

## PHANTASMIC DEVICES: WEDDING VIDEOS AND THE CREATION OF AN IMAGINED TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY BY BULGARIAN MUSLIMS IN SPAIN

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**ABSTRACT.** For the Bulgarian Muslims in Spain wedding videos are a popular device for socializing, overcoming nostalgia and keeping pace with the news and events that take place back home in Bulgaria. The mediatization of the ritual allows an extension of the ritual across time and space. Watching the videos is a re-enactment of the celebration and has become part of the ritual itself. Subsequently, this extension of the ritual through a mediated device has led to its subtle transformations. At the same time, wedding videos and the particular mode of use produce a social effect beyond the structure of the ritual. They contribute to the extending and re-creating of a migrant community that spreads over space transnationally and temporally between the past of home and the present of life in migrancy. Drawing on ethnographic material and using the analytical tools of actor-network theory, the main aim of this paper is to trace the uses and effects of wedding videos for transforming the wedding ritual through postponing and re-enacting it on one hand, and for sustaining the phantasm of an imagined virtual community on the other. The broader problem that this paper seeks to address is the specific role that material devices play for producing social effects for migrant communities.

**Keywords:** transnational migration, transnational rituals, small media, actor-network theory, wedding videos

*Have you watched our wedding video? No? I'll play it for you now, while we are talking, then! Have you seen my daughter's wedding? Wait, I'll show you, so that you know better how she looks like when you go to Spain. Have they showed you already last month's wedding of Selim and Sebi at home? You should see it by all means. Sit, we'll watch it again, the DVD's with us right now.*

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I would hear one of these lines at almost every visit I made to Bulgarian Muslim migrants in Spain or their relatives in Bulgaria.<sup>2</sup> What followed was a stint of at least 3 hours long session of watching of a video recording of a wedding that took place in Bulgaria, with a lot of re-winding and fast-forwarding to find important moments, important people, important places. At first, I thought watching wedding videos is just a background encouraging the flow of conversation or a way to show me a person or a place. But with time, it became apparent that this is a common practice when people gathered together. Sometimes they would re-watch old videos of their own weddings, other times there would be a special gathering to watch a new wedding that just took place back in Bulgaria. If the video was initially played for me during a visit at a migrant's home, others would soon join, and it will turn into a social event. I soon started noticing that watching wedding videos was an important tool for creating and sustaining the idea of a tight-knit transnational community spreading over time and space. After attending a few weddings myself, I also came to observe how the ritual itself has been transforming to adjust to the subsequent watching. Watching the video had become part of the ritual itself, extending and transforming it. But it also brought something else – the event of watching was part of re-creating communal life and of creating and sustaining the connections between the different villagers some still in Bulgaria, others in the small Spanish town. Watching weddings was experienced as participating in a communal life and as overcoming the ruptures that migration brings about.

With this paper I seek to analyse the social uses of wedding videos for creating and sustaining the idea of a transnational community on one hand and the role they play in transforming the wedding ritual itself and how it is enacted. Thus, my argument is two-fold. First, I explore the role of the wedding video as a device which has become an agent in the process of transnationalizing a village community. I argue that the practices related to producing and using wedding videos generate a performance and an experience of an imagined virtual community. In this way I show how wedding videos are devices for transcending spatial and temporal ruptures between the past of home and the presence of life in migrancy. Thus, they are active part of the process of crafting a phantasm of coherence, order and wholeness of the transnational community. Second, I claim that the use of the visual device of the video and

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<sup>2</sup> Bulgarian Muslims is a term used to refer to a group of people also referred to as “Pomaks”, “Bulgarian speaking Muslims” and “Bulgarian-Mohamedans”. The question of their labeling is complex and controversial and there is no agreement neither among academics, nor among political representatives. Emically, different terms are being used, differing from village to village. I have decided upon Bulgarian Muslims because this is one of the ways my informants referred to themselves for outsiders. And while some of them referred to themselves as “Pomaks” internally, it is a term considered by many offensive when used by an outsider. For a detailed history in English of renaming and identity formation among Bulgarian Muslims see Neuburger, 2004; Todorova, 1998.

the technological evolvement from VHS to DVDs bring about changes in the way the ritual unfolds, leads to the introduction of new elements, occasionally changes the flow and accentuates the ritual in new places.<sup>3</sup>

The article draws on ethnographic materials collected between 2007 and 2008 in two sites – the village of Brushlyan, in the South Western part of Bulgaria, and the small town of Tafalla, in Navarra, northern Spain. I have lived with a migrant family in Spain and with a family with relatives in Spain, back in Bulgaria for extended periods of time. I have watched numerous wedding videos both during informal visits and gatherings and on formally arranged interview sessions. I have also participated in two wedding celebrations in Bulgaria during this period. The specificity of this type of migration allows to make an analysis of the community life. Migrants from this region in Bulgaria tend to concentrate in one or two towns abroad. At the time of my research more than one quarter of the former village inhabitants were residing in Tafalla, while a small number were in the neighbouring bigger town of Pamplona. Migrants to other locations were individual cases. In this way the village community is effectively divided in two or three geographical localities and continues to reproduce social relations, rather than being dispersed in multiple places. The social life in Spain actively replicates village social relations, hierarchies, solidarities, even conflicts between families. Celebrations and rituals contribute to this reproduction of the social across borders. In this sense wedding videos are instrumental in this process.

In what follows I first lay out the conceptual grounds for my analysis expanding on the issue of how devices produce social effects inspired by actor-network theory. Then I describe briefly the migration life of my informants, before moving to the specifics of the wedding ritual. Part 3 is devoted to the analysis of the two types of devices used and the way technological innovation resulted in transforming the ritual itself and the use of the device for new purposes. Finally, I conclude with a closer look at the role wedding videos play in sustaining the phantasm of a trans-local and trans-temporal migrant community.

### **Wedding videos as devices and the cult of family and community unity**

Taking the vantage point of wedding videos to analyse the performance and enactment of a migrant community prompted an approach grounded in a

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<sup>3</sup> In this text I chose not to focus on the performance of the wedding as such, nor on the concepts of relatedness and kinship that are reproduced through the ritual, which would have taken me in a different direction and a theoretical investigation. Instead, I only look at the community level and explain how the mediated ritual allows a group of people to perform as a community.

theoretical perspective that takes seriously material objects and technology. I use as a starting point the approach proposed initially in actor-network theory by key authors like Bruno Latour, Michelle Callon, and John Law. In this framework I think of wedding videos as devices which are part of a heterogenous network (Callon and Latour, 1981; Latour, 2007; Law, 1992, 2009) made of human and material actors that enact and are enacted to produce social effect. While ANT started as a study of how science and technology work and how knowledge is a product of and an effect of a network of heterogenous materials, it grew as an approach to be used in a variety of fields to explain the interaction between human and non-human agents and the different modes of ordering or logics produced by this interaction.<sup>4</sup> The radical claim of ANT is that network are composed not only of people, but also of durable materials like machines, texts, money, architectures, and other devices and objects. The metaphor of heterogenous network is at the heart of actor-network theory and is a way of suggesting that society organizations, agents and machines are all effects generated in patterned networks of diverse (not simply human) materials (Law, 1992:2). For the purposes of this paper, I think of the process of producing and imagining a transnational community as an effect of the workings of a heterogeneous network, in which wedding videos as devices are one of the actors.

The notion of device allows to bring objects into the social analysis by considering they have agency, “Whether they might just help (in a minimalist, instrumental version) or force (in a maximalist, determinist version), devices do things. They articulate actions, they act and make others act,” say Muniesa, Millo and Callon (2007:2). In this sense I take wedding videos as devices which act by associating with other actors in the network, or as Annemarie Mol (2010:260) puts it: “Actors are enacted, enabled, and adapted by their associates while in their turn enacting, enabling and adapting these”. By these associations devices also reconfigure the initial relations. The transnational community, the relations between co-villagers, the wedding ritual itself would be different without the participation of the video as a technological tool. The question then is not simply what is the effect of a device, but also what would be the effect if the device was not available.

Many observers agree that ‘technology’ includes not only the built devices, but also the practices and knowledge related to them and the social arrangements that form around those devices, practices and knowledge (e.g. Howcroft et al., 2004; Latour, 2007; MacKenzie and Wacjmann, 1999; Suchman et al., 1999). Thought of this way technology is dynamic and has to be looked at in a processual relational way. In this text I show how the technological change

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Callon et al., 2007 on economic sociology; Mol and Berg, 1994; Akrich and Pasweer, 2000 on medicine; Gommart and Hennion, 1999 on music amateurs and drug addicts; Hui, 2015; Sánchez-Querubín and Rogers, 2018 on migration.

from VHS to DVD triggers transformation both of the experience of the ritual and of its structure. Following further insights from the anthropology of things at the intersection with Actor Network Theory (e.g. Gell, 1998; Navaro-Yasin, 2007; Strathern, 1999) I trace how this is triggered not simply by the new technology for recording and re-playing, but also by the concrete ways people decide to use this technology and what is more, how they relate to it in a specific social context. Thus, this article is an attempt to explain how the phantasm of social order and coherence that is threatened by migration is reinstated by a heterogeneous network of human actors, technology and material devices.

Wedding videos in particular, or indeed other small media materials like recordings, photographs, etc., have not been analyzed specifically through the lens of actor-network theory so far. Video recordings of life cycle rituals (religious and status initiations, weddings, funerals etc.) can be traced in several analytical fields – visual anthropology, anthropology of media, migration theories, studies of the role and meaning of ritual. The main focus in visual anthropology studies is on the photographs or the ethnographic film as an evidence for social and cultural processes. Images are either thought of as a research method of gathering data, or as a way of representing certain aspect of the researched groups of people. The more critical approaches discuss the contradictory nature of these images in regard to their objectivity and representativeness (e.g. (Banks, 2001; Grimshaw, 2001; MacDougall, 1998; Pink, 2001). The question of authorship and knowledge productions is also scrutinized which has resulted in an already established tradition in cooperation in the films and image productions between the ethnographer and the subjects of his study (see Aufderheide, 1995; Carelli, 1988; Prins, 1997; Ruby, 1991; Turner, 1992). But even though more than twenty years ago Banks and Morphy (1997) insisted on a wider understanding of visual anthropology including all visual systems and visual culture, most research remains focused on the production of images by the active intention of the ethnographer, and not as a result of a spontaneous internal production and use of visual system like the wedding videos discussed in this paper.

Anthropology of media studies pays more attention precisely to the uses of visual media (for a detailed overview see Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, 2002). The topics vary from cultural activism and the role of media for empowering minorities (Asch et al., 1991; Ginsburg, 1997; McLagan, 2002; Philipsen and Markussen, 1995; Weatherford, 1990), through the role of newspapers, radio, television and cinema for creating national self-consciousness (Anderson, 1991; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Hamilton, 2002; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994), to the changing conditions of cultural productions (Dornfeld, 2002; Faraday, 2000; Himpele, 2002; Marcus, 1997). In their intersection with migration studies, media analyses predominantly focus on

how minorities are represented in media, on the role of the migrants' audience for the formation of media policies, as well as on the influence of private and public media for the cultural and social minority integration (Aksoy and Robins, 2000; Caglar, 2001; Cunningham and Sinclair, 2000; Karim, 1998; Kosnick, 2000; Vertovec, 2000). None of these approaches focuses on small media like videos or pictures produced for private use.

Studies which focus on the use of private use of media, and more particularly on photography, concentrate on the social function of pictures, especially in relation to their role for the construction and the integration of the family (see studies on family photography of Marian Hirsh (1997) and Annette Kuhn (2002). Along similar lines, already in the 1960's Bourdieu (1990) analysed the practice of taking family photographs and their role for keeping the "cult of unity" of the family, as well as the ritualization of taking photographs itself. More recently, in the field of migration studies, Olena Fedyuk (2007) contributes to the discussion with an insightful analysis of how Ukrainian migrants use photographs for measuring time in migration and for maintaining the family as a unit. Photographs are seen as a 'glue' that bonds together transnational families. The metaphor of the glue can be quite well taken further to analyse the active role objects can play. What Fedyuk does at the level of the family, I take further to demonstrate at the level of the community, emphasizing the aspect of the phantasm of unity and coherence, that exists in the imaginaries of migrants and villagers alike. At the level of ritual representation there are two notable examples of analysis of wedding videos as used by migrants. Barbara Wolbert (2001, 2008) and Gulsum Depeli (2009) both worked on Turkish migrants in Germany and the ways small media contributes to the creation of community cohesion. Both Wolbert and Depeli show how videos produced by migrants during rituals taking place in Germany are then used in Turkey by relatives to create connections between separated families and kin. Wolbert calls this a 'visual production of locality' and coins the idea of 'virtual neighbourhoods'. My analysis takes this one step further by first, introducing a strong emphasis on the role of the device in this process, and second, by pointing to the imaginary virtual community created by these devices used by migrants.

The rest of this text is divided in three parts. I first describe the typical wedding ritual. The second part is devoted to the analysis of the different types of recordings and the variations in their use. I focus on the differences that the change of technology brings about (from VHS to DVD) and trace the role that the device plays for creating social relations between migrants and villagers and for the idea of a transnational community. In the last part I point out the transformations in the substance and in the essence of the ritual and of its distinct practices due to its virtualization and reproduction under migration conditions.

## The wedding ritual

The weddings in Brushlyan take place in the winter. From November to April every weekend there is a wedding, sometimes two. Everyone gets married in the village, even the migrants. "*The summer is the work season, the winter is the weddings season,*" say people in the village. And indeed, even though most migrants have their long holidays in July and August, they usually organize their wedding around New Year's. The wedding in Brushlyan is a much more public event in comparison to other major rites of passage and other ritual events (like birth, circumcision, death etc.). While other turning points in the life cycle are being conducted in the narrow family circle, the wedding is the event in which the whole village participates. Following Bourdieu (1990) I would argue that there is a strong co-dependence between the centrality of an event and its mediatization and image commemoration, in this case, video recording, while in Bourdieu's case – taking photographs. The image capturing of certain events and not of others marks the distinction between the public and the private. Therefore, rituals considered as more private and confined to the narrow family remain unrecorded, and hence single events, never re-used or re-enacted, in contrast to the public event which continues to be re-used in the future through the visual traces of the video.

The wedding itself comprises of two stages - a private, religious ritual, and a public, secular ceremony. The first stage is referred to as *getting married (zhenene)*, the second one is the actual *wedding (svatba)*. Only the second stage is video recorded. The first stage is only for close family members and the Imam, who conducts the ceremony. The first stage importantly signifies the change in the status of the couple and is marked by the woman moving in the home of the man. This is the social validation of the new bond. Nonetheless, the two stages are essentially part of the same 'ritual'. Neither of the two can be skipped. The two parts are essentially inseparable, even if separated in time. Thus, the ritual is divided in two parts, i.e. it is extended, and a period of liminality is inherent to it. The mediatization of the ritual and the further re-enacting it in a different place and time, then is yet another extension of this liminal stage between the start and the final closure of the ritual.

After the couple is already *married*, begins the planning of the second stage – the *wedding*. The event is centred around the civil marriage procedure in the town-hall and the celebrations in which usually the whole village takes part. It is this public ritual that is recorded in detail and then reproduced and used over and over again. The ritual has several turning points: taking the groom from his house, a procession with him and his relatives to the house of the bride, picking up the bride, endowing the bride's parents with gifts, displaying the dowry publicly, a second procession with both kin to the main square, ring dances (*hora*) at the square, civil marriage in the town-hall, again

dances at the square, and finally, two shifts of guests in the restaurant, in between which there is one more round of dances at the square.

There are no special invitations for the wedding guests, because it is assumed that everyone from the village, who is over 18 and not mourning, will be present. It is a rule that there should be at least one representative per family. Guests usually do not bring presents but are expected to 'pay' for the feast. This in itself is turned into a rite. After several dances in the restaurant the bride sets off on a 'greeting tour' (called the '*tax collector tour*'), in which she passes by every single guest to receive congratulations and a note of ten or twenty leva (five or ten euro), depending on the gender. The money is collected by a bride's maid in a large plastic bag.

After the lunch is over, there are more unstructured dances in the centre of the restaurant. This is the moment, in which every song is a special request with a greeting line from a relative or a friend (for which the orchestra is compensated additionally by the guests per song). There is a strict order starting with the witnesses and the parents and moving to more distant relatives, finishing with friends. This is an especially alluding point for discovering the migrant connections of the young couple.

This wedding ritual structure is repeated at every wedding. The possible variations depend on the financial situation of the family, and whether there are any migration influences. The particular migration variations (in case there is a member of the family who is a migrant) can be traced in several directions: the types of presents, the dresses of the bride and the witnesses, in the currency of the notes attached to the bride and groom clothes, in the amount and type of dowry, and the type of orchestra invited. The most visible difference is manifested in the currency and amount of money given to the couple. At migrant weddings the money attached to the clothes is in euro and the amount is bigger. Thus, migration is clearly fixed as an affluence marker. These variations, albeit subtle, are closely inspected later when re-watching the video and have become central points for the audience.

### ***Making the wedding videos***

Over the last fifteen years every wedding in Brushlyan has been filmed on video, which has become part of the wedding ritual itself. The wedding videos are produced exclusively by the head master of the village school. This has elevated his status to one of the most influential people in Brushlyan to a far greater extent than his position as a head master.<sup>5</sup> A wedding video would

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<sup>5</sup> This is very similar to what Turner has suggested about the Kayapo, where being a cameraman and having access to visual media technology are forms of cultural capital and ultimately a question of power relations within a community (Turner, 1992:7).

cost about 350 euro at the time of the research – a substantial sum of money for the village standards. Nevertheless, this was an indispensable part of every wedding's budget, which did not depend on the financial situation of the families. The school head master in his role of a cameraman follows every step of the wedding processions, enters in the house of the bride for the special internal close kin celebration and drinking in the morning, and later on, tracks all the guests during the ring dances at the square, and then all the main turning points in the restaurant. In addition to this, there is a special filming tour, recording every single guest greeting the newly wed while in the restaurant.

There are two types of videos produced over the years – the old videotapes and the new DVD's. The old videos are a full real time recording of the whole wedding day starting at the groom's house and ending with the last dances at the main square after the two shifts of guests in the restaurant. They often last up to seven hours and are comprised of several videotapes. The first one always opens up with thematic panoramic view of the village from afar in winter and summer. This is followed by a staged walk by the soon to be wed, most often in the nearby meadows, finishing with a drink in the most popular road restaurant. This adds to the particularly nostalgic note of the old wedding video tapes. The new ones, recorded on DVD, are cut and edited and are relatively shorter, lasting between three and four hours, again with very long uninterrupted shots of processions and dances. This differentiation is to a great extent conventional in order to get more clarity. The different technical carrier signifies a different moment in time of the production of the video, hence of the wedding itself, which in its turn points to a different attitude towards the wedding video. There is more to this however. The VHS videos were multiplied in a few copies distributed among the relatives, while the DVD videos being much more easily reproducible, are multiplied and distributed in much greater numbers both in Brushlyan, and among the migrants. In this sense, the technical parameters of the video contribute to the practical transformations of its use and clearly demonstrate how the different technical devices produce different social effect. I come back to this point in the second part.

The two types of technical production of the videos reflect two aspects of their consumption and of their meaning. The old videotapes brought to Spain contain exclusively own wedding recordings from the past. The same videos are watched in Bulgaria by close family members. In contrast, the new DVD's are of recent weddings that took place in the village and are watched by close and distant acquaintances alike both in Spain and in Bulgaria. This differentiation also defines the practices of watching and experiencing the videos. While the old ones assume a more private use, mostly directed towards creating temporal links between past and present, which overlap with building spatial visual bridges between "the home" and "abroad", the new DVD's are much

more publicly shared and play a stronger social cohesive role. The old videos are considered as more intimate and aim at re-creating the unity of the family. The new ones serve as a medium for participation in key village events both by close relatives and by the wider village community. In the next section I will demonstrate these two aspects of the use of wedding videos.

### **The social use of wedding videos: meanings and transformations**

#### ***The old wedding videos: practices of reinforcing the cult of the family unity***

According to the site and audience, the old wedding videos can be divided in two types. The first type are the videos brought by migrants to Spain of their own wedding. The second type are the children's weddings watched by elderly family members in Bulgaria. This division also reflects the generational split in the two geographic sites.<sup>6</sup>

Although migrants arrive to Spain with a small number of personal belongings, the wedding video tape is an indispensable object. The old wedding videos are played usually by the women who work part time or in shifts and thus spend more time at home by themselves. Often, the occasion to play the video for me was a distant question about their relatives or something connected to the village. Badie<sup>7</sup>, a 34 years old migrant, who joined her husband in Spain in 2004, worked in shifts in the central restaurant. I remember meeting her for the first time in her house one afternoon. I was not sure whether I had met her husband. She immediately took out the wedding video from under the TV set (the only video tape there!) and played it, instead of simply showing me a picture:

Watch carefully now. This is a real Bruslyan wedding. We have really good wedding in our village, such big celebrations, the dances at the square... You'll see me, how I used to look eight ears ago. I was a bit chubbier then, but now I have lost quite some weight. I know how to live like the Spaniards do, I eat healthier... And you'll see my parents, my brothers, the cousins. Actually, the whole family gathered at one place. Now that I think about it, we haven't gathered all of us, like this, since then.

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<sup>6</sup> Even though the group of the ageing people, who come to Spain for shorter visits, is growing constantly, in general there is a clear tendency of age division among migrants. The ageing would normally come to Spain if asked by their younger relatives to help them with caring for children. These short-term stays are recently more and more often developing into long term relocations. See more on this in Deneva (2012). Nevertheless, the major part of migrants in Spain are still the younger generations.

<sup>7</sup> All names have been changed.

We started watching and gradually Badie introduced me to all the important moments of the wedding ritual, forwarding the tape just as to skip to the next one. She showed me her parents' house and the house of her husband's family, where they used to live in Bulgaria. Then she indicated her family members, the wedding witnesses, and all the rest of her wide kin relatives. She paid special attention to the outfits and commented on how people changed since then, who died, who moved up in their career etc.

Badie's example demonstrates a typical practice of watching wedding videos. One of the possible uses of the video is as a document and evidence of people (including oneself) from the past and of particular practices and images from the village. The recording replaces the photo album, as well as the physical presence. Moreover, reproducing the ritual in real time opens up the opportunity to re-experience it in every minute detail. When I asked Badie how does she know where to find the exact place of each episode on the three videotapes, she told me:

Well, I play the tape quite often. Here in Spain, when I feel sad for home and start missing my parents too much, I play it to see the village, the views, the steep streets, our house. And it makes me feel a bit better.

Re-experiencing the ritual then is a strategy to cure nostalgia. It is not only relatives and close friends who had remained in Bulgaria, that are being remembered in such a way, but also more distant village acquaintances. Watching and commenting becomes a mechanism for normalizing the traumatic experience of the ruptures in the social fabric. At the same time, the video follows not only the presence of the people, but also the landscape of the village, pausing at key sites. Thus, the practice of re-watching and re-experiencing creates not only temporal, but also spatial bridges between home and abroad. In this sense, Loewenthal's (1985) metaphor of the past as a foreign country is reversed. Here, the temporality and spatiality overlap in such a way that the past becomes equivalent with the space of home.

The own wedding videos are watched not only by women in the privacy of their homes, but also by groups of relatives on family and festive occasions. On Ramadan Bairam a large group of relatives gathered to celebrate in the home of my landlord in Tafalla. At some point they decided to play the ten-year-old wedding video of one of his brothers. At first everyone kept chatting about recent everyday issues from their life in Spain, casting only sporadic glances towards the screen. Gradually though, everyone started watching closely and the whole conversation turned to the wedding video. One line of comments was related to what happened over the last years in the village, who built a new house, which places have changed, which streets were

paved. Another line of discussion was the people seen on the main square dancing: who had changed in what way, what happened to each and one of them, who married whom, who migrated to Spain, who's successful, who failed. The conversation quickly moved to more political topics, when the video reached the point of the civil marriage ritual in the town-hall, which was led by the mayor at that time. This part of the ritual also bears evidence to whom is the mayor at the time, which opens up wider commentaries on the recent political developments in the village and the success or failure of the particular mayor and his/her successors. Finally, a huge scandal erupted between two cousins over the present mayor and his decision to buy a new scanner for the medical centre rather than improve the sewerage system, and someone had to stop the video causing such a heated debate.

In this way, the use of wedding videos creates a sense of continuity and participation in an imagined village community, which albeit spread over space, keep being informed of and connected to each other. The diversion of the conversation from the past event to the present political situation in the village generates an even more intense feeling of participation. The personal function of the video as a document for an important event intertwines with the social function of the recording as an archive of the community life and of the village as landscape and consequently as a visually produced locality, to use the term of Wolbert (2001).

On another occasion, the brother of the groom whose wedding we have been watching said:

When I watch this wedding, when I watch our village, I know that one day I'll go back. I'll never feel Spain as close as the small streets of Brushlyan. Now they paved the main street already, we are building new houses. You must have seen them when you went there. There are street lamps almost everywhere. Now, the new mayor has to work on the water supply a bit and it will be heaven, this village of ours. Here in Spain, this is not life, renting a place, being a foreigner. We are here just for a short while. For the wedding of my sons, we'll be back in Brushlyan, you'll see.

This quote is rather symptomatic of the more general opposition between home and abroad/normal and abnormal life, which is constantly present in the migrant discourse. The initial wedding of the parents at home and the final wedding of the sons, again planned at home, are the two points in time which will bracket the temporary unstable and negative migrant experience and will restore the normality of being, which migration has disrupted. In contrast to the Turkish wedding videos described by Wolbert (2008), which take place in Germany, here the direction is one-way. The

wedding is in Bulgaria, just as the home and the community are perceived in Bulgaria, even though many of the migrants have been living in Spain for about eight years and the small village community have long ceased to be concentrated spatially in Brushlyan. Celebrating the wedding ritual in Bulgaria itself is a sign that Brushlyan is thought of as the home par excellence, which is the place for the significant events, while Spain is perceived as a temporary experience, which only deserves the time of the mundane practice. The feast and the ritual only happen at home.

Watching wedding videos at the other end of the field, by parents in Bulgaria, is used in a slightly different way. The videos are used as a cure for their sadness induced by the physical absence of the children. My landlords, Ismet and Ayse, would usually play one of the wedding videos of their three children, all in Spain, after the usual Sunday evening phone call. Even though parents at home have plenty of photos of their children hanging on the walls, the videos offer a moving image, which seems closer to the authentic image. "When I look at Sabrie, dancing at the central square, it's as if she's still here," is what Ayse is telling me, while watching her daughter's wedding with tears in her eyes. And even though there are video recordings from other events in their children lives in Spain (celebrations of Bayram, birthdays, good bye parties for someone leaving back to Bulgaria) the weddings are what is periodically being played as a true signifier for the reality of the children. The significance of the wedding as the most important and festive event in the life cycle reinforces the feeling of co-experiencing the children's lives who are far away. As in the other cases, what can be observed here is what Bourdieu (1990) calls the "cult of the family unity". The recording of the feast has not only a documentary and preservation function, but also accentuates the integrity of the family, which is regarded as especially important under conditions of migration. The video, which contains all family members, does not only represent the wedding ritual, but in itself becomes a ritual of the family cult.

### ***The new wedding DVD's: sustaining a transnational village community***

Technologically the new wedding DVD's are much more easily multiplied and distributed among a wider audience immediately and simultaneously, which has deeper implications for their uses and functions. During my stay in Tafalla all the weddings which took place in the village in the meantime were disseminated among a wide circle of people in Spain within days. Two types of watching practices can be distinguished here: showing the own wedding to close relatives in Spain and watching distant acquaintances wedding by migrants. The own wedding videos are usually played for close kin members

who did not manage to go back to Bulgaria for the event.<sup>8</sup> The young couple gathers the relatives on both sides who are in Spain and plays the video in a celebratory and festive manner. Watching the video becomes a celebration in itself. There is a lot of food and drinks in the home of the new couple, music, usually played at weddings, plays along, the relatives bring small presents and often give money to the young couple. The video is watched in full, and the celebration afterwards might last until early morning. In this sense, this is a continuation of the wedding celebration, postponed in time and space. In this way the absence of the important kin members is compensated through the repetition and re-enactment of the ritual. The detailed recording serves as a tool to re-create a close to the original type of experience. Even though the guests cannot dance the typical *horo* dances in the living room, they sing along and clap their hands in rhythm while watching.

The ritual watching of the videos explains the length of the videos and the big number of real-time episodes. Long real time shots are not due to technical limitations, but to a filming convention.<sup>9</sup> Documenting every moment of the ceremony is significant part of the quality of the recording<sup>10</sup>. The subsequent show of the video becomes a ritual event, close to the original one. Moreover, video film is a strategy of enhancement of status and prestige

Lili is a 22-year-old woman, who had lived in Spain with her parents since she graduated from high school. Her husband was her high school boyfriend with whom she kept in touch over the summers. After they got married, he arrived with her to Spain and moved in with her parents there. Her uncle and his two sons, as well as several other more distant cousins did not have the opportunity to go back to Bulgaria for the wedding. Therefore, on the third night of their arrival to Spain, everyone was invited to watch the wedding video. Lili commented on the event, while running back and forth from the kitchen bringing out all kinds of food brought especially from Bulgaria:

It was so sad that we couldn't be all of us in Brushlyan for my wedding. I almost felt that some part of my body is missing. Now that we have the rest of my family here with us, watching with us, sharing it with us,

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<sup>8</sup> These are wedding in which at least one of the two has established themselves in Spain formerly or right after the wedding. It is very common that the boy goes back to Bulgaria over the summer and “get married” to his long-term girlfriend. She then would join him in Spain, and at New Year’s they would go back to Bulgaria for the big wedding. Another very wide spread practice is that the young couple decides to migrate right after the wedding. In both cases usually there are rather close relatives in Spain who do not manage to go back to Bulgaria to be present at the wedding.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion of the use of real time filming see for example Charles Gore (1997) on televised ritual in Benin.

<sup>10</sup> See also Gillespi (1995) on religious rituals in South East Asia, Depeli (2009) and Wolbert (2008) on Turkish migrants’ wedding videos.

only now do I have the feeling that it is real, that I indeed got married. It was unfinished somehow before this evening here. And you know, my relatives here, they didn't know my husband that well. They haven't seen him in a suit, leading the horo, dancing with me. How can they just look at him with his ordinary everyday clothes and know that we got married? But now, after tonight, after watching the video they will accept him as my husband, I know!

The wedding ritual is completed only after every important kin member has participated in watching the wedding video. In this sense, the wedding video is the final stroke which validates the official marriage ritual. The digital repetition of the ritual widens the opportunities for participation and experience of the ritual. The physical absence is compensated by a repeated and detailed visual sharing post factum. The divided family is being reconstructed through the postponement and extension of the ritual. As with the old wedding videos, but to a far greater extent, the repeated use serves for the restoration, albeit partial, of the damaged family fabric, which migration has caused. The cult of the family unity is reflected in Lili's words. The wedding does not become fully real, until every important kin member has seen it. The aspect of extending the ritual as to include all the essential participants leads to a level of transnationalization of the community and a sustenance of a transnational social field, which cannot be reached through other media of participation.

What is more, this extension of the ritual which adds one more stage in the actual ritual, before it is completed, creates in fact a longer period of liminality, which was not part of the original wedding ritual. Unlike the period between the *'getting married'* and the *'wedding'*, this is a new aspect of breaking the ritual into more parts. Thus, the period of time between the wedding in Bulgaria, and the final chords of the video recording in Spain, is an extension of the transition between two states. Not accepting the husband, until all the relatives have seen him in full wedding attire signifies the need for accreditation of all family members, before the final transformation (into officially married). Lasting sometime up to two weeks, this period bears the traits of indeterminacy and ambiguity, typical for the liminality period, discussed by Turner (1969). Thus, migration brings out a new aspect into the traditional wedding, which changes the texture of the ritual in spatial and temporal terms – from a two-step, into a three-step transition.

Another aspect of this practice of watching is the transformations in the meaning of the ritual which come along. The migrant relatives put different emphasis in the flow of the events than the usual main turning points. Through relatives that were present at the wedding, they have sent special greetings - songs ordered from the band. The greeting my landlord required from the band on behalf of his two sons who were in Spain was: "Hot greetings from the

cousins Ismet and Mehmed, from far away Spain.” This moment was then awaited with eagerness, while the respective cousins were watching the wedding already in Spain. They re-winded and played this spot several times and commented on the particular phrasing and the chosen song. I will come back to this modification of the important points of the ritual in a moment.

The second use of the new wedding DVD’s is by wider audience. Once a wedding DVD is brought to Spain by a recently wed couple, several copies are being circulated among the wider community of migrants. They do not watch it in the same ritual way as the close kin, but watch it with certainty nonetheless. Here the idea of restoring the family unity is brought to the level of the community. Watching is accompanied by comments on various participants in the wedding and their recent live development. Those who were recently in Bulgaria, inspired by the images, share the latest news and gossip. In this way, one of the most important aspects of being part of a wedding in the village - the gossiping - is being delayed and recreated from afar. At this level, watching substitutes the participation. As a result, the videos reinforce the idea of an imagined village community, which includes the migrants. The weddings and the celebrations which go along are an occasion for a recurring experience of the whole village community sharing certain events every week. The wedding video grants an opening into this experience. As in the case of the old video, it disrupts the flow of mundane time by inserting the festivity time of the home into the realm of migration.

This imagined village community, however, is an idealized version of the community as such, which covers all the rupture and social distances caused by migration on one hand, and all the existing conflicts and power relation in the village itself, on the other hand. In such a way, watching the videos covers and even smoothes in a bizarre way the unevenness of the social horizon in the village and creates an idealized version of the village social life and of home. At the same time, this particular aspect creates an even stronger feeling of absence of those who are in Spain and cannot participate. Similarly, for the migrants the idea that there is an occasion for celebration every weekend, which they cannot attend, emphasizes the feeling of rupture between life at home and life abroad. The fear of falling out from the broader village community while becoming confined in the limited migrant community is palpable and is being verbalized exactly in moments of watching a video. The video here serves to recreate the idea of integrity at the level of the community. Atidje’s words illustrate this point:

These videos help me at least a bit to imagine life in the village. I haven’t been at a wedding since I arrived here four years ago. I feel as if I am completely uprooted that way. When I watch a video, even if it’s

of someone I don't even know that well, I feel as if I am back. The same songs, the same dances, the same streets. Plus, some people I wouldn't have even recognized on the street, if I hadn't followed all the videos lately.

In her comment, we may read an additional aspect in the process of imagining the community. Both the own wedding and the more distant wedding videos are being used to recreate the feeling of unity by weaving a specific type of more flexible connections between the members of this transnational field. In this sense, the videos as a technological medium support the virtualization of the ideal community. With the absence of any well-developed internet fora or virtual social network, the wedding videos are the only means of virtual links between the migrants and the inhabitants of Brushlyan.<sup>11</sup>

There is a subtle transformation in the way videos are used, but also in their meaning, which goes along with the technological aspect of their production. The old videos are produced for the married couple and their closest relatives. The new videos are directed to the whole community, transterritorially and temporally spread. The aim of the video is not only to remind people of an event, but to signify for the actuality of the event. In this sense, the new videos become evidence, not only a reference. At the same time, the ritual is not only being watched after the fact by those who were absent. It is newly experienced, re-enacted, and only thus finally completed. This re-enactment of the wedding becomes the actual closure, without which the ritual is not perceived as finished. Thus, the video is not just a sign of the wedding, it has become part of the wedding itself.

### **The extended ritual: when the invisible becomes visible**

The public and multi-fold use of wedding videos transforms the dynamics between the visible and the invisible in the ritual. Being present at the wedding permits direct participation in the ritual, partaking in the dance, in meeting people, in consuming the food and drinks and in this sense, sharing the physical and sensory participation. On the other hand, the purely visual insight into the wedding post factum offers a different kind of entrance into the ritual. The camera offers a different point of view to the event both for those who experience the wedding for the first time through the video and for those who re-watch it, after being part of it. Observing the ritual through the camera enables access to moments otherwise invisible for most of the guests

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<sup>11</sup> Facebook was not yet popular while I was doing my fieldwork, and only a few people had internet connection at home. Clearly, with the spread of home internet and smartphones the use of social network sites like Facebook have become a powerful channel for community building.

present. Such moments would be the procession to the bride's house and to the main square, the dowry display and the ram exchange. These points albeit public, are not shared with the whole village community as opposed to the dances at the main square and the restaurant feast afterwards. Another more concealed moment, inaccessible for direct observation by the wide audience, is the gift giving by the witnesses and the parents in the restaurant. Without a video, the only people who see this are those sitting in close proximity to the centre. The speeches and the central dance floor opening dances are also to be directly observed only by those who sit nearby or directly participate. Thus, the wedding video provides an all-encompassing view from above, which opens up the opportunity to look into these otherwise hidden and invisible moments.

It is this simultaneous closeness and distance generated by the mediation of an event through its video recording, that Sarah Pink describes in her analysis of televised bullfights. She argues that live and televised bullfights do not fit the ritual/spectacle dichotomy, on the contrary, they become an interweaving of media and ritual agendas, constituting each other (Pink, 1997:133). In a similar way, the personal participation in the wedding with its limited view is intertwined with the total view of the spectator, which penetrates in every corner, but is only present virtually. However, what makes this different from the mass television records of rituals, is the interactivity and creativity of the spectators in the more private video reproduction of the ritual. The spectators are not just passive viewers, but participators who control and direct the process of watching, which has become a second order ritual experience. The repeated watching activates the event again, but in a different way by introducing new accents. Rewinding, fast-forwarding, choosing certain points to go back to and watch over and over again, while skipping others, creates a different version of the ritual. The moments that gain importance by being commented upon and re-watched, are not necessarily the main turning points of the ritual as conceived by the main participants in it. While the town-hall civil marriage ritual and the speeches in the restaurant might be regarded as the most central ones by the family and the local village community, the relatives or the other migrants in Spain often emphasize different points. Consequently, watching the wedding is not simply a passive reproduction, but becomes an active part of the ritual, which opens it to new interpretations.

This reveals another difference with public rituals shown on television. The level of intimacy in watching the private wedding videos, in which if not the married couple itself, then at least many of the guests are friends or relatives of the viewers, introduces an additional aspect of indexing and referencing in the process of watching. The special camera tour, documenting

each and every guest and their greetings to the newly wed offers a very precise statistics of the wedding guests, of their presence, their table position, their clothes and their codified (for the camera) behaviour. The viewers exhilarate when they see a kin member and do not miss to note if someone is missing. There is a need of visual reference of the existence of village members, exactly because this is what cannot be reproduced through memories or gossip, while away from home. Moreover, the aspect of indexicality is complemented by the subtle transformation of the behaviour of the ones who are recorded. While in the older videos the guests were directing their congratulations to the new couple, in the new ones, the greetings are addressed to the whole village and the migrant community, which will follow every gestures and word later on. The constant visibility awareness changes the behaviour of the guests and they become much more formal or witty in the new videos.

An example for the change in status of a mini-event within the wedding was the case with one of the latest wedding DVD's brought to Spain during my stay there. Both the bride and the groom were very young, under 20, just out of high-school, hence most of their peers and friends from school were in Bulgaria, while the migrants in Spain were mostly older than them. However, their wedding video became quite popular because of one particular case. As seen in American movies, the cutting of the wedding cake is usually accompanied with the groom and bride feeding each other, and subsequently spreading cream on their faces. In this case, however, the fun game became a bit aggressive with both of them slapping each other with huge pieces of the wedding cake and giving each other rather angry looks. For the regular wedding participant, this small incident would have remained invisible due to the position of the main wedding table. The video recording and subsequent wide circulation of the DVD made this instance visible and public not only for the whole village community in Bulgaria, but also for the migrants in Spain. This particular DVD became quite popular, travelling from house to house with a small note on it, pointing to the exact minute in which the incident is taking place. This otherwise insignificant for the ritual event was watched, re-watched, and discussed for many days in the migrant community.

The inappropriate slaps in the face opened the floor for all kind of comments as to the personalities of the newly wed, which consequently spread to more general discussion of the two kin sides. Someone remembered that one of the grandmothers was particularly bossy when she was young. At the same time, an older woman shared with me, that she did not approve these new inventions in the wedding ritual. This small event, not at all central for the main wedding ritual, would have remained unnoticed for the direct participants. Through the multiplication and the distribution of the DVD however, it turned into the most discussed and commonly shared moment

which evoked comments about several generations of people and even about the transformation of the wedding ritual over time. In this way the emphasis is shifted, and a new parallel version of the event is created by the postponed secondary consumption.

**Conclusion: the transnationalization of the ritual and the ritualization of the transnational migrant space**

The visual recycling of the event leads to transformations of its substance. From a ritual here and now, for which participation is *sine qua non*, it turns through reproduction into a ritual, taking place in more than one place in more than one time. Thus the ritual deterritorializes, and the time of its total completion unfolds as to include both the physical participants and the migrants. The links between what happens in the village and the absent ones who are in Spain, already are thought of as part of the practice itself, which consequently allows to call this a transnational ritual.

Following Victor Turner (1969) then, I have argued that the ritual process is an active thing. It is not an invariable restatement of a static or even cyclic state of affairs, but equally capable of making and marking shift in a situation. The extension of the ritual and the subsequent transformations expresses the change in the overall migrant situation by adjusting to it while at the same time it also normalizes the otherwise ambivalent migrant existence. Moreover, as Moore and Myerhoff argue, ritual is a declaration of order against indeterminacy (1977:17). Migration poses a threat to order, it creates a rupture in the neatly conceptualized community fabric. The wedding ritual, extended and re-enacted, restores the idea of order but at the same time it also emphasizes the absence, the distance and the fragmentation that migration brings about. The extension of the ritual made possible by the use of technical devices sutures these ruptures and ritualizes the migrant space, as an act of normalizing the abnormality of the migration experience.

The phantasm of the ideal community prior migration which has to be recreated becomes activated by the social use of wedding videos as devices. The recording of the ritual and the performance of the ritual have mixed to produce a new version of the ritual. The mediated re-enactment happening through the device has become part of the ritual itself. As such it has transformed the ritual extending it, including new participants, allowing for shifting of the emphasis on different points. The extension and transformation of the ritual through the device of the video produces in its turn a new type of community – translocal and trans-temporal. Through asynchronous and mediated interactions those in Bulgaria and those in Spain become part of one community

that is imagined. The oneness of the community is a phantasm that is perpetuated by the devices. In this sense, the wedding videos are phantasmic devices that allow order and coherence to be reinstated at the level of the imaginaries of a community spread over space and time through migration.

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