ceremony were: leaving her family home where she had created her security; the absence of her role in the decision-making process about whom to marry and when; losing the identity she had built within her original family; heading into the "unknown" – into the family she in most cases hardly knew until the wedding.

What further burdened a female in the patriarchal system, and was also the product of the collective being of society, was related to the woman's "obligation" to give offspring to her husband, especially male offspring. Only when she became a mother, i.e., when she bore male offspring, did she receive her husband's affection: "Only when a boy is in the cradle does the husband begin to pay attention to her" (Kaper, 1999: 62–63). In cases where she could not fulfill this duty, the woman's conscience, deeply rooted in societal custom and guilt, obliged her to leave or divorce her husband so as not to deprive him of the continuation of his lineage. The social context led to the custom of the bride carrying a male child across the threshold during the wedding ceremony – to have male offspring of her own – ritually embracing this mission as a crucial marital duty. "When the bride is

to enter the house, the mother-in-law hands her a male child called a *nakonče*. She brings him a shirt, socks, and a handkerchief as a gift” (Radović, 2007/2008: 270). The custom mentioned above in Montenegrin culture is not a matter of the cultural past altogether. On the contrary, it remains alive in women’s consciousness, being often present in the contemporary habitus of Montenegrin sociality. Another proof, thus, is that male privilege remains persistent in Montenegro.

The Bride’s Costume

Since the bride’s appearance is expected to exude sophistication, mystery, and beauty, it requires clothing specially made for the wedding ceremony. In the past, it consisted of a wedding skirt, a silk shirt embroidered with ornaments, a cap, a *koret* (long, light coat without sleeves), white socks, and *opanci* (traditional sandals). If the bride was from a wealthier family, her costume was richer and included a *dolaktica* (jacket) (Radulov, 2012). The costume designed for the wedding ceremony is part of a broader range of folk costumes, both for men and women. Creativity, ingenuity, and individualized appearance were traditionally suppressed by predefined garments designed for this type of custom.

In this part of the paper, we will focus on the customs that relate to certain parts of the national costume often worn at weddings:

In customary and ritual life, a significant role was ascribed to the belt, which generally denotes chastity, marital fidelity, affection, and loyalty in traditional symbolism. In wedding traditions, a male belt was used to bind the chest in which the bride’s dowry was kept, figuratively signifying some bond or better connection in married life. In the case of divorce, however, the belt also had an opposite meaning: namely, if a husband decided to end the marriage for reasons he considered justified, he would cut the wife’s belt, or the priest would accompany this practice with the following words: “May they settle like these two ends” – which would symbolically mark the breaking of the matrimony. (Đurišić, 2013: 195)

Another significant garment from the perspective of customary practice is the shirt. It still has practical value in wedding customs today in places across Montenegro. “It is almost an indispensable object of mutual gift-giving in wedding customs, along with an embroidered scarf and towel” (Đurišić, 2013: 195).

Traditional elements of social practice remain the basis on which cultural identity develops and owing to which it can change and persist through time. This is why Anthony Giddens posits: “Tradition is not wholly static, because it has to be reinvented by each new generation as it takes over its cultural inheritance from those preceding them” (Giddens, 1990: 37).

Bride's Farewell to her Parental Home

The act of taking the bride from the parental home, and the accompanying patriarchal customs, were imbued with numerous superstitions. We mention only a few of them here: “The brother-in-law watches over the bride so that she is not touched by the hand of another woman, for, in that case, the marriage would be childless” (Rovinski, 1994: 200, cited in Radulov, 2012: 178). When leaving the house, the brother-in-law makes sure that the bride does not turn her head because, in that case, it was believed that the offspring would resemble the bride’s family. The following custom, which has the same root but a different interpretation and symbolism, is reflected in words: “The brothers call their sister, who is now taken by the wedding guests, by her name: ‘Alas, Jane, turn over,’ but her brothers-in-law do not allow this, for it represents a kind of sorcery, that if she turns around, her happiness will remain in the family and she would not take it with her” (Radović, 2007/2008: 270). In this context, there was another belief: if the bride turned her head towards her house, it meant her quick return to the family.

All the customs associated with the young woman’s departure from the parental home testify to an effort to establish a discontinuity between a girl’s life and a married woman’s life. It was a model that undermined the continuity of the girl’s or woman’s personality.

In addition to the education, reputation, and manners taken by the girl from her parental home, she also received a dowry from her parents. The dowry consisted mainly of clothing, under which the mother placed a pomegranate as a symbol of luxury and numerous offspring. In contrast to the customs characteristic of patriarchal Montenegrin society, where the dowry consisted exclusively of clothing and objects serving a purpose in the household to which the woman arrives, in modern society, the dowry has undergone a substantial and symbolic transformation. This change is reflected in the dowry no longer being imposed and perceived according to the established customary norm. The girl usually receives money from her parents for independent use at her leisure. The part of the dowry that might essentially support her life trajectory is the dowry for education.

In contrast to the patriarchal marriage model, modern society “opens up” many possibilities determined by the mood, attitude, taste, and lifestyle of newlyweds, who are relieved of protocols and submissiveness. Therefore, future spouses independently determine and regulate the dress code, the behavior, and the organization of the wedding ceremony for “their day.” In this way, their individuality is brought to the forefront.

TWO ETHNOGRAPHIC SKETCHES

In the following, the ideal-typical description of wedding rituals is illustrated with two ethnographic sketches concretizing presented features of the transformations of the traditional model. The first one is from the post-World War II period: it shows a core of

traditional wedding practices, the differences in different cultural regions (Kosovo and hilly Montenegro), and some novelties brought by modernization in the socialist era. The second account reflects a characteristic socio-cultural matrix of the 21st century, in which global features of popular culture dominate and prevail.³

TRADITIONAL WEDDING, 1966

In the winter of 1966, a young man, an engineer, traveled to Kosovo to first meet his long-time girlfriend's family. He was welcomed by his girlfriend's parents and uncles, who thoroughly scrutinized the young fiancé. After getting to know one another, the young man announced the engagement by asking the father for the hand of his chosen one. He promised to return to Kosovo in the summer; this made the engagement official. Since the girl's father was a man with entrenched patriarchal views, he requested that the wedding be organized in his daughter's birthplace in Kosovo. The head of the family insisted that he would not allow his daughter to leave home without an official wedding ceremony as a guarantee of her legal marriage.

The girl came from a middle-class family in Kosovo – her father was one of the first educated professors there, and her mother was a housewife from a wealthy class of merchants. On the other hand, the young man came from a remote village in the mountainous north of Montenegro, an environment too harsh to live in. He was the youngest child in the family and the only one of the five children to be sent to college.

The wedding ceremony took place in June 1966 in the girl's hometown. The wedding guests from the side of the groom were not numerous: the groom, two brothers in the role of the bride's future brothers-in-law, the closest friend who was best man, and one of their mutual friends. On the wedding day, the bride appeared in front of the guests in a white lace costume with a skirt, tulle veil, winklepickers, a small bag, and lace gloves. The wedding tables were set in the courtyard of her parents' house. The guests were adorned with sprigs of flowers. The bride's entire and extended family, her friends, colleagues, and even her teacher, came to bid her farewell. The celebration also included an orchestra of musicians (with drums, trumpeters, and clarinet) who also bid farewell to the bride and contributed to the joyful and memorable melodic atmosphere.

One of the highly unique customs in Kosovo is the so-called "bride's dance." As the name suggests, the bride started the dance by expressing the lyrical specificity of Kosovo, where she was born and raised. The bride's new challenge, longing, and love become stronger than the suppressed sadness of leaving her parents' home. This is reflected in the rhythmic movements of the "bride's dance," which the other guests must join to ensure the bride's future happiness.

³ This wedding took place in Belgrade. However, the wedding ceremony would not have been much different had it been held in Podgorica (Montenegro). The groom is a grandson of the couple who married in Kosovo in 1966, and the bride is Serbian. Many guests from Montenegro were invited – family and other relatives, godparents, friends, and schoolmates.



Brothers accompany the bride from her family home, Gjilan (Srb. Gnjilane, Kosovo), 1966 (photo by an unknown photographer, private archive).



Bride's wedding costume from 1966 (photo by an unknown photographer, private archive).



Parents and musicians in front of the bride's family home, Gjilan (Kosovo), 1966 (photo by an unknown photographer, private archive).

Before the bride left the family home, all the wedding guests gave her gifts: men gave her money, women, and friends various presents typical of the time (saucer sets, decorative spoons, glasses, irons, chess sets, thermos bottles, etc.). All donations were registered and kept in a separate room so the inverse relationship of mutual gift-giving would be reciprocated in due course. The girl tenderly said goodbye to her relatives and guests, and on leaving the yard, her brothers handed her over to the future brother-in-law, who also distributed money to the guests. News of her wedding was announced with drums and songs. Her future husband took her by the hand, and they walked with the wedding procession and musicians behind them to the municipal building.

A particularly interesting ritual belief revolved around the mother's parting with her daughter, who was leaving for a new home. The mother would intentionally press a kiss on her daughter's neck and throat, thus inscribing herself forever and giving a sign of belonging to her family. This ancient custom originates from the belief that the soul resides in the neck area, namely the throat. Before the bride left, her aunts and cousins would put sugar cubes between her breasts, believing this would sweeten her future married life.

Afterward, a civil wedding took place on the municipal premises, where the signatures of honor attendants confirmed the marriage. From there, the newlyweds left by car for Montenegro. Halfway there, they took a break in Berane, where they rented a room in a motel. The next day, the bride made good on her promise to her caring parents and sent them a telegram saying, "The trip has gone well so far. Everything is as it should be." Confirming that everything was "as it should be" was a coded message that she had not failed in her home education, that she was aware that this was not the first wedding night yet, and that her virginity was still intact.

The second part of this traditional wedding celebration took place in Montenegro, in a distinctly different civilizational environment compared to a small town in Kosovo. The groom's home, where his family was already impatiently waiting, is located in the north of Montenegro, below the mountain Durmitor. The groom's brother-in-law greeted the newlyweds at the edge of the village. Almost ritually, he toasted them with a bottle of *rakija*, from which everyone took a sip. At the same time, he informed the newlyweds about the change in the wedding celebration as the village had meanwhile fallen into mourning due to the death of a villager.

The deceased villager was a relative of the brother-in-law, an older man who was not related by blood to the family planning the wedding feast. Nevertheless, the family promptly adhered to the tradition. The custom of participating in losing a family member and expressing sympathy is still strong in Montenegro. Homage is paid to the deceased with a dignified silence that must not be disturbed under any circumstances. It can be concluded that in the regions dominated by the consternated way of life, death has greater significance than marriage and the customary codes related to it.

Thus, in two dominantly patriarchal communities, one in Kosovo and the other in Montenegro, a mismatch in the hierarchy of values of marriage and death is evident.



Family guests at the wedding, Gjilan (Kosovo), 1966 (photo by an unknown photographer, private archive).



Spouses in the groom's village Novakovići below Durmitor (Montenegro), 1966 (photo by an unknown photographer, private archive).

The socio-historical context, the geomorphological features of both regions, and foreign influences have contributed to the inhabitants' specificities and the mental map of every member of these national communities. In contrast to the bohemian nature and longing for the rhythm and subtle lyricism typically sung in Kosovo, Montenegrin culture is characterized by melancholic, mournful tones, laments, and elegies that can bring even the hour of death, the final farewell to earthly life, to an extraordinary climax.

Upon their arrival in the village, the newlyweds met and greeted their closest family members. At the threshold of the family house, the so-called stone tower, the groom's aunt, dressed in a typical everyday white dress, was waiting for the bride. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law were busy with their unpostponable duties with the cattle. The strict daily life routine and economic management of the livestock and the field did not allow delays or changes, not even for such a great and memorable moment for the whole family. The mother was not entitled to neglect her duties or cede them to someone else, not even for the wedding celebration of her youngest son, born after the death of her husband. In this, the rural economy showed all the rigidity of pre-programmed mechanisms on which life here depended.

At the doorstep, the husband's aunt, the oldest among the women present, handed the baby boy (*nakonče*) to the bride, believing this promotes the chance of male offspring. They are the only recognized heirs of a family line and its land in Montenegro. Entering the house, the bride was carrying the three-year-old male child of her husband's sister and brother-in-law, presenting money to the couple.

Since the wedding table was not set in the house but in front of the cottages, the newlyweds and their wedding guests had to climb to a greater height. This was possible because it was summer. All the women and their "masters" from the area used to move to high-altitude huts each summer so the cattle could access rich mountain pastures nearby. In front of the two wooden huts of the groom's family, hand-hewn timber planks were set up to serve as improvised tables and benches. One row was reserved for the men, another for the women. The newlyweds were given a central place with their guests of honor.

Another curiosity, which also shows the exclusively patriarchal nature of the groom's home, is the fact that on the opposite side of the bride, who arrived wearing white lace gloves, there were several women – relatives and peasant women – all wearing black headscarves and dressed in dark clothes of coarse fabric. Not a single woman stood out. All were "one of them," devoted to the main tasks in the house, in the fields, and with the livestock. The women were the ones who practiced customs, codified them, and passed them on to the next generations. Next to the black-clad women sat somber men in baggy coarse pants, vests, and Montenegrin caps on their heads. This image of black-and-white contrast, which attracts the eye in the photos, also reflects other contrasting differences. They are related to the archetypal patterns of the bride on the one hand and the family unit of which she becomes a member on the other. In terms of civilization, this suggests a polarized priority of death (as the final loss of the male head, host, and worker) to marriage (as potential fertilization and family strengthening).



Men's and women's side table arrangement at the wedding, Novakovići (Montenegro), 1966 (photo by an unknown photographer, private archive).

At the wedding tables in the village, there was usually a meat offering – the calf was slaughtered, the lamb was braised, and all the dairy products from the local farm served. Plates, glasses, and silverware were not numerous. *Rakija* was served from bottles. Local women stood up, served the men, and set the tables as needed. Everything was simple and in step with nature. According to the usual rules, the bride sat next to her brother-in-law and the groom next to his best man. The groom's statement confirmed the cultural divide he observed. He pointed out the difference between urban and rural forms of relationships in wedding celebrations. This prompted him to express special attention and tenderness to his chosen one. He knew this was the first time his spouse was confronted with such a modest and plain life, reduced to the essentials and promising few sparks of joy.

At the wedding celebration under Durmitor, there were no songs or dances. The conversation centered on daily fasting and overcoming the challenges it presented. The bride particularly remembered the appearance of a distant relative of her husband, trotting on a horse through the wheat field. Leading the horse through a wheat field symbolizes the ancient Montenegrin belief that the newlyweds' marriage will surely be fruitful and abundant with children. A respected village member turned directly to the bride and asked her to lift the veil that had fallen over her face. His words were accompanied by the motion of a stick, with which this respected villager raised the bride's tulle veil himself: "*Lift that cloth, bride, so that I can see if you are good and proper!*" His choice of lexical units (the veil is "cloth") reveals the crude and simplified way of living and thinking characterizing the mountain dweller's struggle for bare life.

In a predominantly patriarchal environment like the one in the Durmitor region, a precious detail that reminds us of the subliminal nature of female martyrdom remains memorable. The words of the groom's aunt, breaking the silence at the wedding, symbolized the wisdom of the woman that recalled the brave deeds of ancient heroines. Rising from her place at the table, she apologized for taking the liberty to do so and said:

Forgive me, friends, I must sing at this wedding so my nephew and his wife will be happy. I lost two brothers in the war [World War II, 1941–1945], but the good Lord granted me life and the opportunity to see both of my sons getting married. Nevertheless, I could not sing or dance at moments of such great happiness because the village is in mourning. Since the groom was born after the death of his father, my brother, I am obliged to sing to him in a joyful voice: "What is the bride like? / She is really beautiful, like a fairy. / May God bless her with happiness!"

Immediately afterward, the aunt began dancing the traditional Montenegrin dance *oro* with her other nephew. As a woman from a male-dominated community, she managed to take control of the whole situation and break the tradition of mourning in the village through her bold yet acute intervention. With carefully chosen words and gestures, the aunt proved that she was the guardian of tradition. Her sublime power, at a particularly significant wedding moment, had the potential to break free from the shackles of prohibitions that had been imposed by tradition. Thus, she encouraged everyone present, which was reflected in the song.

Following the aunt, the bride and groom stood up for the first time at their wedding celebration and started dancing the traditional Montenegrin dance. One of the older men from the village began playing the *gusle*,⁴ singing mostly epic songs with mythical and heroic themes celebrating victories on the battlefield, knights and their exploits, etc. Afterward, the toasts became more frequent. The atmosphere also reflected a kind of hierarchy of the village and the home. The house where the bride arrived respected unquestioned authority. Primacy was given to a man – the brother-in-law who replaced the father who died early, and the groom's grandmother who ran the household. The grandmother's daughter-in-law, i.e., the groom's mother, also had a significant position.

On the way to leave the celebration, male guests gave money to the bride. There were very few special gifts, such as a piece of cloth for sewing. The next day, the newlyweds distributed those gifts to the groom's sisters and the women who helped prepare the wedding feast. In the countryside, there is a particular kind of mutual support in times of need, in moments of crisis, in good times, and in bad ones. The cost of picking up the bride and preparing the feast was more than challenging to the budget of the family the bride was joining. Relatives and neighbors knew this from their own experience and readily stepped in to help.

⁴ A single-stringed musical instrument originating among the Slavic peoples in the Balkans.



Wedding feast with *oro* dancing, Novakovići (Montenegro), 1966 (private archive).

Although they came from different backgrounds, the couple shared the same patriarchal model. In the evening, when the closest family went inside the hut lit by the hearth fire, the bride began to sing. Metaphorically, she responded to what she saw by sending a message of her acceptance of the patriarchal model, expressed in the following lines: *“Forgive me, mother, mama / I have obeyed you until now, / from now on I will obey only my mother-in-law // I have obeyed my brother until now, / from now on I will obey only my brother-in-law!”* The hierarchical order of patriarchy was so powerful that it “demanded” and implied the absolute subordination of the new family member. The main task of the bride was to strengthen the community and its authority.

The newlyweds began their married life independently, in a different environment, far from their family homes. The honeymoon and the feast lasted for several days, and stories about it were told to future generations. The couple was not inclined to adhere to customs and folk beliefs during their wedding too strictly. However, from today’s perspective, numerous elements of the patriarchal model of behavior and traditions differ extensively from the wedding ceremony of the younger generations or their descendants.

CONTEMPORARY WEDDING, 2022

In line with contemporary trends, the bride and groom organize their wedding together, and the bride’s and groom’s guests are invited to the wedding ceremony and reception. Traditional customs no longer have a presence. The whole process of planning, organization,

and the actual wedding protocol is dominated by the personal wishes of future spouses, in a “liberal” manner. There is no tendency to please others, be it the parents or their expectations. No traditional customs are preferred; instead, they are avoided or substituted by currently popular variants.

The equality of the man’s and woman’s status is respected during the wedding ceremony and reception. There is not even an allusion to the patriarchal model that favors men as the so-called “stronger sex.” On the contrary, the modern age enforces a groom’s gallant and chivalrous manners toward his bride. He does not allow the bride’s elegance, sophistication, and attractiveness to disappear from the limelight even for a single moment. It is all about a wonderful and unforgettable day, celebrated with an “eternal” smile on their lips.

The wedding ceremony and reception require coordinating numerous specialized services and performers: make-up artists, hairdressers, wigmakers, photographers, cameramen, hostesses, decorators, professional musicians, waiters, pâtissiers, etc. The significance of the parental home from which the girl was taken to get married is diminished, which also applies to the importance of the new home she moves into. A distant echo of the wedding ritual custom in which the girl is handed over to her brother-in-law is now modified so that the father accompanies his daughter from one hotel room to another. Hand-in-hand with his daughter, he leads her to the registry office, where the groom is already waiting. The registry office of the municipality then performs the act of civil marriage.

The tendencies of globalization are unmistakably apparent. Although this fact is not visible at first glance, there is a precise scenario for each part of the wedding ceremony and reception. A detailed seating plan is made for the guests and a schedule for photo sessions. The couple is always and only accompanied by their honor attendants (best man and maid of honor), whom they have personally chosen. They sit with them at the main table, which is set apart from the other tables in the wedding hall. The ceremony proceeds smoothly and without interruptions. After the marriage announcement and the first kiss, the groom pops the champagne, and toasts are performed with all Hollywood’s glitz and glamour. This includes the first dance, practiced by the newlyweds beforehand, and the spouses’ first bites of the wedding cake.

Interestingly, the wedding cake is primarily there for the photography or the imagery to be recorded and passed on. The cake has three tiers with perfectly smooth icing and a symbolic decoration on top. The lower two tiers are fake, meant to give the cake the necessary height and grandeur required for the magnificent moment; only the top tier of the cake is edible. The couple carefully cut it by holding the knife together, giving each other a small bite. This moment is extended to photography. Symbolically, the apotropaic power of the ritual act of sprinkling sugar on the heads of the newlyweds is realized here, foreshadowing their sweet life together.

The male figure’s dominance in traditional society is abolished, mainly through the economic equality of men and women who now enter into a marriage of their own free will and consent. The right to choose life partners has a decisive influence on the decision



Urban wedding ceremony, Belgrade (Serbia), 2022 (photo by Foto Tajna, Belgrade, private archive).



The first dance, Belgrade (Serbia), 2022 (photo by Foto Tajna, Belgrade, private archive).

to marry. Gone are the days of a stern patriarchal society associated with the determination of parents and families, as well as Montenegrin brotherhoods and tribes. The act of marriage is no longer primarily focused on maintaining and passing on the customary tradition or the vows of the ancestors. Parents and relatives are in the background now. They are not ignored; they are present, but their role is reduced to a minimum. Former toasts of parents and cousins have turned into short, clichéd speeches addressed to all the guests present, with a tendency to convey no traditional moral or observational messages to the newly married couple. Gifts for newlyweds are exclusively envelopes with letters of congratulation and a certain amount of money. After guests take photos, they put them in a specially designed and marked box.

The younger generation dominates the invited crowd, and their affinities dictate the entire reception. Finally, the most important segment is the “party” on the dance floor, where the younger guests relax and dance to the rhythm of the music they like. The selection of tracks is also carefully planned. Care is taken to respect the national, ethnic, religious, and other characteristics of the spouses, their families, and all the guests. Every part of the wedding protocol reflects the political correctness required in today’s Montenegrin society.

The visual dimension of the wedding ceremony is intensified, and the spectacle substance is latent in all the group gatherings. Spectacle and glamour are present in various ways: through the splendor of the outfit combinations, the embellishment of the face and body, the fashion exclusivity, the posing, and incessant photo sessions. Numerous photographers and the human desire to freeze representative moments in time eliminate the spontaneity of the wedding, which was once performed without the modern pompous display and exaggerated expectations.

Our thesis of the primacy of the need for universal visibility is confirmed by the bride’s three changes of white dress (followed by the wardrobe changes of the maid of honor, mothers-in-law, and sisters). Keeping in mind the constructed/programmed/formal exterior of the event called the wedding, only the vows “for better, for worse” are the same as before. The symbolic levels of meaning of the wedding ceremony have changed considerably. The “script” for the wedding organization is now more evident. Traditionally, a wedding was understood primarily as a sign of economic strength and the adoption of the family value system. This also explains the increasingly frequent circumvention of Montenegrin national customs and traditions. It suggests that the layers of meaning that were immanent in folk beliefs, mythical stories, and covenants, meaning the long-standing folklore and tradition on which the identity of a nation was primarily based, are now deprived of their meaning. Modern society and wedding etiquette are dominated by hyper-aestheticization, appeal, attractiveness, and popular likability, a status display fuelled to the highest degree by social networks and increasingly dense and viral human communication.

Another difference from the traditional wedding is the wedding table setting. According to tradition, the table was usually set with old-fashioned service, and none of the guests would stand out and have their personal dietary preferences. Considering the poverty that



The wedding cake, Belgrade (Serbia), 2022 (photo by Foto Tajna, Belgrade, private archive10).

Montenegro has dealt with in the past, such choices would have been impossible anyway. Moreover, especially in the Paštrovići region, a roasted ox's head had to be brought to the side of the table reserved for the older man as the most respected guest of the wedding celebration, according to the principle: a head-for-a-head. Nowadays, in the 21st century, the buffet is self-service; the guests choose and serve themselves. The individuality of all the guests is fully respected. Foods include a variety of dishes or “something for everyone,” there are also dishes from the gluten-free menu for the designated guests. It is not proper for the guests to be dissatisfied with any small part of the wedding celebration.

With their anticipatory organization, the newlyweds subtly determine the stylistic range that marks their special day and the beginning of their life together. The tendency towards global trends can be observed in this “sweetened” conception of the wedding celebration. It creates a performance implicitly marked by the motto: “Everything is ‘easy and sweet,’ just like our life will be in the future!”

In the wedding ceremony, every detail and each member is aestheticized. Therefore, they can be used as a kind of exclusive self-expression and promotion, a way to position oneself in the global village we live in today. Advanced technology and the growing boom in social networks contribute to this extensively. They entice people to take photos of themselves compulsively and “send” their best selfies into the world in real-time. One-click or one-touch communication on the screen of various devices is effective and fast, and it feeds the human ego. The “selfie” mannerism allows individuals to see themselves in the best light. We tend to quickly forget that photos taken this way are automatically enhanced with various filters and applications for beautification and quality improvement.

Everything related to the wedding can become commodified, packaged in an attractive and lavish style that highlights the spot of the bride and groom in the society to which they belong and whose milieu is exclusively invited to their wedding. The aim of contemporary Montenegrin society lies precisely in a non-national, non-conflicting, non-traditional, non-patriarchal, comforting wedding celebration, something we endeavored to present by describing modern wedding etiquette.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON WEDDING CUSTOMS IN TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL FRAMEWORKS

Customs offer the possibility to observe the development of a society and its transformation caused by different social and cultural circumstances at the micro and macro levels.

The reason why presenting a comprehensive analysis of all the relevant customs is not possible here lies in the fact that each tribe, brotherhood, and area in Montenegro was characterized by specific idiosyncratic customs – through their discreet differences, they stood out from one another, thus forming microcultural identities which further confirms the culturally heterogeneous identity of Montenegrin society.

The transformation of traditional practices and their manifest and latent forms in the contemporary social context is conditioned by economic and political changes, the democratization and modernization of society, individualization, the conspicuous development of means of communication, networking at the micro, meso, and macro social levels, and the constant effort of society to adapt its practices to current trends.

Since the spectrum of customs in Montenegrin society is diverse and refers to different social practices (weddings, funerals, childbirth), we focused here on one type only – wedding customs. To explain the manifestations of customary wedding practices, we have referred to the social and historical circumstances that constituted the emergence and establishment of customs as a form of conduct typical of a particular community. We chose to analyze weddings because their diverse content reflects a commune-based patriarchal society. This *rite de passage* is where the importance of the collective, which determines the individual's behavior, is explicitly prominent. Collectivist value orientations are the reference within

whose framework social cohesion, connection, and decision-making at the community level (fraternity) are emphasized and are of particular importance.

A patriarchal value system has long shaped Montenegrin society and culture. Social circumstances connected with frequent wars, which resulted in men (whose main task was to secure the family's existence) going to war and perishing in large numbers, led to the male figure occupying a central social position. Therefore, the entire social life in a patriarchal society was shaped by paternalistic principles. In contrast, female community members adapted their behavior and actions to these principles entirely and without reservation. In this article, we have looked at the customs associated with the accompanying acts of the wedding ritual – the proposal, the betrothal, and the act of marriage. In doing so, we have placed each custom in the temporal-social framework to which it belongs (patriarchal or modern) and compared and explained the changes that have taken place in the course of social transformations.

We have observed several changes, highlighting those related to the disappearance or reproduction of patriarchal value patterns. We illustrated the transformation of paternalistic principles that had once been prevalent with the disappearance of the practice where fathers and their relatives made decisions for their children. One of the changes concerns the act of betrothal, which in modern society represents a relationship based on the consent of the future spouses, without specific ceremonies or rituals and now held in an intimate space. Other changes are reflected in individual family members' roles in organizing and performing the wedding ceremony, the extinct magical ritual acts, the expected roles of the spouses, etc.

The analysis concludes that the customary practices typical of the patriarchal social order are disappearing, being replaced by new values characterized by individualism, autonomy, and freedom of individual agency and choice.

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TRADICIONALNE IN SODOBNE POROČNE ŠEGE V ČRNI GORI: SPREMEMBE VREDNOT IN IDENTITETE

Da bi pokazali, da so šege inherentni del črnogorske kulturne identitete, so za obravnavo v tem članku izbrane poročne šege in navade v tradicionalnem (patriarhalnem) in sodobnem družbenem kontekstu. Črna gora je po Ustavi definirana kot država multinacionalnega značaja. Sintagma »črnogorska kulturna identiteta« tu označuje Črnogorce in Srbe pravoslavne vere, ki so po popisu prebivalstva iz leta 2011 predstavljali skupaj ok. 72 % prebivalcev.

Pri obravnavi so bile upoštevane družbeno-zgodovinske okoliščine, ki so bistveno vplivale na posebnosti črnogorske družbe in kulture. Zaradi pogostih vojnih spopadov v nekdanji Črni gori je veliko moških – bojevnikov zgubilo življenje. Izgube so vplivale na vso družbo, posebej ker je veljalo, da moški skrbijo za preživetje družine. Ob dominantnem moškem liku se je ustvarjala podrejenost ženskih članic družine, zadruga, bratstva in drugih oblik skupnosti.

Patriarhalni vrednostni sistem se je zrcalil tudi v vseh dejanjih poročnih praks: pri snubitvi, zaroki, samem poročnem aktu in drugih. Te so predstavljene na podlagi že opravljenih raziskav. K analizi poročnih šeg in navad prispevata tudi etnografski skici o črnogorskih svatbi – prvi iz

60. let prejšnjega stoletja in drugi, sodobni, iz leta 2022. S primerjavo v diahroni perspektivi so konkretizirane spremembe nekaterih dominantnih patriarhalnih načel. Ob koncu 20. stoletja so namreč individualistične vrednostne naravnosti začele nadomeščati poprej prevladujoče kolektivistične. To spreminjanje ustvarja novo obliko črnogorske vrednostne matrice. Opazno je, npr. usihanje praks, da očetje in sorodstvo odločajo namesto otrok. Sodobna zaroka tako razkriva drugačno družbeno razmerje, zasnovano izključno na osebnem dogovoru bodočih zakoncev, ki se ne ozirata na pričakovanja drugih. Druge spremembe se kažejo v spremenjeni vlogi posamičnih družinskih članov pri organizaciji in izvedbi poroke, opustitvi magičnih ritualnih dejanj, pri pričakovanih vlogah mladoporočencev oz. zakoncev, itn.

Spremembe poročnih praks in njihovih manifestnih in latentnih oblik so v današnji črnogorski družbi tesno povezane z ekonomsko-političnim položajem, demokratizacijskimi težnjami in modernizacijo družbe.

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