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Relations of Dance Culture and Social Structure in a Moldavian Rural Community

Rezumat
Relaţiile culturii dansului şi structura ei socială
într-o comunitate rurală moldoveană

Structura socială a aşezărilor ceangăilor moldoveni şi sistemele sociale care se formează în scenele de dans determină în mod semnificativ posibilitatea participării la ocazii de dans şi desfăşurarea formală şi stilistică a dansurilor. Sexul, vârsta şi starea civilă a membrilor comunităţii, precum şi poziţia specifică a dansatorilor şi relaţia dintre ei, sunt relevate în formele de dans şi practicile de utilizare a spaţiului pe ringul de dans, construcţia individuală a dansului şi comportamentul dansatorilor. Prin studiul culturilor locale de dans, se poate observa o structură socială care este ţinută împreună prin norme, reguli şi obligaţii de gen şi definite de generaţie. Acest lucru face din dans o activitate colectivă definită social în comunităţile rurale din Moldova, România. Scopul acestui studiu este de a interpreta practicile reprezentative ale vârstei şi statutului social în cultura dansului, aflate în continuă schimbare, prin exemplul evenimentelor de dans, în special nunţilor, într-un singur sat moldovenesc de ceangăi.

Cuvinte-cheie: cultura dansului, structura sociala, varsta, sexul, nunta, ceangăul din Moldova.

Summary
Relations of dance culture and social structure in a Moldavian rural community

The social structure of the Moldavian Csángó settlements and the social systems that form in the dance scenes significantly determine the possibility of participation in dance occasions and the formal and stylistic performance of dances. The gender, age, and marital status of community members, as well as the specific position of dancers and the relationship between them, are revealed in dance forms and practices of space use on the dance floor, individual dance construction, and dancers' behaviour. Through the study of local dance cultures, a social structure is observable that is held together by gendered and generationally defined norms, rules, and obligations. This makes dancing a socially defined collective activity in rural communities in Moldavia, Romania. The aim of this study is to interpret the representational practices of age and social status in dance culture, which are constantly changing, through the example of dance events, especially weddings, in a single Moldavian Csángó village.

Keywords: dance culture, social structure, age, gender, wedding, Moldavian Csángó.

1. Introduction

According to the hypothesis of the article, dance culture is socially embedded. On the one hand, this means that the society in which this community lives determines the local dance culture [8, p. 129]; on the other hand, dance culture may reflect the social system of the community [7, p. 16; 9, p. 143], so this system can be examined through dance. The social composition of a community may impact the actual dance repertoire by influencing how dance fashions spread and get adopted by introducing dance etiquette and practices for organizing dance events [1, pp. 4-5; 11, p. 105]. Examining the dance occasions, we can obtain a picture of how the community organizes the events, the special role of the organizer(s), and the conditions that ground on age, social status, and gender. An individual is able not only to represent himself/herself through dance but to represent the whole community, its worldview, and its internal system of norms [7, p. 16; 9, p. 143]. Analyzing the use of space, dance forms, relations between the dancers, dancing moves or gestures, stylistic tools, and the dancers' behavior brings us closer to understanding these phenomena. Based on the above-described hypothesis, the paper seeks to answer the question of how local society determines the dance life and dance repertoire of a community and what social structure can be outlined by examining a local dance culture.

2. Research Context

The topic of this article is part of functionalist dance anthropological research that started in 2015. The project examines the transformation, social embeddedness, and functions of the dance life and dance repertoire in Magyarfalu (Arini) village from the 1940s to the present day. The settlement is part of the municipality of Găiceana, in the north-eastern region of Romania, in Bacău County. The community of about 1300 inhabitants is Roman Catholic and of Hungarian ethnicity, belonging to the ethnographic group of the Csángós (Ceangăi).

The research methodology is based on individual fieldwork in the village. During fieldwork, in addition to interviewing, I try to place great emphasis on participant observation and filming of dance events in an organic context. This collecting technique differs from the previous methodology of Hungarian dance folkloristics, the practice of researcher-organised dance filming, where dancers and dances are captured outside of their original conditions [15, pp. 43-44]. In my opinion, if the research seeks to interpret the content and function of the dances, in addition to their formal analysis, it is necessary to observe and document the dances in their own scenes.

In the case of typologizing Magyarfalu village's dance repertoire, we can identify the closed or open chain dance (*horă, ca la cort, sârba, corăgheasca, sfredeluș, sârba studenților, zdrăboleanca*) as the most significant dance form, which is associated with mixed (*mușama*), couple (*brașoveanca*), or group dance forms in varying proportions, depending on the dance occasions. Modern couple dances (*ușoara, tango, vals, foxtrot*) appeared relatively late in the local dance repertoire, only in the 1970s; newer group dances (*manele*) after the change of the Romanian regime; and the latest regional or global fashion dances (*pinguin, meneaito*) around the turn of the millennium. These dances quickly became part of the local dance culture without eclipsing traditional chain dances. The simultaneous practice of dance types with different origins, styles, forms, and music has led to a kind of parallel nonsynchronism in the community's current dance repertoire [10, p. 125].

3. Social Structure as Dance-Forming Factor

The social structure is a network of different social institutions and status relations [3, p. 79; 14, pp. 10, 179, 191]. The structure, as an abstract model, is independent of the members of the community, held together by traditional customs, rules, obligations and norms over which individuals have less control, and thus the basic structure of society itself is only capable of slow change. In reality, this structure exists in the form of social organisation, where people's actions, whether rule-following or rule-breaking, form social life in a variety of ways, but, of course, only within the framework of the structure [3, pp. 79-81].

The social structure of a community can be observed in many areas of culture, including dance events and dance practices [5, p. 59]. One of the pillars of the social frame in Magyarfalu village is the status communities organised along gender and age groups. In this context, we need to distinguish between the demographic and social age structures of the community. The first is a numerical, age-based division of people, while the latter classifies people according to their social status, position, or rank within an age group [4, p. 397]. When examining dance culture, it is worth taking into account the social age structure of the community, since it is not necessarily the dancer's age, measured in years, but rather his/her status in relation to his/her own life stage, primarily his/her marital status and gender, that determines which dance events (s)he can participate in and how (s)he can behave while dancing. The dance etiquette is a set of unwritten rules acquired during dance learning and socialisation, that regulates the dancer's behaviour and has a restrictive role in the context of the community's moral norms. In most cases, the rules of etiquette, which are a less-reflected part of dance culture, refer to the spatial, formal, and stylistic execution of dances, so that the use of space, dance forms, and dance style can be understood as representative expressive tools of the community's social structure.

One of the most visible features of dance is the form in which it is performed. The dance forms specific to a local dance culture reflect the basic social attitudes of that community [11, p. 88]. The most characteristic dance form is the circle in Magyarfalu village, i.e., the closed chain dance. As György Martin states, "Closed circle dance is a form of collective dancing in the strict sense of the word, where it is not just about dancing together but the form itself makes everyone equal, sets equal requirements, and gives equal opportunities to the participants, (…)" [12, p. 11]. The circle, as an expression of unity and equality, can be a

means of inclusion as well as a means of exclusion. In the case of Magyarfalu village, the status of the members of the community and the relations between them largely determine the choice of joining different dance circles, the positioning in the circle, and in the case of the couple dances, the choice of the dancing partner.

4. Social Age Structure at Dance Occasions

Participation in dance events in the examined settlement varies by age group. A *child*, a *youngster*, a *newly married*, a *married*, and an *elder married* person belong to different age categories and may accordingly participate in different dance occasions. In the past, during the public dance events, where the whole village community was represented, *children* were only passive participants. This means that they were present on major holidays or at open-air dances on Sunday but were not allowed to join in the dancing. Even today, only *children* belonging to the immediate family can be present at the wedding feast, still as passive participants. Learning to dance starts at an early age, mostly in a home-family or school environment, but *children* aged around 4-15 years can only show their dancing skills at family dance occasions (christening, birthday, house party) or at organised performances by children's dance groups.

Active participation in public dance events and dancing is allowed after the confirmation, at the age of about 15-16 years. The exact age varies from person to person as the ceremony is not held every year in the village. Therefore, the confirmation is rather a symbolic demarcation between *children* and *youngsters* in the case of dancing. In fact, *youngsters* who have reached adolescence[1] are considered *young* until they are *married*, and they are the ones who can participate and dance at almost any dance occasion.

The age at which *young people* marry has changed a lot since the 1940s: while in the mid-20th century girls were married at 18-19 years old and boys at 22-23 years old (after mandatory military service), it is not uncommon for girls to get married at 24-25 and boys at 28-29. Although the age of *youngsters* is longer in terms of years, the etiquette rules for dancers have not changed, as they are not linked to a specific age but to the individual's status in the social network of the community, and above all to his or her marital status.

There are two categories of people who get married. *Newly married* couples are those who have not yet had a child. This usually means a period of 1 to 3 years, during which the young couple, like a *youngster*, can participate at any dance event if they feel like it. Another group is made up of *married* couples who have already had a child and are now full members of the community. After that, they only attend weddings and a ball on a major holiday.

The last group after this is the *elder married people* or the *elders* whose children have already married. From then on, they are no longer allowed to dance at balls, although they may still attend as participants or observers if organised in the village. In the case of public dance occasions, *elders* can only take an active part in dancing at weddings, on Saint Patron's Day of the church, and at private family parties if they feel like it.

There are a small number of *unmarried* or *divorced people* in the village. In their case, gender separation also plays a role, as an unmarried or divorced man can dance at balls and weddings, but a woman of the same marital status is more likely to dance only at home parties organised by relatives. *Widows/widowers* are not allowed to visit any entertainment for 40 days after the death of their spouse, and most of them keep the ban on dancing for up to a year [6, p. 138].

In summary, the age and marital status distribution of active participation in dancing is mainly determined by the public organisation of dance events, while almost all generations may participate and dance at private parties with friends or family members. I will illustrate the dance-forming effects of the local social structure through the dance etiquette rules of the different age groups using case studies of the weddings I observed in Magyarfalu village, as these were the celebrations at which almost all generations of the community were present.

5. Example of Weddings

The most significant of the dance events related to human life is the wedding in Magyarfalu village. Up until the 1990s, people of different marital statuses attended on different days, since only unmarried young people were allowed to participate in the wedding on the first day, starting at the bride's house, and only married and elderly people were allowed to be at the groom's house on the

second day. The young people were also invited to celebrate the civil wedding. After the change of the Romanian regime, the wedding was reduced to a one-day celebration, and a situation that was unknown before has now arisen: several generations are present at the same time at weddings and dance together.

At a wedding, the participants are divided into small and large groups according to age (and sometimes gender), and they are separated accordingly during the festivities, conversations, meals, and dancing. In the case of the couple dances, the young people usually dance with other youngsters, and if they are in a relationship, each person dances with his/her partner. Sometimes young lads or married men ask an older female relative to dance. Married women dance with their husband or a relative. Generally, we can establish, girls and women also dance in couple with their own gender if these have evolved from older chain dances (for example, in couple versions of the *horă* and *sârba* dances). The older age group very rarely dances in pairs; they prefer to participate in circle dances.

In the case of the chain dances, participants form two or more circles on the dance floor according to age and marital status. Most often, they dance in concentric circles, with young people in the inner circle and married and older people in the outer circle. In the inner circle, dancers are arranged in friendship, and in the outer circle, they take place next to each other based on kinship. In some cases, the joining of dance circles or the formation of different (separate, not concentric) circles often shows gender separation. A woman joins the dance next to another woman, and men stand next to men (see Figures 1-2).

Figure 2.

There are significant differences in the dancing behaviour and the expression of emotions among community members according to their age. This is related to their rules of etiquette, which determine the dancer's representational tools and the formal and stylistic execution of the dances. The dances of the young lads seem to be the most dynamic and spectacular; their gestures are broad, they dance figures with complex motifs, and they turn the circle quickly. They are allowed to use shouted rhymes and whistling during the dancing, loudly expressing their exhilaration. When dancing in the inner circle, almost all attention is focused on them, and they raise the mood for dancing. Newly married men still occasionally join them in the inner circle, but after the birth of their first child, they are 'pushed out' into the outer circle. Here, their dancing is much more sophisticated and energy-saving; their gestures are more restrained; their dancing is not accompanied by sound effects; but they have an active dance style in their own circle.

In all cases, the outer circle is bigger than the inner one, as it is occupied by several generations, slowing down the speed of the circle. This also results in the dancers standing closer together, with the result that the wide arm and leg gestures and the horizontal motif decoration of the dances are omitted. Married men tend to build and expand their motifs vertically and express their joy in dancing with closed eyes and short, rapid head shakes. The dance of unmarried girls, married women, and elderly men or women is characterised by a restrained, clean, and elegant style; their behaviour is subdued and relaxed, and their dance motifs are much simpler than those of lads or married men.

The entire village community is still invited to weddings in Magyarfalu village. During the ce-

Figure 1.

lebrations, the immediate family members of the newlyweds take the initiative, usually starting the dances and helping to create a joyful mood. Thus, the way the dances are performed and the stylistic execution of the dances are also determined by the dancers' family ties and their relationship to the couple being celebrated. Two other important wedding roles, the witnesses at the wedding, locally known as the *godfather* and *godmother*, are worth mentioning. They are in the same age group as the newlyweds but have already married. Throughout the ceremony, the best man and woman wear a long shawl to mark their special status in the wedding. They are expected to take an active part in the dance, but their role as initiators is largely determined by their individual dancing knowledge. My observations so far show that if the godfather has good dancing skills, he starts the closed circle dances and is the leader for open chain dances. Often, they change their partners; the godfather dances with the bride and the godmother with the groom in the middle of the circle.

Non-compliance with the dance rules for weddings, i.e., the inappropriate application of the traditional representational tools, does not have consequences directly during the celebration. However, later, after the event, the older women of the village may spread rumours about the dancer who misbehaved. In the case of a more serious breach of moral norms, the local priest may also speak out against the offender's behaviour (drunkenness, fighting) in the context of the liturgy on Sunday. This is usually passed on to the person and his/her family members, who are under severe psychological pressure from the gossip and the preaching. In this way, the practices of whispering play a controlling and policing function in dance etiquette, helping to reinforce local norms and unwritten rules.

6. Conclusions

The analyses described above show that the social structure of the community, including its gender composition and its social age structure, has a considerable, one might say spectacular, impact on the dance culture of Magyarfalu village. This is expressed in the separation based on the age and marital status of the participants in dance events, in the collective (dance form, use of space on the dance floor) and individual (dance structure, use of motifs) practices of dance creation, and in the dance performances (dancing style, dan-

cers' behaviour). During the period covered by this research, certain aspects of local dance culture have undergone significant transformations, unlike the dance styles that correspond to dancers' social status and the micro-context of dance occasions. This suggests that the etiquette rules for the behaviour of dancers, together with the social fragmentation and community control associated with social scenes, belong to a less visible, deeper, and thus more slowly changing part of the (dance) culture in Magyarfalu village, and these have a more substantial and integral function in the social life of the community. The unreflected social embeddedness of dance activity suggests that dancing itself is a learned human behaviour, part of local knowledge [9, p. 143; 13, p. 17]. It can also be interpreted as a manifestation of the community's implicit programme of action, the habitus, since, without any conscious consideration, dancers reflexively create their dances from body techniques and behavioural patterns they know, improvising them according to the requirements of the social network [2, pp. 73, 78; 3, pp. 97–98].

Figures:

Figure 1. The separation of lads and girls in a circle dance. Trunk (Galbeni), Bacău County, Romania, 1932. Archive: No. F67882, Museum of Ethnography, Hungary. Photographer: Gábor Lükő.

Figure 2. The separation of women and men in a circle dance at a wedding. Magyarfalu (Arini), Bacău County, Romania, 2019. Photographer: Vivien Szőnyi.

Notes and references:

[1] The research was supported by project no. SNN 139575, which was financed by the Hungarian National Research, Development, and Innovation Office.

[2] According to surveys by ethnographer Vilmos Tánczos, in 1992, 100% of the Magyarfalu village's Roman Catholic population spoke Hungarian [16, p. 10], a ratio that had fallen to 93% by 2009 [17, p. 107].

[3] Parallel non-synchronism refers to the simultaneous presence in a given geographical space of socio-cultural systems with different structural characteristics and mentalities. The concept was first used by the philosopher Ernst Bloch to describe social phenomena and later applied by Hermann Bausinger in the field of ethnography. Veronika Lajos pro-

posed a special version of this theory, the concept of "complex non-synchronism," for the interpretation of the Csángó life-worlds in Moldavia. In her opinion, the "multi-layered cultural-social interface" in Moldavia can be traced back to the meeting of three scenes: rural/local, Romanian urban, and Western European metropolitan [10, p. 125].

4   In addition to age, marital status, and gender, traditionally, participation in Romanian dance occasions was determined by kinship, origin, and occupation [5, pp. 59–63].

5   According to Anca Giurchescu, the formal creation of the *sârba* circle dance can represent the social hierarchy of the community [5, p. 59].

6   In many cases, girls are seen as *youngsters* after the start of menstruation and boys after they have finished primary school.

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