

Summary

For us it is sacred

Folklorism in the context of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage

The core task of this book is to describe functions of on-stage wedding performances delivered by folklore dance groups in the local and regional cultural landscape of three selected regions in Poland in the context of the concept of folklorism and world system for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. It is an anthropological attempt to answer the question whether on-stage wedding performances, perceived as a phenomena that fall under the category of folklorism, subsist as a bottom-up way to protect local and regional intangible cultural heritage.

At the end of the 1960s, the precursor of the Polish concept of folklorism and the outstanding ethnographer Józef Burszta drew attention to the fact that weddings are the most frequently chosen rituals for theatrical staging, and that almost all ethnographic regions in Poland have an on-stage representation of wedding rituals (1969: 8). The researcher's statement reflects the enormous scale of the phenomenon and places wedding ceremonial performances in the category of folklorism, which is the main concept of my book. According to Burszta, I perceive folklorism as the use of selected contents and forms of traditional folklore in arranged situations (1969: 88, 1987: 142–143) and in such categories I perceive wedding ceremonies – as a symbolic representation of traditional family rituals.

The book is rooted in the paradigm of anthropology of folklore (Sulima 1985, Kowalski 1990) and is an attempt to anthropological answer to the question whether wedding ceremonial performances, perceived as a phenomenon belonging to the category of folklorism, constitute a form of protection of intangible cultural heritage. I focus on the motivations and consequences of undertaking such activities by members of folk dance groups, ways of understanding folklore, recreating and managing elements of intangible cultural heritage and their use for social, economic and political purposes.

The case studies discussed in this book constitute three ceremonial wedding performances: *Wesele szamotulskie*, *Wesele przyprostyńskie* and *Wesele biskupiańskie*. This choice was justified by the amount of available materials available, continuity and frequency of staging performances, as well as their relationship with the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which is one of the ways of implementation the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the

Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the book, I argue that these shows have become an important element of local and regional cultural landscapes, permanently inscribing in their inhabitants' existence. They also play a role of one of the local initiatives for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Members of local communities consider folk performances as an efficient method to pass on their traditions or, considering their long history, a tradition itself.

The book consists of eight chapters, introduction, conclusion, bibliography and annex containing the list of conducted interviews and used questionnaires. It begins with a chapter titled *Research perspectives*, I present the theoretical and methodological research orientations (Sulima 1985; Kowalski 1990; Buchowski, Burownica 1992), main terminology (Bursztyn 1969, Burownica 1989, Simonides 1995, Klekot 2014, Dąbrowska 1997), the state of research on intangible cultural heritage in Poland and the methods and course of field research.

The second chapter, *Wesela wielkopolskie*, is an ethnographic description of the selected spectacles and a brief history of the folk theater in Poland (Cierniak 1927, Olcha 1963, Śliwonik 2018). It consists of a short description of the region in which a given show operates, information about the sources and circumstances of its creation, and a review of the activities of the folklore group presenting the show (Chodkiewicz, Sochacka 1984; Brzeskwiniwicz 1961; Bzdega 1962).

The third chapter *Political dimension of folklorism* examines the context of the formation and functioning of wedding ritual performances and folk dance groups (Silverman 1983, Stomma 1986). Broad historical and political context explains the assumption that this kind of practice is part of a complex process dating back to the 19th century folklore research and the politics of national liberation that formed the socio-cultural basis of folklorism (Cocchiara 1971, Klotins 2002). In this chapter, I also indicate the political aspects of stage wedding ceremonies (the circumstances of the creation and contemporary practice) and the multi-level political entanglement of regional teams (government support, financial dependence, UNESCO activities).

In chapter four *Understanding folklore and ways to protect it* I focus on folkloristic and anthropological definitions of folklore alongside with their influence on shaping the image of folklore itself. (Krawczyk-Wasilewska 1986; Burszta 1987; Sobczyk 2014; Hajduk-Nijakowska, Smolińska 2011). I put forward an idea that 19th-century collecting of traditional folklore manifestations and salvage ethnography led to formation a folklore matrix that allows individuals to conduct an expert assessment of the authenticity of the reconstruction of the cultural heritage. In this chapter I also elaborate on social defining patterns and attitudes towards folklore. Therefore I present three patterns of behavior that have emerged from my empirical material: Guardian of authenticity, Advocate of change and Local authority. These concepts reflect attitudes towards traditional folklore as well as phenomena that fit into the category of folklorism. The core argument of the chapter is that the way folklore is understood determines how it is preserved.

In chapter five *Issues of authenticity* I continue problems discussed in the previous one. Here I analyze the notion of authenticity, which turned out to be a key concept used both in the literature and in the narratives of my interlocutors. I discuss the meaning of the term in heritology (Rouba 2008, Tomaszewski 2012, Kowalski 2013), anthropology of tourism (Cohen 1988, Ning 1999, Bloch 2013) and folklore studies (Bendix 1997). I argue that scientific terminology developed by specialists in the field of intangible cultural heritage and folklore studies plays a significant role in the social practice of recreating wedding ceremonies. Therefore I believe that the notion of authenticity is not an objective concept that describes the reality but a tool for expert evaluation and a specific mechanism that affect the activity of folk dance groups.

The sixth chapter investigates functions of on-stage wedding performances in the local and regional cultural landscapes. I depict and explain multidimensional role of such kind of folklorism both from the perspective my interlocutors. I discuss them in the context of protection of tradition, regional identity, intergenerational integration, social needs, economic realization and developing individual potential.

In chapter seven *Folklorism and the world system of the protection of the intangible cultural heritage* I take up the subject of the relationship between intangible cultural heritage, folklore and UNESCO (Hafstein 2009, Schreiber 2017). Since all of analysed cases are directly or indirectly related to the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which is one of the ways to implement the UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, I refer to the concepts of „unescoization” (Berliner 2012). Here I also pay attention to the conflicting nature of activities for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. I present the tensions between individual social actors that appeared in the narratives of my interlocutors and discuss them in the context of the issue of „ownership” of cultural heritage (Kobyliński 2009).

The book is summed up by a manifesto of the modified methodology of researching folklore and folklore. Following Bendix, I propose a deconstruction of the language of authenticity and refuse to use it for descriptive purposes. The aim of my work is not to expertly assess the authenticity of wedding ceremonies, but to establish their place, meaning and function in the contemporary local cultural landscape. The book shows on-stage wedding performances from the viewpoint of their creators. It's intent is not to judge their authenticity, but to examine social importance of the folklorism.