

BOOK REVIEW: THE RITES OF PASSAGE TIME AFTER TIME

Hulubaş, Adina and Ioana Repciuc, eds. 2016. *Riturile de trecere în actualitate – The Rites of Passage Time after Time*. Iaşi: Editura Universităţii “Al. I. Cuza”. 394 pages.

The book *The Rites of Passage Time after Time*, edited by Adina Hulubaş and Ioana Repciuc, brings to the scholarly circuit the personality of Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957) by illustrating some of the most representative directions he inaugurated in the European anthropology and ethnology of the last century. Even though it is not his unique contribution to the development of socio-human studies, the most fecund part of van Gennep's academic production is represented by *Les Rites de Passage*, the first edition in 1909 with Emile Nourry (Paris) and reprinted several times. This tome of van Gennep is the cardinal point for the entire collection of articles here offered. *Les Rites* has succeeded in representing a theoretical reference model for several generations of researchers who aim to understand and classify social practices within traditional cultures. Through social practices, I understand here along with the exegetes of his work present in this volume, those ritual gestures, individual or collective, that are studied together by anthropologists and ethnologists, folklorists and sociologists, each one by the angle of their own sector, and which essentially refers to the material and symbolic actions by which individuals participate in community formation.

Among the articles in the introductory section, the contribution of Bjørn Thomassen (“Arnold van Gennep: Fragments of Life-Work at Threshold”) provides us with the richest biographical data on van Gen-

nep, starting from his origins, education and entourage, his scientific journey at the time he lived, by the end of which he accumulated few victories and numerous defeats culminating with a dramatic lack of professional recognition. Intentionally simplifying, we can assume that the main causes of the negative reception of van Gennep's conceptions consisted in his personal conflict with the already consecrated Émile Durkheim and therefore with his scientific heirs. That bad luck changes after 1960, with his rediscovery in the Anglo-Saxon environment, although this did not lead to complete recognition, despite the fecundity of his ideas; it is only in our days that the weight of van Gennep's analytic pattern is entirely acknowledged.

Thus, in the “Rites of Transition in an International Context”, Repciuc presents the spirit of the age in which those who have established the validity of the van-gennepian method of work have become or not partisans of his theoretical vision. From the perspective of studying folklore (French, in particular), from the political anthropology or the postmodern world sociology, we learn one by one cases in which researchers of these domains sometimes admit the van-gennepian source, sometimes denying a worthy appreciation. Under the title “The Passing of Time over the Rites of Passage. A Socio-anthropological Analysis”, Cristina Gavriluţă, a researcher closer to sociology than other contributors, raises his ration-

ale among the more recent responses of the concept of *rite of passage*, with the precise interest of reiterating how modern societies re-establish their connection with the sacred as a reaction to disconnection from popular customs, which had the role of rallying the personal and group connection with the spiritual world. In the paragraph "Reinventing the rite and the need to re-mark the existence" (pp. 106–109), the author discusses how easily observable elements today, such as the metamorphosis of authentic ethnic music, the success of science fiction literature, exotic tourism, the ostentation of wedding parties, and so on, represent the many behaviours in which to search for the dimensions of sacredness (or where these dimensions once were) or the new practices that can accommodate, through re-contextualisation, symbols of passage rites.

In the successive study of Adina Şandru, "Rites and Rituals. An Anthropological Perspective", we have a useful comparison of the most relevant definitions of rites in academic literature. According to the author, they can generate even more profit by taking into account their "different degrees of complexity" (p. 122).

Adina Şandru takes up the definitions of 'rites' and 'rituals' to observe the role of social consecration of the (religious) ritual in contrast with the modifying role of the social structure of the rite. The concept of ritual would present a higher level of formalisation of the sacred and would be subordinate to the rite as its practical, ceremonial manifestation. The ritual is, according to the majority of scholars, a superordinate dimension with respect to ritual ceremonies, since it represents both a model of social dynamics and the set of symbolic behaviours.

It would be appropriate to include in the next version of *Rites of Passage Time after Time* the contribution of a specialist in social psychology to clarify the affinities between van Gennep's views and modern sociopsychology.

Further, the Hulubaş study presents the affect of Simeon Florea Marian's ideas and implicitly van Gennep's assessments of ethno-folklore research – i.e. the working method – from the Folklore Archives of Moldova and Bucovina (Iaşi Branch of the Romanian Academy). Under the leadership of Ion H. Ciubotaru, the gathering of a vast amount of empirical material, collected from the fundamental moments of rural life ("superstition, folk medicine, rites of passage, holidays and magic beliefs, literary folklore, children's folklore, traditional clothing, folk architecture and local occupations" – p. 147) has led to the possibility of subsequent monographs on key themes such as the wedding as a passing ritual, birth habits and funeral practices, all under the significant influence of the tripartite scheme of van-gennepian liminality: preliminary, liminary and post-removal rites with those functions (separation, threshold and aggregation). Moreover, given the epistemological rapprochement between ethnology and dialectology, it would be interesting to have, in addition to this one, an account of the reception of van Gennep's conceptions in European dialectical research.

Galin Georgiev's contribution, "Gift Bestowal in the Rites Traced to the Life Cycle with the Bulgarians: General Findings and Formulations", brings back the image of the gift as a gesture with many roles in traditional societies, a gesture that has maintained its effects (economic, aesthetic, etc.) in modern societies. As van Gennep has formulated, the exchange of gifts builds up and strengthens the social body, being operative especially in the successive phases of separation (thus in transition and reintegration), with the main role of a physical pledge in a spiritual engagement. For the reader the complex figure of the bride shines in the midst of the interesting observations on the mechanism of gift exchange on the occasion of baptism or wedding in different parts of Bulgaria. The bride, whose status is in transition from that of girl to that of woman, is

not only given to the husband accompanied by gifts that are transferable to the new family nucleus, she herself constitutes a gift for both the husband and the newly generated social group.

The following article ("Transition Rites in Bulgarian Weddings: Mid-20th – Early 21st centuries") also deals with the symbolic role of the female figure in nuptial rites. The author, Milena Marinova, analyses the phenomenon of resistance of rites to the pressure of communism. Elements of wedding customs that are important to Bulgarians are presented, showing which have been replaced or modified, since, as elsewhere in the Soviet sphere of influence, the intention of the Bulgarian authorities to suppress any Christian Orthodox element of the matrimonial ritual was part of a larger project. The communists were trying to introduce a new social model in which popular traditions in general, as well as private rites, continued to be useful only to the extent that they served the new ideology, given the fact that the new religion was communism itself.

The contribution of Gabriela Boangiu ("The Symbolic Imagery of the Wedding Rituals in the Oltenia Area") has the additional quality of presenting samples of the nuptial ceremony typical to the Romanians in Oltenia (a historical area in southern Romania) in the form of the results of the investigations carried out by the author, some of them being particularly interesting (especially pp. 207–208) for the study of ritual resistance in modern times.

The same quality is noticeable in Emil Țircomicu's study that resulted from a survey in northeastern Serbia, in which the rites of passage in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Osnić village (Timoc) were observed. Here there are Romanian *rumûni* (as well as Romanians arriving from Romania in recent times) living together with Aromanians and Serbian populations. In this research, Fîru Păunel, a former teacher and folk collector, was chosen as the sole subject. We are dealing with transcripts of inter-

views conducted in 2014 to document local customs at birth (pp. 240–242), at weddings (pp. 243–246) and at funerals (pp. 247–252). Finally, "Holidays and customs of the popular calendar" (pp. 252–258) ending with five pages of a necessary glossary of local terms.

Following the succession of "birth" – "marriage" – "death" there is a presentation of the most important rites of passage from traditional Cyprus, in the work proposed by Kalliopi Protopapa (pp. 266–285), an optimal invitation to reading, this time in the manner of a rich introduction as complex as necessary, the choice being probably motivated by the great wealth of the traditions attested in the island ("Rites of Passage: Childbirth, Marriage, Death in Traditional Cypriot society"). Given the absence of the citations or notes to the text that we would have expected, the work goes on with a sustained rhythm, almost reading as a narrative. The sources are then fully explained in the bibliography, where we are sent to find the three monographs (see Protopapa 2005; 2009; 2012), signed by the author and published by the Cyprus Research Centre.

Eszter Csonka-Takács ("From Birth to Baptism. An Examination of Rite of Passage Phenomenon at Gyimesközéplek") brings to the public the results of a field investigation in a small Hungarian community in Bacău County (Romania). The scholar attended baptisms and visited women in childbed; then, using the tripartite descriptive scheme, she describes the local specificities of birth habits and the introduction of the newly born baby into the community. The study brings a wealth of information about the stages of mother and son/daughter initiation, along with careful observations of the facts (pp. 287–359).

Marin Constantin's article ("The Liminal Experience of Interethnic Marriage in Contemporary Ethnographic Cultures in Romania") also provides information for those sociologists who aim to understand the dynamics of a mixed social group and its functioning in moments of alterity, espe-

cially at times of crisis generated by contact with foreign elements. The analysis uses the case of interethnic marriage to Romanians, or, as the author says, inter-marriage, in which case the ethnic difference is often compounded by religious difference. In Romania likewise, on the line of historical boundaries, endogamy has constituted and constitutes a form of socio-cultural survival of the minorities. Thus, the author recalls the case of the Romanian Orthodox citizens of Bulgarian ethnicity (as well as Catholics, we add) from Dudești (Timișoara) who, in contact with other nationalities, preferred marriage with the members of their own group (pp. 220–222) Tulcea (Crișan and Mila 23). As a rule, around these realities, the scientific debate focuses on the degree of self-isolation that can lead to endogenous behaviour in the minority community. The author asserts that interethnic matrimony is for society a typical case of a mechanism of “rapprochement between strangers and indigenous people” (Constantin is here quoting van Gennep 1996 [1909]: 34); in other words, from the perspective of rites of passage, heterogamy intends to include a foreign body in a group that is considered homogeneous, thus trying to bring it to the main identifying characteristics of the majority. In our specific case, “the choice of a different [...] ethnic partner keeps the bride or groom in a *liminal* position, that is, between the values of the native community and those of exogenous origin” (p. 229). Naturally, the purpose of the group is to assimilate (as much) as possible the new member, preserving the characteristics of the group “for full social and cultural integration” (p. 231).

Van Gennep’s most important lesson is perhaps the possibility – read necessity – of transgressing the disciplinary boundaries where the empirical study of reality requires it. In this respect, the editors are bringing to the readers in the third and last part of the book, “Rites of passage beyond frames”. That is to say they present some border

studies that support the applicability of the theoretical van-gennepian model to contiguous areas of investigation, such as literature (Jon Mackley’s study of the medieval chivalry novel *Sir Gawain and the Ritual Process*), archaeology (Brian Hoggard’s work *Threshold Guardians* and Valeria Fol’s *Masks and the World Beyond*) and religion (Hadas Hirsch’s article “Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca: Personal Appearance and Gender in Medieval Islam”, which speaks about the symbolism of gender differentiation through clothing).

In order to accurately encompass the intentions of the volume it is sometimes appropriate to reread the more significant parts; for example, at the closing of the book, the lecturer remains confident of the newly acquired knowledge supplemented by stimulating angst to go through new areas of research, as van Gennep would certainly have wanted.

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