mothers is clearly maintained throughout and its usefulness demonstrated as the analysis proceeds.

I was somewhat surprised that none of the material from British studies was used to support the argument. A good example is Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter's study of Ashton in the 1950s (1956, 1979) in which men and women appeared to live essentially separate lives). Similar studies (reviewed in Frankenberg, 1969), reveal variations on the theme and suggest structural influences and wider social consequences. Elizabeth Bott's seminal work on Family and Social Network, has clear theoretical and empirical links with the maintenance of male dominance through close- and loose-knit networks and their relation to domestic organisation.

The majority of feminist texts tend to be rather pessimistic in their vision of women's future. Professor Johnson is optimistic. In concluding Strong Mothers, Weak Wives, she suggests that the bases of male dominance which she has discussed in detail are changing, that young people are growing up with new kinds of experiences and are likely to define their own family life in rather different terms to their mothers and fathers. She may well be right. But the history of family life is one of constant flux, and it may be that the constraints on young women and men associated with the economic structures and ideological currents of our time may operate in such a way as to modify the form of male dominance rather than eliminate it.


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Studies of symbolic action stand or fall on their ability to penetrate a forest of symbols and shed light on how expressive forms connect to a real social world and to real human lives. In the worst case, they obfuscate and disorient. In the best case, as with Gail Kligman's The Wedding of the Dead, they illuminate and guide. This masterful interpretation of Romanian life-cycle rituals, and the poetic texts associated with them, takes us to the very core of the world of meaning and experience of a contemporary East European peasant community.

Kligman's service as guide and interpreter draws on over a decade of study in socialist Romania, including more than a year and a half of field research in the region of Maramureș. Long extolled as a "living ethnographic museum" of regional folk culture and traditional community life, Maramureș has been a magnet to ethnographers and folklorists interested in finding ancient substrata of European folk culture. To her credit, Kligman does not fall prey, as other scholars have, to the temptation of reconstructing "primordial" patterns of Maramureș social and ritual life; her ethnographic account is compelling precisely because the community studied, however "archaic" in certain respects, is set firmly and authentically in the complex reality of late 20th century Romania.

In The Wedding of the Dead, Kligman reveals the village of Ieud, first studied by her in 1978 and in a number of visits since, to be a community impinged upon by
forces of change, yet where fundamental values and social relations continue to be expressed and communicated through traditional modes of symbolic discourse and action. The distinctive life-cycle rituals and related traditional verse that serve as the central focus of this book, are presented as texts through which we can not just see the "intelligible reality" lived by this community, but also grasp the ways symbols create and recreate it. The rich folk culture of Maramureș has been well described by many scholars, but rarely, save by the venerable dean of Romanian folkloristics, Mihai Pop (to whom Kligman's book is dedicated), have the principles that underlie Romanian village social life and ideology been as clearly and powerfully articulated through the study of expressive forms.

In the first chapter, after an introduction which sets the study in time, place, and the context of symbolic action, Kligman outlines the character of those underlying principles. The author provides a brief but cogent overview of village social organization and paints a vivid picture of community life—with its strains and stresses, points of unity and discord. Kligman emphasizes the dominance and persistence there of patriarchy and social hierarchy (framed in terms of family/lineage identity) as primary organizing principles that order social relations and shape villagers' perceptions, expectations, and experiences of reality. These patterns of social relations are seen as coinciding neatly with the structure of Orthodox religion, which not only "influences the general organization of daily activity and the division of labor", but provides "a framework for the genesis of an ideology of gender" (p. 68). Once social hierarchy, patriarchy, and the Orthodox moral order have been established as themes undergirding community life, it remains for Kligman to explicate how the "intelligible reality" built on those themes is expressed and reinforced through symbolic forms.

She does this through the examination of three critically important life-cycle rituals. Their detailed description and analysis in three long, demanding, yet fascinating chapters, form the heart of the book. The first two deal with the elaborate weddings and funeral rites of Maramureș peasant communities. For each, Kligman provides an "idealized description" (p. 77) pieced together from a number of specific ritual occasions. This allows her to take the reader step by step through the complete ritual process, as a "complex series of transformations" (p. 147), and reveal its inner logic. Narration of the chronological sequence of events is skillfully interwoven with examples of traditional verse (laments, shouted rhymed couplets, toasts, songs) recorded by Kligman in authentic ritual contexts. Through these media of poetic expression, participants in the rituals voice their acceptance of, as well as ambivalence and anxieties about, the cosmic and social order and their place within it. Kligman's fine grained analysis of these texts illuminate the often extremely subtle relationships between the living and the dead, males and females, village families, the community and the outside world.

The fourth chapter is devoted to an analysis of the "the wedding of the dead", the ritual from which the book's title is drawn. When the community experiences the "untimely death" of a young person, a symbolic rite of marriage—the "wedding of the dead"—is performed in conjunction with the deceased's funeral. The symbolic equation of marriage with death, alluded to in the earlier discussion of weddings and funerals, is probed by Kligman for its full social and metaphorical significance. The account of the invariably tragic "death-wedding" carries a special intensity because it is more personalized, specific cases witnessed by the author described by her in intimate detail. In the context of this particular ritual process, we can see a collective effort to grapple with a fundamental paradox of human life: what Kligman calls the