

THE GORANI WEDDING RITUAL – BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

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Abstract: In this paper I will attempt to determine which contents are present in individual memories of weddings and underline the contents which contribute to the formation of *commonplace memories* within personal memories. By studying individual personal memories of a ritual practice, I will attempt to answer questions about the relationship between individual and collective memory. In the paper I will also consider the issue of the influence of individual memories on the construction of ethnic identity.

The paper is based on an analysis of narrative discourse which has been adapted for ethnographic research. *The Gorani wedding ritual* represents a social practice which encompasses not only the influence of collective on personal remembrance and memory, but also the reverse. *The Gorani wedding ritual* is an example of a social holiday which, on a personal level creates a feeling of connection between individuals and their community, while on a collective level it creates conditions for the continuity of the Gorani community.

Keywords: *the Gorani wedding ritual*, personal (individual) remembrance and memory, collective remembrance and memory, *commonplace memories*, holiday, identity.

A. THE GORANI WEDDING RITUAL¹

The Empirical data available to me, as well as the information collected from domestic and foreign sources indicate that the wedding ritual represents an important segment of Gorani culture (Nikolić, 1995: 169-174; Divac, 1995: 195-202; Derans and Žeslen, 2011; Tončeva, 2012). Members of the Gorani community with whom I have spoken talked about the *Gorani wedding ritual* as a marker of the Gorani ethnic community.² In other words, they did not speak of it only as an important event in their personal lives, but also as something which is of great importance for the whole community. I have hypothesized that, if an event is of special importance, then it must take up *special space* in individual memory.³ This has led me to study personal memories of weddings which, according to the model given by Asman, belong to the group of “memories of ritual practice” (Asman, 2011: 68).

The wedding rituals I will be writing about I have dubbed *the Gorani wedding ritual* first and foremost because it is a type of wedding which is organized in the Gora region.⁴ My interlocutors consider this kind of

wedding ritual to be “a real Gorani wedding”. The weddings were considered as one of the life-cycle events within individuals’ lives.

B. WHERE, WHEN AND HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED

The fieldwork was conducted in 2012 and 2013 in Belgrade, and entailed interviews with members of the Gorani community.⁵ The sampling of interlocutors was random. The conversations were conducted with members of the older (older than 50), middle (between 30 and 50 years old) and younger (under 30) generations, the first, second and third generations of migrants who live in Belgrade.⁶ Because of this, the time period between the wedding and the moment of memory of it varies. My interlocutors were also of various educational backgrounds. It is also a fact that – through no fault of my own – most of my interlocutors were men, which is, itself, a topic for a different paper.

The interviews were conducted outside of private surroundings (apartments or houses) of my interlocutors, which is in part the consequence of the fact that I am still in the phase of establishing contacts and connections with the community. Aside from this, the discursive practices that are being studied are being studied from the *outside* (see Zlatanović, 2010: 129-139), which also represented an aggravating circumstance in establishing informal connections with interlocutors and spending time in their private surroundings. Because of this, one of the components of fieldwork is missing – participant observation, which is considered an important part of ethnological fieldwork (see Zlatanović, 2010: 130). All of this has led me to utilize the analysis of narrative discourse in this paper, in “a form adjusted to ethnographic research” (Zlatanović, 2012: 80).

Aside from the narratives, the analysis also focuses on video footage – DVD recordings of weddings – which can be viewed as “material support for living remembrance” (Asman, 2011: 29).⁷ However, they were not utilized during the interviews, so they could not have helped my interlocutors to remember the weddings or certain segments of them.⁸

C. BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

I have stated that the research focuses on the memories of “ordinary people” (Spasić, 2012: 578, cited in: Kuljić, 2011: 235), or rather, the memories which are “communicated face to face (...)” (Gillis, 2006: 176) and which differs from “other memories, some official and others commercialized.” (Gillis, 2006: 176, cited in: Nora, 1989: 7). In other words, the direction of the analysis goes from the individual to the collective level. The memories individuals have of their own weddings are considered, as well as the role of the individual within the collective memory. However, I begin with the premise that it is neither possible nor correct to consider these two types of memories as separate or isolated. I view the memory of individuals as a process which is “necessarily an intersubjective means of self-constitution, which always shapes the relationship toward others, toward the past and the future” (Kuljić, 2006: 219). I also view individual memory as a “form of deeply constructed narratives” (Brkljačić and Prlenda, 2006: 13). This, however, does not mean that I exclude the possibility that “individual forms of memory are shaped (...) under the influence of collective systems of remembrance.” (Kuljić, 2006: 111). In other words, when dealing with individual memories of weddings I acknowledge the influence of

collective remembrance on personal memory, because I assume that individual memory is inseparable from “the narrative structure of the value system of other forms of social interaction” (Kuljić, 2006: 69) and that memory is, after all, “a diverse and varying collection of material artifacts and social practices” (Brkljačić and Prlenda, 2006: 13, cited in: Klein, 2000: 130), meaning that it is a social phenomenon (Brkljačić and Prlenda, 2006: 13). I do not, however, ascribe greater significance to collective remembrance and memory than to the role of the subject in creating their own memories. This means that I accept that personal memories of a wedding is a form of (re)construction of the past, but I do not consider this (re)construction a pure projection of collective remembrance. Rather, I assume that it is greatly dependent on the individual and the individual’s acceptance of collective patterns and beliefs.⁹ Individual memories are also “determined by the present” (Kuljić, 2006: 72) and they change in accordance with “socially desirable values” (Kuljić, 2006: 72). This means that I accept that an individual “actively, in accordance with the needs of the present, combines, shapes and reevaluates the contents of his or her own memories” (Kuljić, 2006: 72). This also means that I acknowledge that the influence of collective remembrance and memory on personal narratives is not the same over the course of an individual’s life, and changes in accordance with different social and other life circumstances (see Kuljić, 2006: 63-80).

In the paper I also consider remembrance as being “a part of personal and collective identity” (Kuljić, 2006: 6). “Remembrance and identity are two of the most used terms in contemporary public and private discourse” (Gillis, 2006: 171). “The parallel lives of these two concepts point to the fact that the idea of

identity hinges on the idea of remembrance and vice versa.” (Gillis, 2006: 171) I do accept that “memories and identities are not fixed, they are representations or constructs of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena” (Gillis, 2006: 171) and that “identities and remembrances are rather selective, inscriptive more than descriptive, and serve certain interests and ideological positions.” (Gillis, 2006: 172) And it is “our responsibility to decode them in order to uncover the relations which they create and perpetuate” (Gillis, 2006: 173, cited in: Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

All of the ideas stated above are not conditioned by my commitment to a certain theoretical approach in researching memory; they are backed by empirical evidence gathered through research of personal memories of weddings. At the same time, I believe that, throughout the analysis of these kinds of memories it is hard to adhere to only one approach, because “no system and no scientific discipline provide us with a complete image of human remembrance.” (Bojm, 2005: 107). This has encouraged me to consider personal wedding memories from different perspectives, but within the context generated by the relationship between personal and collective memory, as well as the influence of these kinds of memory on the construction of the ethnic identity of both individuals and the community. With all this in mind, I emphasize that this text should be read as only one of many possible views on the subject of remembrance and memories of the *Gorani wedding ritual*.¹⁰

D. MEMORY OF THE WEDDING

It turns out that not all segments of the event are equally remembered by my interlocutors. They had

clearer memories of the segments of the weddings which referred to them personally, and less of those that referred to their partners. Thus, they remember those segments of the wedding in which they did not participate themselves (for example, when the bride is preparing to exit the house of her parents) through narratives they heard from other people and from video footage. There are also differences with regard to the ages of my interlocutors. The memories of my younger interlocutors whose weddings took place five to ten years ago are more detailed – the descriptions of the ritual practices are clearer than in the narratives of people whose weddings took place more than twenty years ago.

What merits special attention is the existence of certain contents which appear in the memories of all interlocutors regardless of how much time had passed since their weddings. These are certain instances which I have termed *commonplace memories*.¹¹



Photo 1 Women's wear ("kapa" – a type of headgear and "terlik" – a kind of coat), the Village of Dikance 2009.

Commonplace memories are: the Gora region, the music ("tupani/tapani" which are a kind of drum, and "zurle", a wind instrument,¹² the costumes – especially women's wear ("kapa" – a type of headgear and "terlik" – a kind of coat)¹³, as well as some segments of the ritual: for men it was leaving the village, or going to get the music ("tupani"/"tapani"), and for women the painting of the bride's face,¹⁴ the taking of the bride ("mlajnesta" /"manesta") from her parents' home ("svatoji"),¹⁵ "stramuvanje"¹⁶ and "izlazak na voda"¹⁷ (see Photo 2).



Photo 2 "Izlazak na voda" in the Village of Dikance 2009.

It is important to note that weddings are normally organized in the center of the village, in a very public space.¹⁸



Photo 3 Dancing the Kolo in the Center of the Village (Village of Leštane 2003).

Based on the personal memories of the people I had spoken to, I came by the knowledge that weddings in the Gora region are organized in the summer when everyone is there for the holidays (see: Derans, Žeslen, 2011: 45-46), that all of one's neighbors from the village are invited, that 25 years ago a wedding was celebrated for a whole week while now it's just 3 days, that civil unions exist but are not treated as anything special, and that weddings in mosques are remembered only by some of the younger interlocutors.¹⁹

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Analysis indicates that the personal memory of a wedding carries with it the *burden* of community – the community *imposes* its values and symbols and influences the details and extent of an individual's memory. Therefore, it would be incorrect to think that an individual's memory of his or her wedding doesn't intersect with collective remembrance and memory. I con-

sider this to be, to a certain extent, the consequence of the fact that *the Gorani wedding ritual* is in fact organized and intended to be *an event to remember*, and not just to be remembered by the bride and groom and their family, but by everyone in the Gora region. Thus, the remembering of a wedding combines individual, local, ethnic and family memories (see: Gillis, 2006: 184, Asman, 2011: 21-22). It seems that this is greatly influenced by the fact that there are a lot of elements which symbolically represent the Gorani community present during the wedding celebration (Antonijević, 1995: 76-89, Hasani, 2003, <http://studiokrstec.piczo.com/goraslike>), up. Zlatanović, 2011(2): 77-87). This is also enforced by the fact that interlocutors who didn't have a "true Gorani wedding" *remember their weddings differently*. In other words, their narratives also contain certain *commonplace memories*, but these display the connection between the individuals and their ethnic identity to a much lesser degree than is the case with interlocutors who had had a "true Gorani wedding". Despite the fact that personal memories of weddings contain elements touching on ethnic identity, the importance ascribed to these elements and the measure to which they will be retained still varies from one individual to the next and from one situation to another.²⁰ In this regard I can say with certainty that *commonplace* memories of individuals are formed under the influence of certain collective models of remembering, with the selection of contents which will be remembered in greater detail, as well as the extent to which the memory will stay close to the collective model, depends on the individual's personal (subjective) choice (Kuljić, 2006: 68-69). That is to say, my interlocutors retain the same contents in their memory, but they do not remember them the same way

because “not all components of personal remembrance translate equally into the social.” (Kuljić, 2006: 63). Besides, a person’s memory of their wedding contains both a “personal” aspect (seen here as “an emotional and cognitive response to experience” (Kuljić, 2006: 11, Kuljić, 2006: 64-65)), and an aspect which represents a piece of the collective image of the past.²¹ With regard to this, I wish to state that collective memory of one's wedding represents a collective framework which only “marks, but does not define individual memory” (Bojm, 2005: 23). At the same time, the *Gorani wedding ritual* and the personal memory of it is not imposed nor *conducted* by the community in the same way in which that is the case with collective remembrance and memory that pertain to state, national and/or religious holidays (see: Asman, 2011, Kuljić, 2006, Brkljačić and Prlenda (ed.), 2006). This, I believe, has to do with differences in context – a wedding is an event in the life of an individual, and not one which marks the past of a political community or group, or official history.

The area in which *Gorani weddings ritual* take place plays a large part in the shaping of individual and collective remembrance and memory.²² In this case it turned out that the Gora region, and the villages situated in this geographic area represent not only symbols of ethnic identity of individuals and the community, but also “anchorings (...) of memory” (Assmann, 2006: 54). This example also shows that “civil space” (Gillis, 2006: 191) is semiotized (see: Assmann, 2006: 70) because the villages in the Gora region “have special symbolic meaning and serve as spatial coordinates for a sense of belonging” (Kuljić, 2006: 180). In that sense they can be viewed as inalienable elements of identity (see: Kuljić, 2006: 181).

Based on the contents which make up the phenomenon which was studied (the gathering of a large number of members of the Gorani community in one place, solidarity, manifestations of the symbols of the ethnic community – Gorani speech (or language), costumes, dances, music etc.) we can see that the *Gorani wedding ritual* tends to be practiced in accordance with a model which entails the inclusion of the larger community into the whole event. In a way, it represents a “constructed flow which adheres to relations and customs” (Kuljić, 2006: 12), or rather, a social event within the Gorani community, a kind of social holiday.²³

It has also been displayed that the *Gorani wedding ritual* fits not only into the physical but also the chronological frame of social time. The weddings are organized in a specific period during the year.²⁴ Thus, they represent “collective *experienced time*” (Assmann, 2006: 54). *The Gorani wedding ritual* as a kind of holiday suggests not only “what we should remember” (Kuljić, 2006: 173), but also “cements the yearly cycle of memory” (Kuljić, 2006: 173). These kinds of memories display the values of the community to which an individual belongs (see: Stevanović, 2009: 114-115).²⁵

If we start from the fact that continuity implies identity (Gillis, 2006: 178) and that there is no “identity without continuity” (Kuljić, 2006: 209), then we can safely say that the *Gorani wedding ritual* represents a communication channel through which the continuity of the Gorani community and identity is sought (see: Asman, 2011: 19). At the same time it enables the repetition of content which is considered iconic for the Gorani community. That way, it simultaneously displays the “connection between collective remembrance and the construction of identity” (Kuljić, 2006:

10).²⁶ The Gorani wedding ritual also enables certain elements to be remembered and *revived* through memory. In accordance with the meaning and importance it has both for individual members and the community itself, the *Gorani wedding ritual* can safely be considered one of *the monuments* of Gorani culture.

E. IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

It is clear that *the Gorani wedding ritual* not only occupies a special place in personal memory, it also represents a form of collective memory. Also, remembering this ritual as well as the ritual itself as a form of social remembrance aren't *new ways* which replaced *old forms* of memory and remembering (see: Gillis, 2006: 185-186, 187, 188, 190). In other words, the *Gorani wedding ritual* was not created by "new conditions" (Gillis, 2006: 186). It became a form of collective remembrance and memory first and foremost because it is an event connected to the private lives of individuals which, none the less, takes place in the public sphere, and contains a myriad of symbols of ethnic identity and brings about the merger of different "identity planes" (Asman, 2011: 68-71).

ENDNOTES

- [1] The paper represents the results of research conducted as part of the *Multiethnicity, multiculturalism, migrations - contemporary processes* project (no. 177027) funded entirely by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.
- [2] Goranci or Gorani are ethnonyms for members of the Gorani ethnic community. There is no fundamental difference between the two. It is thought that the names Goranin/Goranka and Gorani (pl.) are older, while the names Goranac/Goranka and Goranci (pl.) are newer (see: Mladenović 2001: 33). My interlocu-

Finally, I can conclude that individual remembrance and memory cannot be constituted and maintained without a social relational framework (see: Assmann, 2006: 52). "The subject of remembrance and memory always remains the individual, but it depends on 'frameworks' which organize his or her memory" (Assmann, 2006: 52). "In other words: the individual remembrance of a human being are built through the person's participation in communication processes." (Assmann, 2006: 53). However, as far as personal memories of *Gorani weddings ritual* are concerned, I can conclude that, not only is there an influence of collective remembrance and memory on personal memory, but the reverse process is evident as well. As far as the collective model, as a framework, influences the contents of personal memory, so far individual remembrance and memory - being organized in accordance with a collective framework - enables it to reproduce and last. In that sense, I can conclude that not only collective, but also individual remembrance and memory influences the present by "providing people with a symbolic framework, designing their existence and enabling them to make sense of the world." (Kuljić, 2006: 215).

- tors refer to themselves as Goranac/Goranka and use the term Goranci to denote members of their community. Thus I thought it justified to use these names in the paper. Translator's note: I have used the term *Gorani* as an adjective to describe something as belonging to or coming from the Gorani/Goranci people.
- [3] In the paper I use the terms 'memory' and 'remembrance', because I wish to stress that I view memory as "a process which takes place solely in the direction of present towards the past" (Stevanović 2009: 102), while "remembrance denotes a

- process that goes both ways” (Stevanović 2009: 102). “Remembrance is, thus, regulated, while memory isn’t, or at least doesn’t have to be” (Stevanović 2009: 103).
- [4] The Gora region is a valley in the mountains situated “south of Prizren, between the highest peaks of Šar Mountain, Korab and Koritnik” (Hasani, 2000: 33). Because of its closeness to Prizren, this part of the Gora region is also often called Prizrenska Gora (see: Mladenović, 2001).
- [5] The interview as a “method of gathering data about the past (...)” (Brkljačić and Prlenda, 2006: 11) because of the selectivity of remembrance and subjectivity of interlocutors is not a very precise method (Brkljačić and Prlenda, 2006: 11). I do however postulate that, liberated from the “imperative of objectivity and considered as the space of precious insight into the subjective experiences of historical actors, interviews” (Brkljačić and Prlenda, 2006: 11) are a “first rate source (...) for studying the mechanisms of remembering and the structure of memory” (Brkljačić and Prlenda, 2006: 11).
- [6] There are 7767 members of the Gorani community living in Serbia. 5328 of them live in Belgrade (see: Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2011. u Republici Srbiji, str. 14 i 20). Because of this I have conducted my research in Belgrade and not some other city in Serbia.
- [7] The empirical data which I am utilizing in the paper refers to practices observed in some villages in the Prizrenska Gora region (Dikance, Globočica, G. Krstac, Kukuljane, Leštane, Mlike). During the course of my research I have also used unpublished ethnographic data collected by ethnologist Desanka Nikolić in the field in 1992 and 1993 in some Gorani villages (D. i G. Rapča, Ljubovište, Brod, Vranište, G. Krstac). I would like to thank my colleague D. Nikolić on the material and the help she provided me with over the course of my own fieldwork.
- [8] My interlocutors were asked to describe their own weddings to me. I tried not to influence my interlocutors to remember things they didn’t think of immediately. I only asked additional questions when I was unfamiliar with a term or a segment of the wedding ritual.
- [9] My basic assumption is that the past that an individual remembers is “never authentic history, but a fluid image of the past in which personal, group, family and generational experiences intersect, permeate, become newly emphasized, montaged and distorted” (Kuljić, 2006: 71). It is “never the naked subjective perspective, but a complex, dynamical creator of meaning of the world” (Kuljić, 2006: 304).
- [10] This relationship could also be viewed through the prism of nostalgia.
- [11] This term is not used in the meaning which is usually ascribed to it (see Kuljić, 2006: 179-184), I assume that in personal memory there are certain *places of memory* which appear in the narratives of all interlocutors, which means they can be considered *common places of memory* or, Translator’s note: *common-place memories*.
- [12] Interlocutors state that “zurle” and “tupani” are musical instruments which must be played at a *Gorani wedding ritual*. They remember certain melodies and state that each segment of the ritual has an accompanying melody (the ‘nibet’ is an example of such a melody).
- [13] Memories of the costumes are primarily tied to the appearance and color of the costume and its material value, as well as its symbolic importance. Thus, for example, a black „terlik“ symbolizes the status change from a girl into a woman (see Photo 1 into this paper – a bride is standing between her sisters-in-law).
- [14] The bride’s face is painted by a „maimarica“, a woman who is good at the practice.
- [15] My interlocutors state that it is customary for the bride to be taken from her parents’ home on horseback, and for her to circle the village. The bride is not taken on horseback if there wasn’t an engagement before the wedding.
- [16] The bride is supposed to “stramuje” – to act shy or show that she can control her emotions, that she possesses the qualities which are expected of her as a woman in the community she belongs to (according to my interlocutors).
- [17] In the morning, after the “wedding night”, at the fountain in the center of the village the bride helps her mother and father in law and other close relatives to wash their faces (see Photo 2 into this paper).
- [18] My interlocutors state that there was a brief pause between 1999 and 2003. In this period the weddings were organized in restaurants in Belgrade or in the Gora region for safety reasons. Such weddings were also organized in the Gora region during socialism, but they were less common than those that took place in the centers of the villages (see Photo 3 into this paper).
- [19] Up until seven years ago there was a segment of the *Gorani wedding ritual* which entailed the imam coming to the groom’s parents’ house to perform the religious wedding ceremony, but it never occurred that the wedding would take place in the mosque, as it does today, my interlocutors state. Although the

wedding in a mosque is not represented at all, add interlocutors.

- [20] "Of course, the structures which incite retention change over time or center remembrance on other priorities." (Kuljić, 2006: 66) It follows that "the harmonization of the traces of the past is shaped by interests" (Kuljić, 2006: 66).
- [21] It could be said that this is due to the difference between remembrance and memory (see: Kuljić, 2006: 11), but it isn't. My basic assumption is that an individual has different experiences and contents stored in their memory of their wedding, or rather they have contents which pertain to different aspects of their identities – they are simultaneously, a spouse, a relative, a friend, a member of the ethnic community etc.
- [22] This can be viewed as one of the ways to "control collective remembrance" (Stevanović, 2009: 106), as well as to reshape it (Stevanović, 2009: 106).
- [23] Contemporary Kosovo political elites speak of *Đuren* as a "Gorani national holiday" (<http://www.vila-goranka.de/?p=2318>, last visited 17.9.2012.). My interlocutors view *Đuren* as a holiday of springtime, when young people meet and engagements are made. From the contents of this holiday (see: Antonijević, 1995: 84-86) it could also be inferred that it isn't celebrated as a "national holiday". This example shows how governments can influence both personal and collective remembrance when it comes to celebrating certain social holidays (see: Kuljić, 2006: 11, 174-179).
- [24] There is a summer timetable of weddings through which the public can be informed as to who, on what day and in which village organizes a wedding celebration (<http://www.stilrapca.webs.com>, last visited 15.12.2012.).
- [25] It remains to be determined what these notions of value are based on, how these objects were picked and how value was ascribed to them (see Gillis, 1996).
- [26] It is a fact that the symbols which are used have the function of connecting and displaying fellowship and identity. Despite this it remains an open question to what extent the wedding is better or worse at accomplishing that compared to other events (the celebration of *Đuren* for example), or in comparison with the use of some other symbols/markers of identity (for example, speech (language)). Because of this, I can say that the *Gorani wedding ritual* represents one, but by no means the only event which can contribute to the reproduction and continuing of Gorani identity.

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