
ARTICLES

MARRIAGE AND ETHNIC CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Culture is the most important characteristic of humanity, and it is reflected especially by the spiritual creation of a community. Within a community, there are certain focal points or generators of culture, which are defined by the fact that they form a certain type of spiritual sociality. Among these, the family is very important. As an act of founding and strengthening the family, marriage carries and generates family culture and, consequently, ethnic culture as well. In Romanian culture, marriage meant a very well-defined passage ritual that leads to the transfiguration of the spouses, especially the wife, to the consecration of the family union, and to the offspring's legitimation. At the same time, marriage is a mythical scenario, with Christian and pre-Christian religious implications being visible both in communal rituals and in popular, artistic, or spiritual creations. The changes made in the definition of culture, morality, and marriage, unsupported by ethnic tradition, destroy this connection. Marriage defined only from a social or legal point of view, the diversification of types of cohabitation that imitate or replace conjugal family, risk differentiating themselves from or even opposing the culturally accepted formulas and, thereby, changing the purpose of the marital relationship from founding and strengthening the family to one of opportunity, favourable to certain social groups.

Keywords: ethnicity, family, marriage, culture.

THEORETICAL CLARIFICATIONS

Culture, in one of its most “traditional” definitions, means the spiritual essence of an ethnic group’s creations and, at the same time, the spiritual source of the creativity itself. This is evident in what German authors (Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Schiller and others) described by the term *Kultur* in their dialogue with the Franco-Saxon world, bearer and promoter of the idea of civilization. In this horizon, the ethnicity has a spiritual nature, and it is the main cultural agent of the society.

The role of popular culture and mythology is fundamental to traditional societies, whose understanding is impossible if we ignore the collective imaginary, myths, rites, and symbols². In these societies, among the facts generating sociality –

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² Corina Bistriceanu Pantelimon, *Sociologia tradiției [Sociology of Tradition]*, Bucharest, Ethnology Publishing, 2007.

those that define the specific profile of the community – those generating faith are preferred. Death, birth or marriage are acts of faith and therefore also of sociality, as Roger Scruton pointed out, because they support or restore the solidarity of the group: on one hand, by linking together those who participate in ceremonies and rituals and, as such, know what to feel, how to feel and how to do this together; on the other hand, reintegrating the levels of humanity – the community of the living, the ancestors and the unborn – and distinguishing them again, by the initiative formulas assumed by the funeral service.

“Those things are sacred in which the spirit of the community has taken residence, and in which our destiny is at stake: as it is at stake, for example, in sexual feelings, in attitudes to children and parents, in the rituals of membership and initiation whereby the first-person plural – the ‘we’ – is formed”³.

Roger Scruton notes in his analysis of modern culture, by which he identifies the culture-cult relationship of affiliation. Religion also induces and presupposes an ethical vision (man is object of judgment, having long-term responsibility) and the emotional security that virtue practices guarantee. Virtue is knowing what to feel and how to express, and this teaching is condensed into rites, rituals, myths and beliefs, belonging to the common culture.

“The common culture tells him how and what to feel, and in doing so raises his life to the ethical plane, where the thought of judgement inhabits whatever he does”⁴.

Even if he does not emphasize the link between culture and the ethnic profile of the people’s community, the English philosopher related the most important part of culture – popular or common culture – to rituals and beliefs, to the specific spirituality of an ethnic group, the most intimately conditioned by the spirit of the national community.

In his meditation on culture, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru talks about the “spiritual pattern” that identifies the ethnic type. Ethnic culture is

“a complex of typical manifestations, which the individual finds at birth and to which he adapts without opposition”⁵.

Unconsciously assumed by this instinctive, unconditional adaptation, the ethnos becomes a conscious part of the social personality at the time of the emergence of the need for introduction towards the stranger, the *alter*. The community becomes an ethnic group, therefore, through the formation of the cultural and social consciousness, stratified ascendently by the Romanian philosopher: fundamental is the awareness of the community of origin, understood as blood bonds, kinship; then the knowledge of the community of language appears, of the expressive cultural specificity; the last and

³ Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture*, London, Blumsbury Publishing, 2005, p. 13.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁵ „Un complex de manifestări tipice, pe care individul le găsește la nașterea sa și la care el se adaptează fără împotrivire”, in Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Etnicul românesc. Naționalismul [The Romanian Ethnos. The Nationalism]*, Bucharest, Albatros Publishing, 1996, p. 35.

most difficult to assume seems to be the conscience of the community of historical destiny, the presence and historical affirmation of a particular culture. Unlike the ethical finality of folk culture at Scruton, Rădulescu-Motru, recognizing the non-material origin of culture (not the objects of creation, but the spiritual force that leads to creation is the essence of culture), emphasizes the role of the ethnic identification, of the conscious assumption of the cultural identity of a people and of the historical affirmation of its creative capacity.

Closer to Scruton's conception are Lucian Blaga's ideas⁶. The definition of culture is rendered by the style factor, which has a load which is mostly unconscious, abyssal⁷. The unity of style in the creation of an ethnic group can be seen especially by those outside it. The style cannot be easily understandable to consciousness, because it transfers into conscious contents by irradiating the unconscious into the conscious, by manifesting certain accents, attitudes, initiatives etc. The style appears most in the process of spiritual creation and bears the name of personality. In the case of Romanian culture, Blaga emphasizes the popular peasant profile – a childish profile, in the sense of preserving the mythical horizon of the development of and understanding life – of the most prolific spiritual creation.

In all of these three discussed systems, culture is linked to the distinctive community character of a people, *i.e.*, ethnicity, and to the construction of an identity and stability of the self-consciousness of an ethnic community; most often, this identity is specified in the confrontation with the stranger, the different one. Every society therefore develops systems of representations that describe and interpret for each member of the respective society the realms of reality: the cosmos, the social world, the body, space, time, etc. There are certain differences between representations; some, strongly integrated into the common culture, are “long-term” representations: those that explain family relations, hierarchical relationships, the sacred and the profane, life and death, moral good and evil, etc.; others are representations in which intervene certain “generators of knowledge” specific to the historical context, “short life representations”, whose capacity of cultural integration is lower: representations on personal happiness or success, on wealth, even the social order, generally those associated with knowledge within the framework of everyday life. The social representations or ideas about reality and the values attached to it are those that generate facts, organizations, social structures at least to the same extent as they themselves are generated by the objective, external reality.

The cultural capacity of the ethnic group is measurable in the cultural institutions it has. Its cultural incapacity is reflected in the predominant adoption of “short-lived” representations, in the replacement of focal points of cultural

⁶ Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii [The Trilogy of Culture]*, Bucharest, Universal Literature Publishing, 1969.

⁷ While to Freud, the unconscious' content stems from the conscious mind, and to Jung, from compensatory contents, from intuitions or from ancestors' experiences, for Lucian Blaga the unconscious has an organized structure, more stable and more complex than conscience itself.

irradiation with noncultural, anti-cultural or pseudocultural instances. Such an intervention in the cultural being of an ethnic community equals the identity dismissal of that community and cannot be legitimized by any particular process of civilization that would involve it. We will illustrate the consequences of such anti-cultural intervention on the case of marriage.

THE EUROPEAN MARRIAGE'S CULTURAL ROOTS

In the Indo-European culture, the family is a structure supported by two axes: lineage and marriage. The most important is the lineage, powerful from a biological point of view (as a form of physical reproduction of human society), from an economic one (as a way of perpetuating the material heritage of the family, and also as a way of belonging, of continuity between a sacralised space and the family), from a normative one (the values and norms that guide the life of the family group), from a spiritual and cultural one (the domestic cult, the formulas of artistic creation). Marriage is the bond that legitimates and protects descendants. Therefore, it is subordinate, but necessary for family continuity. It seems to have been regulated from the beginning by firm prescriptions: the marital selection, the principles and consequences of marriage, its purpose were the main objects for moral-religious regulation. Incest, for example, was considered by dichotomic thinking the transition point from nature to culture (Claude Levi-Strauss, 1949) or from animality to humanity (Freud, 1913)⁸.

In ancient European culture, marriage was known primarily as an initiation ritual involving the establishment of a new home or family by the transition of the young woman from a virgin status to a mother status. In Émile Benveniste's research⁹, the Indo-European kinship system was dominated by the patriarchal family culture, where the central term was *pater* father. Its dominant use was mythological – this is the most important argument for considering the system of affinity not only as a social reality, but above all as a cultural entity. Jupiter, the ruler of the great Greek pantheon, is a name derived from a family designation, namely *Dyes Pater* or *Zeus Pater*. From the meaning of “founder”, “civilizer”, *pater* formed the family of terms *patrius* (which relates to the world of the father), *patria* (place of ancestors, in the strict spatial sense of the term, as the location of the founding roots). To assign the strict family meaning of biological descent there was the term *atta*, form which gave in the Vedic, Greek, Latin and Romanian languages the word *tata*, a form for childish, affectionate address.

⁸ Nicolae Constantinescu, *Etnologia și folclorul relațiilor de rudenie [Ethnology and Folklore of Kinship]*, Bucharest, Universe Publishing, 2000, pp. 96–99.

⁹ Emile Benveniste, *Vocabularul instituțiilor indo-europene [The Vocabulary of the Indoeuropeas Institutions]*, Bucharest, Paideia Publishing, 1999.

For the mother, the Indo-Europeans used *mater*, which also had its family correspondent in *anna*. This pair may lead to the hypothesis that there was also a maternal mythological hypostasis similar to the paternal, patriarchal one, but much older and almost forgotten within the Indo-European vocabulary. The social, cultural and legal status of the mother was designated by *matrimonium*, a construction which, although similar in constitution to the term *patrimonium*, had a different meaning. Subsequently, in the Romance languages, including Romanian, *matrimonium* means the state inaugurated by marriage. According to linguistic analysis, marriage itself was to Indo-Europeans an action, a ritual, involving two specialized terms, *the man* (the dynamic part, the one who “takes” a woman for marriage) and *the woman*, found in a double stance involved in any passage rite: before marriage, the woman was the virgin, the young girl (*mari*); after marriage she became the mother, the wife, the mistress of the household (*mater*).

The marriage ceremony, in both Greek and Roman societies, involved the same stages: *enghyesis* (gr.) or *tradio* (lat.) – the ceremony of separation of the young girl from her father’s house, whom she had honoured until that time and the one who had protected her; *telos* (gr.) or *deductio in domum* (lat.) – the leading of the girl towards husband’s house; she was covered with white veils, as during the great religious ceremonies; *pompé* (gr.) or *confarreactio* (lat.), meaning the initiation of the young woman into the worship of the new household’s cult, by touching the sacred fire, the lustral water, offering a sacrifice on the household altar and sharing a ritual food (a fruit or a cake) with her new husband¹⁰. Once married, the two obtained the status of parents and leaders of the domestic group.

Marriage was, therefore, a cultural manifestation, through which a unity of worship was born, statutes were consecrated, specialized sacerdocies (of the spouses) were inaugurated, ceremonies were to become mandatory in the newly established family unit. Domestic morality recommends obedience to the wife and commanding to the husband, but also mutual respect. They are not two people bound by particular feelings or interests but share a responsibility that transcends each of them. They carry the same title in the family: *pater familias* – *mater familias* to the Romans, *oikodespótes* – *oikodespoina* to the Greeks, *grihapati* and *grihapatni* to the Hindus. The same principle of the family status bond is suggested in the formula that the Roman women uttered at marriage: “*Ubi tu Caius, ego Caia*” (“*Everywhere you are Caius, I will be Caia*”). He is the leader of the cult, and she is the executor of a large number of rituals, especially those relating to domestic religion. She does not hold the religion by birth, but by delegation; she is not the master of the domestic altar but is initiated into domestic worship of the husband’s family by marriage. She cannot represent the ancestors since she does not descend from them and she herself will not become an ancestor. However, the wife has her own domain and specific rights. Where there is no wife, there are no offspring, and household worship is

¹⁰ George Duby and Philippe Aries (eds.), *Istoria vieții private [A History of Private Life]*, Vol. I, Bucharest, Meridiane Publishing, 1994.

insufficient and incomplete. According to Plutarch, to Romans the presence of the wife is so necessary in carrying out sacrificial rituals that a priest could lose his priesthood while remaining a widower¹¹.

Subsequently, in the culture of Western Christianity, marriage became a sacrament celebrated in the church, a public temple, open not only to families, but to all members of the parish; it tends to refer to itself as an institution *per se*, preceded by the engagement. The cultural elements introduced by the Christian church were the prohibition of incest and the consent of the two young partners, transfigured as an oath before God¹². Sexual roles are defined according to the new religion, in which women and men are equal before God. According to some fathers of early Christianity (Evagrius and his Latin translator, John Cassian), women and men must conform to the angelic model of life which lacks sexuality. Even within the marital relationship, it is good to limit sexuality only to the act of conception, outside of which the husband and wife can live as brother and sister. Fertility is God's gift after man's expulsion from heaven, the compensation for death after the original sin, and the blessing of marital union; however, apart from the birth of children, Christian marriage can have other meanings. Starting from the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians of Paul the Apostle, St. John Chrysostom says that procreation was important for humanity in the time of the First Testament. The New Testament implies a new family morality that has ascetic concern and sexual abstinence at its centre, and for which conception is of secondary importance. The reasons for this change are: 1) the earth has been filled with people; 2) Belief in the resurrection and the afterlife triggered with the coming of Jesus Christ relativizes the importance of survival through followers; 3) women, but especially men can be parents of spiritual sons, not necessarily of natural ones. The marital roles and relationships consecrated by marriage are therefore, through Christianity, resettled in a new cultural interpretation, through which a new type of religiousness, sociality and morality are established¹³.

With modernity into play, marriage is "civilized" in the sense of exiting the cultural, moral, religious sphere. The new ethics of duty is formulated around the principle "must be"; as an enlightened idea, it is linked to law, as a complementary notion, designating the moral obligations of citizens to the state and society. And duty demands obedience, like the religion's divinities:

"The ancient religious devoutness was prevailed by the modern, hyperbolic religion of 'it's your duty'"¹⁴.

¹¹ Fustel de Colanges, *Cetatea antică [The Ancient City]*, Bucharest, Meridians Publishing, 1984, pp. 66–80.

¹² Jacques Le Goff, *Omul medieval [The Middle Age Man]*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 1999.

¹³ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Etica procreației în învățătura Sfinților Părinți [The ethics of procreation in the teaching of the Holy Fathers]*, Bucharest, Sophia Publishing, 2003, pp. 78–97.

¹⁴ „Străvechii datorii religioase i-a urmat religia modernă, hiperbolică, a lui «ai datorია»”, in Gilles Lipovetski, *Amurgul datoriei [The Twilight of Duty]*, Bucharest, Babel Publishing, 1996, p. 35.

Marriage and sexual morality for a long time remained subordinate to Christian morality (especially through the confession practiced by women, through which the Church managed to impose pre-marital purity and fidelity in marriage). This overlap between secular and religious morality lasted until the 20th century. In parallel, however, there is a current of promoting sexual libertarianism and the liberalization of morals, through the practice of contraception, the spread of naked feminism, obscene writings, abortion and the regulation of divorce. Only at this point can we observe a slow process of deculturalization of marriage, in which the marriage contract is deprived of any moral or spiritual connotation, where the marital roles are no longer prescribed and they no longer imitate any supra-individual pattern, where even the roles of parents are challenged and replaced by vague and non-cultural concepts such as “parenthood” or “parenting”.

SOME TRAITS OF MARRIAGE IN ROMANIAN CULTURE

Southeast European societies, much less politicized than Western ones, predominantly rural, have not experienced the same evolution of marriage. Given their folkloric societies, they do not retain much information about the typical wedding ceremony. Instead, as traditional societies, in which changes have arrived late and with difficulty, they retain until recently or even to present, features of an ancient marriage ritual.

Marriage means the establishment of a new household, the opening of the continuing family; its etymology (*cășă-torie*) refers to the home, household or family. Although the emphasis on continuity is not so pressed in Romanian family culture, compared to Mediterranean ones, for example, marriage is in our popular culture, mandatory for everything that is born and is about to die; it is the peak of existence in this world, the core of universal cyclical existence. The marriage imperative results in continuity with a greater probability and efficiency even than the dynastic imperatives that require at least one descendant worthy to continue the bloodline. The two are, in fact, different forms of continuity: the dynastic one is historical, having to affirm the maintenance of a heritage; the wedding as immanence is anhistoric, fulfilling a cycle of cosmic equilibrium. After passing childhood, the threshold to the maturity is the belonging to the young people social structures (*i.e.*, the ones who participate to the youth dance, *hora*) and, most importantly, the wedding, the transition from the role of one's child to that of one's parent. Not only is the bride finally separated from the life that she had until now, but also the groom who, shaved and ritually trimmed, experience the initiatic transformation from a boy to a man. And he goes through the same ritual scenario of forgiveness, even if he will remain, after marriage, in the parental household: he will no longer be the same person, but another, substantially different one.

Wedding is, in Romanian culture, part of the natural and inevitable destiny of any form of life. It is the action that saves the individual from the smallness and

perishability of his condition: without the eternity that precedes them and the hereafter that will follow them, anyone is without significance. However, each individual must be the bridge between the two eternities, between the world from which he comes and the one to which he must participate, in absolute solidarity with the totality. This bond is made at the very moment of the wedding, by conception. As such, neither animals, nor plants, nor the dead¹⁵, nor the crazy can escape this fate – and the traditional calendar has kept certain moments for celebrating everyone’s weddings¹⁶. Here we recall, for their beauty, but also for the remembrance of the cultural richness of traditional Romanian society, the customs of separating the bride from the virgin state. We use the ethnographic collections, especially the monograph that Simion-Florea Marian, a member of the Romanian Academy, dedicated to the cycle of family life and about which Ovidiu Bârlea said that it has “a durability that seems to increase with the passage of time”. The forgiveness that is asked by dying people before giving their soul, is also taken by brides, before going to marriage. When she leaves her parent’s home, she kneels to listen the oration of the *colăcier* (the bearer of the wedding sacred bread) who asks for parental mercy and blessing in her name. Then,

“she stands up and takes forgiveness from all who are present, beginning first with his father and, passing through all, ending with the youngest member. Even from the newborn in the swing, if it’s there, she takes forgiveness, asking each one in particular to forgive her”¹⁷.

Simion Florea Marian, in his encyclopaedia which talks about wedding and marriage in traditional Romanian culture, counts twenty-seven moments of preparation for the wedding, thirty-four events that constitute the wedding itself and

¹⁵ Gail Klingman, *Nunta mortului [The Wedding of the Dead]*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2005.

¹⁶ Ion Ghinoiu, *Obiceiuri populare de peste an [Popular Customs over the Year]*, Bucharest, Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1997, pp. 138–140.

¹⁷ „(Mireasa) se scoală din genunchi și-și ia iertăciune de la toți cei de față, începând, mai întâi, de la tatăl său și, perindându-i pe toți, sfârșește cu cel mai mic. Chiar și de la copilul din leagăn, dacă este, își ia iertăciune, rugând pe fiecare îndeosebi ca s-o ierte”, Meanwhile, one of the wives present at the scene sings a very emotional and slow song:

„Frunză verde-amărăciune,

Ia-ți copilă iertăciune,

De la mamă, de la nene,

De la ceriul cel cu stele.

De la frați, de la surori,

De la grădina cu flori;

De la strat cu busuioc,

De la flăcăi, de la joc;

De la strat cu tămâiță,

De la fetele cu găță;

Din ogradă, de la poartă,

De la fetele cu coadă;

De la uncheși și mătuși

Din tindă și de la uși”, in Simion Florea Marian, *Nunta la români [The Romanian Wedding]*,

Bucharest, Word and Soul – National Culture Publishing, 1995, p. 282.

four more ritual scenarios consecutive to the wedding¹⁸. Vasile Scurtu finds almost fifty terms of kinship that denote the roles given by marriage and the relatedness obtained through alliance¹⁹. Marriage inaugurates a whole culture and society with well-defined and differentiated beliefs, values, roles, relationships and structures.

The culture of marriage is deeply spiritual and extremely rich. The wedding reenacts mythical scenarios and rituals, with its setting and officiants transforming into initiatory realities. The preparations are numerous and meticulous, aiming to find the most auspicious dates and circumstances. The wedding priests, known as *nuni* (godparents) are the ones who officiate the ritual union of the couple, supporting them or even substituting them in the most perilous parts of the wedding ceremony²⁰, giving them advice on how to establish and sustain a family, a household. Once the ritualistic tests were passed, the groom and bride became mythical characters; they temporarily

“leave the profane world, enter the divine world, procreate, and after the wedding, they become ordinary people, householders of the village”²¹.

The wedding has both Christian and pre-Christian traits:

“Following the example of the divine couple’s mating during the wedding (...) and after the fulfillment of the two acts of consecration, one Christian, the marriage (the priest placing the imperial crowns on the heads of the young couple) and the other pre-Christian, the bread or cake breaking, ritual done by the godmother above the bride’s head, the grooms officially became capable of procreation, being two sacred characters who bring forth the child after nine months”²².

Romanian folklore contains the model of marriage and wedding in some of his most well-known myths. *Miorița*, the emblematic ballad of popular culture, culminates in the transcendental wedding of the initiated shepherd, the groom of a “*queen of the world*”, the death-wedding, which transcends the plans of earthly existence to that of a miraculous, supernatural existence; here, death fulfils, like a wedding, the human destiny in a higher plane than the earthly one. The wedding of the Sun and the Moon, another mythical representation of marriage, identifies the limits of the fundamental laws of nature, the only case where the wedding is impossible: the union of the stars, the siblings whose offspring would lead to the end of the world, the reversed wedding, whose culmination is not fertility, but death. We cannot mention the entire cultural

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ Vasile Scurtu, *Termenii de înrudire în limba română [Terms of Kinship in Romanian]*, Bucharest, Academy Publishing, 1966.

²⁰ Nicolae Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 214–216.

²¹ „(ei) părăsesc, temporar, lumea profană, pătrund în lumea divină, procrează și redevin, după nuntă, oameni obișnuiți, gospodari ai satului”, in Ion Ghinoiu, *Dicționar. Mitologie română [Dictionary. Romanian Mythology]*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Universe – Gold Publishing, 2013, p. 191.

²² „După modelul împerecherii cuplului divin în timpul nunții (...) și după împlinirea celor două acte de consacrare, unul creștin, cununia (așezarea de către preot a cununiilor împărătești pe capul tinerilor) și altul precreștin, colăcăria (ruperea colacului sau turtei de către nănașă deasupra capului miresei), mirii devin ați procreării, personaje sacre care aduc, după nouă luni, pruncul”, in *Ibidem*.

symbolism of marriage and wedding in Romanian tradition here; no single work could encompass such content alone. The statements made so far briefly illustrate a part of it. We conclude this chapter by emphasizing that the social reflection of marriage culture means the assigning of roles to the man and woman, primarily, with all the significance involved in this culture. The two are not individuals; the specificity of cultural existence is, in fact, that a person is never just an individual, meaning a person who lacks specific traits and powers, vocations, missions, and services that elevate them above their particular existence. The woman is a bride, wife, homemaker, and mother, and in these human and superhuman roles, she actualizes powers that are not rightly hers and can only manifest through her. Similarly, the man is a groom, a fulfilled person only through marriage. Even in contemporary Romanian society, marriage still takes place on three levels: traditional culture (preparations, feast, kinship wedding, and community ceremony), the Eastern Orthodox religion (the wedding service), and civil (the marriage contract).

THE WEDDING'S CIVILIZING AS A FORM OF ANTICULTURE

Modernity has always criticised family cultures and marriage. Individual freedom to choose alternative family arrangements and gender equality in all types of social relationships, including family relationships, are ideologies that are incompatible with any kind of culture, in any of the senses discussed in this article.

Freedom manifests itself as the possibility (not only theoretical but applied) to renounce: the stylistic matrices of material or spiritual creation, the supra-individual models, the implications of family life. The exit from culture begins, paradoxically, with the affirmation of the supremacy of reason. John Stuart Mill, concerned with finding the place of individual liberty, affirmed:

“The beliefs which we have most warrant for, have no safeguard to rest on, but a standing invitation to the whole world to prove them unfounded”²³.

This invitation, a condition of spiritual freedom, is however the end of faith, which cannot be subjected to questioning, but only to its denial; for a contested belief or religion cannot be improved through the contribution of human reason; just as gods cannot be ennobled by attributing human traits to them.

Equality, on the other hand, consecrated in Christianity as the unity of human condition before divine judgment and, in any cultural-communitarian formula, as the unity in relation to the idea of legitimate authority, becomes falsified in the process of its transfer from the strictly political sphere (equality before the law of any nature) to the social and familial sphere (equality between husband/wife, children and

²³ „Credințele cele mai îndreptățite nu au la baza lor nici o altă cheazășie decât invitația permanentă, adresată întregii lumi, de a dovedi că sunt nefondate”, in John Stuart Mill, *Despre Libertate [On liberty]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1994, p. 31.

parents, etc.). If we only focus on the effect that gender equality policies have in contemporary societies, we observe that what these policies have achieved, beyond establishing real equality in political and civil rights of men and women, is an ideological caricature resulting from the blending of substantial feminine and masculine traits. Their promoters are outraged by the persistence, even in the most advanced societies in this regard, of stereotypical gender behaviours. For example, women's resistance to giving up domestic responsibilities such as caring for children, managing intimacy, and preparing meals, as well as men's persistence in managing aggression and power in public spaces, are indisputable, despite the persistent encouragement of gender equality²⁴.

Apart from these two ideals of Western-European civilization, a third one has strongly emerged in the last 4–5 decades: happiness. It is no longer seen as a transindividual ideal, aiming to restore the primordial unity between humans and the divine, for example, but rather as a political and civic objective²⁵ and, above all, a human right. Contrary to the religious ethical vision which, for Roger Scruton, was specific to culture, contemporary society acquaints itself with intelligent ethics. Unfavorable to both the traditional moral values of antiquity (kindness, beauty, truth, temperance, courage, wisdom, justice) and those of Christianity (purity, humility, love), civilized society asserts itself only within the framework of urban life, where individualism, anonymity, promiscuity, permanent confrontation with strangers, the reduction (quantitatively and qualitatively) of the family, the scattering of kinship result in an “organizing chaos”, a perpetual and prolific dynamism, a fertile interactionism. The solution to controlling this ever-changing reality is “intelligent ethics”, which favors compromise, experimental solutions that take into account interests and particular conditions; “prudent ethics”, a way to “gain time against the evil and the people's pain”²⁶.

In *The Choice of Hercules: Pleasure and Duty in the 21st Century* (2007), A. C. Grayling analyzes the optimal model of life in the contemporary world. The myth of the Greek hero's choice is invoked as a pretext for meditation: enticed in two contrary directions, that of leisure and easy life, and that of toil and suffering, Hercules chooses the difficult and narrow path of virtue. The opposition implied by Hercules' choice is between premodern moralism (synonymous with terrorism and barbarism) and the civilization of welfare based on consumption; a specific “culture” is projected, dominated by objects, self-love (visible as an ethical imperative in narcissistic prescriptions: hygiene, sports, aesthetics, diet), psychologism, and information. Postmodern hedonism is no longer excessive but moderated, rationalized, pursuing “rationalized happiness” as its objective, which prevents the

²⁴ Martine Segalen, *Sociologia familiei [Family Sociology]*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2011, pp. 292–295.

²⁵ There are states which have happiness ministries, officials, and folders for efficiently managing happiness e.g., United Arab Emirates.

²⁶ Gilles Lipovetsky, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

potential guilt that could be associated with pure and sincere hedonism. A. C. Grayling demonstrates that the moral problems that ethics has previously concerned itself with “in vain” are, in fact, minor or unreal. Thus, the domain of “family values” and family culture itself proves to be a source of false problems. The nuclear family “is an urban Western industrial phenomenon of relatively recent origin, and it notoriously proves to be unsuccessful, suffocated by structural and ethical flaws”²⁷.

Sex and sexuality should be removed from moral concerns. “Anatomy is no longer destiny”, claims A.C. Grayling, and sexual behavior should be the same for both sexes. Sexual activity is good in itself because it provides satisfaction and establishes connections between people; as such, a reordering of values should liberate sexual relationships from taboos and restrictions. Death remains a problem that cultural models so far have not conveniently solved, according to the author. Convenient would be to relieve of the act of dying, a process that takes place while the person is still alive and should allow the free expression of his options. It is not the sacredness of life, but the quality of life that should be promoted. Thus, euthanasia is a moral good as long as it alleviates suffering. Finally, religion is immoral because it traumatizes, promotes inequalities, kills, etc.²⁸. Atheism, or the manifestation against religious morals, which seeks to control feelings and ideas, is a good attitude, with freedom of expression demonstrating the *maturation of an intellectual community*; thus, contemporary concerns regarding human rights and animal rights, which are much more comprehensive and rational than anything anticipated in religious morality, are encouraged²⁹.

According to the imperatives of civilization, marriage cannot and should not escape this new post-culture. It must open itself to new, non-cultural forms. For example, marriage that starts with the premise of its dissolution, through the conclusion of a prenuptial agreement; an understanding regarding the separate economic status of the spouses is intended to facilitate their separation not only in the case of divorce but also in an economically individualized conjugal “career”. This goes against the primary purpose of the institution of marriage.

According to Nicolae Constantinescu, the distinction between sexes, which laid the foundation for the first social division of labor, instituted not a disjunctive relationship of opposition among members of society, but rather one of complementarity. It is precisely this complementarity of the sexes that makes the union of individuals into family units through marriage a necessity, even an obligation, a sine qua non condition for social existence. The early “*specialization*” based on sex has made men and women dependent on each other, so that marriage is

²⁷ „(Familia nucleară) este un fenomen industrial urban occidental de origine relativ recentă – și se dovedește în mod notoriu neizbutit, fiind sufocată de defecte structurale și etice”, in A. C. Grayling, *Alegerea lui Hercule [The Choice of Hercules]*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2009, p. 93.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

seen, both from the outside and the inside, not so much as an expression of satisfying biological or psychological needs, but rather economic ones:

“(...) in most primitive societies (as well as, although to a lesser extent, in the rural classes of our society), marriage has an entirely different importance, not erotic but economic”³⁰.

Civil partnership or regulated cohabitation is another substitute for marriage born out of the political premise and historical moment marked by the anti-moral revolution of the youth of the 1960s–1970s, in which the liberation of love from bourgeois family values and the commitment of formalized marriage was demanded. The regulation of what was then requested to be deregulated is a self-negation of this formula of domestic coexistence. Currently, most European countries have formalized cohabitation, a form of pseudo-marriage plagued by internal contradictions.

Finally, diversity-based marriages, whether legally regulated or only proposed as measures to affirm freedom and diversity of individual sexual behaviors, contradict each of the formulas that have constituted the cultural basis of marriage: homosexual partnerships (another one of the commitments of Western civilization), those with animals, with real or virtual objects, with oneself, etc.

Norbert Elias (1939) saw civilization as the “expression of the self-awareness of the Western world”, a way of affirming the national consciousness of developed European states that synthesizes the elements through which the West considers itself superior to more “primitive” societies³¹. Western civilization seemed to be built in a complementary way to the ethnic cultures it could serve as a model or guide for political, social, or economic evolution or affirmation. However, the way this civilization defines marriage today openly opposes the culture associated with it.

CONCLUSION

As far as we are concerned, marriage is still a strong focal point of Romanian family and ethnic culture; the losses we would suffer by adopting the proposed anti-cultural models, in terms of individual identity, social cohesion, and spiritual creativity, can be irreparable.

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³⁰ „(...) în cele mai multe dintre societățile primitive (ca și – dar la un grad mai scăzut – în clasele rurale ale societății noastre), căsătoria prezintă o cu totul altă importanță, nu erotică, ci economică”, in Claude Levi-Strauss, quoted by Nicolae Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, 2000, pp. 104–105.

³¹ Norbert Elias, *Procesul civilizării [On the Process of Civilisation]*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2002, p. 49.

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