

Marriage and Magic in a Transylvanian Village¹

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ABSTRACT

In this study I present the possibilities of magical influence on marriages, based on my fieldwork in a Transylvanian village. I investigate how, according to the villagers, the creation and dissolution of marriages can be magically influenced, and how they use magic to interpret the delay of the marriage, conflicts between spouses, broken relationships, and the death of a spouse. The location of the research is a village with an ethnically and religiously mixed population, where Reformed Hungarians, Orthodox Romanians and mainly Orthodox Roma live.

The study is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will focus on the recollections of the older generation, in the second part, on cases that happened in the lives of the middle-aged population, and in the third part, I will compare cases preserved in memory with contemporary cases. This comparison reveals that methods of magical intervention have changed, as have the kinds of problems that arise. From contemporary stories, it seems that the marriage prospects of an unmarried youth are no longer influenced by magic. If there is a suspicion that a marriage is being prevented by magical means (binding), people try to break this binding with the help of Romanian Orthodox priests or seers/clairvoyants. Priests and clairvoyants also pray over the clothes of those wishing to marry, and at the same time mothers fast for their unmarried children. Magic has been replaced by methods drawn from Romanian Orthodox religious practice, which are accepted and practised in secret by most of the Hungarians in the village.

Reflecting on the images of marriage being hindered by magical binding and of the predestined partner (RO: *ursita/ursitul*), I examine the relationship between Romanian and Hungarian beliefs and interpretative possibilities, referring to previous Hungarian and Romanian ethnographic research. In addition, I summarize everything that is important in relation to the specialists involved (seers or clairvoyants, Romanian Orthodox priests). According to local perception, the social institution of marriage can be influenced through magic. Marriage, divorce, and the death of one of the parties can also be interpreted magically within the local framework of interpretation.

KEYWORDS

Magical binding; predestined partner; cursing; seer; clairvoyant; Orthodox priest; interethnic influences; marriage.



In this paper I explore the possibility of individuals influencing marriage by the use of magic, on the basis of fieldwork conducted in a village on the Transylvanian Plain.² This topic arose as part of a broader research project that focused on how residents of different ethnic and religious backgrounds

related to one another in this rural community, to what extent they were acquainted with the different religious cultures represented in their village, and what the more serious problems were that drove them to appeal to one another as well as to religious specialists for help.³

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Calvinist Hungarians, Orthodox Romanians and predominantly Orthodox Roma live in the village⁴; they belong to a wider and still strong relationship network that links them to other villages and towns in the region. Although a minority of people have local civil service jobs or work for local businesses, most commute to town for work. Very few working age inhabitants earn their living from farming; beef and buffalo cattle owners are becoming fewer by the day, and even fewer people keep sheep. With the exception of a handful of successful farmers and entrepreneurs, the Hungarian and Romanian populations have experienced a noticeable economic decline in the past decade. In contrast, several Roma families have prospered and have embarked upon ostentatious building projects. Roma mobility is significant, with many people working abroad. Among Hungarian and Romanian locals, only members of the younger generation seek foreign employment, and typically entire families move abroad. One of the most discussed problems in daily village life is the increasing rate of theft. Local gossip lays the blame on poor Roma families, but in most cases, there is no evidence to back up the charges.

Cultural and social life too have seen changes. Sunday dances (locally known simply as *dances*), which in earlier times happened on a weekly basis, have not been held for decades, and the party culture is waning. Instrumental music, group singing, and traditional dances are on the verge of disappearing – only a few members of the youngest generations still learn these dances, and they do so by taking lessons from dance instructors.

Loneliness, with people staying at home and watching TV, is a widespread feature of village life. The elderly, in particular, mourn the loss of their rich local culture and complain about being lonely and about the too-rare occurrence of community events. The transformation of those events and of the party culture in the past decades has failed to generate new forms and content that could properly fulfil the role of what has been lost. The *dance* of old, in which the entire community participated (in separate groups of “little ones,” youngsters,

and married people), cannot be replaced by the bar, frequented mainly by young lads (and bachelors⁵) and by men who are lonely, divorced, widowed or, in many cases, alcoholics. One needs only to remember how ordered a setting the weekly dance used to provide for entertainment, leisure, the channelling of frustrations, and communal communication. It also offered a natural place for courtship and prodded young people to search for a partner. I cannot engage here in a description of all the changes that have occurred in the village’s social life, but it is important to note the demise of the weekly dance, given the positive effects this had both on courtship and on existing marriages.

Starting a family and providing heirs remains exceptionally important for today’s villagers. Besides the blessings that come with children, parents’ lives are fulfilled by their children’s marriages and the birth of grandchildren. Today we find parents constantly worrying about their children either delaying matrimony or eschewing it altogether. At the same time, ethnically mixed (Hungarian – Romanian) marriages have become increasingly acceptable. When members of today’s oldest generation were young, a mixed marriage (seen as undesirable) often led to conflict and the deterioration of parent – child relationships. There were instances of parents cursing their children,⁶ and mixed marriages were also noted as motives for suicide.

Singleness, developing a relationship, bad marriages, and the sudden, early death of a spouse all have at their root complex causes, and people in the village usually consider more than one explanation plausible. As an alternative explanation in many problematic cases, they bring up manipulation by magic, *being exposed to the will and hidden interference of others*. In my paper I examine how locals think the making and breaking of marriages can be influenced through magic, and how they appeal to *magic* to explain why matrimony does not happen, why there are conflicts between spouses, or their relationship takes a turn for the worse, and to explain the death of a spouse. In the following list, I briefly outline marriage-related situations in which magical intervention was considered



(or performed or commissioned):

(1) *Matrimony induced through magical techniques* between a free (single) man and a single woman. One of the interested parties initiates the magical intervention on a given person, usually by asking for the help of a folk specialist (seer, clairvoyant; HU: *néző*). Cases of this type appear in the recollections of the elderly.

(2) *Binding the marriage* of a single young person with magical techniques to make it impossible for them to marry.⁷ Villagers believe that seers, healers and witches⁸ are capable of doing this binding and that it happens even to this day.

(3) *Causing a breakdown in or ending a marriage through magic* in various ways, again with the help of specialists. A given couple might separate after magical intervention destroys their relationship, or one spouse can be made to develop an illness and die, leaving the other free to marry again. While family members (e.g., mother-in-law, sister-in-law) unhappy with a child's choice of partner generally opt for the former method, the latter is often pursued by an outsider who has sexual and marital interests in the spouse of the opposite sex. The coerced marriages that result from this second method are usually disastrous; not only are the couple unhappy, but the guilty party cannot die until they have confessed their deed. Examples of the second method being used occur only in the narratives of the elderly, and exclusively with reference to the past.

(4) *After a divorce, one of the former spouses or a family member of one of the former spouses may severely afflict the health of the other former spouse through magical techniques*, thus affecting both their chances of marrying again and their life prospects and health. The spiritual and physical tribulations of someone facing a crisis after divorce are often understood by villagers as the consequence of harmful magic, which can either be outsourced to a specialist or performed by a family member of the aggrieved person. It is commonly believed that the trials associated with a bad marriage "extend" into the future and interlink with future troubles in a whole chain

of unfortunate events. Whereas one member of the former couple has long since started a new relationship, the other is on their own, suffers, declines, has a serious illness, etc. In several instances in the village, victims turned to Orthodox priests (in monasteries, or in the parish) for help and the problems were resolved.

My paper is structured in three parts. The first part (I) concerns the recollections of the current oldest generation (70-80 years old) and events that happened when they were young. These include both well-known cases, recounted often because of their tragic outcomes, but also lesser-known ones. In none of the cases did the events involve the narrator directly. In the second part (II) I turn to near-contemporary cases that occurred in the lives of people who are currently middle-aged, the accounts of which were shared by the afflicted person or by a member of their immediate family. These examples are different from the older ones, not least because it is more difficult for individuals to talk about their own experiences or those of close relatives. It requires the development of a strong relationship of trust for people to open up about their deepest woes. The narratives they tell are not generally known in the village; apart from family members, only their closest friends are aware of them.

In the third part of the paper (III) I go on to compare the cases that survive in memory with those from our own times. We will see that differences between them are rendered significant not only by personal involvement in the latter cases and, on account of this, by wider ranging, more plentiful and more reliable documentation, but also by a change in the methods of magical intervention; in addition, there are differences in the problems mentioned. Reflecting on the notions of *marriage prevented by magical binding* and of the *predestined partner* (HU: *eleve elrendelt társ*; RO: *ursita/ursitul*), I will analyse the relation between R and Romanian beliefs and hermeneutical possibilities, building on previous Hungarian and Romanian research on the Transylvanian Plain, collections of folklore, and monographs. I will also provide a summary of all the important data concerning the specialists



involved (whether seers or Orthodox priests). I will round off my paper by formulating a series of conclusions.

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I. Memories

The following events, related to me mainly by women in their 70s and 80s, took place in the three decades after World War II. One of these women's major concerns revolved around the need to create suitable conditions with the use of magic that would result in *marriage* for a young person they feared might remain single for life if left to his or her own devices (1). When, for whatever reason, marriage did not happen at the desired moment, and fears arose that the young person would end up a spinster or a confirmed bachelor, people would strive to induce an acceptable marriage via magical techniques, usually targeting an attractive potential marriage partner of the appropriate ethnicity and social rank to be the subject of a magical rite⁹ conducted by a specialist. On occasion, a family resorted to conducting *maleficent magic* themselves; for example, parents once fed an enchanted black chicken to the chosen lad so that he would take their daughter or niece to his home immediately after the meal, which in the eyes of the community amounted to marrying her.¹⁰ More commonly they sought the help of specialists. Even though there was a Romanian woman in the village who was known as a witch with a talent for successfully manipulating marital relations, the majority of interviewees noted that people in need sought *seers* and *soothsayers* from more distant villages. A *seer* in these areas refers to a specialist in divination, who is frequently called upon to perform a magical intervention or undo the maleficent magic (harmful magic, HU: *csinálmány, csináltatás*)¹¹ of another witch. In addition, *seers* dispense medicinal herbs for various ailments. To heal or to undo a malevolent magical spell they often also prescribe religious exercise (prayer, fasting).

My fieldwork involved interviewing Hungarian, Romanian, and Roma villagers. On this topic I learned the most from Hungarians, less from Romanians, and nothing from the Roma (it did not arise in my conversations with them). These differences obviously stem both from the course our discussions took and from the human relationships I managed to develop. As my research illustrates, Hungarian and Romanian villagers do talk to one another about these subjects, and the narratives involve people from both communities.

1.1. *Manipulating Marriage with the Help of Seers*

An eighty-three-year-old Hungarian talked about a Hungarian seer in the region, whose activity he was able to observe in his youth without their knowledge. During the troubled period of dekulakisation, the narrator was deployed to a nearby village to oversee the confiscation and transportation of grain and lodged with the chairman of the new collective farming unit, in his hay loft. From here, on rainy days when he could not carry out his duties, he could watch the chairman's wife – a seer – receive her clients and observe their interactions. He thus learned exactly who came and why, what the seer requested as remuneration, and what she was given. Sometimes the interviewee knew the clients and was able to follow up on events and see whether the promised effect actually happened. He noted that the seer's earnings raised the family's income substantially. One day he was surprised to see his Hungarian neighbour and her sister coming to request the seer's services. They wanted to marry off the sister to a chosen young man. The seer requested they return on Sunday morning (during the next religious service) with a hundred lei and a grey hen. In their presence she looked into a wooden pail of water,¹² spoke into it, and saw not the reflection of the things in the room but the face of the proposed bridegroom, predicting that he would call on them that same afternoon. According to my informant,



She said: "Go now, take the shortest way home! For," she says, "the boy is coming to your house!" And, well, this is what happened. They started off, and they arrived home by the shortest route, after walking in heavy rain the whole way.

In the end, the lad took the girl to be his wife, but they had an unhappy marriage. The method employed in this act of harmful magic does not appear in the narrative. The narrator merely allows us to surmise that the seer not only made a prediction, but also performed a magical intervention at some point. We know that she used the pail of water to look into the future, and that she asked for money and a hen, but we do not know whether she used the hen in a magical rite. Given the symbolic significance of the black hen in the region, she very likely did.¹³ Two other facts support the probability of magical intervention. Generally speaking, seers in this region conduct their divination procedure over a piece of clothing or a playing card (possibly a photograph these days) and then perform a magical intervention. And again, marriages induced by magic are always unhappy, as in this case.

Information regarding a Romanian seer who undertook to manipulate marriage was supplied to me by Auntie Róza, now eighty years old and still a lively, talkative woman. She has been married twice. Her first marriage was very short, but her second lasted for many decades, until her husband died. Since she had no children, she used to offer her services to relatives when they found themselves in crisis situations. On several occasions she accompanied relatives to a seer, acting as a sort of mediator. She would outline the relative's problem, ask for help, and afterwards comment on the advice and the techniques the seer offered, as well as negotiating the fee.¹⁴ Auntie Róza's decisive manner and perseverance rendered her extremely useful.¹⁵ I shall present one instance: A girl in her husband's family got married with her parents' consent, but later they could not accept the husband's family, whom they regarded as lazy. Domestic conflicts¹⁶ drove

the young wife to move back to her parents' home several times, until the couple finally divorced. Both spouses regretted the divorce. They tried unsuccessfully to find new partners. At one point the girl *went into service* in Cluj, and there an acquaintance told her about a seer in Jimbor,¹⁷ whom the acquaintance had consulted about her own unhappy marriage:

... someone told her they should go to Jimbor, past Buza, where there is that Romanian community. And she says that they went, and the seer said to her: Just go home, *and look for your coat in the wardrobe, it's smeared with something*. For, she says, they had been here, *the person your husband is seeing, and look, she says, what they've done*. And so it was! She got the young woman's coat...

When the young divorcée heard this story about the lover who had interfered by magic, and who had secretly gone to the home of her victim and had smeared *something* on the coat in the wardrobe, she became suspicious that someone might have interfered in a similar way in her case, too. She contacted Auntie Róza and asked her to accompany her and her mother to the seer in Jimbor. Auntie Róza readily complied. Below, I give her account from the moment when they arrived, with the seer asking for the client's jacket to *look at* it and then retreating with it to another room (Auntie Róza laid special emphasis on this; it was, therefore, important for the seer to be hidden from their sight). While this act of divination was being carried out, the poultry in the courtyard (turkeys and geese) started to attack the window, presumably sensing the presence of some out-of-the-ordinary activity or power:

(...) Right then! When she began, she went into another room and asked for one of her jackets, to look at it, *not before us*. Lo! the turkeys, lo! the geese! They were breaking down the window! She was inside; and she came out, and she says: *Remember* that you were at a funeral. She told us how old the woman was, the one who died. She says, your mother-in-law was there too,



and she picked up some of the mud that had fallen from the heel of your boot and threw it into the grave, so she could prove that her son was good and you were good-for-nothing, and you would never get another husband. "Oh" – then her sister says – "oh, Auntie, I'll give you such and such, just make things right and everything." I say, "Listen to me, say no more! She won't keep her promise, who knows what they do?" But she says: "I'll give you eight fasts; you do them, you keep them backwards." (...) That's right, fasts. And then, she says to keep them backwards, to begin Saturday, and come back with the money. You'll see! When you get to the last one, the man will show up – and so it was! Well, listen to that! She made a phone call, and the man had already gone to ask them to call Ili to come home, "cause I want to make her my wife."

The seer concludes that the young woman was magically harmed by her former mother-in-law in the following manner: at a funeral they both attended, the mother-in-law picked up some soil from under the heel of her daughter-in-law's boot and cast it into the grave with the purpose of ruining her prospects of finding a new husband, showing in this way that she was a good-for-nothing woman (and so nobody else would want to marry her). The path to lifting the magical harm lay through a fast kept "backwards" for eight days in the reverse order of weekdays – in the first week on Saturday, the second week on Friday, and so on. The fast was a strict one. She was forbidden to eat anything and had to isolate herself from everyone else; she could not meet with anyone, nor could she give anyone anything from the house. This type of isolation and abstinence is, in fact, a recurring feature of the fasts kept in this region to lift magical harm. The unusual aspects in this case are the "reverse" fasting and the number of days of fasting. In addition, the ascetic religious exercise is "extended" with elements that are obviously magical in character: separating oneself from the world, protecting one's household goods, avoiding contact and the possibility of being touched:

When the fast was done, then – she did what she did... He is her husband to this day. (What kind of fast was it? Did she eat something, or nothing?)¹⁸ *She was not allowed to eat anything then, just pray. Well, that's the real fast, that she should lock herself up*, and there, locked up inside, there she should pray, on those occasions, with no one else. *She has to be careful that she does not give away even a hair from her hand on that day.* (And she speaks with no one?) No, she is not allowed to discuss with anyone, so that nobody finds out she is keeping a fast. (And how can one keep to this in a village?) One could keep to it in a village. (One could?) One could keep to it. (She locked herself up?) She locked herself up, and she's not at home, the broom is at the door, and no one is at home. (I see.) Well, it was like this in the old times, we used to just put the broom out by the door, and nobody is at home, just so. I'm telling you, I've been in many places, I've seen many things, really!

The seer expected payment after the successful conclusion of the affair, when the former husband reappeared, but it was not delivered. Later, when the young wife became ill, the suspicion arose that the seer had performed harmful magic against her because she had not been paid. Her role was perceived, therefore, as ambivalent, just as happens around the globe with other folk specialists with a similar sphere of action. An attempt was then made to pay the seer, but it turned out that she had died. The messengers did not return home but consulted a different Romanian seer, who established that the young wife's illness had natural causes (in the words of Auntie Róza, "twisted intestine" [*volvulus*]).

This conversation with Auntie Róza brought up another case: Approximately fifty years ago, two Hungarian girls from the village consulted the same seer in Jimbor because they wanted to get married (to two particular young men) but without magical intervention the situation seemed hopeless. In conversation with Auntie Róza, the seer mentioned the bindings that had to be renewed:





Now then, she says, I still have to go to your area, to – *să reînnoiască nodurile* (to renew the knots / the bindings) – *to renew what is placed around the necks*. 'Cause she had made [a bond] for this one as well, and for another one – she is now dead, that little woman.

The seer had prepared *two bindings (knots)* for the girls, which they wore around their necks even after their nuptials had been successfully concluded. We do not know what these knots contained, only that they were meant to be worn around the neck like a necklace, and that their efficacy did not last for life. They had to be “renewed” periodically, and for this purpose the specialist travelled to the village. Since she confused Auntie Róza with someone else, someone who evidently knew the story of the two girls, she asked Auntie Róza to take a message about her imminent arrival to the two women. This case is public knowledge by now, and several people mentioned the names of the two women to me. One of them has died in the meantime, while the other moved away from the village with her husband a long time ago. These marriages also turned out badly. It is very important to note that these narratives describe every single marriage brought about by magical intervention, without the knowledge of one of the parties,¹⁹ as leading to unhappiness.²⁰ Naturally, we cannot know if that was the true sequence of events (or the real cause of the unhappiness). Indeed, it may be that it was only in retrospect that this explanation was employed to make sense of unhappy marriages. It is important to note that the magical intervention carries negative moral connotations.

There have been other cases in which, before a divorce, the mother-in-law or one of the spouses wanted to magically harm the other – to ruin their chances of marrying again, or their health, or their life in general. Such cases occur nowadays too. By now, divorce has become a common phenomenon: it frequently follows longer marriages blessed with several children, it produces a significant rupture, and it is painful and conflicting. I shall return to this topic in the final part of my paper. I shall also address

the issue of the lover who magically harms a marriage, given that this is the interpretation offered for a well-known tragedy that took place a considerable while ago.

1.2. *Marrying at the Price of Someone's Death*

Many village residents still remember two extremely sad stories about young married couples with small children. In both cases the wife died with tragic suddenness, whereas the husband remarried soon after the event. Their contemporaries struggled to understand both the tragedy and the husband's unwontedly short period of mourning. Their narratives combine real and (in terms of local beliefs) possible elements. At the same time, they actually articulate two foundational causes for the collapse of a marriage: *animosity within the family* and *the danger posed by the appearance of a lover*, respectively. The following narrative (1) appeals to *a mother's curse* in order to explain the death of a young wife.

A Romanian girl and a Hungarian boy fell in love. The boy persuaded the girl to elope, because her parents were opposed to the marriage, whereas his approved. Their family life started very well; they had good marital relations and were blessed with children. The woman always sought opportunities to send their children into company where they could learn Hungarian as well. The family's financial position was also improving. According to the village's system of values, life was going very well indeed for them. And then tragedy struck: the woman was electrocuted. The way she died evoked in the minds of the people who knew her the fact that her mother had cursed her:

So the boy was Hungarian, the young woman Romanian, and then the mother of the woman cursed her because she went after a Hungarian. She said that for her to become the laughing-stock of the village just when fortune was about to smile on her the most... well, something like this... (...) That's right, and so it happened. So she had an electric shock... she was electrocuted. It was the Saturday before

Easter, so she had everything prepared, baking, cooking, and she thought she would wash the clothes they took off right away and hang them out to dry. And in the cattle shed there was a wire strung out which was tied to the basket of the light bulb. So there used to be a kind of basket to prevent bulbs from being knocked and breaking; and there was a basket like that, made of iron, over the bulb there. So – it had been done like this in the first place, the bulb was already [covered] like that. And there was a short circuit, and the power ran through the wire. And she hung the clothes on the wire, and that was it! She died on the spot. She fell there, she was found lying there, poor thing! I saw her only when they were bringing her out, but, well, she was stuck to the wire. When they were bringing her out, poor thing, of course all her clothing, well, everybody saw that all her parts were showing; so, it was, in a way, as if she had been cursed. Now they were really well off, they had a car, the two of them got along very well, and then – then the curse took hold of her, you see. But really, this is what I heard from others as well, that, well, the curse of the parents does get hold of children.

I observed in various contexts that members of the older generation still believe in the power of the *parental curse* (word magic) and that they are prone to explain even the misfortunes of people's descendants in later generations as the outworking of their (grand)parents' curse, which they have inherited. It is clear from this narrative that a mixed marriage still posed serious problems for the girl's family. The husband remarried, and the children were raised by their maternal grandmother.

The other case (2) may have happened earlier, probably in the late fifties or early sixties. According to local opinion, the wife's demise was caused by a widow who had set her sights on the husband, hoping that he would marry her once his wife was dead. Their neighbours believed that the husband had had an earlier affair with this widow. The narrative states that the person who performed the magical harm appeared in the guise of a frog. Other possible

explanations for this tragic event were also proposed:

Well, in such cases they used to say that *the family was harmed* (original: *meg van csinálva*). Where we used to live, on Small Street, our neighbour there, the woman next door, was burned alive. She was lighting the lamp, and – there was a little path, like so, there they had a tiny kitchen. And as she was lighting it – back then we used to have lamps, there was no electricity. Gas lamps. She was lighting the lamp, and it blew up, and all her clothes were burned, right up to here, see. The hem of her dress was all that was left, and the flames went higher than her head. At the time I was just a little girl. And when she had almost entirely burned away, then she ran to our place. 'Cause until then she kept running in the garden – maybe, just maybe, she could put out the flames. Her children were quite little, four-five years old, 'cause she had a boy and a girl. Her husband was out with the sheep. And they were getting ready to go out – there was some house-party; this was on a Saturday evening – at the collective, back then there was the collective. And in her state of nerves, I do not know how she managed it, but she spilled the gas from the lamp on herself, and it caught fire. And by the time her husband arrived: what then? 'Cause my people had already called the ambulance, and the ambulance came, and, well, they took her away, but seventy-five percent of her body was burned. She was that burned. And then, as she came into the house, see, she lay on the bed and she kept shouting: – Mother dearest, why did you curse me so? Now, if her mother was guilty or someone else, God Almighty only knows... So her husband came, and then the ambulance arrived and took her away – and the woman died.

Witchcraft is a convenient explanation for inexplicable misfortunes. The young wife (and other people too) had lit that same gas lamp many times before, but this kind of accident had never happened. Why did it happen precisely then? Why did it happen to her and to no-one



else? This case reminds me of the *old granary* in the classic work of Evans-Pritchard.²¹ "It cannot be mere coincidence" that a given person is standing in the shadow of the granary when it crumbles and collapses, no matter how old it is and how seriously the termites have eaten it away. It cannot be a matter of chance that the gas spills out of the lamp onto this woman, so that this young mother with little children is consumed by fire. The granary collapses over whoever is the victim of harmful magic – and here fire consumes the person who was either magically harmed by the widow, or cursed by her mother on account of her choice of husband. Carelessness/fatigue is not a sufficient explanation for an accident so banal, yet with such fatal consequences, to happen. The curse, or the harmful magic, is also needed here. The narrator evokes with deep feeling the harmful magic of the widow from the local neighbourhood (she was the alleged lover and later became the new wife) through describing the behaviour of the frog, conceived as her alter ego. The frog pursues, hides, watches – and, naturally, it is a toad of enormous size (HU: *varasbéka*):

And when she came, when they brought her home – she had been in the hospital in Cluj – and as they were bringing her home with the horse and cart, they had to climb a smallish hill. And a *big toad* kept following – now under the coffin, now under the cart, it was keeping pace with the horse. And when they drew up to the courtyard, it crept there, under the pig shed. And when the funeral took place, it was watching from under there, from under the pig shed. Then, after the burial – then my folk explained that *her husband was previously seeing another woman, a widow, and perhaps it was she who made [the magic], that the woman [the wife] should die*. Then, at last, I don't even know, some two months after the burial, the man did in fact marry that woman. *He married her, but then ... they had a bad life*. Hard; they had a hard life. And when the woman was dying, *she had to confess that she was the one who had made [the magic], so that his wife would die*. She

was not able to die until she told her husband that she had made [the magic] so that his wife should die. (...) I'm telling you that – that I'll never forget that. But it was a big one, this big, look! A huge, huge toad! It kept hopping after the coffin, as they were carrying the woman up. But that widow was living some two houses away, and the toad came out from there, and came when they were bringing her home. Many, one sees many awful things like this... (...) (*Were they Romanians or Hungarians?*) Hungarians. Hungarians. But her mother and father were not here, they were not at home, because they had gone to Iacobeni. And they [the couple] were on really bad terms with her mother. And then she kept shouting: Mother dearest, why did you curse me so?

These different explanations do not cancel each other out. That the family was "made," that is, they were the victims of black, harmful magic, may indeed constitute an explanation. This was the only narrator who mentioned such an overarching explanation. From other narrators I learned only of one of the two surviving explanations: the mother's curse and, more often and with more emphasis, the harmful magic of the widow (and future wife). Other studies on the Transylvanian Plain also mention cases in which a person who sets their sights on someone's spouse performs harmful magic against their marriage to enable them to marry this spouse once the current one has died.²² An important point to remember is that author of the magical harm achieves her goal, but the ensuing marriage is unhappy, and she cannot even pass away until she confesses the deed to her husband.

The toad is regarded even today as an animal that represents the magical harm committed against a marriage: if it attempts to enter a house (that is, if one encounters it on the steps or in the doorway), Hungarians and Romanians alike interpret this as someone trying to magically ruin the relationship of the (young) couple who live there. A Romanian woman from the village recounted that, upon finishing a fast, she and her daughter were shown in a dream



the identity of the person who had sent the toad and the harmful magic.

In the third part of my paper I shall return to these old narratives, as well as to the magical techniques and specialists presented here.

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II. Marriage and Magic Today

II.1. *The Binding that Prevents Marriage*

The only son of a prosperous farmer in the village is already in his forties, but is yet to marry. He is intelligent, better educated than most people, has a good job, works on the farm in his free time, is extremely hard-working, and has a good relationship with his parents. They help each other out, and they all enjoy good health. They have everything. The parents' only regret is that *their son has not been able to marry*, and so the family has no future. There will be no descendants to give purpose to their struggles in life. For the past several years they have kept trying to understand what caused this and to help their son in numerous ways, including enlisting the help of various specialists, but nothing has worked. I learned of this case from the parents and other people close to them. However, it was only after a long time, and after I had won their trust, that the parents opened up about their problem and their attempts to find a solution. The mother spoke the most. She had discussed the problem with Hungarian²³ and Romanian women from her circle of friends. On their advice, she had repeatedly consulted first the local priest, then priests serving in neighbouring towns, and finally monastery priests, asking for advice and help. One more experienced Romanian friend tried to pass on every possibility she knew. She also played an active part by accompanying the mother on her visits to Orthodox priests.

Several Romanian Orthodox priests agreed that the son's "marriage had been bound" (HU: *meg van kötve a házassága*; RO: *e legată căsnicia*)²⁴ for a long time. Some of them said

specifically that he had been the victim of binding since he was twenty-two. Since the binding (harmful magic, *csinálmány*) had been done a long time ago, "it is difficult to undo it," it was difficult to help. For the most part, these priests recommended fasting. They fixed the duration, the days of the week and the severity of the fast, and occasionally they also recommended prayers. The mother took with her items of her son's clothing worn in contact with the skin; these were blessed, and her son would wear them while she was fasting. The son was usually aware of who his mother had consulted and knew that she was fasting for his sake, but there were times when he did not know. Generally speaking, the couple are handling this delicate problem with great sensitivity; they are making efforts not to suffocate the son with remarks or expectations. They rarely express their worries and do so with great discretion, although they are getting old and feel the situation is getting more desperate by the day. I would like to emphasise two points. The first is that *the chief adviser in this process is a local Romanian woman* who visits the family almost every day. When the need arises, it is she who phones priests to schedule a consultation, since the mother is a little uncomfortable about appealing to Orthodox priests (although she has been both alone and with a Hungarian woman friend). The second important lesson of this case is that *for this Calvinist family, fasting is a strange practice, hard to observe*. The mother says that some priests acknowledge this from the start and prescribe more relaxed fasts. She is doing all she can, since her son's happiness is important to her and she can see that he is not happy with being single. Interestingly, people's offers of help are all angled in this direction, with no one looking for the solution elsewhere, in the son's communication skills, habits, behaviour, attitude to girls, or limited free time.

An interesting feature of this narrative is that the son was twenty-two years old when he had his last relationship with a girl that could have led to marriage. It was he who left the girl, and the specialists consulted believe that this girl "bound his marriage" out of revenge,



so that since he could not be happy with her, he could not be happy with anyone else.²⁵ The mother, however, recalls that her own mother had been so upset when she got married that she refused to speak to her for a whole year. After the wedding, she did not dare visit her parents again until she was already pregnant with her son. She has begun to suspect that her mother may have cursed her for having married against her will and that perhaps her son cannot marry as a consequence of this curse. She regards both these explanations as possible. The problem remains unresolved. She has no confidence in the techniques recommended by the specialists.²⁶ Although she has not followed every single piece of advice, she does not think this, or her questioning attitude, has anything to do with the lack of success.

II.2. "She Won't Rest until Her Son Divorces Me"

The course of Ilona's life tellingly illustrates how difficult – almost impossible – it is, (even) for people of her age, to fight one's environment, to break out from it, or to change the mentality of the village – and how much bitterness a bad relationship with her mother-in-law can cause for a wife, even if she has a good marriage. After graduating from university, Ilona enrolled in a Master programme in a different subject. She then took a job in the village in the field of her BA degree. In the meantime, she was raising three children and regularly helping out her husband and mother-in-law as well as her own parents. She worked incredibly hard; one gains the impression that she used to go to her job to get some rest. The truth is that she successfully carried out all her work assignments and even contributed many innovative ideas. However, her superiors either cut her off short when she was presenting them or laid claim to the results of her projects without explanation. She finds peace in her home and immediate family: her children and husband, and her parents, who have always supported her and surrounded her with love. Not so her mother-in-law, who assumed from the start of the marriage that her daughter-in-law would take over a substantial

part of her household chores; in spite of Ilona's compliance, she continues to behave with animosity and to hurt Ilona on a daily basis by systematically taking credit for all her household work.

The couple have been married for twenty-six years. The husband still has a close relationship with his mother and his parental home (he keeps all important documents there, he works on the family farm, and his animals and machinery are also kept there). Every single day, Ilona would help with her mother-in-law's household chores before doing her own chores, and in the meantime she raised her children, difficult though it was to get everything done. It would be hard to explain why things turned out the way they did. Ilona accepts the situation and does not ask too many questions. Her mother-in-law's animosity is a different story; it troubles her profoundly, and she does not understand why she "deserved" this. Almost every day, when all the work is done and Ilona is about to leave the house, her mother-in-law keeps shouting after her that she will not rest until she has made her son divorce her. Still, the marriage is flourishing, and their offspring are given plenty of love.

Even though Ilona has never been happy with her mother-in-law's treatment of her, she did not sense any particular danger until one of her husband's childhood friends, a Romanian man who had moved away, came home for a visit and told them that Ilona was in peril. It seems that in the meantime this friend had endured a long period of suffering and as a result had become a *clairvoyant* (HU: *tisztánlátó*; RO: *clarvăzător*),²⁷ able to see when magical danger was looming over others and to recognise if someone was about to be harmed by magic. This good friend first warned Ilona's husband, who simply laughed it off, since he did not believe "*in these things*." Then he sought Ilona out and warned her that her life was in danger on account of the machinations of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, who "*wanted to destroy her*." She learned the story of his suffering: his former wife (of Roma descent) had sought to magically harm him after their

divorce, but the *package* that served as the vehicle of the magical harm was picked up by their toddler and so the intended harm “fell” on him. For years afterwards this boy suffered from symptoms normally associated with possession. Father and son regularly sought help at monasteries and visited the tombs of the saints, meeting many priests who provided relief. After some years the boy was released from his symptoms, and in the meantime the man discovered his clairvoyant abilities, which he was now trying to put to good use by helping others. Ilona was so impressed by the story that she agreed to visit the nearby monastery with the clairvoyant and ask for help. They were received by the *stareț* [abbot],²⁸ who explained in great detail what Ilona should do and, among other things, how to write a *pomelnic*²⁹ correctly. An important aspect of her narrative is the cultural hesitance she felt towards the Orthodox church space and cult, and the reserves which she had concerning the rituals or, at least, certain elements of those rituals. As a believing, church-going Calvinist, she found it difficult to kiss the wonder-working icon of Mary, and it was a strange experience to be covered with the *patrafir* [stole]³⁰ while the abbot was praying for her. While they were in church, the good friend who accompanied Ilona noticed that light was descending on her, a sign of her strong faith.

Ilona has been prone to sickness in recent years, and these periods of illness have matched the predictions of her clairvoyant friend. In addition, the family have experienced many problems he had foretold. This has not only strengthened her confidence in his powers but has made her more and more afraid that her mother-in-law (and sister-in-law) may indeed harm her by magic. When, not long ago, the mother-in-law described with a wealth of detail how she had gone with a neighbour to a seer in town because the woman concerned did not love her daughter-in-law and wanted to get her son to divorce her, Ilona understood this not as a random piece of news but rather as a statement of fact. Clearly, her mother-in-law had not gone merely as a companion; rather, she must have been seeking a similar result. Then she began to

fear the consequences and to view her serious health problems as the result of the alleged magical harm. In reality, simple exhaustion would have been sufficient to account for all her problems, yet people in her family are reluctant to admit that so many years of loyal service and an excessive workload do wear one out. Although Ilona is aware of her exhaustion, she is almost ashamed to treat it as a problem.

In Ilona's narrative we are confronted with two distinct attempts to magically harm a marriage. Both attempts supposedly enlist seers to separate the spouses. Given her illnesses and the clairvoyant's predictions, Ilona assumes that her mother-in-law may even be plotting her death, not just her divorce. She agrees for a short period to seek the help of Orthodox priests, yet is evidently reluctant to accept this solution; soon she finds another explanation and turns elsewhere.³¹ As with the previous case, that of the unmarried son of the farming family, here too it should be mentioned that a certain reluctance regarding some aspects of Romanian Orthodox religious practice occurs, in my opinion, more often among educated Hungarians. The two women in the narratives above (the unmarried son's mother, and Ilona) share a *strong Hungarian Protestant identity* and therefore think it very important to distance themselves from Orthodoxy (although this distancing still allows them to seek assistance from priests, recite Orthodox prayers and keep Orthodox fasts).



III.1. Love Magic or Changing One's Position in Society through Magic

Two monographs on love magic, written at almost the same time by the Romanian academic Tudor Pamfile and by Bronislaw Malinowski,³² analysed cultures situated at considerable distance one from the other, yet the subtypes of love magic discussed in these studies (from making someone interested to forming a relationship) show that there

are surprising similarities between the two cultures. In North-West Melanesia, Malinowski identified the following methods of influencing as most typical: through dreams (1), through eating and/or food (2), through touch and smell (3) (Malinowski 1929, 368). According to his observations, love magic forms an integral part of a wider system of magical techniques and ideas also employed in other areas of life (Malinowski 1929, 361).

Pamfile has finished his monograph on love magic in 1915. He presents a rich arsenal of methods of influencing attraction and love, as well as methods of divination (observing in dream or through divination techniques the future partner). The use of plants, food and drink, singing and dancing, as well as the importance of dreams, are important similarities with love magic on Trobriand islands. We can notice the importance of the idea of the predestined partner among Romanians [*ursita, ursitul*], as well as the possibilities of spoiling a relationship or the destiny in love matters of a person (*fapt de urât*, destroying attractiveness). Young girls and their mothers have an active role in influencing marital status (Pamfile 1998).

Writing on magic in late antique Egypt, David Frankfurter elaborates on the broader connotations of binding spells, pointing to a kind of continuity between magical procedures that constrain or incite the actions of others (Frankfurter 2001, 482). Frankfurter's approach supersedes the research tradition that classified magical binding (binding spells) according to technique and aim. The horse spell he examines belongs to the larger category of spells that bring about a change in competitive situations; apart from love, these may include sport or judicial, political, or financial affairs (Frankfurter 2001). Another interesting aspect is that the girl who had been turned into a mare was restored to human form by the monk Macarius through prayer and sprinkling with holy water. In other words, Macarius was the one to "undo the spell" (Frankfurter 2001, 480), just like the Romanian Orthodox monks of the Transylvanian Plain and Transylvania in general. All this reminds us that in Christian culture there is continuity

in the way Churches relate to magic, and certain traditions have survived to this day, albeit not in every historical Church.

In this paper I consciously avoid making explicit use of the concept of love magic. This choice of terms was informed by what I experienced in the village; I tried to pay close attention to the way in which locals narrated / discussed the topics concerned. Indeed, in the village in which I conducted my research the concept of love did not even arise in this context. Feelings were very rarely mentioned. The *aim* of the magical interventions analysed here was not to generate intense emotions or a passionate physical and spiritual relationship (or to prevent these from happening); rather, they sought to affect *the socially accepted institution of marriage* and family life – forming a relationship with a partner and, through them, a family: that is, *changing one's marital status*³³ and demonstrating one's success in securing a partner. This partner was meant to come from a family of the same ethnicity and suitable social status in the eyes of the parents. I would not go so far as to state that in this village tender feelings do not matter, or that they did not play an essential role in the relationships discussed here, only that, as these villagers perceive it, the actions of the specialist who implemented the magical intervention and of the client who commissioned it were not motivated primarily by love. None of the narratives referred to the magical inducing of a love affair.³⁴ It seems that, in local understanding, sexuality and physical relations (seen independently of their emotional background) do not belong to the sphere of magic. For instance, extra-marital affairs were often talked of, but only by way of prosaic acknowledgement, and narrators mostly spoke about cases involving their priests, since they expected them to set an example of morality. Given that some priests had illegitimate children, in certain cases more than one and with different women, this would become the talk of the village. However, neither the priests nor the women involved were seen as workers of magic, nor were the priests said to have fallen in love. The heart of the issue, at least



as I understood their words, was inconstancy and weakness of character.

It is only in certain situations that magic is invoked to explain matrimony. The second marriage of a widower occurring too soon after the death of his first wife, and marriages that had been opposed on account of differences in social status, or which had taken a turn for the worse, proved particularly liable to be given such an explanation. The cases presented in this paper offer ample evidence of how this can be achieved: on the one hand, by causing the wife's demise (that is, by eliminating the rival), and on the other hand, by binding (using a binding spell). "Feeding" (with the meat of a black hen) also serves to bring about a relationship, even though the magic lasts for only one night. In other cases, it is difficult to pinpoint the technique employed;³⁵ often we know only that it was preceded by a prediction. In the course of my fieldwork, the concept of (magical) binding³⁶ emerged only in relation to matrimony. Even though the village did have a resident specialist in influencing marriage, a Romanian witch [vrăjitoare],³⁷ locals stated without exception that when the need arose they travelled elsewhere, to more distant experts. No doubt the local "witch," too, must have been consulted by clients travelling from afar, just like the local bone-setters.

In the village, as in the entire region, the experts in binding – and, generally speaking, in manipulation through magic – were the so-called *nézőnék* [seers, clairvoyants], and *jós nők* [soothsayers]. It is important to note that all these were exclusively women.³⁸ It seems, however, that people have appealed to them for help less frequently since 1989. Nowadays they continue to provide services of magical intervention (binding / preventing matrimony, separating spouses, magically harming a former spouse after divorce), but demand for preventing or neutralising the effects of harmful magic, or undoing magical binding, has decreased. *Warding off trouble is nowadays more the province of Romanian Orthodox parish and monastery priests*, and the techniques employed are therefore drawn from the sphere

of religious experience (prayer, fasting, the blessing of food and clothing). As we have seen in the narratives presented in detail above, religious elements can also be found in the advice of lay experts; they too prescribe prayer, recommend fasting, or request that items of the victim's clothing be brought to them. However, there are "twists" in what they require: the fast that must be kept "backwards" (fasting days in reverse order), the need to isolate oneself during periods of fasting. The specialists in the magic of binding and unbinding came from all the region's ethnic groups. Clients consulted them irrespective of their ethnic background, just as they do nowadays with Romanian Orthodox priests. Again, the assistance provided by religious specialists is evidently not related to their ethnicity or even to religion, but much more to the fact that it is they who traditionally assume and perform such duties. As the Orthodox Church continues to encourage this, the number of people turning to them is increasing rather than decreasing.

People's attitudes to every kind of specialist display ambivalence. The common belief is that where intervention for the good is possible, it is also possible to interfere for evil purposes. He who helps may perhaps also harm. In the case of the services offered by seers, we have seen that the client or their family member occasionally expressed doubts regarding the outcome, even though they were expected to pay a considerable sum, which was usually handed over beforehand. It is important to note that the rules of the Orthodox Church only allow it to accept charity, with everyone giving in line with their judgement and financial resources. I did not hear narratives that presented Orthodox priests in a bad light. Of the only priest in the region who has gained notoriety in the local media³⁹ the residents of this village have nothing negative to say. They view him not as a magician but rather as someone they know well from a different context, who alongside his ecclesiastical service also fulfils a function of assistance.

When we consider the magnitude of the change marriage produced (and continues to

Orthodox Church



produce) in the status of women and men in village society, it becomes easier to understand why they resort(ed) even to something as drastic as magical methods and techniques to achieve it. It is also possible that some have appealed to magic with harmful, selfish intentions. It would be hard to determine to what extent specialists actually interfere actively in cases of harmful magic, and whether they do indeed attempt to induce someone's demise. Suffice it to note that we are faced, here too, with the same ambivalence, uncertainty, and blurring of boundaries between rumour, beliefs and reality that characterise theories and discourse related to magic all over the world.⁴⁰ Here I merely observe, based primarily on the village narratives I collected, that the reality is uncertain and the attitude to specialists ambivalent. For a clearer picture we would need to be acquainted with each and every case in minute detail, a task bordering on the impossible. We can scarcely interview every party involved (every specialist who was consulted, every family member, etc.). We have no way of knowing the activity of the given specialists in its entirety, or their thoughts about each and every case. The ambivalent attitude mentioned above has to do most often with doubts related to the use of knowledge. The community passes unequivocal judgement on the aims of the magic employed: if it interferes in a marriage or induces someone's death, even the actor (or the person who commissioned it) presents it as negative.

The narratives presented in full here and those used as background material show that women play a very active role both in the manipulation of marriage by magic⁴¹ and in attempts to release a family member (man or woman) from the effects of magic. Men do not usually appear as clients of such specialists. If they encounter problems, it is normally their mother, wife or sister who sets out to ask for help. In many cases the men concerned are not even aware of this, but occasionally a mother confides in her son about what she is doing, especially if the rites to be performed require the son's active participation.⁴² This is what is happening with the son whose "marriage was

bound" in his youth and on behalf of whom it is chiefly the mother who prays and fasts on the advice of priests. This son appears in the role of a child not only because his mother is taking the initiative to try to lift the magical harm, but because he is actually living his life like a child in his parents' home, despite no longer being young.

Using magic as a convenient explanation for a man's failure to marry absolves him, in a way, from personal responsibility. The assumption that magical harm was done directs attention away from some immediate issues⁴³ that could be the real reason why matrimony has never occurred. These might include such possible factors as poor communication skills (especially with members of the opposite sex), insufficiently developed emotional intelligence, fear of commitment, and poorly-masked immaturity. But equally valid reasons could be workaholicism or simply an excessively restrained attitude to spending, even in today's consumer society. An experienced priest from the region was making an important point when he told a mother that her son was unable to marry because "girls nowadays prefer to live in town." Agriculture and animal husbandry are not the most attractive occupations for a girl in contemporary Romania (Transylvanian Plain) – or for young people in general. In some cases, problems of addiction add to the difficulties – though one has to admit that addicts can be found among married people too. Although a man's failure to marry might have other explanations, even a fraction of those mentioned above would be enough to account for it.

Along with magic, the inherited family curse is another explanation that absolves the unintentionally single young man and assigns the cause to a different realm, one in which he has no decision-making capacity. In other situations, like that of Ilona, harmful magic, for example, may be the easier, more comfortable explanation. Were she to refuse some of her daily tasks, stop doing everything she is expected to do, and deal with her ill health by resting, this would cause even greater turmoil in the family. Since the problem seems to stem

“merely” from her mother-in-law, life goes on as usual, and, as we have seen, her husband cannot even be bothered to take the danger seriously. And yet danger there is, albeit perhaps not from a magical source.

III.2. Interethnic Influences: Matrimony Prevented by Magical Binding and the Idea of the Predestined Partner

Given the close network of relationships between people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, one cannot realistically hope to examine Hungarian or Romanian ideas and practices in isolation.⁴⁴ In villages in this area, Hungarian and Romanian residents talk to one another about every aspect of life. In my experience, their communication with Roma fellow-villagers is less wide-ranging, but I may have simply missed the opportunity to observe friendly and neighbourly relationships of similar depth between Hungarians and Roma, and Romanians and Roma, respectively. Beliefs and magical practices of Hungarian and Romanian origin are inextricably intertwined, as too are other features of the culture of the Transylvanian Plain (music and dance, to give two examples).⁴⁵ Strong relationships have also developed in the area of popular religiosity, but here I witnessed a one-sided, Orthodox effect.⁴⁶ These days, it would be hard to find a Hungarian or Roma family members of which have not visited Orthodox monasteries and have not asked monastic priests, or other local or regional priests, to pray for them or their relatives. Individuals and families react in different ways to advice given by Orthodox priests. While they do not always show unconditional trust or persevere in the recommended religious practices, it is a fact that conforming to the established model is more common than having reserves, and in most cases people appeal to these priests more than once in their lifetime. In many cases the problems are resolved, and the positive outcome encourages further such resolutions by becoming a paradigm for future problematic situations. I chose to present the two contemporary cases discussed above not

because I find typical the more than usually cautious and doubting attitude to Orthodox religious assistance they display,⁴⁷ but because I know these cases from very many angles and in great detail, and because they exemplify two specific concerns related to marriage.

Therefore, when examining villagers' views on the manipulation of marriage by magic, one has to cope with an amalgam, a combination of Hungarian and Romanian traditions – that is, a kind of *hybrid system of beliefs* and an equally heterogeneous practice. While the origin of certain elements can be discovered from an overview of Hungarian and Romanian ethnographic scholarship, it is only in the rarest of cases that I venture to advance a suggestion of this kind, and even then only by way of hypothesis. I will however develop one of these assumptions, because in this case the effect can be identified with great probability. It concerns the ideas of marriage being *bound* through magic and of the *predestined partner*. Both beliefs are copiously documented in Romanian collections of folklore and in academic monographs, as well as in recently published anthropological research. These concepts also appear in Hungarian scholarship about the Transylvanian Plain, occasionally with interesting nuances.

“Binding” marriage, that is, making it impossible, by using a magical binding (spell), for it ever to happen, leads to a tragic situation in the family of the unmarried man or woman as they grow older. I suspect this idea originated in Romanian folk culture, whence it entered the imagery of local Hungarians, so that by now it has been internalised as a legitimate explanation for the existence of confirmed bachelors and spinsters in Hungarian circles as well. While the idea is absent from earlier collections of Hungarian lore and magical practices,⁴⁸ Romanian studies discuss it. Most recently, Alexandra Tătăran presented (in the chapter of her monograph entitled *Delay of marriage*) a series of similar cases in which appeal was made to a village priest residing in Bistrița county. This priest was famous in the region for his ability to undo harmful magic that prevented matrimony.⁴⁹ Tătăran encountered



at the site of her fieldwork the expression *the wedding ceremony is bound* (*e legată cununia*⁵⁰), a synonym for the Romanian expression used in the village I studied, *the marriage is bound* (*e legată căsnicia*). Tătăran's "the wedding ceremony is bound" sharpens the interpretive frame by focusing on a characteristic / symbolic instrument of *matrimony*. Galina Lindquist too met a similar idea during her fieldwork in Moscow: *the crown of celibacy*, which, in turn, stems from Russian popular belief (Lindquist 2006). She linked this notion with the crowns held over the heads of the bride and groom in Orthodox religious wedding ceremonies (crown in Russian: *venets*). If the *crown of celibacy* floats above a young man's head, it must have been placed there by the harmful action of an expert in magic, and, although invisible, it is all the more efficacious in condemning the victim to remain single. Lindquist adds that the experts she researched in Moscow also dealt with cases in which the victim was afflicted by the *seal of loneliness* (*pechat' odinochestva*), and as a result lived in absolute loneliness, with no significant other (Lindquist 2016).

Romanian popular belief also has another notion to explain why a person is unable to get married: *spiteful deed* (RO: *fapt de urât*).⁵¹ To discuss this concept and other important related beliefs and practices I draw on Tudor Pamfile's monograph *Dragostea în datina tineretului roman* [Love in the Traditions of Romanian Youth].⁵² Pamfile states that personal enemies may perform magical harm against a young individual so as to render him unattractive to everyone he meets (he is found ugly, repulsive). This type of harmful magic can be undone with the assistance of experts in magic (RO: *desfaceri de urât*, "undoing the spiteful deed"⁵³). This *fapt de urât* can happen not only in the life of unmarried people but also in that of married couples, in which latter case the marriage is harmed on the initiative of a third person.

A frequent occurrence in Romanian folklore collections is the idea of the *predestined partner* (RO: *ursita*, *ursitul*, lit. "one's fated"). It is believed that when things are going well, partners predestined for each other find each

other, get married, and live happily together. But the "fated" partner may be compelled by magic to marry someone else, which means that the other partner is left on their own; they are unable to marry, since there is no one for them to marry. The only solution is for them to interfere by magic and separate the married couple. Two possibilities emerge from the sources I consulted. On the one hand, the magical harm may affect only the marriage, that is, the relationship between the spouses, not the well-being of either – this would be the above-mentioned *fapt de urât* applied to a married couple. In this case, the couple separate and the person who enlisted the help of magic becomes the new spouse (in other words, the true matrimony, with the fated partner, takes place "at last"). (In milder cases, something like this can happen during courtship, when the harmful magic breaks up a merely nascent relationship.)

The truly shocking cases, however, are those in which a person "finds out" through the divination of an expert in magic that someone else married their fated partner (falsely, through harmful magic⁵⁴) and asks the expert to induce the death of the spouse who "usurped" the partner predestined for him/her.⁵⁵ Narratives record various courses of action. Some have committed this fatal act without remorse; others are tormented by a guilty conscience until the day they die. In Hungarian collections from the Transylvanian Plain I found narratives in which the bride told the groom that she had killed his former wife when they were already walking into the church to be married.⁵⁶ In the village of my research, the moment of truth is characteristically the one we saw in the first part of this paper: women who have changed the course of events by magic confess their deed on their deathbeds.

A recurring element of *ursita*-related harmful magic⁵⁷ is the frog (usually a large toad) that appears as the alter ego/familiar or the representative of the witch. It keeps appearing; it returns every time it is thrown out of the house; it is difficult to get rid of.⁵⁸ The toad is frequently invested with this kind of role in both Romanian and Hungarian narratives from the



village. Several narrators spoke of how people had tried to dispose of it and what meaning they gave to its appearance. Here too, there was a (Romanian) woman who still remembered that when she was a girl her mother had taught her to tie the toad's legs together with red thread so that she could take it somewhere a long way away from the house. In several other places in the Transylvanian Plain, toads tied up like this used to be hung upside down in smokeries. On such occasions the suffering witch (alter ego) would appear and beg for a stop to the torment. A widespread witch-related belief in the region is that there are ways to take revenge on the witch who harms by magic; she can be tormented by striking, stabbing, etc., her image or alter ego (such as, for instance, stabbing with a pitchfork the cat "caught in the act" of stealing milk from the cattle shed, or beating a shearling coat on the threshold of the shed). The witch not only feels these torments but is left with physical marks, so that even if she does not reveal herself while being tormented, she can be identified later from these marks.

Large-bellied toads appearing in someone's house are interpreted as alter egos of pregnant women. Such toads with large bellies are attested in the collections of Vilmos Keszeg. According to one narrative, for instance, a single woman consulted a "wise woman" (HU: *tudós asszony*), who used to "walk with the devil" (HU: *ördögekkel járt*), to find out whom she would marry. The wise woman looked into a bucket of water and "showed" there that she would marry a father of seven. She told the single woman that a big-bellied toad would come to her house, and if she killed it, the pregnant wife of the man with seven children would die and he would come to get her, to propose. When the toad appeared in her home, the woman hurled a piece of red-hot iron into its mouth. A few weeks later the man's wife died, "she did not die by hot iron, but her mouth was on fire." Two weeks after that, the widower proposed to the woman. The narrator claims that this woman very much regretted having killed the toad and having also murdered the wife: "She committed sin for herself" and "looked after" the seven children.⁵⁹ It is very

important to bear in mind that, irrespective of ethnic/national and religion, to coerce or dissolve a marriage through magic is regarded as a sin, even when it does not result in death. The ensuing hardship and unhappiness are viewed as actual penance.

Finally, I would like to mention a small but significant fact. A number of monographs mention the belief that the toad has to be sent back to whoever sent it in the first place, together with the harmful magical bundle.⁶⁰ I also encountered this advice during my fieldwork in the village. A Romanian acquaintance became aware of the fact that a toad kept trying to enter her house. No matter how many times they drove it away, it came back. She suspected that someone was trying to attack her daughter's marriage, but was at a loss what to do. Being a regular churchgoer, she confided in the Orthodox priest and asked for his advice. To her surprise, he told her to scold the toad and send it away, which showed that he had the same understanding of the phenomenon as she did. Since Orthodox village priests meet many problems of this and similar kinds in the course of their day-to-day pastoral duties, it goes without saying that they are extremely knowledgeable concerning popular beliefs and all the practices that go with them. They also know that these beliefs play a significant role in the daily life of their parishioners and generally manage to adapt to this state of affairs, which puts them in a position to offer professional advice when troubles arise.



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Conclusions

In this paper I have presented, based on my fieldwork in a village on the Transylvanian Plain, what members of the older and middle-aged generations know about manipulating marriage through magic. Naturally, the elderly spoke of their memories; these included events that happened to their relatives and in which they also played a part, at least as mediators.

In addition, they narrated widely known tragedies that had not affect them personally. By contrast, the relevance of the narratives told by the middle-aged subjects extends, without exception, to the present as well. These are very personal stories, and I had the opportunity to collect significantly more detail. Accordingly, the possibilities for manipulating marriage, then as well as now, can be reduced to a set of fundamental patterns: *using magic to prevent or induce matrimony, or to dissolve a marriage*. Nowadays even tensions or conflicts between divorced spouses can generate accusations of magical harming.

The recent stories, which are still ongoing, are firmly rooted in the fertile soil of the stories of earlier generations. What kind of relationship can we glimpse between these layers? How do changes that have taken place in the region and in the history of the families concerned influence the interpretation of life events and the quest for a solution? An idea that spans the generations is the power of a parental curse and its being inherited by children. Family prestige is also inherited, and it is significant that the post-1989 restoration of land confiscated under communism led to the reappearance of the old village hierarchy as well. All this affects matrimony: who marries who, which marriages are met with approval, and in what kinds of circumstances the suspicion of magical manipulation arises.

As far as existing marriages are concerned, I observed in several cases that the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is fraught with danger; the former may not only make the latter's life miserable, but, according to local belief, may even endanger it (or cause the daughter-in-law's demise). Previously, marriages either took place by consent, or the bride and groom eloped. If there was no agreement between the two families, the marriage could fall under a curse, which affected people's ideas about the couple's future happiness and their interpretation of misfortunes (including those of their descendants). A family's rank, financial position and prestige strongly influence marital choices. This

can be observed since the fall of communism too; based on what I have seen in other parts of Transylvania, I can say that it has never ceased to be the case in the region. The comparatively modest family background of the bride can often be the spur to a mother-in-law's enmity. In such rural environments, this happens first and foremost in older-established large farming families.

The narratives that live on in the memories of the elderly suggest that in the old days, matrimony was regarded as important even when one had enlisted the assistance of a seer, that is, when the natural course of life was disrupted through magic. Although such marriages "never turned out happily," parents of daughters still gave in to the pressure they felt, to prevent the girl being left on the shelf or failing to secure the desired husband. Often, the girl was treated like a mere object, with the actively engaged person being the mother, who commissioned the intervention. But we have seen that two girls could also team up to visit a specialist, supporting one another. The community unanimously condemned and continues to condemn such intervention, regarding it as a sin and a source of unhappiness.

Contemporary narratives tell a different story. The rising number of confirmed bachelors is a new phenomenon. It seems that manipulating the chances of unmarried youth through magic is no longer practised. Nowadays the angle of approach is different: a close relative assumes that someone has "bound his / her marriage through magic," and strives to undo this binding, to which end the assistance of Orthodox priests and of seers is called upon. Hungarian villagers usually accept the proffered explanations and problem-solving methods, even though these are culturally alien to them. The narratives discussed above allow us to observe a change from old to contemporary methods of influencing matrimony. These days, binding, feeding, etc. are no longer customary; instead, Orthodox priests and seers usually recite prayers over the clothing of the individual who wants to get married, or mothers undertake fasts on behalf of their sons – in other



words, magic has been replaced by religious methods (with even seers recommending religious practices). There has certainly been a change in the role of seers, but it is clear that they survived socialism and continue to be present in today's post-socialist reality. One seeks them out in nearby villages and towns; they have approximately the same sphere of action (divination, healing); and, interestingly, they typically prefer modest surroundings and simplicity. The role of Romanian Orthodox priests has certainly increased, considering that before 1948, most Romanians in the region were Greco-Catholics.

A common feature of the two narratives from the present is that in both cases the men (the unmarried only son, and Ilona's husband) come from better-off farming families, who are attempting even today to farm extensive lands compared to other villagers and who own more cattle than the average. The labour that comes with such large farms costs these families (especially the men) substantial effort. They work extremely hard; they operate farm machinery; and they also supervise their labourers. Farming consumes their entire day. In one narrative the relationship between the wife and the mother-in-law is growing increasingly strained; presumably the man's parents did not approve of his choice of wife. But in the other case, too, word has it in the village that the mother did not approve of her son's youthful relationship, the claimed source of the problem. It seems that nowadays local young men (and women) can only enjoy healthy relationships and/or a happy, balanced marriage if their parents refrain from interfering in their lives. At the same time, we have seen that even a supportive, helpful, understanding attitude towards the young man / woman is by no means a guarantee of success. Matrimony is highly valued; in many cases, it is unattainable, and, if a marriage does take place, the course it takes depends to a very great extent on the wider family context. Regardless of sex, ethnic background or religion, magic provides a "ready-made" explanation for numerous puzzling woes

and difficulties, the true causes of which it is seemingly in no one's interest to explore.

I should add that a common element that transcends boundaries of time and ethnicity is the *frog* as the envoy that channels the harmful magic or as the alter ego of the witch. It appears in both earlier and contemporary narratives; both Hungarians and Romanians spoke of it and gave it the same meaning, and sought to remove it in the same way. At any rate, it is important to emphasise that Hungarians and Romanians in the village do speak to one another about disturbing occurrences and problems, that Romanian neighbours and friends (men and women) frequently offer their advice, establish contact with specialists, and on occasion even accompany the person in trouble on visits to them. Many narratives feature Hungarians and Romanians alike, but in different roles, irrespective of who the narrator is. These explanations and solutions offered when certain problems arise are part of the shared heritage, and so they circulate in the village (just like frogs).

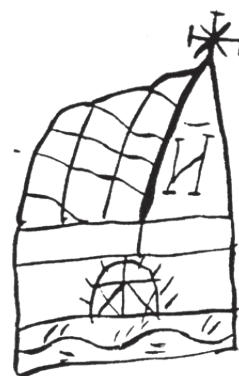
Interethnic relationships are continually transforming. This can be measured first and foremost in the frequency of and reception given to mixed marriages. Whereas in former times interethnic marriage was considered shocking, nowadays Hungarian – Romanian marriages occur frequently and enjoy acceptance, and one finds Romanian – Roma and Hungarian – Roma mixed marriages as well. In 2018 alone, five mixed marriages were celebrated in the village (more than the number of marriages between two Hungarian partners). Nowadays there is no longer a need to posit magical interference as an explanation for mixed marriages.

The issues raised here are viewed only from one specific perspective, the manipulation of marriage through magic. Further advanced research will be needed to explore the depth and complexity of social problems such as the sharp increase in recent decades in the number of confirmed bachelors. The inheriting of social status as conditioned or not by political regime, the changes that have taken place in social prestige and their effects on matrimony, and



attitudes to magic all likewise demand further research.

Each of the narratives examined answers a *why?*-type question, just as in Azande witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1937): *Why this spouse? Why did the wife die? Why is the man unable to marry (or, in other cases, why are divorced people unable to remarry)?* In the local perception, the social institution of marriage can be influenced through magic. Local interpretive networks facilitate a magical understanding of matrimony, divorce, and the death of a spouse.



NOTES

1. The text expands the article published by the author (Tünde Komáromi) in 2019 in the journal *Ethnographia* 130 (1): 20-44, and entitled "Mágikusan befolyásolt házasságok egy erdélyi faluban."

2. The Transylvanian Plain lies in the central part of Transylvania, between the Little Someș, Great Someș, Șieu, Mureș and Arieș rivers (Kós 2000, 9).

3. The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement № 324214.

4. To protect the privacy of the people concerned, I will not disclose the name of the village. All names given in the paper are fictitious. I provide only approximate data regarding population and ethnic percentages, since precise data would allow the settlement to be identified. The village has around 1500 inhabitants; around half are Hungarian, with one quarter Romanian and one quarter Roma.

5. The expression used in the village is *vénlegények* (lit. "old lads"); it denotes lads or men who are not yet married, but are no longer young.

6. Parental cursing also took place in situations in which parents had other reasons for not accepting their children's choice of marriage partner.

7. The expression used in the village is *meg van kötve a házassága* ("his / her marriage is bound," RO: *e legată căsnicia*, cf. „cununie legată / delay of marriage,” Alexandra Tătăran 2016, 26).

8. In this context, the concept of witch (RO: *vrăjitoare*) was used only in Romanian and for persons of Romanian ethnicity. In the past there was a *vrăjitoare* living in the village, and she specialised precisely in inducing and binding marriages.

9. I am using the concepts *magic* and *magical rite* based on the study by Mauss. The term used in the village for harmful magic is *csináltatás* (RO *făcătură*, lit. "having something made/done"). The specialist in magic is known locally as *soothsayer* (female) or *seer*, and I therefore use this term instead of Mauss' concept of *magician*. (cf. Mauss 2000, 58).

10. Although both the region and the village were famous for their spectacular wedding traditions, many stories attest to the

fact that such weddings often did not take place, with nuptials taking a more modest form. Thus, in several cases, merely moving in together, or possibly a more festive dinner, marked the beginning of the marriage. If a relationship induced by magic broke apart early on, the spouses were considered divorced, and any future partner they found needed to have had a similar past. A divorce that follows a short period of marriage does not seem rare in this period. Many older women admitted that they left their first husband shortly after getting married and moved back to their parents, and later took a new husband.

11. Cf., e.g., Kós (2000, 363-8). According to Károly Kós, in the Transylvanian Plain *néző* [seer] is a synonym for the terms *kuruzsló* [healer], *javas* [shaman], and *jós* [soothsayer]. The most commonly used word in the locality of my research is *nézőné*, "seer;" other occurring terms are *jós* / *jósnő*, "soothsayer" (man and woman), and in a single case, in reference to a (deceased) Romanian woman from the village, *boszorkány*, RO: *vrăjitoare*, "witch."

12. Looking into the pail was a widespread procedure of folk divination all over this region (as well as in the Arieș valley), and was used especially for identifying a thief or finding out how the theft had been committed. Vilmos Keszeg (1997, 97-125) has published a study on this subject and Eleonora Sava (2007) a monograph.

13. I learned of a very interesting "use" of the black hen from a research paper on witchcraft in the region of Maramureș. The village is multi-ethnic, the witch, Romanian, and she is a widely sought-after specialist. Among other things, she kept fasts on behalf of others (upon request). During the so-called "fast of the Sun" (RO: *postul soarelui*), she herself fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, and on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays she locked a black hen in a cage and made it fast. In this way, every day except Sunday was a fast day, the hen replacing the witch for three days a week (Liiceanu 1998, 97-98).

14. In one narrative, the mother, who is worried about her daughter, gives the seer a sum equivalent to a whole month's pay. The amounts are perhaps no longer remembered accurately, but it is certainly implied that the sums of money were large, meaning that these specialists made a significant financial profit.

15. Auntie Róza had personal experience of soothsayers and seers. She had repeatedly visited such specialists both in her youth and also later on, when she was already married. As a girl, she had gone



to the seer in town with another girl. They questioned the seer first and foremost concerning their marriage prospects and their future husbands. The payment consisted of home-baked bread and bacon, which one of the girls carried with her (it was her own food portion). As a wife, at a spa resort she had consulted a seer of Roma descent who was vacationing there, in the latter's hotel room. She presumed that the woman was a soothsayer simply on account of her ethnic background, but it turned out to be true. She first spoke to the seer in the dining room and then visited her in her room. One had to be discreet since soothsaying was in that period (under socialism) an officially persecuted activity.

16. In one such conflict the husband slapped his wife. In the words of the narrator, the "silly" woman immediately ran to her parents' home. I would like to draw attention here to the fact that the narrator (a woman herself) finds physical aggression against a wife acceptable. There was much more bitterness ahead for the wife to swallow. Among other things, she heroically bore with her husband's infidelities, smiling to the world even though he had just cheated on her with her best friend, while she was lying sick in hospital.

17. Jimbor is a village in the region of Buza. The seer was the mother of the head of the local collective farming unit. When they sought her out, she committed to the task reluctantly, for fear she would get her son into trouble. In spite of this, she was known throughout the region; her fame and address, not to mention the stories involving her, spread by word of mouth. This seer had Romanian nationality. Both Romanian and Hungarian seers were sought out by Romanians and Hungarians alike.

18. I have indicated in brackets the questions I asked in the course of the interview.

19. Cf.: "If someone is made through harmful magic to love someone, it is an unfortunate thing. What if they were not meant for one another, yet the women bring them together? They used to say: "Till God takes note, two old women got them together" [„Ha valakit megcsinálnak, hogy szeressen valakit, nem szerencsés dolog. Hátha nincs neki rendelve, összerakják az asszonyok. Szokták mondani: „Még (míg) az isten észreveszi, két öregasszony összeteszi"]. The quotation is taken from the collections of Gabriella Vőő (1972. VI. Seventy-year-old man, Arhiva de Folclor a Academiei Române [Romanian Academy Folklore Archive] (013.548), Cluj). I shall return to a popular belief mentioned here, which I have not yet discussed, namely that the person to whom someone is married was "not destined for them."

20. Alexandra Tătăran also comments on marriages brought about in a similar way, though binding: Once the nuptials have taken place every spell is lifted, and the spouses start to hate each other; this is the secret behind their unhappy life (Tătăran 2016, 31).

21. Evans-Pritchard (1993, 22).

22. Such cases will be addressed later on, cf. the belief in the "predestined partner" (HU: *eleve elrendelt társ*; RO: *ursita*).

23. The Hungarian friend had faced a similar problem at one point. In that case, too, they had gone together to the Romanian Orthodox priest. Her son had married and had children, and the problem was solved.

24. Both the Romanian expression and its Hungarian counterpart are confusing. Nevertheless, given that this is the local term for this phenomenon, I need to use it. It means that magical binding prevents marriage from happening, and consequently the victim remains single.

25. On the harmful magic of the abandoned lover, see e.g. Canianu (1999, 165).

26. The father had also consulted a seer and they had followed her advice as well, again without results.

27. I give the Hungarian and Romanian terms for the clairvoyant as used by Ilona.

28. *Stareț* is the Romanian term for the monk in charge of a monastery.

29. A *pomelnic* (RO) is a piece of paper on which the faithful write down the names of relatives, alive and deceased, on behalf of whom they wish to have prayers recited in a church or monastery. The word is cognate with the verb *a pomeni*, meaning "to mention," "to remember."

30. The term *patrafir* (from Church Slavonic *epitrahil* / Greek *epitrachelion*) refers to a stole, a scarf-like piece of priestly clothing worn around the neck and mandatory during services. Since it signifies divine blessing, priests began the habit of holding it over the head of the believer during certain rites.

31. She is now undergoing bioresonance therapy to treat her illnesses, but that part of the story is not relevant to the topics discussed here.

32. Cf., e.g., Malinowski (1929); Pamfile (1998). On ancient Greek love magic and its aggressive terminology, shaped by competition and frustration, see Faraone (1999, 483).

33. Aurora Liiceanu gives a similar account. She emphasises that in the practice of experts called, in her case, *vrăjitoare* (witch), the most frequent request is for the inducing of marriage, to which end the witch and the client (*beneficiary*) work together. The village she studied put enormous pressure on people to marry. Liiceanu too believes that the magical intervention sought to effect a change in someone's marital status (Liiceanu 1998, 76-8).

34. By contrast, such events and magical techniques have been widely reported in the Arieș valley (e.g., Komáromi 2009, 184). On love and love magic in other parts of Transylvania, see also Balázs (2010); Balatonyi (2016). The cases published in Lajos Balázs' study are all ones of love magic; they seek to increase someone's desire or an attraction one cannot resist, or magically harm an unfaithful partner to gain revenge. There is only one exception, a case in which a mother-in-law committed magical harm against her daughter-in-law because she did not like her: she sewed an egg-shaped harmful magical object into the pillow of the bed in which the couple spent their wedding night, and the bride became incurably ill. This narrative also states that the victims consulted "monks" to find a cure, but without success (Balázs 2010, 314-5).

35. In the case of one Romanian couple it even happened that the groom's parents placed a harmful magical bundle in the trousseau; the harmful magic eventually caused the death of both spouses. The bundle consisted of a red cloth and feathers braided together and sewn into their pillow.

36. In a research paper, Éva Pócs mentions in the category of bindings that influence bodily functions both "binding the luck of a girl, to make it impossible for her to get married" [*a lány szerencsésjének megkötése, hogy ne mehesen férjhez*] and causing impotence by binding (Pócs 1963, 591). In the same paper Pócs quotes from Andor Komáromy's account of witch trials some information taken from a case in Bihor county: "For the girl to be rendered unable to marry, she is bound thus: A lock of her hair is wound around the leg of a hen, which is buried under the hearth" ["Hogy a lány férjhez ne mehesen, úgy kötik meg, hogy hajának egy fűrtjét tyúk lábára tekerik, és azt elássák a tűzhely alá," Pócs (1963, 576) / Komáromy (1910, 245)]. I did not encounter practices of a similar kind in this village; however, the correlation between girl



and hen clearly existed there as well, since wedding traditions included an episode in which the bride was replaced by a hen. Liiceanu (1998, 48), describes the "selective" binding of potency: in such cases, a woman binds the potency of the man who is important to her in such a way that he is rendered impotent for everyone else except her.

37. I would like to note here that the village had another "expert" in influencing matrimony, one who employed different techniques: the so-called "Hear ye" (HU: *Hajjake'*, that is *Hallja kend*) – the matchmaker.

38. Narrators mentioned only one male (folk) specialist, the "clairvoyant" good friend, who discovered his abilities precisely by frequenting Orthodox priests, monasteries, and the tombs of saints; by doing so, he was granted a miracle. An important difference is that people in need do not seek him out, but rather he seeks out those he deems to be in need.

39. Since the accusations published in the media are unproven, I refrain from giving the name of the priest. My impression is that people who live in his neighbourhood and know him well value him, whereas those living further away gossip about him as a black magician with supernatural powers. I believe we are face to face with a charismatic personality, who clearly divides opinion and is extremely controversial.

40. On the ambivalence of magic, see, e.g., Malinowski (1993, 37); Evans-Pritchard (1937, 388-89); Kieckhefer (1989, 80-1); (Moore 2001, 4-5); Komáromi (2009, 37-40).

41. On the active role of women in magic see also Liiceanu (1998, 104).

42. Liiceanu (1998, 47) concludes that unmarried men never go to the witch [*vrăjitoare*] alone, but if they are aware of the intervention and participate in it, the results will be better.

43. On the strategic use of witchcraft accusations see Argyrou (1993).

44. Research on the Transylvanian Plain that publishes Hungarian and Romanian material side by side, thereby systematically comparing knowledge and practice alike, such as Aurél Vajkai's work entitled *Népi orvoslás a Borsavölgyében* (Vajkai 1943), counts as a rarity.

45. György Martin (2010), June, Folkszemle: http://folkradio.hu/folkszemle/martin_mezosegifyalvaktanc kulturaja/index.php: "Here the intertwining and mutual influence of the Hungarian, Romanian, Gypsy and Saxon cultures brought the wealth of the thesaurus of Transylvanian dance and music to its pinnacle. As a consequence of the constant interchange of dances and dance tunes, the boundaries of Hungarian and Romanian specificity are completely blurred in the Transylvanian Plain, and a veritable musical and dance bilingualism manifests itself" ["A magyar, román, cigány és szász kultúra összefonódása, kölcsönhatása itt fokozta a legmagasabbra az erdélyi tánc- és zenekincs gazdagságát. A táncok és a táncdalok állandó csereberéje következtében a Mezőségen teljesen összemosódnak a magyar és román jellegzetességek határai, s valódi zenei és táncbéli kényszerűség érvényesül"].

46. This relationship must have been strong even when the Romanians in the village and the area belonged to the Greco-Catholic church (prior to 1948); nevertheless, completely new research is needed to identify what it consisted of, which elements were common, and whether Orthodox influence became stronger after the Second World War and the banning of Greco-Catholicism.

47. Both cases involve educated women, which means they

identify more strongly with their religious identity (and their customary religious experience), which is strongly linked with their ethnic identity.

48. Judit Balatonyi encountered this idea in Ghimes; see the "tying away a marriage" (HU: *házasság elkötése*, Balatonyi 2016, 230).

49. "Village priest solving marital deadlocks," Tătăran (2016, 23-8).

50. *Cununie* is a Romanian term denoting the Orthodox religious wedding ceremony; it alludes to the crowns (Romanian: *cunună*) held above the heads of the couple at one point in the ceremony.

51. *Fapt de urât* means a harmful magic that renders a person ugly or hated.

52. Pamfile's monograph was completed in 1915 but first published only in 1998.

53. Pamfile (1998, 189).

54. Pamfile (1998, 200): "their fated man is taken away by trickery and charms."

55. Tătăran calls this type of harmful magic *ordaining spells* (*vrăji de orândă*). They seek to compel the man widowed after the induced death to marry the perpetrator of the magic. According to Tătăran, in today's Romania a life-and-death struggle is being waged around marriage, especially in country areas. The death-causing interference mentioned above can be recognised by three signs: sudden illness and death; the widower remarries soon; the new spouse does not suit him from a social point of view and is noted for "knowing those things" (Liiceanu 1998, 27-31).

56. Keszeg (1999, 208-9).

57. See, e.g., Pamfile (1998, 200) and Liiceanu (1998, 76): *vrăjuri de ursită* [fate charms].

58. Pamfile (1998, 203); Olteanu (1997, 47-8); (Keszeg 1999, 207-12). The frog as the alter ego of the witch is also attested in international scholarship; see, e.g., Mauss (2000, 47).

59. Keszeg (1999, 209).

60. This method is practised not only in the Transylvanian Plain but elsewhere too; see also Pamfile (1998, 203).



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