

“LITTLE BRIDE, YOU WILL DRINK YOUR OWN BLOOD”: VERBAL AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ROMANIAN ORAL LITERATURE

ALEXANDRA CHERECHEȘ*

Abstract: A general view of the violence against women in Romanian oral literature is exposed, focusing especially on wedding songs. Verbal and physical abuse has a notable presence in this folklore: insults, mockeries, and beatings are reproduced, assimilated by a culture where the predominant figure tends to be always masculine. Therefore, some aspects of the idea of masculinity and femininity in Romanian oral literature will be reviewed.

Keywords: Violence, masculinity, femininity, gender roles, Romanian oral literature, Romanian folklore.

*Am audzît dîm bătrîn că la nascere are drept să-j bată muișerea bărbatu!*¹
[I have heard an old saying: the man has a right from birth to beat his wife up!]

1. Lazy, crazy, unfaithful, and... stupid

Violence against women represents a crucial problem of our societies and, unfortunately, it is still spread worldwide. Thanks to mass-media and other forms of communication, nowadays this issue is being discussed by different disciplines, from social to legal sciences:

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University of Jaén. E-mail: alexandra.ch@hotmail.es.

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¹ Emil Petrovici, *Folclor din Valea Almăjului* (Timișoara: Waldpress, 2004), 34.

All the translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

“The feminine population of Romania could be divided into 3 groups: the woman of the countryside, the middle-schooled woman living in town, and the highly educated woman. Even nowadays the conditions of the woman of the countryside are not very different from those during the old regime: she is subjected to man, first as a father, then as a husband and eventually as a son. Although in some counties the woman seems to have the same rights, she is often thought of as inferior: her opinion is never asked for, she is married at her parents’ will, and her main duty is to give birth to children that she must raise and the work for their dowry.²”

Notwithstanding this, to grasp the presence of gender-based violence in the past,³ written texts based upon oral literature are one of the few instruments that show the voice of the suffering woman: “oral tradition also reflects the gender concepts of its time, so that it can be examined as part of the symbolic system which justifies and reproduces the prevailing roles and relations between genders”.⁴ Thus, in this paper, Romanian oral literature will be revised, considering that in this folklore we can find texts in which verbal and physical aggression against women is blatantly exposed.⁵ In general, the images and metaphors vary from insults and curses to explicit beatings. Songs and poems from 19th to 21st centuries, located in different regions, unveil a common belief: the woman can be an angel endowed with virtues, but she is also a diabolical creature:

Sub potcoava cizmei mele
șade dracu cu-o muiere
și mă-nvață să fac rele.⁶

² Tatiana Iațcu, “Romanian Women and Their Exiles”, in *The Proceedings of the European Integration-Between Tradition and Modernity Congress*, 1 (Târgu-Mureș: Editura Universității Petru Maior, 2005): 338.

³ See also Ina Curic and Lorena Văețiși, *Inegalitatea de gen: violența invizibilă* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2005); Mihaela Bucuta, Gabriela Dima, Katalin Zoltani, Dalma Delia Antal, “The phenomenon of domestic violence in Romania: A prevention and intervention”, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Family Studies* XVII.1 (2012): 153-168; Catalina Elena Prisacaru, “Patterns of Violence in Greek and Romanian Rural Settings”, *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies* 10 (2017): 321-331.

⁴ Aili Nenola, “Gender, culture and folklore”, *ELO. Estudos do Literatura Oral* 5 (1999): 23.

⁵ For historical documents regarding 19th century Moldova, see Alina, Felea, Teodor Candu, Larisa Svetlicinaia, “Violența în societatea moldovenească (înc. sec. XIX). Contribuții documentare”, *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei* 1.109 (2017): 122-130.

Very significant for their sociohistorical and anthropological perspectives are the works of Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, *În șalvari și cu ișlic. Biserică, sexualitate, căsătorie și divorț în Țara Românească a secolului al XVIII-lea* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), especially 270-295; and Nicoleta Roman, “Deznădăjduită muiere n-au fost ca mine”. *Femei, onoare și păcat în Valahia secolului al XIX-lea* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2016).

⁶ Grigore Bota, “Collected texts”, in Raluca Bârsan, *Treci, dorule, Mureșul...* (Târgu Mureș: Ardealul, 2003), 48.

The devil and a woman stand
under the sole of my boot
and they teach me evilness.

The dichotomy goodness/evil entails different metaphors and symbols: the woman can be a flower, a bird, a princess, a fairy...⁷ As for the flower, in the following poem we shall consider it as a passive element, whereas the boy is an active individual:

Săracele fetele,
ele sânt ca florile.
Aici cresc, colea-nfloresc,
dincolo se vestejesc.
Dar ficioru săracu,
când se plimbă prin grădină
florile-i toate se-nchină,
dar el se plimbă și tace
și rupe floarea ce-i place.⁸

Poor girls, they are like flowers.
Here they grow up,
there they flourish,
over there they wither.
But the poor boy,
when he walks in the garden,
he sees the flowers taking a bow,
[and] he wanders, quietly,
and plucks the flower he likes.

Here, it becomes clear that the man is the one who chooses, and the woman embodies an object which is being selected. We will explore more broadly this situation in the second section of this work, but it is necessary to note that, for the most part, the texts selected reflect masculine values (albeit women sing them). For example, these songs and poems reveal that growing up means leaving the freedom and the innocence, thus entering a world where marriage encompasses violence and oppression:

⁷ Beauty and its connotations in Romanian oral literature are studied by Petru Ursache, *Etnofrumosul sau Cazul Mărie* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2014), 73 et seq.

⁸ Ligia Bârgu-Georgescu, *Dragi îmi sânt izvoarele, luna și cu soarele. Cântece despre natură* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1983), 185.

Floricea din cărare,
 ce-ai crescut așa de mare,
 c-a da bruma peste tine,
 te-a bruma necoaptă bine.
 Că și eu am fost o floare,
 m-a brumat bruma cea mare,
 și-am căzut jos în cărare
 și m-a călcat în picioare;
 nu m-a călcat un străin,
 m-a călcat al meu vecin;
 nu m-a călcat dușmanul,
 dar m-a călcat bărbatul.⁹

Little flower from the road,
 why have you grown up that big?
 Because the frost will come
 and, still unripe, you will freeze.
 Because I too was a flower
 and the great frost came
 and I fell down the road
 and I have been trodden;
 I have not been trodden by a stranger,
 but the neighbor did it,
 I have not been trodden by an enemy,
 but my husband did it.

The formula “ai grăbit la măritat / ca floarea la scuturat” (“you hurried up to get married / like the withering flower”) is well-known in multiple wedding songs.¹⁰ The ephemeral condition of the young girl bumps into the timeless marital status. The little flower, heartwarming and sensitive, is abruptly torn away from her family:

Pruncuță din doi părinți,
 ce gândești să te măriți?
 Ce păzăști la măritat,
 ca floarea la scuturat?
 Tu gândești că ț'a h'i bine,
 dacă-i h'i gazdă de tine.
 Ȃla-i mândru și-i frumos,

⁹ Ibid., 193-194

¹⁰ See Vasile Bele, “Nunta tradițională” *Memoria Ethnologica* 60-61 (2016): 160-177.

da mai mult îi lăcrămos.
 Bărbatu-i pară de foc
 Iel te bate cân gânde[ște]
 Haine nouă nu-ț mai ie,
 poartă care l-i ave!¹¹

Little girl from two parents,
 why do you want to get married?
 Why do you hurry up
 like a flower which will wither?
 You think you will be fine
 when you will become a guest.
 Marriage brings pride and beauty,
 but, above all, it brings tears.
 Man is a hot flame,
 he hits you whenever he wants.
 He will not buy you any new clothes,
 then wear whatever you have!

To grasp the relevance of a context where the dominant figure is always masculine, equally important are proverbs and sayings:

Muiere are gîndu dracului/năcuratului (...). Muiere ca și cînil: latră, da nu mușcă. Muiere fără bătaie nu-i bună. Muiere hotărește, satana împlinește. Muiere-i albina cășii. Muiere-i dracu, numa coarnile-i hienzăsc/lipsăsc. Muiere-i mai re ca dracu (...). Muiere o scos bărbatu dîn rai.¹²

The woman has the devils' thinking (...). The woman is like a dog: she barks, but she does not bite. The woman who is not beaten is not good. The woman decides, Satan executes. The woman is the bee of the house. The woman is the devil: she only lacks the horns. The woman is worse than the devil (...). The woman pushed the man out of paradise.

¹¹ Vasile Scurtu "Cercetări folklorice în Ugocea românească", in *Anuarul Arhivei de Folklor*, ed. Ion Mușlea (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1942): 185, no.32.

¹² Stella Nikula, "'Așe să zîce pî la noi...'" (Proverbe și zicători de la românii din județul Bichiș)" *Izvorul. Revista de Etnografie și Folclor* 28 (2007): 48.

The biblical resonances or the image of Eve as temptation and sin are spread in Romanian folklore but, despite their religious content, they can be found in many literatures¹³ and hold the potential to be reframed in new systems of thought, even in meteorology: “când e ploaie cu soare, se crede că îşi bate dracul nevasta şi Dumnezeu râde”:¹⁴ “when it is raining but the sun is shining, it is believed that the devil beats his wife up, and God laughs at it”. Likewise, the prose and poetry selected depict a negative perception of feminine intelligence;¹⁵ she is either cunning and malicious, or genuinely foolish:

dintele minţii la muiere tocmai după morte iese (...). Muierea înţeleptă o bate cineva şi i e ruşine să plângă, iar muierea rea numai dintr-o vorbă ardică mahalaua-n cap (...). Muierea: póle lungi, minte scurtă.¹⁶
 woman’s wisdom tooth emerges only after her death (...). If beaten, the bright woman will be ashamed and will not cry, but the evil woman will wreck havoc for a single word said to her (...). The woman: long skirt, short minded.

¹³ For Spanish proverbs, see Anna M. Fernández Poncela, *Estereotipos y roles de género en el refranero popular: charlatanas, mentirosas, malvadas y peligrosas* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2002). For medieval and early-modern Spanish literature, see: Louise O. Vasvári “‘Buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone, e buona femina e mala femina vuol bastone’. Medieval Cultural Fictions of Wife Battering”, in *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early-Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004): 313-336; María del Pilar Puig Mares, “Palo y mala vida. (El tema de la maldaridad)”, in *La fractura historiográfica: las investigaciones de Edad Media y Renacimiento desde el Tercer Milenio*, ed. Javier San José Lera, Francisco Javier Burguillo López, Laura Mier Pérez (Salamanca: Universidad, 2008): 749-767.

German, French, Italian, and English texts are studied in ed. Albrecht, Classen, Marilyn Sandidge, *The Power of a Woman’s Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2007); see especially chapter six, on domestic violence (187-230). Gender violence in African literature is widely analyzed by Helen Rachel Cousins *Conjugal Wrongs: Gender Violence in African Women’s Literature*, Ph.D. Thesis (Birmingham: The University of Birmingham, 2001), 59-117. For Indian folklore, see Ann Grodzins Gold, “Outspoken Women: Representations of Female Voices in a Rajasthani Folklore Community”, *Oral Tradition* 12.1 (1997): 103-133. Romanian texts show links to multiple Yiddish folk songs compiled in Adrienne Cooper, “Women Sing of Family Violence”, *Lilith* (2011). Available online: <<http://www.lilith.org/print/?pid=664&type=article>>.

See: Adrienne Cooper, Sarah Mina Gordon, “He Beat Me Black and Blue: Yiddish Songs of Family Violence”, Parts 1, 2, 3 and 4 (2011). Available online: <<https://forward.com/schmooze/138304/he-beat-me-black-and-blue-yiddish-songs-of-family/>>.

Online materials retrieved by March, 6th, 2019.

See also Robert A. Rothstein, “‘The Girl He Left Behind’: Women in East European Songs of Emigration”, *SEefa Journal* 5.1 (2000): 29-31.

¹⁴ Traian Gherman, *Meteorologia populară* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2000), 70.

¹⁵ Ion-Aurel Candrea, *Lumea basmelor. Studii şi culegeri de folclor românesc*, ed. Antoaneta Olteanu (Bucharest: Paideia, 2001), 114.

¹⁶ J. C. Hinţescu, *Proverbele românilor* (Sibiu: Editura şi Tipografia Eredei de Closius, 1877), 112.

Thus, violence against the girlfriend, the wife or the mother-in-law¹⁷ are justified by the male superiority and taken as a form of instruction:

Femeia nebătută e ca moara neferecată. Dacă nu știi de ce îți bați nevasta, lasă că știe ea. Femeia și nucul trebuie batute. Femeia nebătută este ca o casă nemăturată. Moara se bate de 3 ori, iar femeia de 6 ori pe zi. Muierea d-aia-i muiere, să sufere. Femeia trebuie bătută chiar dacă nu a făcut nimic pentru că oricum o să facă.

The woman who is not beaten is like the mill which is unbound. If you don't know why you are beating your wife, don't worry, she knows. The woman and the nut tree must be beaten. The woman who is not beaten is like a house which is not swept. The mill is beaten three times and the woman six times a day. A woman's role is to suffer. The woman must be beaten even if she has done nothing wrong –she will do something wrong anyway.¹⁸

In one of my fieldworks in Transylvania, I have recorded several songs performed by a group of women,¹⁹ three of which I would like to examine here because of their relevance:

Dragile méle muiéri,
să vă spun ce-am pățat ieri:
rău m-o bătut bărbatu'
că m-o gășit cu altu'.
Și m-o gășit după casă,
desculță și dezbrăcată.

¹⁷ In Romanian folklore, violence against the mother-in-law generally has humorous undertones. Romanian ballads and their connection to European folklore are studied in Helga Stein, *Zur Herkunft und Altersbestimmung einer Novellenballade. Die Schwiegermutter beseitigt die ihr anvertraute Schwiegertochter* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1979). See also Isaac Jack Lévy, Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, "A Mother-in-Law not even in Clay is Good: *sfuegra ni de barro es buena...*", *Folklore* 123.2 (2012): 127-151.

In a poem where she abuses her daughter-in-law while the son/husband is away, when he comes back and sees what has happened, he exclaims: "(...) Ai noroc că-mi ești măicuță, / că te-aș tăia dărăbuță / și te-aș purta pe uliță, / să se-nvețe soacrele / cum să țin nurorile!". Lucia Stăvilă, "Collected texts", in Raluca Bârsan, *Treci, dorule, Mureșul...* (Târgu Mureș: Ardealul, 2003): 221-231. "(...) You are lucky to be my mom, / otherwise I would chop you in pieces / and I would walk around the street with you / so mothers-in-law would learn / how to treat their daughters-in-law!".

¹⁸ Ana Maria Dumitrescu, "Aggressiveness and violence in the life of Romanian women / Agresividad y violencia en la vida de las mujeres de Rumanía", *Alternativas. Cuadernos de Trabajo Social* 21 (2014): 29-46. (Author's translation).

¹⁹ F. Bogdan (1935), M. Șerbănați (1947), V. Vaivoda (1953), M. Chiorean (1939), from Solovăstru, county of Târgu-Mureș. Place and date of the recording: Solovăstru, 10/10/2018.

Și m-o gasît după șură,
 dându-i la bădița gură.
 Că așa-i la noi în sat:
 s-ai drăgut p'ingă bărbat!
 Ț-asa-i în comuna noastră:
 dacă n-ai drăguț, ești prostă!

Dear girlfriends, let me tell you
 what happened yesterday:
 my husband beat me up because
 he caught me with another man.
 And he found me barefoot and naked
 at the back of my house.
 And he found me at the back of the barn,
 while I was kissing my beloved.
 Because it is customary in our village
 to have a beloved alongside a husband.
 Because it is customary in our county:
 if you do not have a lover, you are stupid!

When they were performing these songs, the women were laughing and smiling, as if the description of the nakedness and the infidelity, together with the consequent beating, were humorous. Also, the topical of the drunken woman was appreciated as amusing,²⁰ together with the unfaithfulness committed with a member of the church:

Bată-l Dumnezó, s-o bată,
 c-o făcut crâșma la poartă
 de vine nevasta beată
șă lai la la la la la...
 Și viu sara di la plug
 și cân' viu sara di la plug
 nu șteiu boii să-i dejug
șă lai la la la la la...
 Și pân' la popa să mă duc:
 -Părinte, sfântia ta,
 hai că móre nevasta
șă lai la la la la la...

²⁰ Robert A. Rothstein "Geyt a yid in shenklay arayn: Yiddish Songs of Drunkenness," in ed. David Goldberg, *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Folklore, and Literature, Fifth Collection*, (Evanston, IL/ New York: Northwestern University Press, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1993): 243-262.

Și dacă nu mă crezi pe mine
 și dacă nu mă crezi pe mine
 dascălu' știe mai bine
șa lai la la la la la...

C-am beut cu el cinci kile
 și cinci chile și jumătate
 dute-acasă și o bate
șa lai la la la la la...

Și dute-acasă, bate-o bine,
 și dute-acasă, bate-o bine,
 să uite de hăl' cinci chile
șa lai la la la la la...

Sî dute-acasă, bate-o rău
 și dute-acasă, bate-o rău
 să uite de făgădau
șa lai la la la la la...

Damn it, may God punish her,
 because he built the tavern by our door,
 and my wife comes all drunk,
șa lai la la la la la...

And I finish ploughing at night
 and when I come home
 I do not know how to remove the oxen's yokes
șa lai la la la la la...

And I go to the priest:
 -Father, your holiness,
 please, come, my wife is dying
șa lai la la la la la...

And if you do not believe me,
 and if you do not believe me,
 the church's cantor knows better
șa lai la la la la la...

Because I drank with him five kilos
 five kilos and a half,
 go home and hit her
șa lai la la la la la...

And go home and beat her properly,
 and go home and beat her properly,
 so, she will forget about the five kilos
șa lai la la la la la...

And go home and beat her up,
and go home and beat her up,
so, she will forget about the tavern,
şa lai la la la la la...

We should differentiate between the voice of the woman and that of the man, respectively, as it happens in the two songs above. When the feminine point of view is being deployed, she usually uses the text as a confidence, talking to her mother or her friends,²¹ framing the violence in several actions she should have not carried out: “he hit me *because...*”; “he beat me up *because...*”. There is always a “cause”. Nonetheless, when the masculine outlook admits the beatings, he is supercilious and arrogant:

Cucuruz, penuşă verde,²²
spune-i la mândra de-a crede,
luni sara să nu m-aştepte
că nu merg feciori la fete.
Marţa sára nu merg eu
că mă bate Dumnezeu.
Miercuri sára mă bat sfinţii,
joi mă blastăma părinţii.
Vineri sára-i zî de post:
n-are mândra niciun rost.
Sâmbătă sára îs beat:
de mă duc, o iéu de cap.
[/ Sâmbătă sára m-i somn,
de mă duc la ié adorm]²³.
Dumíneca sara-s beat,
de mă duc la ié, o bat.
la că-i săptămâna-ntreagă
poţi să ştii că nu-mi eşti dragă.

²¹ For broader perspectives, see Rothstein Robert A., “The Sad Lot of Women in Ukrainian and Yiddish Folksongs”, in *Textures and Meanings: Thirty Years of Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst*, ed. Leonard H. Ehrlich, Shmuel Bolozky, Robert A. Rothstein, Murray Schwartz, Jay R. Berkovitz, James E. Young (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2004): 213-227; Adriana Llinares, “La malmaridada francesa y española. Motivos y variaciones”, in *Lírica tradicional europea*, ed. Eva Silvia Capelli, Josefa Zamudio de Predan (Bahía Blanca: Universidad Nacional del Sur, 1999): 107-136.

²² There are multiple versions of this song, with diverse endings and purposes; see, for example, Cruciţa Crişan. “Collected texts”, in Raluca Bârsan, *Treci, dorule, Mureşul...* (Târgu Mureş: Ardealul, 2003): 80.

²³ This variant was sung by one of the women interviewed, M. Şerbănăţi.

Green leaf of corn,
 tell my girlfriend, if she believes it,
 not to wait for me on Monday night,
 because boys do not visit girls that day.
 Tuesday night I am not going
 because God may punish me.
 Wednesday night the saints may punish me,
 Thursday my parents may curse me.
 Friday is fasting day:
 there is no reason to go.
 Saturday night I am drunk:
 if I see her, I will pull her hair.
 [/Saturday night I am sleepy,
 if I see her, I may fall asleep].
 Sunday night I am drunk,
 if I see her, I will beat her.
 So, look, the whole week is over:
 you should know I do not love you.

Even though the context in which these songs were performed has almost disappeared (agricultural works, social gatherings for married or unmarried girls, etc.), the lyrics have preserved a powerful message, because during these encounters, women are able to express thoughts and feelings. As we delve into some songs, they clarify that, in these rural cultural settings, strongly influenced by men's power, women must be exemplary housewives, mastering all the house chores, and, bearing in mind procreation, they must be good mothers.²⁴ Above all, they are obliged to obey their husbands and sacrifice even their own life for the sake of the family.²⁵ The following epithalamium states that, after the wedding, there are only three exits for the woman:

²⁴ Doina Paicu, "Folclor literar din Poiana Ștampeii în viziune integrată", in ed. Călin Brăteanu, Constanța Cristescu, *Ghidul iubitorilor de folclor. 2.2012* (Suceava: Lidana, 2012), 152.

²⁵ Given the space limitations, we cannot study the case of the women in Romanian ballads, for example, Ana being walled-up in *Craftsman Manole* (or *The Monastery of Argeș*) after God commands the main character to sacrifice the first person he sees (that being precisely his wife). For various analysis, see Alan Dundes, "How Indic Parallels to the Ballad of the *Walled-Up Wife* Reveal the Pitfalls of Parochial Nationalistic Folkloristics", *The Journal of American Folklore* 108.427 (1995): 38-53; Alan Dundes ed., *The Walled-Up Wife. A Casebook* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); Monika Kropiej, "Folk Storytelling between Fiction and Tradition: The *Walled-Up Wife* and Other Construction Legends", *Studia Mythologica Slavica* XIV (2011), 61-86; Viorica Vesa-Florea, "Poezia populară", *Metafora lacrimii în poezia românească* (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2014), 25-54; ed. Florentina Andreescu, Michael J. C. Shapiro, *Genre and the (Post)-Communist Woman: Analyzing Transformations of the Central and Eastern European Female Ideal* (London: Routledge, 2014); and Gheorghiu Ciocoi, "Les premières

Mireasă din doi părinți,
 la ce focu te măriți:
 măritatu nu-i noroc
 că bărbatu-i zdici de foc,
 măritatu nu-i tocmeală
 că bărbatu-i zdici de pară.
 Tu, de astăzi înainte,
 drumurile ți-s oprite,
 numa tri ți-s năpustite:
 la fântână după apă,
 în grădină după ceapă
 și la mă-ta, câteodată.²⁶

Bride with two parents,
 why the hell are you getting married?
 Getting married brings no luck,
 because man is a whip made of fire,
 getting married is not a swap,
 because man is a whip made of flames.
 From now on,
 your roads are cut off,
 only three are left:
 to the fountain to bring water,
 to the garden to pick up onions
 and to your mum's, sometimes.

These activities, like cleaning up, doing laundry, preparing food..., are judged by the husband, by the mother-in-law and, ultimately, by the community. Because of this demand, many songs mock women's laziness:

La casa cu șapte fete
 pter găinile de sete
 cu fântâna su' părete;
 d-apoi unde-s opt flăcăi
 este apă și-n budăi.²⁷

versions de la ballade du sacrifice au Sud du Danube dans les collections folkloriques Bulgares", *Diversité et Identité Culturelle en Europe* XII.1 (2015), 291-302.

²⁶ Ion Vancea, "Ileana Vancea din Nănești", *Memoria Ethnologica* 1 (2001), 107, no.270.

²⁷ Georgeta Maria Iuga, "Collected texts from Borșa", *Memoria Ethnologica* 1 (2001), 31.

In a house with seven girls
the hens die of thirst
although the well water is close;
but in a house with eight boys
there is water even in the pitcher.

We perceive that humor can be stressed by woman's defects and errors, but the final verses repeatedly disclose an abuse taken as normal and legitimate:

De la mine a treia casă
mă-nsurai și luai nevestă
o trimit să mulgă vaca.
Ea se duce, mulge scroafa,
intră toanta în coteț
sare scroafa pe pereți
mai aveam vreo trei purcei
mor și ăia de frica ei
mai aveam vreo trei găini
sar și alea prin vecini.
Și-am bătut-o într-o seară
de urla ca trenu-n gară
Și-am trimis-o la părinți
fără păr și fără dinți.²⁸

Three houses away from mine
I have chosen a wife, I got married,
I send her to milk the cow:
she goes and milks the sow;
the stupid goes to the henhouse:
the sow jumps all over the place;
I had three piglets,
she scares them to death;
I had three hens,
they jump around the neighborhood.
So I beat her up last night
and she screamed like a train.
And I sent her to her parents,

²⁸ Ioana-Roxandra Fruntelată, Cristian Mușă, *Starchiojd. Moștenirea culturală (partea a doua). Sărbători, obiceiuri, repertoriu folcloric, tradiții locale reprezentative* (Ploiești: Mythos, 2015), 239.

hairless and with no teeth.

Incompetent girls may also be a punishment for the man who only seeks wealth and social stability:

Foie verde trei lalele,
 mă-nsurai să-mi iau muiere,
 mă bucurai cu avere,
 și-mi luai muma mării mele,
 vai de păcatele mele!
 La avere, la argint,
 la un bou de priponit!
 Bou ici, bou colea,
 bou trece Dunărea.
 Avere s-a cheltuit
 nebuna mi-a-mbătrânit
 și eu tot m-am prăpădit!
 Puică, fusei urgisit
 de Dumnezeu cel iubit
 bate-vă crucea de femei,
 m-ați lăsat încins cu tei,
 cu totă avere să piei!
 Fire-ai, maică, blestemată
 că nu mă făcuși o fată!²⁹

Green leaf and three tulips,
 I married to get a woman,
 I enjoyed wealth,
 and I married my great-grandmother,
 oh, dear me!
 I had money, I had silver,
 I had my ox well tied!
 The ox is here, the ox is there,
 the ox passes the Danube.
 The money is spent,
 the crazy woman got old
 and I perish!
 Oh, sweetheart, I have been punished

²⁹ Grigore G. Tocilescu, *Materialuri folkloristice. Volumul 1. Partea 1. Poesia poporană* (Bucharest: Tipografia "Corpului Didactic" C. Ispășescu & G. Brătănescu, 1900a), 315.

by my loved God,
 may God punish you, women,
 you made me lose my mind
 and I perish with all my wealth!
 May god punish you, mother,
 I should have been born a girl!

Interestingly enough, in the last poem the masculine voice wishes a feminine embodiment, saying that it could bring him more luck. On the contrary, the motif of the woman crying for her destiny (her gender and her commitments) is much more frequent. Other folk songs merge the beating of animals, children and people: their brief descriptions of violence produce laughter in the audience precisely by reifying and objectifying the comical element.³⁰ An example of the cat and the woman treated as punch balls is reproduced below:

Bărbatul mă ține bine
 când dă-n mătă dă și-n mine
 pe mătă o scapă afară
 pe mine mă prinde iară.³¹

My husband treats me well:
 when he hits the cat, he hits me too,
 the cat escapes outside,
 but he catches me again.

The sentence “treats me well” uncovers a double sense found in many texts:

Nevastă, frumosă esci,
 cu bărbatul cum trăesci?
 -Trăesc bine ca dracul,
 și aseară mi-a spart capul.³²

Bride, you are beautiful,
 how is the life with your husband?
 -I live great, as if I was in hell,
 and last night he broke my head.

³⁰ Henri Bergson, *La risa. Ensayo sobre el significado de la comicidad* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Godot, 2011), 56.

³¹ Irina Nicolau ed., *Versuri din flori. Supliment al Revistei Martor* 5 (2000), 25.

³² Ion Pop-Retegatul, Andrei Ion Todoran, *Chiuituri: de care strigă feciorii în joc / adunate din popor de Ion Pop Reteganul; și date poporului de A. Todoran* (Gherla: Tiparul, Editura și Proprietatea Tipografiei Aurora A. Todoran, 1891), 96, no.475.

Equally, if this violence is understood as a sort of teaching, the parents also use it for a purpose, and the girl tries to empathize with her mother:

Nu mă bate, maică, bate,
că n-am șezut mult pe spate.
De auziai cum se ruga,
ai fi stat și dumneata!³³

Do not hit me, mother,
because I have not rested that much.
If you had heard him begging
you too would have stayed!

Masculinity questioned is one of the most interesting subjects in this literature. The man who does not hit his wife is objectified as “obgeala de sub pat” (“the rag under the bed”), or divinised as an uncommon angel:

Bărbatu meu nu-i bărbat,
că-i obgeala de sub pat,
că de când m-am măritat
nici o palmă nu mi-o dat.
Numa’ asară mi-o dat una,
de-am văzt soarele și luna;
numa’ asara mi-o dat două,
de-am văzt că afară plouă.³⁴

My husband is not a real man,
he is the rag under the bed,
because since we got married
he has not even slapped me once.
He only slapped me once last night,
and I have seen the sun and the moon;
he only slapped me twice last night
and I have seen raining outside.

A meu bărbat nu-i bărbat,

³³ Tocilescu, *Materialuri folkloristice. Volumul 1. Partea 1. Poesia poporană*, 458.

³⁴ Elena-Maria-Floare Mera, “Collected texts”, in Raluca Bârsan, *Treci, dorule, Mureșul...* (Târgu Mureș: Ardealul, 2003): 189, no.164.

că de cân' m-am măritat
nici o palmă nu mi-o dat.
Numa' una pistă masă,
să fiu găzdoaie aleasă.³⁵

My husband is not a real man,
because since we got married
he has not even slapped me once.
He only slapped me once over the table,
to make me a great housewife.

A meu bărbat nu-i bărbat,
că-i înger din cer picat.
Că de când m-am măritat
nici o palmă nu mi-o dat.
Numa' una c-un țuleu,
să știi că-i bărbatu meu;
numa' una cu zbiciu,
să fiu loatră ca briciu.³⁶

My husband is not a real man,
he is rather an angel fallen from the sky.
Because since we got married
he has not even slapped me once.
Only once he hit me with a cob,
to remind me he is my husband,
only once he hit me with a whip,
to make me an exemplary housewife.

It is obvious that virility has a link with strength, power, and, ultimately, violence: when he does not condemn the girl, the man is seen as submissive, docile and subjugated to the woman.³⁷ However, in some poems in which women decide to be unfaithful arises a tenacious resistance, by saying that, at least, they choose to love whom they want:

³⁵ Ibid.: 189, no.163.

³⁶ Maria Dorina Pasca, "Collected texts", in Raluca Bârsan, *Treci, dorule, Mureșul...* (Târgu Mureș: Ardealul: 2003), 200.

³⁷ For example, well-known contemporary songs containing the formula "măi bărbate, nu mă bate" can be found online and are performed by Krypton, Ștefania Rareș, Natalia Olaru, or Irina Loghin. The motif of the drunk husband who beats his wife and his mother-in-law is present in Sorin Pantea's "La birtuțu din pădure" ("nu sparg ușa, nici dulapu' / numa la muiere capu'; / nu sparg ușa, nici cuptoru', / numa-i smulg

Nu mă bate, măi bărbate,
 că ți le-oi spune pe toate;
 și de nu mă crezi pe mine,
 dascălu știe mai bine,
 că și el s-o blăstămat,
 c-o dormit bugat sub pat.³⁸

Do not beat me, husband,
 because I will tell you everything;
 and if you do not believe me,
 the church's cantor knows better,
 because he too has been cursed
 and slept under the bed.

De la noi a treia casă,
 plânge lelea crâsniceasă
 c-a bătut-o crâsnicu
 să-și spună ibovnicu;
 și-a bătut-o c-o nuia,
 că nu face cum el vrea;
 a bătut-o c-o țepușe,
 ibovnicu-i după ușe;
 (...)
 și de-a bate-o chiar cu gardul,
 ea tot s-a iubi cu altul.³⁹

Three houses away from ours
 the church cantor's wife is crying
 because he beat her
 to make her say who is her lover;
 and he hit her with a rod,
 because she does not obey him;
 and he hit her with a stake,

la soacra păru": "I neither break the door nor the wardrobe / only my wife's head; / I neither break the door nor the oven: / I only pull my mother-in-law's hair"). Doru Pop's albums are also a source of conjugal violence. For a subtle analysis on the *manele* genre and the role of women, see Adrian Schiop, *Șmecherie și lume rea. Universul social al manelelor* (Bucharest: Cartier, 2018), 102-109.

³⁸ Sabina Ispas, Doina Truță, *Lirică populară de dragoste* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1985), 178.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

and her lover is behind the door;
 (...)
 he can hit her with the whole fence:
 she will still love somebody else.

Dragile mele muieri,
 să vă spun ce-am pațit ieri:
 ca m-a bătut bărbatu
 c-am dat gură la altu;
 bată-mă, n-are ce-mi face,
 eu dau gură cui îmi place.⁴⁰

Dear girlfriends,
 let me tell you what happened yesterday:
 my husband beat me up
 because I kissed someone else;
 he can beat me up, there is nothing he can do,
 I kiss whomever I want.

Dragile mele muieri,
 să vă spui ce-am pățit ieri.
 Că ieri m-o bătut bărbatu
 de ce m-am iubit cu altu.
 Las', bărbate, nu mă băte,
 că-s muieră în dreptate.
 El o răs, io i-am ochit,
 că noi de mult ne-am iubit.
 C-aia nu-i nevastă-n sat
 care n-are paie-n pat
 și-un drăguț lângă bărbat.⁴¹

Dear girlfriends,
 I will tell you what happened yesterday.
 Yesterday my husband beat me
 because I was loving someone else.
 You, husband, do not beat me,
 because I am a right woman.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 178-179.

⁴¹ Pasca, "Collected texts", in Raluca Bârsan, *Treci, dorule, Mureșul...*, 199-200.

He smiled, I winked the eye,
 because it has been a long time since we love each other.
 Because in this village you are not a real wife
 if you do not have straws in your bed
 and a lover alongside a husband.

In the last two texts, the sign of confession is emphasised with a beginning like “dragile mele muieri” (“dear girlfriends of mine”), a verse that has multiple layers of exegesis: firstly, it is a confidence told to the same gender (the friends or the mother); secondly, it heightens that infidelity can cause public offence and opprobrium, therefore the feminine voice prefers her husband’s beatings rather than giving up. Again, physical and moral aggressiveness join:

Dragile mele muieri,
 să vă spun ce-am pățit ieri:
 că m-a bătut bărbatu,
 că m-o găsit cu altu.
 M-o găsit de după casă
 când stam la bădita-n brață;
 m-o găsit de după șură
 dându-i la bădița gură.
 Și m-o bătut cu ciubica
 și nu mă doare nimic;
 și m-o bătut cu colopu
 numa’ mi-o sunat cojocu.⁴²

Dear girlfriends,
 let me tell you what happened yesterday:
 my husband beat me up,
 because he found me with another man.
 He found me at the back of my house,
 hugging my lover.
 He found me at the back of the barn
 kissing my lover.
 And he hit me with the cap,
 but I do not feel any pain;
 and he hit me with the hat,
 only my sheepskin coat was dinging.

⁴² Silvia Georgică, “Collected texts”, in Raluca Bârsan, *Treci, dorule, Mureșul...* (Târgu Mureș: Ardealul: 2003),84-85.

Frunză verde ș-o secară,
 ș-asară, ș-alaltăsară,
 m-o băgat bărbatu-n fiară,
 m-o băgat și m-o bătut
 ca să mă las de iubit.
 De m-ar mai băga o dată,
 de iubit nu mă las moartă!
 Și mă spăl cu foi de nuc
 și deseară iar mă duc.⁴³

Green leaf and a rye,
 last night, and the night before,
 my husband put me in the dungeon
 and he put me in and he beat me
 to make me stop loving.
 But he can put me there again,
 I will not stop loving until I die!
 And I wash myself with walnut leaves
 and tonight I am going out again.

It is important to pay attention to all the stakes, rods, whips, and sticks that are being mentioned, as well as the slaps and fists, because the physical pain caused by them has the opposed effect: the more suffering these objects perpetrate, the less “instructive” they are:

Dau-ar dracu-n tini, bărbate,
 dacă nu m-ai putut bate!
 M-ai lăsat, nu m-ai bătut
 bună poamă m-am făcut.
 M-ai bate, d-amu-i târzâu,
 mă iubesc toți de pe râu
 (...).⁴⁴

May the devil curse you, man,
 because you could not beat me!
 You left me alone, you did not beat me,
 look at me now, how puckish I became,
 you would like to beat me, but it is too late,
 all the men by the river love me.

⁴³ Ispas, Truță, *Lirică populară de dragoste*, 178.

⁴⁴ Georgică, “Collected texts”, in Raluca Bârsan, *Treci, dorule, Mureșul...*, 85.

As we have examined in this body of material, on the one hand, for the feminine voices, words spoken (or sung) serve as a cathartic element in which curses, insults, exclamations and all sort of confessions can bring into light what is normally hidden and secret. On the other hand, the male voices combine physical and verbal violence against the woman. In terms of insults, apart from being lazy, stupid or crazy, the most common and severe is still “curvă” (“whore”):

Da' vinde curvă tot ce ai
iar la soare să mă dai
vinde-te pe năsălie
să mă scoți din pușcărie
și-auleu ce greu e-aicea
curvă mică curvă rea
de-oi ieși de-aicișea
te-oi tăia de sus în jos
ce pe-un șarpe veninos
ș-auleu ce greu e-aicea.⁴⁵

You, whore, sell all your goods,
to take me out of prison,
exchange yourself for the litter,
so you can take me out of here,
oh, God, it is so bad in here,
little whore, bad whore,
if I get outside,
I will cut you from top to bottom,
like a poisonous snake,
oh, God, it is so bad in here.

Fóie verde trei granate,
la fântâna din Vártópe
lemnele sunt strâmbe tóte,
nevestele curve tóte,
babele pe jumătate,
fetele umblă turbate,
c-au rămas nemăritate!⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Nicolau, *Versuri din flori. Supliment al Revistei Martor* 5, 40.

⁴⁶ Tocilescu, *Materialuri folkloristice. Volumul 1. Partea 1. Poesia poporană*, 428.

Green leaf, three grenades,
 at Vârtope fountain,
 all the woods are twisted,
 all the wives are whores,
 the old women are halfway,
 the girls wander crazy,
 because they remained unmarried!

Puica neichii tu erai,
 care te făgăduiai
 că pe altul nu mai ai;
 dar aseră la fântână
 te prinsei cu trei de mână.
 Unul te ținea de mână,
 altul te săruta-n gură.
 Curvă-ai fost, curvă sa fii,
 la mine să nu mai vii!
 Curvă a-i fost la maică-ta,
 curvă-ai fost la casa ta,
 la mine n-ai ce căta!⁴⁷

You were my sweetheart
 and you were proud
 of having me as your only love;
 but last night at the fountain
 I caught you embracing three men.
 One of them was holding your hand,
 another one was kissing your mouth.
 You were a whore, you will remain a whore,
 do not come here anymore!
 You were a whore when you lived at your mum's,
 you were a whore in your own house, do not come back!

Several songs eventually refer to silence as the inexorable pathway to some serenity:

Taci, mireasă, nu mai plânge,
 că cu lumea nu-i învinge:
 a-nvinge lumea cu tine

⁴⁷ Ibid., 314.

până ce te-a pune bine.⁴⁸

Shut up, bride, stop crying,
because you will not beat the world:
the world will beat you
until it will put you right.

Care fată nu iubește
supărată-i cât trăiește,
care nu iubește fată
cât traiește-i supărată
c-apoi dacă se mărită
de la toate ie-i oprită:
de la joc, de la părinți,
de la prietenii ibdiți,
că bărbatu-i mofturos
batăr cât-îi de frumos,
cât de mult de te-ar ibdi
nu vré sa meri nicări.
Nu te mai poți bdizui
că pré bine te-ar ibdi
că bărbatu nu ți-i frate
să gândești că nu te-a bate
și-i musai să te supui
la voia bărbatului:
dacă voia lui o faci,
multe suferेști și taci.⁴⁹

The girl who does not love
will be sad for the rest of her life,
the girl who does not love,
will be sad for the rest of her life,
because if she gets married
everything stops:
her dances, her parents,
her loving friends,
because man is whimsical,
even though he is handsome,

⁴⁸ Vancea, "Ileana Vancea din Nănești", 109, no.318.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 97, no.117.

although he loves you a lot,
he will not let you go anywhere.
You cannot believe
that he will love you good,
for he is not your brother;
do not think he will not beat you
and you must subject
to his will:
if you do what he wants,
you will suffer and shut up.

We shall compare the last text to this Greek “Dance of the maidens”, dating from 19th century:

‘Out, now, maidens, to the dance!
Out while you have still the chance;

for very soon you’ll wedded be,
from household troubles never free;

when children round you ’gin to grow,
how to neighbors can you go?’.

‘We shall beat them well, I trow;
leave them all at home, I vow!’.

‘Time to dance how can you take,
when you have to cook and bake?’.

‘We will leave the bread to burn,
all the meat to smoke may turn!’.

‘You must sit at home and spin;
weaving, too, will keep you in’.

‘Both we laugh at gaily, pooh!
Loom and twirling spindle too!’.

‘Your husband you indoors will close,
and with his stick he’ll give you blows’.

'The stick should have two ends, he'd see!
And we would have a second key!'⁵⁰

As we have pointed out so far, accusations of laziness, ignorance, infidelity, and malice are present in numerous poems and songs. Again, we should separate the male and the female voice: the first typically complaints of his wife, her character, her physical or psychological traits; the second seeks to communicate her pain to her mother or friends, a sufferance juxtaposed with the strenuous life she endures. This dialogue (sometimes monologue) will be reread in the following pages thanks to the wedding songs: they are particularly significant not only because this rite of passage is one of the most relevant in rural women's lives, but because the texts unveil sociohistorical conditions that must be taken into consideration

2. Living under the yoke: the weeping wife

Lorenzo Lotto's Cupido⁵¹ and his playful gaze holding the yoke of the Cassotti couple could be read with a tender or a delicate point of view,⁵² but this pleasant and subtle effect is not present in the Romanian epithalamiums dedicated to the bride:

Plângi tare, mireasă,-amu
că ți-i gata juguțu
numa să-ți bagi căpuțu;
și ți-i băga capu-n jug
și nu li-i scoate mai mult,

⁵⁰ Lucy M. J. Garnett, *Greek Folk-Songs from the Turkish Provinces of Greece, Albania, Thessaly (Not Yet Wholly Free), and Macedonia* (London: Elliot Stock, 62, Paternoster Row, E.C., 1885), 184-185.

⁵¹ Lorenzo Lotto, *Signor Marsilio Cassotti and his Wife Faustina*, 1523, Prado Museum, Madrid: <https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/micer-marsilio-cassotti-y-su-esposa-faustina/799f6e5e-840c-4f33-b9d3-a952874c2293>

⁵² In *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1611), Philip Massinger states: "the sum of all that makes a just man happy / consists in the well choosing of his wife: / and there, well to discharge it, does require / equality of years, of birth, of fortune; / for beauty being poor, and not cried up / by birth or wealth, can truly mix with neither. / And wealth, when there's such difference in years, / and fair descent, must make the yoke uneasy", Philip Massinger, "A New Way to Pay Old Debts", in *The Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford, with an Introduction by Hartley Coleridge* (London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street, 1839), 307.

Henry Peacham shows in his *Minerva Britanna* (1612) that "the yoke's an ensign of servility", and it is still used today as allegory of marriage. It is also mentioned in William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598/1599). For the classical Greek sources and interpretations of the yoke, see Cristina Egoscózábal, "La metáfora del yugo en la literatura griega", *Habis* 35 (2004): 31-37. Another analysis is provided in Daniele Cerrato, "Cuerpos vulnerados. La violencia contra las mujeres a través del mito", ed. Dolores Ramírez Almazán, *In Corpore Dominae. Cuerpos escritos/Cuerpos proscritos* (Sevilla: ArCiBel Editores, 2011), 70 and 78.

și ți-i băga capu-n ham
și nu li-i scoate șohan.⁵³

Bride, cry a lot now,
because your little yoke is ready
for you to put your little head in;
and you will put your head in the yoke
and you will not take it out anymore,
and you will put your head in the girdle
and you will not take it out anymore.

Thanks to the joke, the immediate outcomes of marriage are insinuated: this engagement is supposed to last forever:

Nireasuicî, fii mai bunî,
nu da floarea pi cununî,
că cununa-i jug di fier
trazi într-însu pân' ce pceri.⁵⁴

Little bride, behave better,
do not swap your flower and your crown,
because the crown is an iron yoke,
you will pull it until you perish.

The magical powers of the yoke are found in Romanian spells as well: “on the wedding night, the mother of the new husband prepared several enchantments to protect the married couple and defend them against the evil: she put under their bed the oxen’s yoke, to make them agree in everything, like the oxen do when they pull the yoke”.⁵⁵ In some parts of Romania, “after having drunk from the water bottle, the girl puts inside a little piece of wood from a yoke, because she thinks that, by doing this, when the boy she wants will marry her, they will be inseparable like two oxen in a yoke, and their life will always follow the right path.”⁵⁶ In Moldova, both “fathers-in-

⁵³ Vancea, “Ileana Vancea din Nănești”, 109, no.307.

⁵⁴ Ion Moanță, “Nunta românească și cântecele ei. Prezentare tematico-motivică (I)”, in Constanța Cristescu *et al.*, *Ghidul iubitorilor de folclor* (Suceava: Lidana, 2014), 89.

⁵⁵ Maria Vâtcă, “Obiceiuri de nuntă din Valea Almăjului, Jud. Caraș-Severin”, *Analele Universității de Vest din Timișoara. Seria Științe Filologice* LIV (2016), 182.

⁵⁶ Artur Gorovei, *Datinile noastre la naștere și la nuntă* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2002), 81.

law and mothers-in-law were put together in a yoke (...) because the yoke unites the relatives and symbolizes the harmony that must be kept.⁵⁷

In the songs selected, the message becomes evident with a brief, but effective, image (the yoke): for the girl, this *junction* (we should not overlook the etymology) is a way of *submission*. What is more, the bride must preserve her tears for worse times:

Mireasă ca ș-o scânteie,
lasă, lacrimile stăie
că lacrimi ți-or trebui
când bărbatu te-a sfădi.⁵⁸

Bride like a spark,
keep your tears
because you will need them
when your husband berates you.

At this stage, there is an automatic relation between marriage and sadness, caused by the simple fact that in-laws are not considered real family:

Măritatu nu-i noroc,
că bărbatu-i zdici de foc;
măritatu nu-i ticneală,
că bărbatu-i zdici de pară.
Nici bărbatu nu ți-i frate,
să gândești că nu te bate;
nici soacra ta nu ți-i mamă,
să gândești că nu te-ndeamnă.⁵⁹

Marriage brings no luck,
because man is a whip made of fire;
marriage brings no peace,
because man is a whip made of fire.
Your husband is not your brother,
do not think he will not hit you;
your mother-in-law is not your mother,
do not think she will not rush you.

⁵⁷ Tatiana Tureac, *Nunta moldovenească-Model de formare a cuplului familial* (Chișinău: Universitatea de Stat din Tiraspol, 2018), 63.

⁵⁸ Vancea, "Ileana Vancea din Nănești", 108, no.297.

⁵⁹ Moanță, "Nunta românească și cântecele ei. Prezentare tematico-motivică", 83.

Frunză verde matostat,
de când te-ai măritat,
te-ai dus după un câine de bărbat.
El vine seara din sat,
vine ca un blestemat,
și te ia la scârmănat.
Tu-i pui mălaiu pe masă,
el te ia de păr prin casă;
tu-i pui pâinea de tot,
el te ia din cot în cot.⁶⁰

Green leaf and a jasper,
since you got married
you have chosen a man who is a dog.
He comes at night from the village,
comes in like an insane
and starts pulling your hair.
You put the flour on the table
he pulls your hair all over the house,
you put the bread on the table
he starts hitting you.

It is also interesting how many love songs impinge on the two-sided facet of the relationship: the masculine voice complains that he cannot attack the woman because of his feelings:

Hăi, mândrucă, rău te-aș bate,
mâsurile mni-s legate
cu hir de mătase neagră,
nu te pot bate de dragă.⁶¹

Oh sweetheart, I would beat you up,
but my hands are knotted
with a black silk thread:
I cannot hit you because I love you.

⁶⁰ Grigore G. Tocilescu, *Materialuri folkloristice. Volumul 1. Partea 2. Poesia poporană* (Bucharest: Tipografia "Corpului Didactic" C. Ispășescu & G. Brătănescu, 1900b), 743.

⁶¹ Ion Mușlea, "Cercetări folklorice în Țara Oașului", ed. Ion Mușlea, *Anuarul Arhivei de Folclor. I* (Bucharest: Academia Română, 1932), 169.

Most of the time, wedding songs prefer to anticipate the bride's destiny:

Mireasă de doi părinți
ce gândești de te măriți?
Nu-i așé bărbat de bun
să nu-ț tragă câte-un pumn,
nu-i așé de bun bărbat
să nu te tragă de cap.⁶²

Bride with two parents,
why do you want to marry?
There is no such a good man
who does not punch you,
there is no such a good man
who does not pull your hair.

Tu mnireasă, mniresucă,
mândră ești și frumoșé:
mâni-alaltă nu-i fi-așé
că-i fi neagră și pălită
și de oameni povestită.⁶³

You, little bride,
you look proud and pretty:
tomorrow you will not look the same,
because you will be black and wounded
and people will gossip about it.

Again, physical abuse is portrayed in detail, specifying that the woman will be “black and wounded”, a similar idea to that mentioned in the Yiddish song “A gutn ovnt, Brayne” (Good night, Brayne): “yesterday he beat me / made me black and blue / I was too ashamed to tell you / good night, good night”.⁶⁴ Shame is present in both songs, because “people will gossip about it”: thus, trying to get help from others may be difficult in a context where beatings are judged as a corrective. The harsh irony is continuously underscored, so the effects of the songs are more striking:

⁶² Vancea, “Ileana Vancea din Nănești”, 108, no.302.

⁶³ Samfira China, “Collected texts”, *Memoria Ethnologica* 2-3 (2002): 360-361, no.794.

⁶⁴ Cooper and Gordon, “He Beat Me Black and Blue: Yiddish Songs of Family Violence” (online).

Nu te supăra, mireasă,
 că mirele-i om milos,
 nu te bate cu lemn gros,
 și te bate cu subțire
 și te bate-n toate zile.⁶⁵

Do not worry, bride,
 your husband will show mercy,
 he will not hit you with a thick wood,
 but with a thin one,
 and he will hit you every day.

Nu te supăra, mireasă,
 că-i joardă la grindă-n casă;
 nici nu-i lungă, nici nu-i lată,
 ci pe spate măsurată.⁶⁶

Do not feel bad, bride,
 because the stick is on the beam;
 it is neither large nor wide,
 but measured with your back.

Diminutives like “cocușoru” (“little bow”) and “pumnișoru” (“little fist”) increase the contrast between the warmth of the girl and the violence:

Undi-ț ședi cocușoru
 a să-ț șadî pumnișoru.
 Undi-ț șad florili
 a să-ț șadî palmili.⁶⁷

Where your little bow is
 there will be a little fist.
 Where your flowers are
 there will be slaps.

⁶⁵ Moanță, “Nunta românească și cântecele ei. Prezentare tematico-motivică (I)”, 89.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 89.

The list of advices is generally a record of good manners and rules which can prevent (or delay) husband's hostility:

Nireasî, nirili tău,
 înziru lu Dumnadzău,
 da dacî nu-i faşi pi plac,
 îi şî înzir, îi şî drac,
 da şî cân te-a prinde-a bati,
 soacra-i dracu, nu ti scoati.⁶⁸

Bride, your husband
 is a heavenly angel,
 but if you disobey him,
 he will be an angel and a devil
 and he will beat you up;
 your mother-in-law is a devil: she will not help you.

As we have studied before, mothers-in-law are not considered a foothold, quite the opposite: multiple songs refer to her as a devil who will always stand by her son, even when he uses violence. Within the framework of rural households, the bride usually must live with her in-laws, which increases the tensions. For instance, women's duties and their positive results have a direct impact on the way they will be treated by their husbands:

(...)
 Tu, mireasă, tu, tu, tu,
 tu dacă te-ai măritat
 pune-ţi gându la bărbat:
 nu-i da blidu nespălat,
 nici lingura de su paţ,
 că ă-a da cu ele-n cap!⁶⁹

You, bride, you, you, you,
 if you got married,
 start thinking of your husband:
 do not give him a dirty dish,
 do not give him a dirty spoon,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁹ Petrică Scăunaşu, "Nunta în Țara Codrului", *Memoria Ethnologica* 2-3 (2002a), 398.

because he will hit you with them!

To complete this scenario, a larger wedding song should be included:

Hăulesce fiiculiță,
 cât vei fi la mă-ta'n gâtă
 că dacă te-i mărita
 hăulitul ți-i uita
 în casă de sócră-ta,
 în tindă de socru-tău
 afară de soțu-tău.
 Că sócră-ta nu ți-i mamă
 să-ți ție cuvântu'n samă.
 Și socru-tău nu ți-i nene
 să-ți deie faguri de miere,
 și bărbatul nu ți-i frate,
 să socioți că nu te-a bate.
 Că mila de la mămucă
 ca și miezul cel de nucă,
 și mila de la tătuță
 ca și mierea din litruță,
 iar mila de la bărbat
 ca creanga de măr uscat.
 Când te pui să te umbrești
 mai rău fața-ți dogorești.
 Dacă-i vrea ceva a zice
 el ți-a'mplea gura de sânge
 și te-a pune și-l vei bea.
 (Mireasa): -Dară eu cum să mi-l beu
 dacă e sângele meu?
 Și eu dară cum l-oi bea,
 c'acela-i din carnea mea...?⁷⁰

Sing, little girl,
 until you are at your mother's,
 because when you will get married,
 you will forget the songs,
 at your mother-in-law's house,

⁷⁰ Simion Florea Marian, *Nunta la români. Studiu istorico-etnografic-comparativ* (Bucharest: Tipografia Carol Göbl, 1890), 246-247.

at your father-in-law's entrance,
 at your husband's.
 Because your mother-in-law
 is not your mom,
 she will not agree with you.
 And your father-in-law
 is not your dad,
 he will not give you sweet fruit,
 and your husband
 is not your brother,
 and he will beat you.
 Because your mom's mercy
 is like the nutmeg fruit,
 and your dad's mercy
 is like a jar of honey,
 but your husband's mercy
 is like the apple tree's dried branch:
 when you want a little shadow,
 you end up burning your face.
 When you want to say something,
 he will fill your mouth with blood,
 and will make you drink it.
 (Bride): -But how am I supposed to drink it
 if it is my own blood?
 And how am I supposed to drink it
 if it is from my own flesh?

By stating the differences between her former home and the new one, the bride is invited to accept her departure as unavoidable. Sweet fruits will be substituted by bitterness, and relief is impossible: “he will fill your mouth with blood, / and will make you drink it”. Hence, the girl's intervention in the last verses, somewhat childish and candid (“But how am I supposed to drink it / if it is my own blood?”), aims at the incomprehension produced by this hostility. To sum up, another excerpt from a wedding song directly compares marriage to death:⁷¹

(...)
 Gată-te mireasă, bine,
 c-amu ne-om duce cu tine

⁷¹ For Romanian popular songs and the wedding of the dead, see Gail Kligman, *Nunta mortului. Ritual, poetică și cultură populară în Transilvania* (Iași: Polirom, 2005).

și ți-oi lua iertăciune
ca și cum te-ai duce din lume;
de la neamuri, de la toate,
cum ai merge chiar la moarte.⁷²

Bride, get ready,
because we will take you now
and you will beg forgiveness
as if you were leaving the country;
you will say goodbye to all your relatives,
as if you were going to die.

Despite its concision, this overview of the violence shown in Romanian oral literature might be used as a starting point in reexamining folklore and gender, and comparing different traditions, from popular songs to rites of passage and customs. The issue of women and their status in society is at stake at many levels, even in contemporary music. Thereby, the song “Durerea femeiască”, performed by Tatiana Stepa and based on Adrian Păunescu’s eponymous poem, ends with these words:

(...)
Vă e urât cu noi, vă e urât,
și ne-ați ucide, dragilor bărbați,
așa că vă rugăm numai atât:
puteți să ne jigniți, să ne-njurați,
dar faceți-o cu tonul coborât
și pân-adorm copiii, așteptați.

(...)
You do not like being with us, indeed,
and you would kill us, dear men,
so we will only beg you this:
you can offend us, you can insult us,
but do it in a low tone,
and wait until the children are asleep.

3. Conclusions

By analyzing the language and structure of different Romanian wedding songs, love songs and other poems, it is possible to establish that this folklore displays many motifs of physical and verbal

⁷² Petrică Scăunașu, “Collected texts”, *Memoria Ethnologica* 2-3 (2002b), 407-408.

violence against women. As for the physical abuse, hair pulling, punching, slapping, and attacking with sticks, whips and other tools or utensils are among the most commonly mentioned. Insults and humiliations are also exposed, and the idea that these assaults are a private issue is reiterated: rather than helping the woman, in-laws and neighbors appear keeping away or slandering.

There are notable texts in which manhood and masculinity are parodied because the man does not beat his wife, therefore he is feminized, considered fragile and submissive. Bearing in mind rural contexts, women are generally shown in a domestic setting, while men are the owners of both the internal and external spaces—even women’s bodies. The traditional image of wifeness is, then, outlined by a cleanliness of the home and her honor. When she transgresses one of these elements, her moral and physical integrity are in danger.

Finally, despite being performed almost by women, many of the texts examined implicitly support the masculine perspective, and they reveal that the enemy is not only the aggressive man, but also other women (such as the mother-in-law). Lack of gender solidarity, and the inheritance of suffering generation after generation betray conducts and idiosyncrasies that lead us to ponder the correspondence between literature and reality.