RITUALS AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIONS AMONG YOUNG UNMARRIED COUPLES

Anca DOHOTARIU

Rituals and Religious Holidays and Their Representations among Young Unmarried Couples. A Qualitative Investigation Romania-France

Anca DOHOTARIU[1]

Abstract

This article presents, on the one hand, two of the major rites of life, i. e. – christening and marriage, and, on the other hand, two annual religious holidays, i. e. – Easter and Christmas. I am seeking to reveal an aspect that had been less present in the Romanian literature of this field: the religious dimension of the life of a couple. I begin with a qualitative comparison between Romania and France that reveals the way that contemporary conjugality re-defines nowadays. Secondly, the *representations* of the unmarried couples regarding marriage, christening and religious holidays shall be discussed. The main purpose of this article is to question the thesis found in the most recent Romanian research stating that the commitment of the young people to religious holidays and implicitly to marriage is a matter of *faith*. However, through the anthropological detour, as a methodological instrument, and starting from a relational theoretical perspective, the analysis of the discourses of Bucharest and Marseille youth reveals the *dynamic* nature of their social life. Thus, the commitment of the Romanian young people to religious holidays, marriage and christening as social norms are rather a manifestation of their belonging to a family and to a specific social life in the broad sense of the term within a general context characterized by emergence of freedom and equality as democratic values.

Keywords: civil marriage; religious marriage; unmarried couple; family; comparison; post-communism; young people.

[1] CNCS postdoctoral fellow at Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; PhD Lecturer, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Bucharest, ROMANIA. Email: anca.dohotariu@ fspub.unibuc.com

Introduction

In the age of *unmarriage* (Fr. *démariage*) (Théry, 1996:14) the decision whether or not to officialise in the eyes of the State, a private relationship has become a matter of personal conscience. Numerous experts (Cherlin, 2004; Coontz, 2004; Déchaux, 1995), sociologists, anthropologists, or demographers analysed the metamorphoses of *contemporary conjugality* (Fulchiron, 2009), from several standpoints. The experts agree that this new metamorphoses in family life began in the West during the 1960s and 1970s. After the sudden decrease in nuptiality, Louis Roussel draws attention to a startling *threshold levelling* (Fr. *arasement des seuils*) (Roussel, 1989: 266) in the cycle of life. This *levelling* is visible especially in the case of young people who do not simply *postpone* (Galland, 1991: 147) entering adult life. The sudden transition into a state of maturity after marriage is replaced with a gradual transition comprised of different stages. According to the contemporary ideal of a *permanent youth*, marriage is no longer the threshold between single life and family life. Marriage as an institution becomes elective rather than finite. From this relational theoretical perspective, the contemporary couple is a *living social institution* (Mauss, 1969), continuously defining itself.

Without confirming the hypothesis of *temporal gap* between Western and Eastern European democracies, this article tries to reveal *the religious dimension* of living together. Starting from an *anthropological detour* (Balandier, 1985) regarding non-marital conjugality of youth with a high level of education in both Bucharest and Marseille, this article analyses the *representations* of un-married young people of rituals and religious holidays. Romanian and French samples will be compared. This article has been written using qualitative research I have done for my PhD thesis. It is a qualitative research consisting of almost 100 interviews conducted with young people with a high level of education who live together with their partners outside marriage in Bucharest and Marseille. The half-guided individual interviews were conducted in two stages, in 2005 and 2006, and include also a pre-research I did in 2004.

Above all, the dichotomy couple – religiosity leads to the matter of *rituality*. While this issue is a major one in anthropology and sociology, this kind of research has enjoyed less empirical and theoretical interest: "Anthropologists sometimes suggest that this lack of interest of sociologists towards rituals may be the counterpart of the too high interest in beliefs, as sociologists are more interested in gathering the discourses of actors than in analyzing their practices." (Hervieu-Léger, 2004: 12).

With this remark, Danièle Hervieu-Léger defines rituality as "an activity which symbolically produces social continuity" (Hervieu-Léger, 2004: 18) and raises the question of the sociological idea of the disappearance of the social ritual dimension in contemporary societies. Thus, the author states that, on the one

hand, *de-ritualization* is a logical consequence of *de-mystification* of the human environment where collective life is no longer governed by super-natural realities but by modern autonomy. On the other hand, the author explains the diminished rituality in modern societies by highlighting the way that the perception of time has changed. More precisely, the cyclic representation of temporality has been gradually replaced by a linear representation. However, today's life remains imbued with both public and private rituals which are far from being *exclusively* related to religion and institutions. Laurence Hérault (2004: 152) also argues that transcendence remains the major element differentiating *traditional rites* that are exclusively mystic and linked to super-natural entities and *modern*, rationalized, de-sacred rites, which lack the *faith* dimension. According to this socio-anthropological perspective, rational thinking rejects what are irrational, therefore traditional rites which embody a belief in super-natural entities dictates the absence of rationality. Moreover, traditional irrational faith has been replaced in the modern age by de-sacred rational beliefs. This makes the definition of current religious beliefs even more difficult, the modern belief system being a mixture of both irrational and rational thinking. Thus, instead of clarifying and explaining a theoretical analysis and/or an empirical field, the concept of *faith* causes misunderstanding. Consequently, the religious dimension of a couple's life, which is implicitly ritualized, will be analysed in this article using other terms. I shall choose to "rethink the rituals called *traditional* and *modern* as being a *modalité d'action* șFr.ț rather than understanding them in terms of faith or irrational thinking." (Hérault, 2004: 154).

Far from offering a full analysis of the role of religion in family life in Romania after the fall of the communist regime (Cojocaru, Cojocaru & Sandu, 2011), this article seeks to reveal an aspect that had been less present in Romanian secondary literature (Cojocaru, Cojocaru, Bragaru & Purcaru, 2011) – the religious dimension of a couple's life. I will start with an analysis of the representations of Romanian young people regarding civil marriage as a basic secular rite, I shall compare this with their representations of religious marriage and christening, and also the main religious holidays in their life – Easter and Christmas. The main goal of this article is to find out to what extent religious holidays reveal the way that contemporary conjugality is being redefined.

Civil marriage: between legal norms and social representations

In today's understanding, the word *marriage* means, above all, civil marriage because the law stipulates that civil marriage shall precede religious marriage. Before analysing the marriage-related civil law, an overview of the *long time* (Théry, 1998: 19-22) is needed in order to deconstruct the institution of marriage from sociologic, historical and legal points of view.

Although it is mainly a study of the social and political construction of feminine identity in the 19th century in Romania, Ionela Băluță's analysis provides a general view on the key moments when the legal and social norms regarding marriage and family were re-defined in the Old Kingdom: "The legal doctrine is a major element of the socio-political construction of a society. On the one hand, it stipulates rules and norms defining the social and political status of each member of the community. [...] On the other hand, it interprets and encodes the meaning of ideological ideas and symbols. Not to understand that șin the Old Kingdomț representations translated into legal norms were unanimously accepted; these are representations that managed to impose themselves as against others since they expressed best the dominant ideology." (Băluță, 2008: 87).

In the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, the Old Kingdom witnessed co-existence of both written norms and customs. Gradually, written texts multiplied. In those times, family relations were strongly influenced by religious norms. Within the framework of marriage, the freedom of the spouses was rather limited: dowry had major part to play in organizing and concluding the marriage and prevailed over love. Although women had no right to be involved in public affairs at that time, both men and women could exercise their right to divorce (Vintilă-Ghițulescu, 2004).

Later on, the 1865 Civil Code, inspired by the 1804 French Civil Code, stipulates the transfer from common traditional customs to written law and introduces the obligatory requirement that religious marriage should be preceded by civil marriage. Unlike the French Civil Law, the Romanian Civil Law preserves the regulations regarding divorce: without being reduced to a mere legal matter, divorce turns into a real instrument of the political will of the time, supporting demographic expansion and favoring a certain hierarchical family model (Băluță, 2003). In other words, a whole range of aspects regarding marriage and family in the 19th century (Biet & Théry, 1989) entails a systematic comparison between Romanian and French socio-political realities during those times. The inability to separate filiation and conjugality as well as the inability to separate maternity and femininity was implicit at times when the husband had parental and conjugal authority. All the same, the ideology of elective love has gradually been absorbed into modern social practices. Obviously, *contextualization* of the specific practices and ideas related to marriage in the two socio-political systems remains indispensable for a comparative approach. However, the studies available confirm the existence of the *fusion couple* ideal (Théry, 1999: 138) and of hierarchical marriage based on love in Romania during the second half on the 19th century. In this respect, Ionela Băluță (2008) states that these ideals are much less visible in a truly rural Romanian society at a historical moment of modernization, where *import* of the French model of civil marriage co-exists with local realities that are typical of the Romanian social environment.

Another major moment in the history of marriage in Romania is 1954, when the *new* Family Code was enacted. This law was inspired from the Soviet law and abrogated the entire Book I of the previous Civil Code, whose articles regulated the family relations between 1864 and 1954. Without clearly defining marriage, the new Code stipulated that "family is based upon the free mutual consent of the spouses" (The Family Code, 2005, art. 1, par. 3). In other words in 1954 the legal doctrine stipulated an implicit synonymy between marriage and family, despite the fact that the existence of filiation was enough to create a family. Marriage could only be concluded between individuals of the opposite sex and, moreover, the assets acquired during marriage were considered *joint assets*, according to the unique and immutable matrimonial regulations stipulated in the same Code (Dohotariu, 2006: 372). Along with the legislation regulating family relations during the Communist era, the 1954 Code conforms entirely with the political interventionist purposes of the Communist age. In a world where rendering society homogenous was a declared political aim, according to the dominant political ideology (Kligman, 1998: 4), individuals were supposed to exist primarily as workers and sons of the homeland. Beyond any identity or any personal relations, "*Homo sovieticus* was only an obedient clone, multiplied in millions, who were supposed to subordinate their personal lives to the rules dictated by the unique party." (Vasilescu, 2003: 236).

In this context, the legitimacy of the divorce, for instance, depends on the whim of political propaganda (Zlătescu, 1982). In 1948, articles 254-276 of the Civil Code regarding the dissolution of marriage were abrogated. In 1954, the Family Code stipulated the possibility of divorce *for well-justified reasons* (art. 37), but in 1966, the termination of marriage was possible only in *exceptional* cases. Consequently, there were only 48 cases of divorce in Romanian in 1976 (Kligman, 1998: 51), a historic number, which leads to the conclusion that either statistics were manipulated at that time, or political intrusion into personal lives was extremely high. The history of divorce in France shows that divorce was restricted by the 1804 Civil Code, while in 1816 the legal termination of marriage was abolished (Segalen, 2005: 52-55). Divorce is absent in French marriages almost throughout the 19th century and for a long time during the 20th century: in 1884, The Naquet Law only authorises divorce on grounds of the defendant's exclusive fault; divorce by mutual consent was re-instated in 1975. In Romania the possibility of divorce based on the mutual consent of both spouses was not possible until 1993, as the result of a new article added to the 1954 Family Code. However, this article is meant for married couples without children. In other words, the divorce of couples without children can be pronounced only if the guilt of both parties can be proved. Ten years after the fall of the Communist regime, the 1954 Family Code was abrogated and a *new* Civil Code was passed in 2011. The new Civil Code stipulated the possibility of spouses to divorce by mutual consent "irrespective of the date when the marriage had been concluded and

irrespective of the existence of children resulted from the marriage" (Civil Code, art. 374, al. 1). Although it does not regulate living together outside marriage, it does not introduce the legal notion of *couple* and it does not allow marriage between individuals of the same sex. The 2011 Civil Code includes new elements through which individuals can exercise, above all, the freedom to choose (regulations regarding engagement, matrimonial conventions allowing individuals to choose one of the three matrimonies available, etc.).

Irrespective of the links between family and social norms regarding marriage and the life of the couple, on the one hand, and political and legal norms in force at various moments of the Romanian recent history, on the other. It is inarguable that almost 50 years of Communism in Romania has left a legacy incomparable to France at any time in its recent history. It is however possible that, despite the political will of the Communist regime to control birth, divorce and nuptiality at any price, the demographic trends in Romania (Mureșan, 2007) may have been influenced by larger and deeper European trends. This hypothesis invites an analysis of the changes during the 1990s. However, after the fall of the Communist regime, the emergence of the democratic values of freedom and gender equality enjoy increasing visibility in private life and marriage (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011).

In the Post-Communist socio-political environment, the Romanian demography experienced significant changes although the *turmoil* of family life is not as spectacular as the ones in France in the 1970s (Villeneuve - Gokalp, 1990). Thus, decreased nuptiality and fertility, increasing rate of divorce and of births outside marriage, higher average age for the first birth and higher average age for marriage are some aspects of interest for Romanian demography experts. Their particular interest is the lack of demographic balance and the societal *aging* process. In other words, in order to analyze the decreased nuptiality in Romania after 1990, the Romanian demography experts analyze Western literature on the dichotomy individual/society as well as on the *second demographic transition* (Ariès, 1980). This literature is supporting or, on the contrary, rejecting the hypothesis of the *model of the post modern family* (Hoem, Kostova, Jasilioniene & Mureșan, 2009) – according to which the nuptiality rate is increasingly lower.

This very short overview is the Post-Communist demographic landscape of the unmarried couples interviewed in Bucharest. Similarly to their contemporaries in France, young people in Romania explain the way in which they relate to the institution of marriage and the implications of this *personal* relation upon their private life, family life, professional life, and social life in general. The quantitative analysis of the statements made about marriage reveals many differences and similarities between the values, representations and matrimonial practices of the young people interviewed in Bucharest and Marseille. However, the qualitative analysis of their statements allows a deep and nuanced comparison between the two countries. The interviews in France reveal that the choice to marry or not is *a*

matter of personal conscience. Within this framework, a whole range of cases can be found: *commitment to traditional marriage, marriage for a free otherness, or the alternative to marriage.* At the same time, both in the collective conscience and in social practices, marriage is a social institution with an intrinsically symbolic dimension. In Romania, the representations of the individuals interviewed reveal deep commitment of young people regarding the old concept of the biographic cycle and the ideology of romantic love, according to *local family ideology*, in the sense of commitment to family, as a network of personal relations differing from non-family relations. In other words, after the fall of the Communist regime, family life becomes a space of freedom and personal autonomy, no longer depending on the moral and social ideology of the former political system. On the other hand, there was a will to protect oneself against the involvement of the State in ones private life, especially in certain particular matters (abortion, contraception, etc.). On the other hand, state paternalism is far from being eradicated: given the absence of a democratic civic culture, *protection* by the State is welcomed (for instance, under the form of subsidies and family incentives, etc.). Thus, the will to *protect oneself* against the involvement of the state is not accompanied by criticism of traditional marriage; *official* conjugality still remains the ideal. However, representations, values and practices related to marriage are discretely redefining themselves, in the sense of a democratization of the marital institution. Unlike France, Romania sees marriage as a norm that is still not linked to personal conscience: *it is* normal *to marry*, often state young people interviewed in Bucharest. Obviously, any person has the freedom to choose *not* to marry. This assumed option would be the result of a wish for change; however, the interviews suggest, rather the absence of a claim for such a change. The young people interviewed seem perfectly adapted to the social context to which they belong. They comply with the norm and invoke the stability of the matrimonial institution despite the risk of divorce, inherent to marriage.

However, in a social space marked by the intricate combination of the dynamics of change and resistance to a new environment, the values and practices regarding marriage redefine themselves continuously. Their discrete metamorphoses contribute to a greater compatibility between today's marital institution alongside freedom and gender equality as democratic values. Thus, one of the most significant changes resulting from the analysis is the will to *personalize* marriage. At the same time, an individual may have several ways, often contradictory, to represent marriage and any other aspects related to marriage – wedding, bride's dress, etc. Moreover, during their biographic cycle, young people accumulate experiences that result into their continuous redefining of their way to live their private lives.

For instance, a young man interviewed in Bucharest seems very affected by a previous couple relationship that he had hoped would turn into marriage. The interviewed man spoke about his former *fiancée* with whom he would have wanted

to propose to, as an act of *proof* of their love. However, his former partner left him and, although the separation did not have the seriousness of a divorce, the interviewed man remained very affected by that experience. Thus, at the moment when he was interviewed, he stated that for him, marriage is of the most importance. However he would approach marriage differently in the future based on his previous experience. He still wished to marry *"one day",* but the fear of failure, he may prefer living as a couple, outside of marriage: *"With or without a paper, the relationship will be the same"* (man, 29, single, 29/08/2006). The young man thus makes a clear distinction between the couple relationship and marriage; marriage reduced to a mere administrative formality allows him to justify himself and to the others the personal choice made. As a result of his relationships, the interviewed man changed his attitude towards marriage but his discourse did not lose coherence. In other words, a mere administrative formality is far from being deprived from symbolic content: marriage remains a personal act whose symbolism becomes concrete when official. However, a relationship that becomes official cannot guarantee the sustainability of the couple. At the same time, from the point of view of the same interviewed man, marriage includes certain pecuniary aspects, impossible to avoid when living as a couple, which can have both advantages and disadvantages. In this respect, the young man recalls that expenses made for the wedding and the possibility to make a loan which, in his opinion, is easier to grant to married couples.

This interview was very significant reflection of marriage in Romania in general, where separation of couples and continuity co-exist. Young people are changing in a changing society. Despite his previous long term relationship, this young man still feels the need to be married *in the eyes of the others*. At the same time, his discourse suggests a certain separation from the classical representation of marriage in Romania. In his opinion, an official relationship is not only a *passage* from one stage of life to another where the two partners remain equally involved in their joint life. On the contrary, their relationship builds up in time. Free but equal, the couple strengthens itself in time, beyond any *paper* and the real proof of personal involvement is the wish to continue despite the unknown of tomorrow. Moreover, the interviewed man said that his everyday life in Bucharest puts no social pressure to make him marry: *"no one points at me as if to an unmarried"* (man, 29, single, 29/08/2006). However, he prefers to marry at some point. Why? Because like most interviewed people in Bucharest, the young man believes that *"marriage is the environment to have a child"* (man, 29, single, 29/08/2006).

While in Marseille, there is a clear distinction between conjugality (official or not) and filiation, in Bucharest this distinction has its specific form. On the one hand, as social representation, filiation is almost unconceivable outside marriage: *"The moment when we set up a family, in a year or two, we shall marry. Family means more than simply living together, it means having a child"* (woman, 26,

single, 28/07/2005) emphasizes a young Romanian woman. On the other hand, we can notice a real gap between these values and social practices outside marriage. Apart from the fact that, legally speaking, there is no difference between children depending on the matrimonial status of their parents, in everyday life it is very difficult if not impossible to state the existence of social stigmata of children whose parents are not married.

Another young woman interviewed in Bucharest associates marriage with the birth of a child, thus emphasizing that she expected first to get pregnant in order to get married and to bear the name of her partner. In other words, in her opinion, marriage is not justified if there is no child. However, the young woman stated that her friends are affected by their parents insistence to have their couple relationships rendered official. She is a young woman holding a BA in IT whose parents have no higher education and live in the countryside and whose partner did not continue his education after high-school. Despite these socio-cultural aspects that are somehow compatible with her degree of conformism, the young woman opposes her parents' insisting upon her getting married and rejects, in her own way, the old concept of biographic cycle. Thus, the young woman surprises us with her wish to get married in a totally different form from the traditional routine – *"somewhere on a beach, just the two of us and our friends"* (woman, 26, single, 30/07/2005).

Apart from the relation between conjugality and filiation, concepts about the biographic cycle are also a significant aspect of the representation of young people about the institution of marriage. Young men and young women interviewed in Bucharest, they all seem to agree on the idea that *there is a certain age when one should marry*. In the collective imaginary, there is still a propensity to associate the life of a couple outside marriage to the idea of insecurity. In addition, while in France, the life in two outside marriage has become a practice which is not seen as unusual, the interviews done in Romania can be compared to a photo of a category in course of being re-defined. According to the findings of my enquiry, the choice to make the couple relationship official is something pertaining to *normality*; this statement is recurrent in all the discourse of the interviewed people together with the wish to be unique, typical of contemporary modernity. For instance, while certain interviewed women wish to wear the wedding dress one day, others are indifferent to it or even express their disapproval: *"Ah, I hate the wedding dress! Maybe because my parents have always put pressure on me to get married ... Brides are horrible, they all look like unfinished dolls"* (woman, 25, single, 15/10/2007).

Regarding the influence of parents about ideas of marriage and conjugality in general, some of the interviewed people reproduce while others contest what they have seen in their families. In a society where people choose marriage because of its exteriority (the idea to be perceived by others as married), in time, young people start opposing this representation of the privacy of the relation: *marriage*

is a commitment involving first of all the two partners. More interviews reflect this view, out of which three of them are very clarifying in this respect.

Beyond differences pertaining to context, as, for example, the typical Romanian background marked by local familialism, the statement of a young woman interviewed in Bucharest resembled very much to the statements made by the young people interviewed in Marseille. Although she lives in a society where couples first *should* become official to have children, the young woman considers that marriage is nothing else than a personal choice, while her partner, interviewed separately, shared her views. In addition, unlike these two young people, another young man interviewed who had no higher education, born in Bucharest and comes from a low-income family, stated that, although he is indifferent to marriage, he would still marry *"because it is nice to do so"* (man, 27, single, 11/08/2005), and because this would make her partner happy: *"in general, girls are the ones who want to get married"* (man, 27, single, 11/08/2005). Beyond this stereotype, the man interviewed stated that marriage intervenes *normally* and *naturally* in somebody's life, thus giving stability to the life of the couple. Though *"the most important is the relationship, not the marriage itself" (man, 27, single, 11/08/2005);* however, not any relationship, but one continuously re-invented by the two partners free and united at the same time. Without being radically different from other relationships analyzed, the relationship of this young man could be definitely characterized as a *duo couple* (Théry, 1999: 143), *à la roumaine*. Last but not least, only one interviewed man from Bucharest defined marriage as *a matter of personal conscience*. Without having education in social sciences, the discourse of the young man revealed a sociological intuition of the institution of marriage: *"I believe that at a certain moment we shall reach the case where we shall opt for marriage. I believe the moment of marriage shall come before the birth of a child. Not necessarily; this does not mean that, if a pregnancy appears by accident, we shall run to the town hall. Child and marriage are two different matters. […] Any relationship can change. People change, priorities change. […] Marriage is … a commitment. A mutual commitment to build up something together. In addition, it is explicit. It is a symbol of a commitment to put bricks one on top of the other. […] Marriage may bring a degree of security that it is not explicit now. Maybe, or I hope, I hope it will bring a new kind of commitment, a new kind of mutual responsibility. Actually, I think it will create a new entity. At this moment, there is only the entity called couple which is somehow [her] with me. Marriage will bring something in addition which does not exist at his moment. […] at this moment, the next decision in out couple life could be the decision to build a house. Or to marry. […] Marriage is a matter between me and [her], not a matter with the others, or colleagues or parents. […] I'd like my wedding to take place on a deserted island, only the two of us and the official who performs the wedding. However, our close friends expect us to invite them! Moreover, Romania has no deserted island where the representative of the town hall would*

come … This moment has its significance which is a symbol for me but I shall have to take into account the norms of the society we live in; we cannot do otherwise; we cannot avoid the society we live in. We cannot go somewhere and come back and announce that we are married. […] Marriage is not an obligation, like the military service or something like that. Marriage is, I repeat, a symbolic gesture. I think it is what is now. Symbolism, that is all. Not a change in relationships and … I don't think I'll be looked at differently by the others. So it does not imply … a different way to look at each other" (man, 29, single, 26/08/2005).

Generally, while in France, the norm is dictated by personal decision to make a relationship official or not, in Romania, the norm remains marriage itself, a choice by which the young people can express their belonging to family and society in general. However, marriage cannot be reduced to the civil dimension of the act. In this respect, an interviewed man stated: *"To be honest, until now, I haven't made the difference between civil marriage and religious marriage. I think however that religious marriage would be good at a certain moment."* (man, 29, single, 26/08/2005). What is the representation of religious marriage in the imaginary of the interviewed young people?

Religious marriage: between religious beliefs and social belonging

Although difficult to analyze, the decline of religious marriage in France is typical of couples that live together before making their relationship official. These couples are usually less practitioners than couples who get married directly without living together before. However, findings of the research done reveal that the decline of religious marriage is less significant than the decline of religious practices. Namely, religious marriage is not necessarily indicative of the degree of religious practice of the two partners, but rather expresses their family belonging and social belonging.

This is the summary of the description given to the ritual of religious marriage (at the temple, church or synagogue, etc.), presented by Michel Bozon in 1992. According to the author, religious marriage is above all a social and symbolic choice, rather than a dogmatic one (Bozon, 1992: 414-416), and this hypothesis is easy to find in anthropological writings: *"For a small number of believer husbands, the religious ceremony has major importance; for others, it is part of the solemn nature of the event. However, it is only a stage in a lasting nuptial scenario"* (Segalen, 2005: 90).

How can we therefore explain the current decline of religious marriages in France? The first hypothesis is the deep movement of historic de-Christianization typical of Western societies (Burguière, 1972). Michel Bozon takes over this hypothesis and adds the idea of depreciation of marriage in general – a *de-*

motivated marriage, deprived of meanings (Bozon, 1997: 54). Unlike the thesis of irreversible decline of the marital institution, authors who present religious marriage and its related ritual (Dittgen 1991 and 1994) emphasize the idea of thorough redefinition of the *contents* and *meanings* of the marital institution.

Regarding religious marriage in Romania, the few writings in this field (Voicu, 2007) present less the significance of marriage in general and especially of religious marriage. Thus, all available writings pay a particular quantitative attention and plead in favor of the hypothesis of *faith* as a determinant of local commitment to religious marriage.

Beyond this perspective, the interviews done in Bucharest, analyzed as against the interviews done in Marseille, allow a deep analysis of opinions (and, to a lesser extent, of practices) regarding religious marriage and christening (personal and of the children of the interviewed persons). The qualitative study intends to clarify to what extent these rituals are described and lived as a personal event or a family event or a religious event or all three together (out of 40 Romanian people interviewed, 39 were Orthodox and only 1 was Catholic).

Above all, marriage as an event can be seen as revealing the fact that in today's Romania, marriage is an institution at the crossroads of separations and continuities. However, although the interviewed individuals often remind of the image of an *atypical* marriage in a private environment with few participants, practice seldom correspond to this idealized image. Even before 1990, wedding in Romania is a party involving a financial dimension. The wedding usually starts with the civil wedding, goes on with the religious wedding and ends with a big party that lasts an entire night. Clothes are special for weddings. At the Tow Hall or church or restaurant, the guests dress elegantly and usually wear two outfits, a day outfit and an evening outfit. The two spouses also change their clothes after the ceremony at the Town Hall; the bride's dress especially is the attraction of all eyes. The families of the two spouses (their parents, mainly) make their financial contribution to organize the event.

In addition, a comparative study reveals a few significant aspects regarding marriage. In Marseille, marriage concluded *stealthily* is presented as a big adventure that takes the form of a funny and mysterious game but anyway, serious. However, for some people interviewed in Bucharest, the idea of *stealthily performed* marriage has rather the significance of a shameful act which proves once again the difference between marriage as personal choice and marriage as norm. The idea of a great magnitude wedding is far from being attractive for Romanian young people. An interviewed young woman was eager to wear a wedding dress but at the same time, given the difficulties related to the wedding, described the wedding as a burden. Last but not least, another common case is that of an interviewed man who refused to get married precisely to avoid the *must* to invite

to his wedding all relatives, more or less known, of the two large original families of the two spouses.

More importantly, the anthropological detour from the French point of view allows us to notice that, while in Marseille, the commitment to the idea of religious marriage seems inexistent, while in Bucharest this commitment is major. A comparison between the two series of interviewed people reveals, on the one hand, similarities between the two countries in terms of religious practices (young Romanian people state they practice religion as little as French young people), and on the other hand, differences between Romania and France (interviewed people in Bucharest stating they are believers are many more than in Marseille). Can we reduce commitment to religious marriage to a mere matter of faith? In this respect, it is to take into account the fact that religious freedom was officially forbidden during the Communist regime. In an oppressive political context, religious practices are often interpreted as an attempt of spiritual survival and / evasion. The consequence of ideological ban on any form of religion is not the one à priori expected: instead of disappearing forever, religious beliefs and practices are preserved and strongly put forward. Unlike other former Communist countries (Poland, for instance), they are not a form of resistance against political intrusion into private life, but rather a deep need to preserve one's identity (family, ethnicity, etc.).

Whether inherited or not, the commitment to religious marriage among young people interviewed in Bucharest is obvious: 33 out of 40 Romanians interviewed prefer civil wedding to be followed by religious wedding as against 31 out of 34 French interviewed who stated that religious wedding is far from being indispensable. However, the sample in Bucharest reveal a whole range of cases varying from the image of religious marriage seen as major ceremony as against any other ceremony of a couple, to total indifference towards religion and religious marriage. Between these two extremes, the young people interviewed in Romania fall in one of the following three cases: 1. they give priority to the religious dimension of the event, 2. they give priority to family, and 3. they are simply committed to the festive dimension of the religious marriage.

Unlike all the young people interviewed in Marseille, a young woman from Bucharest defines marriage as *a vow you take in front of God*, above all. At the moment of the enquiry, the young woman already had the experience of a previous marriage. A classic example of a 19 year old girl who married her first partner who was undergraduate in theology, a good friend of her brother. The wedding took place in the countryside, in a traditional environment where both large families of the two participated in, and the young girl compared the event with a nightmare resembling a Kusturitza film. After the wedding, the couple settled in Bucharest in the flat of the girl's parents and they all live together until the husband of the interviewed girl immigrates to a Western country to practice his job as a priest. Although she later divorced, after the separation the young woman

met the man who was her partner at the moment of the interview. Even though she stated that she wanted to spend *the rest of her life* with him, as she was involved in this relationship with no hesitation, the interviewed woman stated her fear to re-marry. *"It is something sacred, you know…marriage. I mean, I won't go … I don't know but it is not a game, this is how it looks for me. It is very serious. If one decides to get married, one must be very aware of what one does and should not start from the assumption 'It's not a problem, I can get divorced'. If you start from this idea … […] I would rather like to have a religious marriage than a civil one, honestly. I would like very much. All right, the civil marriage entitles you to certain rights, to certain assets, to a legal entitlement, you know. While for me, it is the religious marriage that matters"* (woman, 29, divorced, 03/08/2006).

Another young woman declares herself a believer despite her not being a good practitioner: *"I cannot state I go to church too often"* (woman, 26, single, 30/07/2005). The young woman considers that marriage remains mainly an event linked to the decision to have a child and because, in her opinion, a child cannot remain un-baptized, religious marriage *must* take place undoubtedly. In other words, unlike Marseille, in Bucharest, religious marriage is usually presented as essential. However, religious marriage is not wished to avoid a potential religious *sin*, so it cannot be reduced, according to the views of the interviewed young people, to the dogmatic dimension of marriage as institution. On the contrary, beyond any religious practice, religious marriage is rather a way to manifest one's own belonging to a family, a link between past and future generations. For instance, without being practitioners and being very sure of their own beliefs, some of the interviewed youth expressed their attraction to religious marriage because of the significances of church as institution from the family perspective.

Last but not least, some of the young people interviewed in Romanian expressed their interest in the festive dimension of the religious marriage. *"Religious wedding is not seen as needed; it is actually part of the ceremony. To feel this ritual happening, you must go through it from the very beginning to the end. If I could choose, I would like to have it happen like in America: one marriage only and with the priest who marries you! A single stage and a single party given. I have been to many marriages, especially because it is the weddings' season now, and, you know, I feel it artificial to go to the church to get married when you are already married because you have been at the Town Hall already. It looks a bit crazy. The real ceremony takes place in the church! At the tow hall, it is always too crowded and a fuss, and not very festive and not very impressive"* (man, 25, single, 24/03/2005). However, the festive dimension of the event is not always so interesting for everybody. In this respect, some of the interviewed people declared that they were ready to give up religious marriage only to get rid of the *burden* of organizing a *tiring* event.

Analysed from the point of view of the way in which the young people describe the idea of religious belief, marriage in church reveals a dimension almost

unperceivable à priori. *"Wedding in the church … I can't say I am not a believer entirely. But … it is a different belief, modern, somehow occasional, not so strong…, that is, for Christmas and Easter I go to church, the way people do it. So the wedding should be performed in church because this is the way to do it, in church. I cannot say I don't like it. I have never heard somebody complain he or she didn't enjoy having the Redding in church"* (man, 26, single, 27/09/2005). Similarly, a young woman spontaneously emphasized that she was not a practitioner and she had a *different* view about religion and, although religious wedding did not seem necessarily a must for her, she underlined she would anyway get married in church as well because of family traditions. Although rather opposed to the idea that the commitment of Romanian young people to marriage can be explained by strong religious beliefs, the study about representations of marriage remains necessary but insufficient. Thus, both christening – of the interviewed people and of their children – and religious holidays – Easter and Christmas -– analysed from a comparative point of view Romania – France, allow a deeper analysis of the religious dimension of the life of couples.

Christening, religious holidays and life of the couple

The comparison between the two series of interviewed people reveals that only *part* of the interviewed people from Marseille is baptized (25 out of 34) as against *all* the interviewed people in Bucharest. On the other hand, regarding christening of children, only one Romanian person interviewed person considers that christening is not an indispensible ritual. Most young people in Bucharest stated that, in principle, they would choose to baptize their children. Like in the case of marriage, this study focuses only upon representations regarding christening, since only two young women were pregnant at the moment of the interview, out of the total young women interviewed, while other two people (a man and a woman) had each a child from a previous marriage. Out of the 34 young people interviewed in Marseille, only four were in favor of the idea of christening their children. In other words, while in France christening is a personal choice that belongs to the child itself, in Romania christening remains a family choice: French children reach the age when they can choose themselves whether they wish to be baptized or not, while Romanian children are baptized since their first months of life. Consequently, my research leads to the idea of commitment to baptizing as an aspect of one's own belonging to a family, rather than being a matter of religious belief. At the same time, this standpoint remains perfectly compatible with the fact that, although they declare themselves as believers, the young people interviewed in Bucharest are not necessarily religious practitioners.

The qualitative analysis of the research done in Bucharest reveals the heterogeneous Romanian social space. For instance, two interviews are extremely

suggestive for the religiosity of the youth interviewed in Romania, revealing their belonging to a family. Firstly, a man interviewed stated: *"Well, I am not necessarily a very religious person, I don't stick too much to these things. I do believe in God but not in the way to go to the priest to confess my sins, or to go to messes; I have never fasted and I shall never fast. For me religion is something else, I can understand religion from my standpoint, I am against some matters, and that is all."* (man, 27, single, 29/08/2006). Secondly, a woman interviewed recalls: *"I am an Orthodox. But, you know, I went to the Baptist church for two years. I was in high-school and I saw a poster advertising some English courses at the Baptist church. The course also had religious spirit and I started taking up some of their ideas and thus ... Well, I had been in the Orthodox religion and I was not very pleased with the Orthodox Church so I told myself: Let's see what it is like with another church. I enjoyed it, I started going to the Baptist church and I was about to be baptized but my parents didn't allow me to, they did not agree. I didn't want to act against the will of my parents either so I went to the Baptist church for two years until I got bored and I stopped going. Eventually, you realize that not even the Baptist church has only perfect people, open and honest, and eventually you should remain with your own God who rests in your soul ... and I stopped going. At present, I may go to a church from time to time to light a candle but I won't go on Sundays or things like that. However, I truly believe in God, I strongly believe, but I think God has nothing to do with that institution have nothing to do with your belief. You can go to church until you find your peace but, well, I am not crazy about going to church"* (woman, 28, single, 25/02/2006).

Apart from the matter of christening, Easter and Christmas are another extremely significant topic to reflect the intermingling of family life, leisure time and religiosity of today's young people in the context of contemporary conjugality. At the beginning, the enquiry focused on the way in which unmarried couples spend their leisure time (weekends, holidays, etc.) in order to compare everyday lives of young people with higher education in two democratic countries with totally different pasts. However, as we defined the field, we chose the category *leisure time*, insisting on topics related to Easter and Christmas.The two holidays are a separate topic that can be approached from a multi-disciplinary perspective – ethnological, historical, socio-anthropological or from the perspective of sociology and the history of religions. Analyzed in the Eastern Europe context before and after the fall of the Communism, Easter and Christmas prove to be not only two religious holidays but also family holidays indicative of the way in which the life of the couple, religiosity and people's belonging to a family manifest themselves.

Between 1947 - 1990 in Romania, like in many Communist countries, eradication of religious holidays was a clearly stated political goal. A few years after the Romanian Popular Republic was proclaimed, public celebration of religious holidays was forbidden. „In Romania, the Communist regime tried to gradually

remove, at least from the public life, religious holidays and symbols and to create a new kind of *holiday*, entirely de-sacred, with a more or less obvious political meaning. The ceremony-holiday, often called *serbare* (En. celebration), meant to change the weight from the spiritual enjoying of the holiday to the spiritual vacuum of the celebration, from living together the spirit to mere gathering together, from the sacred ritual to the profane show" (Cucu-Oancea, 2005: 160). Ozana Cucu-Oancea (2005) considers that Christmas is the one that disturbs most the manufacturing of the *new* Socialist *conscience*. In this respect, the author reveals and analyzes the main Socialist symbols created to represent winter holidays in the *new* society, as reflected in the press of those times. The main goal was to turn a Christian holiday into a festivity deprived of any religious signi-ficance. Following the Soviet example, the Romanian Communist regime started to make a radical symbolic transfer. Starting with 1948, the three Christmas days were no longer holidays and the New Year's Eve became the Socialist symbol of winter. Santa Claus was also turned into Father Frost (Ded Morz) a working class representative who brings gifts on the New Year's Eve (Cucu-Oancea, 2006). December is thus completely restructured in the sense of a certain de-sacralisation of the winter holidays. During the Golden Age, Christmas and all related religious symbols were meant to be forgotten. December is no longer symbolic for religious communion and family reunion but somehow mercantilized as it became *the month of gifts*.

After the 1990s, representations of Christmas inherited from the previous age were slightly adapted to the new context of the market economy. Father Frost becomes again Santa Claus; Christmas is both a religious and national holiday. In the *new* context of socio-economic and political transition, any form of religiosity is free to operate. The Orthodox Easter, in its turn, is celebrated nationally by two days off but the dates vary from one year to another. To note that this comparison focuses upon Christmas and less on Easter because there are notable differences in terms of celebrating Easter between the two countries.

This is the local background or, in other words, the general context of the main Romanian religious holidays that we can trace in the discourses of the young people about their own life stories. Christmas and Easter are analyzed exclusively from the standpoint of the life of a couple in Bucharest and Marseille, respectively. This analysis of Christmas and Easter has been done in order to test the hypothesis according to which Christmas and Easter do not simply reveal differences between religious beliefs as they are presented from one group to another but they are two major holidays in terms of personal commitment as part of the couple and in terms of the place held by the couple relationship as against the relations with their original families. Firstly, we can notice that, out of the total couple rela-tionships analyzed in Marseille, some are couples that spend their Christmas together and others are couples that spend their Christmas separately (in most cases, with their parents). A comparative analysis of the data shows that in

Bucharest, most couples prefer spending their Christmas together as against only two couples whose partners state that in general they spend Christmas separately. All this shows once again that, while in France, the polarity characterizing a love relationship is transposed in social practices, while in Romania, the general trend is to live in couples.

In Marseille, all the young people interviewed, irrespective of their religion, stated that they had the habit to celebrate Christmas which was seen both as a commercial holiday and as a family holiday. On the other hand, half of the couples stated they did not have the habit to celebrate Easter. Out of the 34 interviewed French, 19 spontaneously declared that Easter means just *an extended weekend*, and only 10 interviewed persons stated that for them, Easter meant *lunch with the family*. In a context very heterogeneous from the religious point of view, with more and more atheist and agnostic individuals, Easter looks like an event less and less of interest for French young people. However, all the youth interviewed in Bucharest have the habit to celebrate Easter; only four stated that Easter was rather *indifferent* to them.

The quantitative analysis of the data gathered in Bucharest and in Marseille does not allow finding out to what extent the duration of the relationship influences the decision of the two partners to celebrate Christmas or Easter together or separately. However, the qualitative analysis of their discourse reveals some aspects. Like in France, the Romanians interviewed describe the New Year's Eve as an event spent with friends in enjoying the privacy of their couple. However, in Marseille the New Year's Eve seems less majestic than in Bucharest. Without analyzing the New Year's Eve as an annual event, I shall limit myself to the assumption that the importance given to the New Year's Eve in Romania is among other things inherited from the Communist times. In France, the young couples start by celebrating Christmas or Easter separately, each partner with his/her parents or other members of their own families. In time, as the relationship becomes increasingly *serious* and both partners begin building up a joint future, the two original families gradually give a special place to the new couple which often takes part in their family reunions. Some of the young people interviewed in Marseille said that they started to celebrate Christmas the moment when they became parents. At the same time, the young people interviewed in Bucharest stated that they introduced their partner to their parents starting from the moment when the relationship became *serious*, and they do not complicate things when they feel their relationship is ephemeral. However, unlike the French ones, Romanians do not expect their relationship to turn from an *ephemeral* relationship into a *lasting* on to celebrate their Christmas or Easter with their partner or with the family of one partner. Since the relationship is old enough, the two partners do not hesitate to celebrate these holidays with parents, although everybody knows that the two may not have a common future in the long run. For instance, one of the interviewed people was aware of the *passage* from a moment of their

relationship where the two celebrate their holidays separately to a moment where the two celebrate holidays together: *"For Christmas and Easter I go home, definitely I go home. If I can, I go to visit her as well. […] Yes, we spend these holidays together. Anyway, until now, we have had Christmas and Easter only twice. This is what I have done so far. From now on, maybe Christmas separately, but we shall try to visit each other as well. We decided to spend the next Christmas at our place. [Why?] No idea; just like that. For instance, we realized everybody had a Christmas tree and we hadn't one. So if we have a Christmas tree, it'd be better to stay at our place. It may be nice to go to my family as well … I really don't know when the separation interferes, I mean, when you stop going to your parents and you stay at your place. It simply looks like a step forward in one's relationship. Another example worth presenting is an interviewed woman living with her boyfriend for years who stated: First two years, we celebrated Christmas and Easter separately, each of us with our families, then we tried to split the time. For instance, last year we celebrated Christmas with his family, he enjoyed it but I didn't, and this year with my family, I enjoyed it and he didn't, because each of us is used to spending Christmas with our own families. It is pretty difficult, you cannot cater all tastes. The same with Easter. So we celebrate Christmas and Easter in the family, I couldn't do it otherwise"* (man, 25, single, 24/03/2006). This reveals the *transition* from the time when the two celebrate holidays separately, each one in one's own family, to the moment when they spend holidays in the family, but together. Beyond this aspect, this excerpt reveals the way in which the young woman and her partner manage to combine the general norm (fusion within relationship) with the current shy but visible trend to give value to personal autonomy. Despite her own beliefs, the young woman accepts to spend Christmas with the family of her partner. However, the fact that the woman interviewed accepts a certain role in the family of her partner does not mean being *adopted* by that family. In other words, the two make a couple, go together always everywhere, but give priority to their relations with their own families.

Apart from this example, most couples interviewed in Bucharest end up by celebrating their holidays together, with one of their original families. Thus, holidays become object of an amiable negotiation meant to please everybody. *"We have an agreement, therefore, I cannot say we have fully complied with but we have, mostly: to spend one holiday in Bucharest with his family and the next holiday in Constanța … with my family. We usually would go to Constanta for Christmas and we would stay in Bucharest for Easter, and, well, I would run for a day to Constanta to visit my family for a day. […] The New Year's Eve, we would spend it somewhere in the mountains with friends. This is what we have done the latest years"* (woman, 28, single, 12/08/2005). Thus, the two holidays do not reveal a significant change in the life as a couple of the Romanian young people. However, despite apparent lack of change, the life as a couple never stops changing. In their own way, young people manage to reconcile inherited values and

norms with their own, less traditional wishes. In other words, although life as a couple sees no spectacular changes like in Western countries in the '70s, conjugality outside marriage in Bucharest confirms slow but deep assimilation of democratic values of freedom and gender equality.

Conclusions

Following the intricate long term process of laicization, religiosity in France becomes, in general, a matter of personal conscience. Given the emergence of democratic values of freedom and gender equality, the choice to render or not official a couple relationship becomes a matter of personal conscience. In today's Romania, a democratic country with a recent totalitarian past, marriage, entirely redefined and different from the 19th century religious marriage or the proletarian Communist marriage, remains a basic social norm. However, everyday life of young people living in urban area confirms diffusion of democratic values across everyday life as well as in rites and holidays that structure life cycles.

Generally speaking this article has fulfilled two ambitious goals that require further research. Firstly, from the methodological point of view, the *anthropological detour* is brought forward as an extremely useful working tool but insufficiently used in Romanian research. In this respect, beyond the attempt to compare the incomparable (Sartori, 1994: 22), an analysis exercise is provided in the sense of focusing upon a society that is highly different in order to remove pre-notions and biases that may be major obstacles in understanding the dynamics of a society which the author herself belongs to. Secondly, within the theoretical framework, the limits of the hypothesis of *faith* as explanation for the commitment to rites and religious holidays are hereby presented; consequently, a relational approach is proposed to allow analysis of the slow but deep dynamics of the institutions of the contemporary Romanian society. Obviously, future studies tackling actual *practices* of the religious dimension of family life and of couple's life remain indispensible in order to test new research paths suggested.

Acknowledgements

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