# CLOTHING AS MARITAL STATUS INSIGNIA. A STUDY ON THE TRADITIONAL FEMALE CLOTHING OF ROMANIANS FROM RUPEA, TRANSYLVANIA

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**Abstract** The current study shows how the traditional feminine clothing functions as a system of signs in Rupea (Romania). For this purpose, several photos taken on the occasion of various community events, and commented in interviews with local people, were capitalized through photo elicitation. The differences in the outfits worn by girls and women underline the importance given by the community to its female members' nubility and fertility. The clothing is a sign showing marital status. The community uses it as a means to guide males' connubial choices. Moreover, it indicates each woman's place in the community and in her kin.
**Keywords** Traditional clothing, marital status, traditional communities, system of signs, adornment.

Transylvanian Romanians take great care of their traditional clothing. The garments remain in their families and are passed down from generation to generation, particularly in the case of the rural community members' festive and ceremonial attire. Most of these garments are / were made within the community, some of them even in the actual households, from the textiles at hand (fabrics of a manufacturing nature, such as wool, hemp, cotton, linen). Almost every Romanian has at least one great-grandfather in the countryside – most of the time, in fact, several relatives reside in the village, such as uncles, grandparents, parents. These elderly carers make sure that young people wear traditional clothing appropriate to their age and

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community status, even if at present young people only occasionally, episodically participate in the rural communities' life. Until the middle of the last century, these garments were the customary clothing worn on Sundays and during the other holidays of the religious calendar, as well as during the various events of the community. They are variants made of more precious materials and particularly richer in terms of decorations and accessories than the clothes worn on weekdays.

When an old piece of clothing from the traditional garment needs to be removed, it is replaced with a new piece that reproduces it as accurately as possible. For this reason, local craftsmen are in high demand in these communities.

Why is traditional clothing given so much attention? What is the anthropological substratum of Transylvanian Romanians' care towards them? The present study provides a possible common answer to these questions.

The aim of the present paper is to highlight the way traditional female clothing, more precisely the traditional garment from Rupea, in central Romania, is used as a status symbol. Moreover, it will focus on the manner in which local women's and girls' traditional clothing shows their marital status. The present study is an exercise in structuralist semiology. It suggests the myth (in Barthes' sense) behind the community regulation of clothing differentiation.

**Clothing as a system of signs. Theoretical background**

People communicate through clothing. They put on clothes not just to protect themselves against bad weather, to modestly cover their nakedness or for adornment purposes. People also dress to produce meaning, as Barthes[1] shows. They have been doing so for a long time. Ever since prehistoric times, the inhabitants of the current European area have structured and communicated their identity with the aid of material culture products[2] to which they attached meaning. Society creates and can modify these meanings.[3]

Clothing can historically and sociologically be viewed as a system with rules and restrictions acknowledged by society.[4] It is structured similarly to the concept of language developed by Saussure.[5] Clothing is both a mark of the ego and the community,[6] it carries

[1] Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, trans. Andy Stafford (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 25.

[2] Peter S.Wells, "Identity and Material Culture in the Later Prehistory of Central Europe," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 6, no.3 (1998): 261.

[3] Arthur Asa Berger, "Semiotics and Society," *Society* 51 (2014): 26.

[4] Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, 94.

[5] Ibid., 8, and Grant D. McCracken, Victor J. Roth, "Does Clothing Have a Code? Empirical Findings and Theoretical Implications in the Study of Clothing as a Means of Communication," *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 6, no.1 (1989): 14.

[6] Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

individual and collective identity.[7] Clothing communicates social layering and class distinctions,[8] as well as power relations.[9] It reveals a group's political and cultural history, carries its ideology[10] and indicates its life style.[11] Clothing conveys the individual's self-representation, which it also influences;[12] it conveys the individual's belonging and his/her status within the group, as well as, primarily in consumer society, his/her economic resources as a source of prestige.[13]

In the contemporary Western society, clothing is also a tool for the sexual objectification of women. This phenomenon, which arises from considering sexual appeal a woman's main value, goes back to childhood.[14] Treating women as objects for males to look at and women's acceptance of male standards on female body attractiveness – perceived as a source of popularity and power –, reduce the differences between girls and women lowering the age limit when girls dress to be sexually attractive.[15] Girls strive to look and dress like women at the peak of sexuality. The clothing supply supports this trend.

In the contemporary Western society, fashion is closely involved in building the meanings associated to clothing. Fashion merges the opposite needs of social adaptation and personal highlighting,[16] imitation and differentiation.[17] Fashion improves the consistency of the social group, differentiating it from the neighbouring groups, and confers unity on a social class.[18] The *trickle-down theory* is considered Georg Simmel's representative contribution to the fashion theory.[19] According to this theory, the elites establish fashion trends and then change them when ordinary people adopt them. The upper classes abandon their fashionable

[7] Tijana Todorović, Tomaž Toporišič and Alenka Pavko-Čuden, "Clothes and Costumes as Form of Nonverbal Communication," *Tekstilec* 57, no.4 (2014): 322.

[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 169-174.

[9] Yuet See Monica Owyong, "Clothing semiotics and the social construction of power relations," *Social Semiotics* 19, no.2 (2009): 191.

[10] Diana Crane and Laura Bovone, "Approaches to material culture: The sociology of fashion and clothing," *Poetics* 34, no.6 (2006): 322, and Gwen Bouvier, "Clothing and meaning making: a multimodal approach to women's abayas," *Visual Communication* 17, no.2 (2018): 205.

[11] Crane and Bovone, "Approaches to material culture," 322, and Todorović, Toporišič and Pavko-Čuden, "Clothes and Costumes as Form of Nonverbal Communication," 322.

[12] Crane and Bovone, "Approaches to material culture," 323.

[13] Todorović, Toporišič and Pavko-Čuden, "Clothes and Costumes as Form of Nonverbal Communication," 322.

[14] Kaitlin Graff, Sarah K. Murnen and Linda Smolak, "Too Sexualized to be Taken Seriously? Perceptions of a Girl in Childlike vs. Sexualizing Clothing," *Sex Roles* 66 (2012): 770.

[15] Samantha M. Goodin, Alyssa Van Denburg, Sarah K. Murnen, and Linda Smolak, "'Putting on' Sexiness: A Content Analysis of the Presence of Sexualizing Characteristics in Girls' Clothing," *Sex Roles* 65 (2011): 2.

[16] Georg Simmel, *Philosophie de la mode*, trans. Arthur Lochmann (Paris: Allia, 2013).

[17] Barthes, *The Fashion System.*

[18] Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *The American Journal of Sociology* 62, no.6 (1957): 547-549.

[19] Michael Carter, *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 69.

outfits when they are adopted, through imitation, by the lower classes.[20] In fashion, those who want to stand out are imitated by those who do not want to stand out, as shown by Barthes.[21]

However, the power of fashion is conditioned by the existence of a space for free individual decision regarding the communication of social status through clothing. In the case of contemporary Western clothing, the emphasis is placed on the potential for individualization of the garments chosen by the wearer, who thus communicates his self-representation. When it comes to traditional clothing, things are different. Fashion has no power over traditional communities.[22] In traditional communities, the clothing-related decision is collective, it belongs to the community. In these cases, changes in clothing occur at a slow pace. Traditional clothing informs on its wearers' status within their community. It also represents the means by which communities communicate the expectations concerning their members' behaviour. Customizations are allowed only to limited extents, given that traditional clothing is precisely a result of people with similar status wearing similar outfits.

**Methodological clarifications**

To highlight the sign quality of the traditional women's clothing in Rupea, photos from two private collections (owned by several locals), as well as from my own much smaller collection, were analysed. One of the locals' collection contains snapshots of community life during the last century. The other collection has photos taken over the last fifteen years, on the occasion of traditional customs and events re-enactment for performance purposes. The clothing worn by the people in the photos from the latter collection is authentic, it belongs to the locals. Some of it might be the same as the one worn in the older photos from the first collection.

With the photos as a starting point, interviews based on the photo elicitation method were conducted. The respondents were the owner of the first collection of photos (I1, male, 82 years old) and several locals from Rupea (I2-I6, women, 72-80 years old), deemed to be well-informed informants. The photo elicitation technique resorts to images in order to generate research data.[23] It is a technique specific to visual sociology, which consists of inserting photos in research interviews, to stimulate comments and discussions.[24] In the case of research on the significance of clothing, the available photos were used in order to obtain, during the interviews, as much consistent information as possible about clothing differentiations. The

[20] Simmel, "Fashion," 547-549.
[21] Barthes, *The Fashion System.*
[22] Idem, *The Language of Fashion*, 85.
[23] Roman R. Williams and Kyle Whitehouse, "Photo Elicitation and the Visual Sociology of Religion," *Review of Religious Research* 57 (2015): 304.
[24] Douglas Harper, "Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation," *Visual Studies* 17, no.1 (2002): 13–26, and Marcus Banks, *Using visual data in qualitative research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2007), 60-69.

results of a long-term unstructured participatory observation, occasioned by the author's annual participation in the main community events in Rupea, were also used in this context.

The information thus obtained was organized and used to show that the way women are dressed conveys a lot about their marital status and, implicitly, about community events. The study presents in detail the clothing differences indicated as significant by the respondents.

Photos are used in this article with the permission of the owners of the collections from which they originate. In the case of recent photos, the collection owner has the consent of the subjects to use the images in the promotion of the cultural association ("Junii Cetății"/ "Lads of the Fortress") in which the subjects are active.

**A few historical details about Rupea**

Rupea (or Reps, Rupes, Kőhalom, Cohalm in different historical epochs) is nowadays a little town in Transylvania, in the Brașov County. The locality received town status in 1951. From an ethnographic point of view, Rupea is the name of a distinct subzone in the Târnave Plateau area. Traces of human habitation dating back as early as the Paleolithic have been discovered on the territory of the current locality and in its immediate vicinity.[25] Rupea (Reps) was one of the first seven Saxon citadels in Transylvania (Siebenbürgen) and one of the important centres in the Saxons' administrative history, throughout the Middle Ages.[26]

Most of the Saxons departed for Germany after the Communist regime came to power in Romania, and especially after its fall in 1989. But the secular cohabitation of the Romanians and the Saxons consolidated their self-representations, as well as the interest in preserving their own customs. The entire province of Transylvania is, due to its multiethnicity, an area favourable to identity consolidation.

An objective reporting of Transylvanian history is almost impossible, as Katherine Verdery[27] points out. In the case of the Romanians and the Hungarians, the differences of representation regarding the history of this historical province are so great that they supported distinct, very different revolutions (the Hungarian one aiming at self-determination, the Romanian one aiming at national recognition), in the same space and at the same time, in 1848.[28] The rise of Romanian nationalism was a consequence of the educational and status privileges offered to the Uniate, Greek-Catholic clergy, in the process of converting Romanians to Catholicism in the 18th century. The Catholicisation of the Romanians had not only a religious but also a political stake for the Habsburg Empire in relation to the Hungarian

[25] Adrian Doboș and Silviu Gridan, "Recente descoperiri paleolitice în sud-estul Transilvaniei: microzona Rupea – Homorod – Ungra, judeţul Braşov," *Materiale şi cercetări arheologice* XIV (2018): 5-12.
[26] Mariana Borcoman, *Așezări transilvane. Rupea* (Cluj Napoca: Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2010), 61-100.
[27] Katherine Verdery, *Transylvanian villagers* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 19.
[28] Verdery, *Transylvanian villagers*, 190.

Calvinist nobles in Transylvania.[29] Due to the differences in political status, a consequence of the privileges granted by the Hungarian monarchy to the Germans since their settlement in Transylvania, the Romanians could not compete economically with the Germans until after 1918, within the Romanian state. In this context, in the context of the integration of Transylvania into Romania and, consequently, of the change in the status and self-representation of the Transylvanian Romanians, the interwar period was experienced by the Germans as a period of maximum inter-ethnic tension.[30] From the Romanians' perspective, the Romanians are specialists in stratagems, they manage to get by and are hospitable, the Hungarians are easily offended, belligerent, civilized but arrogant and cruel, the Germans are calculating, unsociable, but persevering and orderly.[31] To this representation of themselves in relation to others is added the fact that for the Romanians the "civilized" and privileged nationalities in Transylvania for hundreds of years were both enemies and models.[32] However, on the background of the generalisation of discontent, communism has tempered the inter-ethnic relations.[33]

In the 1970s, a plant of binders and azbocement was built in the surrounding area of Rupea. For the communist regime, industry was the priority, the role of farmers was to support industry, at great cost to them.[34] In fact, in the economic history of Transylvania, the development of efficient agriculture was never supported, Verdery believes.[35] In the Habsburg period, this was due to the Hungarian nobles who owned land and were satisfied with the cheap way Romanian peasants worked their land. In the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Hungarian state promoted industry. In the interwar period, the Romanian state took advantage of Transylvania's history of industrial development, superior to the other Romanian provinces,[36] then the communist state opted for the generalised industrialisation of Romania.

Returning to Rupea, a neighbourhood of multi-family buildings was built for the workers of the plant. The former locals did not look favourably on the newcomers and made the display of their local traditions an argument in favour of this attitude.

During the communist period, the manifestations of traditional culture were initially discouraged, and some of them, such as the groups of carolling lads, even banned by the authorities of the new regime. The communist regime newly installed as a result of electoral fraud[37] with the help of the Russian army did not enjoy the support of the population. In this

[29] Ibid., 107-119.
[30] Ibid., 321.
[31] Ibid., 369-370.
[32] Ibid., 325.
[33] Ibid., 34.
[34] Ibid., 43.
[35] Ibid., 57.
[36] Ibid., 175-289.
[37] Lucian Boia, *Strania istorie a comunismului românesc (şi nefericitele ei consecinţe)* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2016), 37.

context, any event that could bring together a community and highlight its young people was considered potentially subversive and dangerous. This danger was associated to the organic religious component of community events, altogether annoying for the representatives of an atheist programmatic political regime. Things changed in Romania in the 1970s, with Nicolae Ceaușescu's discovery of the advantages stemmed from mixing communism with nationalism.

Lucian Boia[38] points out as a paradoxical dimension of Romanian communism the fact that from anti-national (internationalist) at the beginning, Romanian communism turned to ultranationalist. The social ascension of some Romanians with strong anchors in traditional rural culture, and the backlash against the anti-nationalist orientation evident in Romanian culture in the early years of the communist regime generated and sustained nationalist communism.[39] The Romanian Orthodox Church also sustained an ethnicist nationalism.[40] Katherine Verdery[41] also highlights the spectacular combination of Romanian national ideology with Marxism-Leninism: national ideology is organically linked to Romanian socialism, in fact also to its new ethnic-Romanian elite. The link is a natural continuation of the strong discourse on the nation existing in Romanian culture and politics before communism[42] and assumed in the identity of Romanians.

The manifestations of traditional culture were ideologically reclaimed as expressions of national pride and, more subtly, of the continuity of the Dacian component in Romanian popular culture. They were unloaded of their community and/ or religious significance, and capitalized on as performance, in a lot of folklore festivals.

Having become townspeople, the locals from Rupea adapted to these transformations faster and easier than the surrounding villagers, bringing their traditions on stage and thus perpetuating them. Somewhat paradoxically, for all of the aforementioned reasons, the people from Rupea showed greater concern for the preservation of traditional clothing compared to the situation in the neighbouring villages.[43] In this context, it is efficient to refer to the clothes of the girls and women from Rupea to highlighting the status-marker function of clothing.

At present, in Rupea, the lads sing Christmas carols and dance in the courtyards of the girls who accompany them to carolling (there are 20-30 girls). They, the carolling lads, organize a ball on the first Saturday after Christmas and a dance party for Pentecost. Married locals have a ball of their own before entering Lent. Some of the women still

[38] Ibid., 7-33.
[39] Ibid., 85-87.
[40] Ibid., 177.
[41] Katherine Verdery, *Compromis și rezistenţă. Cultura română sub Ceauşescu*, trans. Sorin Antohi (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994).
[42] Ibid., 77-106.
[43] Daniela Sorea, "Head Adornment as Sign of Marital Status. A Semiological Study," *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov* Series VII 11, no.60 (2018): 107.

come dressed in traditional garment to the church on Pentecost, or to the weddings in their kin. These are the occasions when traditional clothing is worn for real, in accordance with the community meanings attached to it.

Traditional weddings (with lads on horseback, carriage with the bride's dowry and traditionally dressed participants) have not been organized in Rupea since the first years after the Second World War, except as a show, in festivals or cultural projects. In addition, traditional clothing is worn as a national costume on the occasion of various political events. On these occasions the locals of Rupea wear their traditional festive clothes. They do not use different, showy costumes. New garments are only those introduced out of necessity, to replace those damaged by age and frequent use. New pieces are made in the network of local craftsmen, respecting traditional patterns and meanings. Ornamental differentiations that personalise the garments within the limits allowed by tradition impress the public as a sign of authenticity at the cultural events in which the locals of Rupea take part.

**The traditional clothing of girls from Rupea**

Until the middle of the last century, the way girls and women were dressed provided enough information to outline the representation on ongoing community events. Thus, on the first day of Christmas the girls were dressed as in the pictures below, with a wide black skirt, a short white homespun cloth coat and a thick cream-coloured silk headscarf (Figure 1). The clothing briefly described above is that of the girls who were carolled by the group of carolling lads. The girls still go to church dressed like this, and then from one to the other, to wait for the carollers.

Only on the first day of Christmas do all the carolled girls dress like that. Until after the Second World War, when the dance of the young people supervised by the whole community took place into the open, the girls dressed differently from the second day of Christmas, according to their age (I3, I5). The very young ones (14-16 years old) wore the same black skirt, but a black coat instead of a white one, and a brown or yellow headscarf tied under the chin. The other girls "tied their headscarves and girded with the aprons" (I2, I5), a syntagmatic formulation that refers to wearing the most valuable garment pieces, those shown in figure 2.

*Figure 1: Girls of Rupea on the first day of Christmas, in the church yard (1993)*

*Fig. 2: Girls with tied headscarves and girded with aprons (1943, 1950-1960, 2010-2015)*

This is a head adornment made up of two headscarves with floral print or embroidery, one red and over it, a black one. The red one has only one corner in sight, on the left side of the wearer's head, and a narrow strip on her forehead. The black headscarf is tied in such a way as to highlight its ornaments, with one corner over the wearer's right ear and another on the back. The headscarves in this adornment are not knotted in the front, under the chin, like the ones on the first day of Christmas, and like the very young girls' ones (I2).

The aprons are made of waxed fabric (to give them stiffness) and are decorated on the edges with strips of gilded thread and sequins, which stripes highlight the rosettes of green and red silk bow applied at the bottom. The aprons are tied over the pleated hem of the traditional blouse and are fastened under a beaded belt. Over the blouse, the girls wear an ornamented sheepskin breastplate (I4, I5).

This attire (with or without a breastplate) was also worn on the occasion of other major religious holidays (Easter, Pentecost) and on the occasion of the weddings of close relatives.

The winter holidays end for Orthodox Christians on St. John's Day, January 7th, after the Epiphany. At the ball held on that occasion, until the middle of the last century, the girls wore lighter clothes, suitable for an indoor party. Nowadays, young people dance in a single ball night, on the third day of Christmas. The tradition of St. John's Ball was not resumed when community events were again allowed to take place during communism, as many of the young people in Rupea, now pupils or students in other cities, went to school at the end of the winter holidays.

The girls now dress for the Christmas ball as they used to dress for the St. John's ball. On this occasion as well, the clothing differs according to the girls' age. The youngest are dressed as in figure 3, with a white traditional blouse, with lace on the sleeves, a white cloth skirt and, over the skirt, two rectangular pieces of hand-woven, red fabric. This is the traditional holiday attire most often worn by the girls in this age group, on various occasions, throughout the year.

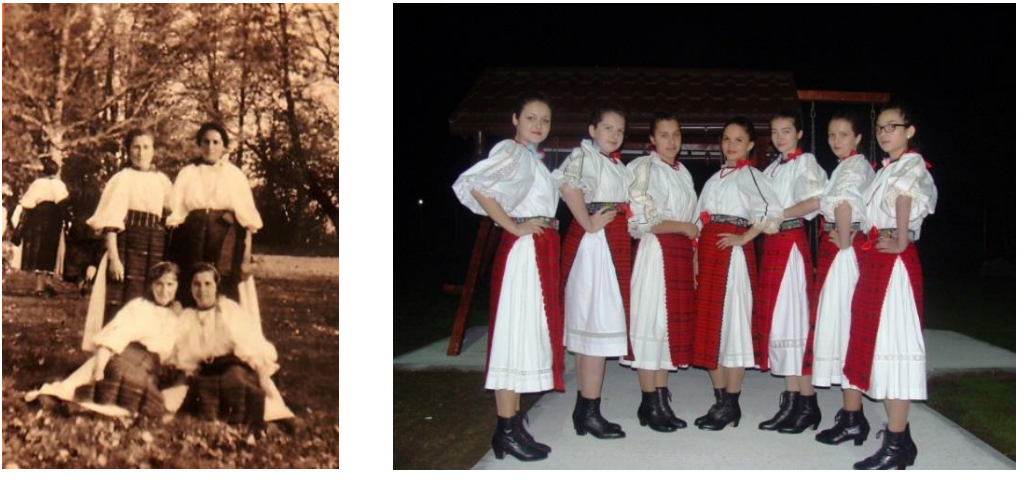

*Figure 3: Very young girls in festive attire (1935,2015-2019)*

From the age of 16, the girls wear at the ball the costume shown in figure 4. Its pieces enhance the contrast between the white of the blouse and of the skirt, and the black of the breastplate and of the rectangular pieces of cloth worn over the skirt. This clothing is also used on various occasions throughout the year.

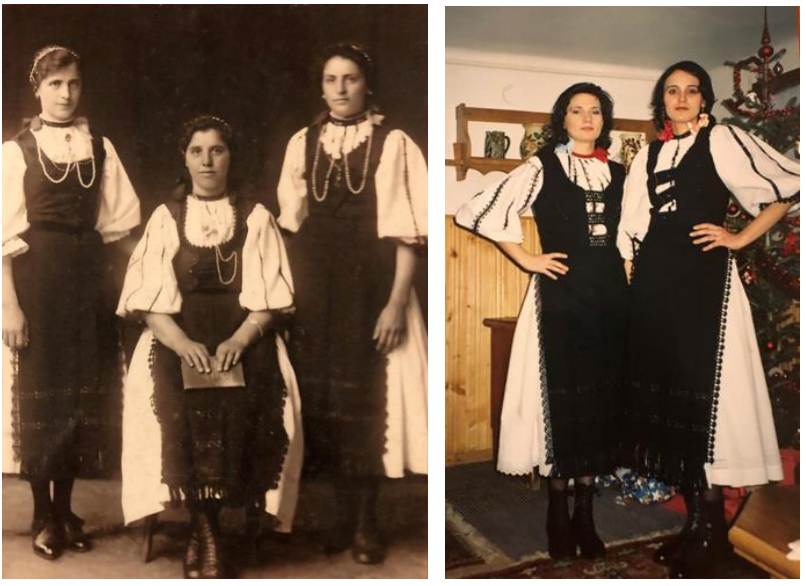

*Figure 4: Girls aged over 16 in festive attire (1934, 2004)*

**The traditional clothing of women from Rupea**

Married women also wore headscarves and aprons on the occasion of major holidays and other significant community events. Nowadays, some of the women dress like this at the winter ball for married people.

Women's clothing differs from the girls' by the absence of the exposed corner of the red headscarf (in the case of women, only the narrow strip of the red headscarf is seen on the forehead), as shown in figure 5, and by the rectangular red wool woven piece, over the long hem of the blouse (as in figure 6). This piece is missing for girls (I4, I5).

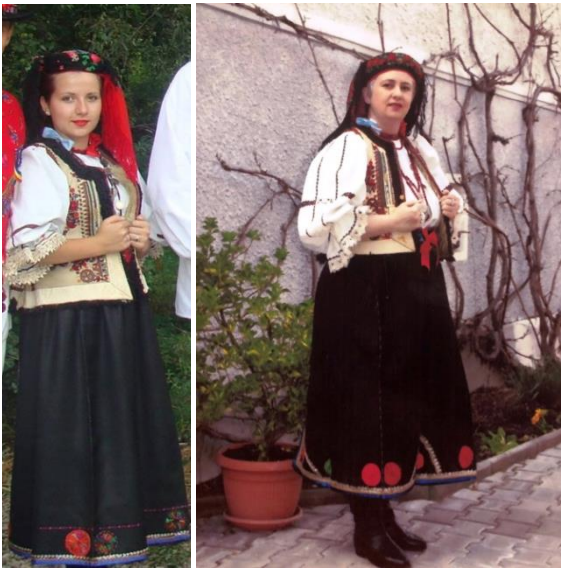

*Figure 5: Girl (left) and married woman (right) wearing headscarves and aprons (2010-2020)*

*Figure 6: Married women's clothing seen from behind cam (2015-2019)*

The aprons were worn by women, along with other head adornments, especially on the occasion of weddings in the kin which they belonged to. The aprons costume is the ceremonial wedding garment.

It is also the basis of the bride's clothing. As shown in figure 7, the bride wears a wide woven belt over her aprons, and on the side, hanging from the waist, two red flowered

scarves. On the head, instead of the usual flowered headscarves of girls and women, the bride wears a head adornment consisting mainly of two overlapping rows of metallic ornamental prisms placed transversely above the forehead, floral ornaments on the ears and a stiffened bundle of peacock feathers fixed vertically to the nape of the neck (I2, I4).

*Figure 7: Brides and grooms from Rupea (1910, 1938, 1974)*

For a year after the wedding, the former brides wore a head ornament like the ones in Figure 8 at all other weddings in the community. These are the same strings of metal prisms, but this time fixed with a long piece of thin cloth under the chin (I2, I5). This is the head adornment for the wedding godmother, too. It is currently worn by young wives at the winter ball for married people.

*Figure 8: Women in the first year after the wedding, or wedding godmothers (1880-1900, 1974, 2011)*

For a year after they were wedding godmothers, women wore at weddings that thin piece of cloth wrapped not over the strings of prisms, but over a flowered red headscarf, which in its turn was tied over a kind of toque of thick, hand-woven rolled white cloth (figure 9), with an ornate end of the cloth left hanging at the back, below the shoulders. This was also the head ornament for very close relatives of the bride or groom's family, aunts or godchildren (I2, I5).

*Figure 9: Women who were wedding godmothers in the current year, or are very close relatives of the bride or groom's family (1974, 1970-1980)*

The cloth toque can also be worn in several ways to indicate the wearer's degree of kinship with the bride and groom, and the wearer's age (I3, I5). Women who were close relatives of the bride or groom placed a flowery red headscarf under their chin, which they tied over the toque, on top of their head (figure 10). More distant relatives wore only a red headscarf tied at the back under the toque (figure 11).

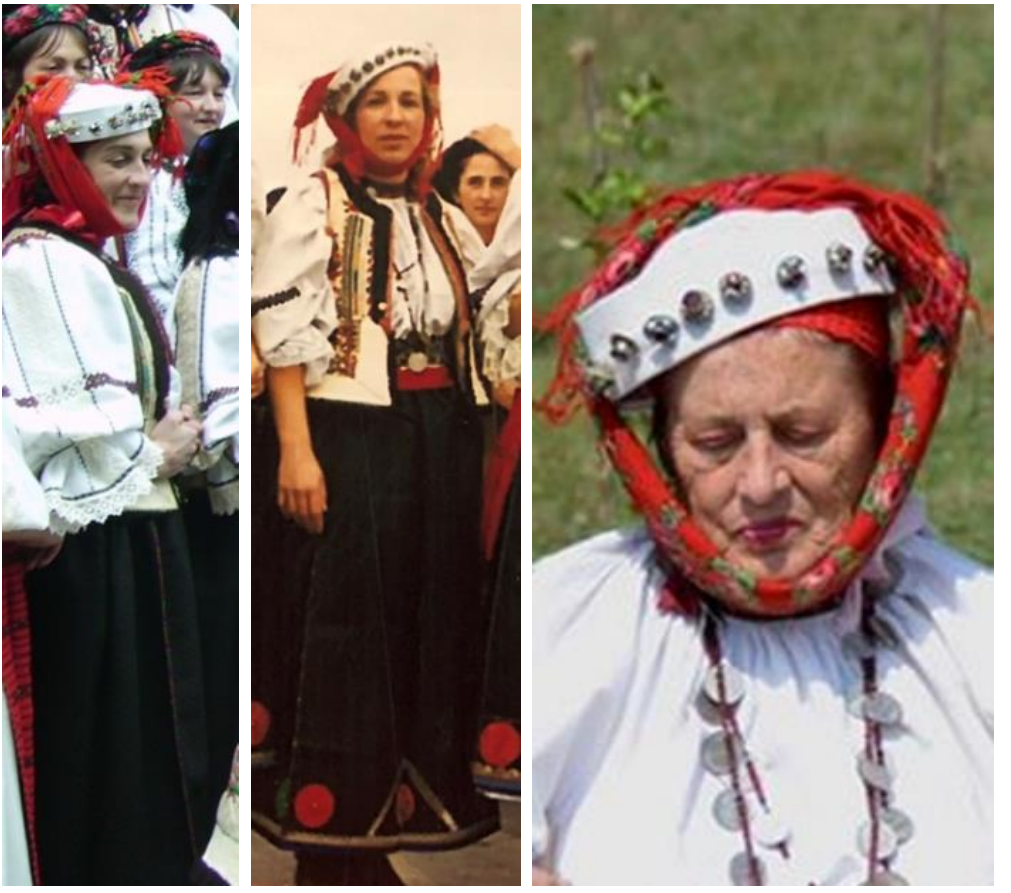

*Figure 10: Women who were close relatives of the bride or groom's families (2010-2015, 1993, 2011)*

*Figure 11: Women who were distant relatives of the bride or groom's families (1960-1970, 1995-2000, 2000-2010)*

In front of the cloth cylinder, silver ornamental needles with precious or semi-precious stones arranged crosswise are inserted. Wives in the first year of marriage wear 12 needles. Later, for each baby they give birth to, they pull a needle out of the head adornment (I5).

Elderly women wear plain toques (without the red headscarf above or below). If they no longer think that it is appropriate for them to wear the apron garment, elderly women put on their skirts and breastplates of black or navy-blue cloth over the blouses, covering their heads with silk scarves, as in figure 12, or with flowered scarves, but knotted under the chin (I4, I5).

*Figure 12: Elderly women (all photos: 1970-1980)*

Thus, just by looking at the different attire (figure 13) of women, one can find out a lot about them and about the community events (kinship, births, weddings).

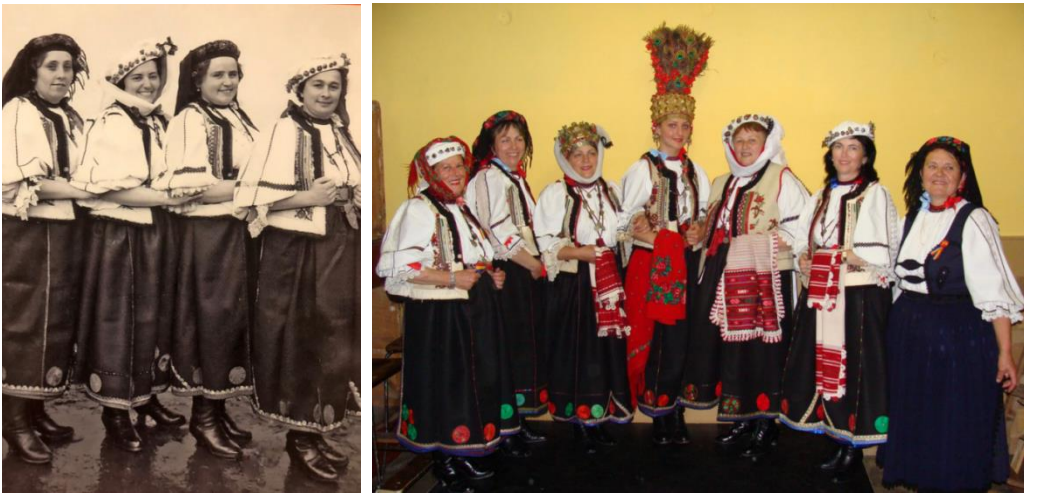

*Figure 13: Various head adornments of the women in Rupea (1974, 2010-2015)*

**The traditional male clothing in Rupea**

Men's clothing has much less differentiation. One of them concerns the number of coloured wool tassels fastened in the corners of the flowered headscarf worn around the neck. Until they enter the team of carolling lads, the boys wear tassel-free headscarves. The same goes for the elderly. In-between, both lads and married men have three or five tassels, depending on whether they are farther or closer to the age of marriage (I1). Both men and boys wear a wide leather belt around their shirt. On top of that, the boys wear a long belt with metal studs, wrapped twice around the waist and knotted in front (figure 14). Only the boys' hats are adorned with geranium flowers, and, in winter, only their fur hats are adorned with bundles of boxwood. The fur hats of married men and those of widowers are not adorned.

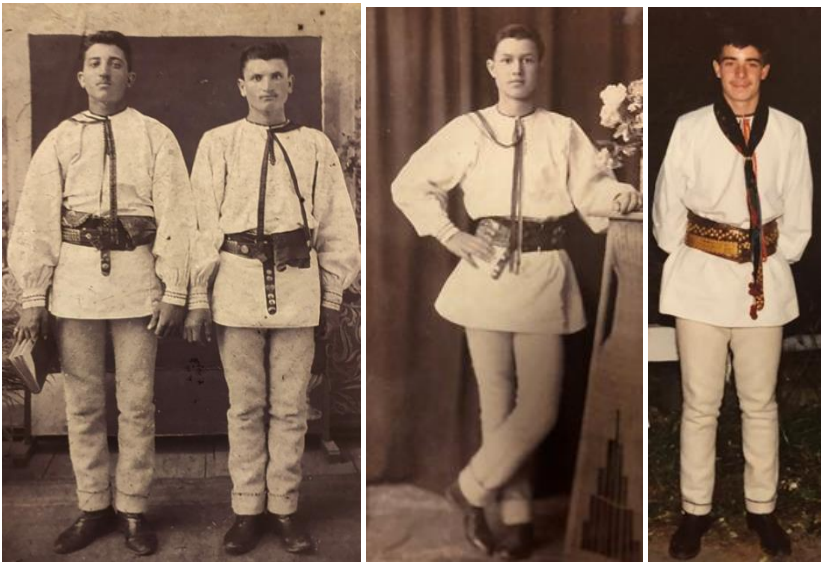

*Fig. 14: Boys wearing studded belts (1930-1940, 1940-1950, 1990-1995)*

At the wedding, the groom and the lads in his retinue wear two red flowered scarves on their shoulders, as a differentiating sign, as in figure 15. This is the same kind of scarves that the bride wears around her waist (I2, I3). Otherwise, lads and married men have similar clothing.

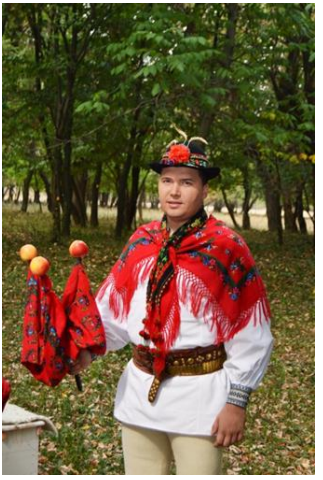
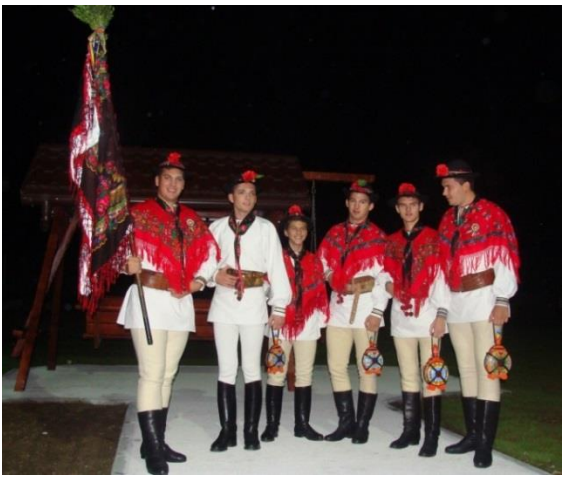

*Fig. 15: Groom and lads in the groom's retinue (all photos: 2015-2019)*

**Clothing differentiations as signs of marital status**

Typologically,[44] the female costume of Rupea is one with a "catrință" (rectangular piece of fabric that is fastened at the waist and covers the lower part of the body). From among the subtypes of this type, in Rupea are worn the one with two rectangular pieces, arranged in the front and in the back, and the one with an apron in the front and "catrință" in the back. In relation to the typology proposed by Secoșan and Petrescu,[45] the bridal girls' costume with aprons is an anomaly. This variant, with only the apron at the front and the long hem of the blouse showing at the back, is not presented as a subtype. With general reference to the long hem of the blouse, the authors state that it is considered to be worn underneath, its exposure being sanctioned as immoral.[46]

Girls of the same age, or women sharing the same status are dressed alike. Their status is indicated by the structure of the clothing. The subtle differences are related to the richness of their aprons' ornaments (a sign of the wearer's financial status) and/or the quality of handcrafted ornaments (an indicator of the skilfulness characteristic of the women related to the person wearing the outfit) (I6), but not to the structure of the clothing, i.e. its composition and design line. Secoșan and Petrescu[47] show that this way of marking wealth generally characterizes Romanian folk clothing.

[44] Elena Secoșan and Paul Petrescu, *Portul popular de sărbătoare din România* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1984).
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 50.
[47] Ibid., 26.

Girls' clothing in contemporary Western society is an expression of their assuming, with the consent of the community, the male standards of sexual appeal, from an early age.[48] Things are different in the case of traditional clothing. The unitary structuring of traditional female clothing prevents their premature sexualisation. Only those of the right age can wear the maidens' headscarves. The look that measures girls and women is not only of men, but of the whole community, through its most knowledgeable members. Community members do not know the dress code to the same extent, their place within the community influences this knowledge.[49] Those who know the most about the significance of traditional clothing are the elderly women. They are the ones who actually evaluate, their opinion is appropriated by the whole community. Their gaze unloads physical attractiveness of frivolity, but retains interest in the fertility-indicative physical traits. Big breasts and a high waist (narrow)-to-hip ratio- the latter as an indicator of a low risk of illness, sex hormone levels, age[50] are the traits that the community values. In order to increase the waist to hip ratio, the girls and young women from Rupea wear craped canvas skirt under the skirt of the traditional clothing.

The unitary structure of female traditional clothing leaves little room for manoeuvre for fashion. As previously mentioned, the uniform form of traditional clothing conveys information and provides the meanings. Fashion can influence the choice of fabric and clothing shape details, just as in the case of African women's clothing under contemporary Western influence,[51] or in the case of the Islamic abaya.[52] Thus, in the case of Rupea girls' and women's traditional clothing, in the beginning of the 20th century the wimples, which were manually woven in their households, were replaced by silk scarves brought from Poland or Bohemia, or flowery canvas scarves brought from America. During the same period the woven aprons were replaced by the aprons still worn today, made of industrially manufactured fabric which was waxed in the local workshops of the Saxons. In the second half of the 20th centrury, when making traditional blouses, home woven cloth and handmade lace were replaced with finer, industrially manufactured cloth and lace. They were accepted and easily adopted by the community because they had little if any influence on the shape of the clothing and its significance, respectively.

On a structuralist model, female garments from Rupea can be classified using several pairs of opposites. These reveal, as in the case of the pairs of gusteme in Lévi-Strauss's comparative analysis[53] regarding French and English cuisines, the choices of the community and thus its values.

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[48] Graff, Murnen and Smolak, "Too Sexualized," 764, and Goodin, Van Denburg, Murnen and Smolak, "'Putting on' Sexiness," 10.

[49] McCracken and Roth, "Does Clothing Have a Code?" 15-27.

[50] Russell A. Hill, Sophie Donovan and Nicola F. Koyama, "Female sexual advertisement reflects resource availability in twentieth-century UK society," *Human Nature* 16 (2005): 274.

[51] Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, 85-86.

[52] Bouvier, "Clothing and meaning making".

[53] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Antropologia structurală* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1978), 99-119.

Thus, women's clothing can be discreet / eclatant. Very young girls and older women wear clothes that do not attract attention. Things are different for girls of marriageable age and young married women, who wear flowery aprons and headscarves, as well as for the bridegrooms' relatives at weddings.

Another opposition is the compliant/provocative one. It overlaps with the closed/open head adornment opposition[54] which refers to the tying of the headscarves under the chin or on the crown of the head, and is related to the place where the garment is worn. Secoșan and Petrescu[55] show too that at church the head is more decently covered than at the party or other parties. In church the (mono-coloured) headscarf is tied under the chin, only at the dancing meetings and other parties can the coloured headscarves be tied on the crown of the head (I6). Even the bride and the godmother of the wedding put on their spectacular clothing and head adornments only after the religious wedding, which was done discreetly, with few participants, before the fastidious community ceremony (I1). Girls, both very young and of marriageable age, go to church at Christmas in black skirts and aprons. Girls of marriageable age wear their aprons with rossettes with the long hem of the blouse uncovered at the back only to dances and other parties.

Another opposition is the uniformising/differentiating one. Age-group specific clothing for girls is uniformising. Similarly is the usual festive clothing of wives. Differentiating are the ceremonial garments of the bride and godmother. Likewise, the head adornments of a woman who has been married for less than a year, or who has given birth. In fact, head adornment as an indicator of marital status is not a particularity of the traditional clothing of Rupea, it is a general characteristic of Romanian folk costumes.[56]

Another pair of opposites, operational in the specific context of wedding ceremonies, is a random guest/relative of the bride or groom. This pair of opposites can be considered as a particularisation of the uniformizing /differentiating pair. The random guests wore age-specific clothing at the wedding, the relatives marked by garments their degree of kinship and/or significant events in their personal lives in the past year. All these pairs of opposites are based on another, very important one in popular clothing,[57] namely unmarried/married.

The differences in girls' clothing indicate age (very young girls/girls who are ready to get married) and the occasion being celebrated as part of the community's annual calendar of festivities. The differences in women's clothing mainly indicate the important moments in their personal life. These differentiations are strongly signalled at the level of the head adornment.[58]

In the case of girls, the traditional clothing differs (according to the type of blouse and to the thick cloth coat) depending on the day when it is worn during the winter holidays. Winter celebrations precede the main calendar period used by the community for weddings,

[54] Sorea, "Head Adornment as Sign of Marital Status," 110.
[55] Secoșan and Petrescu, *Portul popular*, 42.
[56] Ibid., 26.
[57] Ibid., 24.
[58] Sorea, "Head Adornment as Sign of Marital Status."

namely the time line between St. John's Day (January 7) and the beginning of the Lent. The different clothing worn by the girls on different days indicate that they are physiologically and financially ready to get married.

In the case of women, a wedding in the kinship group is an occasion for communication through clothing that the woman is a married one (distinct if she is a new wife, married for less than a year), the number of her childbirths, her recent involvement in a wedding as godmothers (acting as godparents is a sign of prestige within the community), her relation to the newlyweds, or that she is already an old woman. The information communicated through clothing is about the nobility or the fertility of the person wearing it, and is important for the power and prestige of her family.

As already shown, in comparison with female clothing, male garment is simple, has fewer distinctive features and hence provides less information on the status of the person wearing it.

**Discussions and conclusions**

All information about a female person, her marital status and her role in the ongoing community event, is available to a discerning viewer in that person's clothing. If female clothing is richer both in terms of its ornaments and significance, it means that men are the ones who choose and assess, while community communicates them women to choose and assess. As this issue has already been shown on another occasion, men must be guided in their choices.[59]

The fact that traditional clothing communicates a person's belonging to a nubile and fertile group and men are guided to choose based on significant details of female garment regarding this belonging suggests that the mythic core of the community's clothing system is as follows: People's purpose in life is to get married and have children. It is men's jobs to look for the right women to have their babies. The community's role is to help them find those, its very survival depends on that.

The myth above has little to do with the one highlighted by Barthes[60] as characteristic of contemporary Western society and which involves assuming the values and behaviour of bourgeoisie as something natural. The myth of contemporary Western society is historically rooted, and increases the power of fashion and individualizing initiatives. The myth underlying the traditional clothing of Rupea is unhistorical, constrains the power of fashion and discredits individual innovation. It is rooted in one of the cultural universals. Traditional clothing communicates the representations of the community about the marital status and duties of its members.

In this context, the community of local Romanians in Rupea, until the middle of the last century, can be considered a traditional one, in the sense given by Barthes[61] to the term.

[59] Sorea, "Head Adornment as Sign of Marital Status," 111.
[60] Roland Barthes, *Mitologii*, trans. Maria Carpov (Iași: Institutul European, 1997), 268-273.
[61] Idem, *The Language of Fashion*, 85-86.

This finding is captivating for anthropologists, it opens up a generous field of research, namely the survival of traditional cultures in contemporary Europe.

A tool to detect such survivals can be configured as a result of an abductive reasoning: There where the significance of differentiating between ceremonial and festive attire is known at community level, the community operates or has operated until recently in the traditional register. In such a context, the search for "ancestral grammar"[62] which arbitrarily structures community traditional clothing emerges as a promising research topic.

The community does not necessarily link myth to Christian teaching. In representing the community, the latter does not fit well with the exhibition of marital status. Eclatant and provocative clothes are not worn in church. Instead, the community is very careful about the garments that girls and women do not wear there, considering them inappropriate, but wear them at celebrations and dress them for wedding ceremonies. This signals the separation, even a certain hierarchical opposition, between religious duties and marital expectations, implicitly corroborating the communal importance of the myth.

The use of traditional clothing as a national costume may interfere with such an anthropological archaeology approach. The interest in people and national identity in the early 20th century has given many traditional garments the status of a national costume, a marker of ethnic identity. Over the local, community significance of the garments, the significance of the assumed national belonging was superimposed. The latter is easier to recognise, as it operates at the level of the structure, line and colour of the garment. The traditional significance is carried by the details, it is accessible only to members of the community. A Romanian costume differs more from a Saxon/Hungarian costume than a marriageable girl's costume differs from a young wife's costume. In Transylvania during the communist period, the declared concern for respecting the rights of the neighbouring nationalities materialised in the concern for the presence at all festivities of persons/groups dressed in Romanian, Hungarian and Saxon national costumes.

The national costume functions as a uniform.[63] The wearer of the uniform does not communicate him/herself as an individual. The uniform instead communicates the wearer's membership and status within the group. The national costume is by definition conservative and thus less sensitive to fashion. The concern for conveying ethnicity doubles in its case the reluctance of the community to innovative and personalizing interventions. Thus, the national costume takes over and preserves the operational status signs in the traditional community where it comes from. With its help, the meanings of traditional clothing remain accessible even after the community no longer needs them.

However, if the emphasis is on the national significance of traditional clothing, the tradition can only be preserved, but no more actually functional, alive. Anthropological

[62] Ibid., 27.

[63] Todorović, Toporišič and Pavko-Čuden, "Clothes and Costumes as Form of Nonverbal Communication," 327-328.

research then becomes imminent, as a recovery of vestiges of culture universals which are conveyed by clothing.

Even in the case of wearing traditional clothing as a stage costume or national costume in Rupea, the constraints on conveying the wearer's status are still kept. Girls never dress like married women and married women do not adorn themselves more than is allowed. That is the case because the old women within the community, who know everything about the significance of traditional clothing and are always around.

In conclusion, the differentiations in traditional clothing of the Romanians from Rupea overlap with the differences in the marital status of their wearers. The effort expended at the community level to develop and keep functional this differential sign system suggests the importance the community attributed to marriage. By facilitating, encouraging and honouring permitted marital relationships, the community ensures its own perpetuation.

The present study highlights in detail the structure of the functional clothing system in Rupea. It can be assumed that other small communities in Romania, or, due to the common features of their contemporary history, in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, have kept their own systems of clothing signs. The cultural trajectory of the communities located on this side of the Iron Curtain associates in many cases the concern for the preservation of traditions, as a way of resistance to invasive political changes. This may be a generous direction for the development of research on clothing as insignia of marital status.

Equally generous can be the hermeneutical, depth-based approach to community options for those significant clothing solutions and not others. The status of some of the clothing signs can be symbolically consolidated. For example, the significance of the red headscarves present on the occasion of the wedding on the chests of the groomsmen, over the bride's aprons, in the wedding flag and in the groom's mace, also in various combinations in the head adornment of girls and women from Rupea deserves a separate analysis. Headscarves are red and flowery in a context related to perpetuation, by founding a new family. They do not seem to be chosen just arbitrarily.

These developments are opportunities to strengthen the representation about the function of traditional clothing as insignia. Implicitly, from a functionalist perspective, these developments would support the answer suggested by the present study to the questions about the anthropological significance of the interest in the details of clothing: traditional communities communicate their rules and expectations regarding the marriages of their members through clothing, in an approach whose stake is the very perpetuation of the communities.