

Soldiering Stories of the Aranyos Seat. An Ethnographic, Anthropological Study

In this monograph I study the soldiering stories collected in the small ethnographic region of Aranyosszék (Romanian: Scaunul Arieşului), located in Transylvania, Romania. The paper focuses on the narratives of the local Hungarian ethnic minority. The research focuses on comprehending the narratives as an integral part of the local society, as a tool of communication, which not only reflect, but also construe the social reality of the present, the shared understanding of the past, and the social position and narrative identity of the teller. The stories are understood as tools of individual narrative strategies, as texts of actual speech events and also as a communication that creates social links and commonly shared knowledges.

The first section introduces the different contexts that influenced the research, namely the fieldsite, the fieldwork and finally the concept soldiering stories. The analytical chapters of the second section interpret the different local social relations through the lens of the narratives of soldiering. The first chapter considers ethnicity and investigates the narrative representation of the different groups, the second one examines why the army is such a popular institution and how it shaped the generational relations, while the third one investigates the gendered aspects of the narratives with a primary intention to revise the common understanding of military stories as a male genre and to refine the image of the style and mood of the storytelling of men and women. The last part of the dissertation investigates the written and the oral texts of a marginalized local man, his stories of soldiering in the context of his life story and life situation, and two sets of documents, written during military service.

The dissertation demonstrates that stories of soldiering are a popular, life-historical genre, which are not only part of the local repertoire of oral stories but of social life as well. In a sense narratives link people, time periods and places through telling, listening, commenting and retelling, and as a result they reinforce synchronic and diachronic social ties. They integrate the different experiences and actors in a narrative universe that is both an image and an element of the social universe. The thesis argued that the narrative and the social is also a moral universe, that the stories create and the morally evaluated categories and morally favourable social and individual positions for the tellers. The stories of soldiering which tell of the events of a rite of passage or that of major historical events are especially capable of forming, reinforcing and validating the social norms and values.