

Bildiri

Wedding Videos From Paris: A Transnational Cinema of the Home-Mode*

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Abstract

Starting from the 1980s, production of wedding videos became almost indistinguishable from the wedding ceremonies. Turning into a ritual in a ritual, from our perspective, these videos are more than mere documents of a familial history; wedding video practices fulfill some cultural needs of their practitioners. In our contemporary world, where migration is a strong social experience, these videos may as well serve as a tool for linkage between host and home cultures. This paper aims to explore the traces of such a linkage by examining the shooting process of a particular video of a Turkish wedding in Paris.

keywords: wedding videography, ethnographic film, home mode communication, contact zones, anthropology of visual communication

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Résumé

Depuis les années 1980, la production des vidéos de mariage est devenue une partie inséparable des cérémonies nuptiales. Transformés à un rituel dans un autre rituel, de notre point de vue ces vidéos sont plus que les documents de l'histoire de la famille ; ils satisfont à certains besoins culturels de ceux qui les pratiquent. Dans notre monde contemporain, l'immigration est une expérience sociale déterminante et ces vidéos peuvent être un moyen pour interrelier les cultures d'accueil et d'origine. Ce papier a le but d'explorer les traces d'une telle relation à travers l'étude du processus de tournage d'une vidéo particulière concernant un mariage turc à Paris.

mot-clés: *film de mariage, film ethnographique, home mode communication, zones de contact, anthropologie visuelle*

Özet

1980'lerden itibaren düğün ritüeli içinde yer almaya başlayan ve günümüzde düğün törenlerinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak bir alt ritüele dönüşen düğün videoları, aile tarihçesi açısından önemli belgeler olmalarının ötesinde, kullanıcıları açısından bazı kültürel gereksinimleri karşılamaktadırlar. Göç olgusunun çok güçlü bir toplumsal belirleyici olduğu günümüz dünyasında, bu videolar farklı kültürler arasında zamansal/mekânsal sınırların ötesinde bir köprü işlevi üstlenirler. Bu sunuşun amacı, Paris'te gerçekleşen bir Türk düğününün video çekim kaşamalarını inceleyerek Türk göçmen aileleri arasında kurulan zamansal/mekansal bağlantıların izlerini takip etmektir.

anahtar kelimeler: *düğün videoları, etnografik film, temas bölgeleri, görsel iletişim antropolojisi*

"I am suggesting that cinema be understood as an event in which people are trying to articulate meaning about the world. I am also suggesting that there is no specific set of films we can call "ethnographic cinema," that instead there is only cinema and the way we use it. There is cinema and the various ways people deal with it. Some people treat cinema as a way to understand culture. I am also suggesting that we can treat culture as a way to understand cinema. In both cases it is cinema and how that particular way of structuring the world can be understood as a communicative act"
(Sol Worth, 1977)

1.

Today, we witness the celebration of cultural diversity in numerous film festivals all around the world. Many film screenings, conferences, workshops choose cultural diversity as a subject matter, while a variety of terms used in social sciences (transnationalism, interculturalism, multiculturalism) are applied to film studies to address distinctive cultural cinematic modes of production and consumption. Transnational cinema is a lively venue for film scholars; discussions of migrant, third, accented, beur, world cinemas, can be followed from increasing numbers of academic studies; scholars from all over the world study on their national cinemas for their own part. Film's capacity to overcome prejudices, cultural misunderstandings and its potential for a deeper cultural understanding is frequently rendered in many circles; even in some cases, films are made for this manner only.

The central idea of multiculturalism is the *mutual and reciprocal relativization* (Shohat&Stam, 1994) which is possible through a contact perspective in where "the point is not to embrace the other perspective completely but at least to recognize it, acknowledge it, take it into account, be ready to be transformed by it..." (Ginsburg, 1995) We observe a similar perspective in many film festival letters; one current example is the 14th Istanbul 1001 Documentary Film Festival; like many others, this festival too, proposes filmmakers and viewers a cultural experience by referring to the 'universal' language of cinema: "The festival has created an atmosphere that allows different societies to know and understand each other through documentary films by utilizing the universal language of cinema"(1001belgesel.net/en). Similar attempts in developing a cultural understanding through films depend on a simple presumption: Film is a cultural artifact. The experience of visual anthropology shows however, that the fallacy of many efforts to develop a cultural understanding through films stems from treating images as natural events and the tendency to regard films as mere copies of the world. According to Sol Worth (1977) for instance, the common usage of phrases like "the language of cinema" as well as "visual language" and "language of art" form a trap which even careful scientists fall into: "We seem to want very much to believe that by the use of pictures we can overcome the problem attendant to words and in particular to different languages. Somehow the notion persists that the cinema, like pictures in general, has no individual cultures that "speak".

• Filmmaking is a way of story-telling, and since “every story is a travel story – a spatial practice” (De Certeau, 1996), it must be noted that cinema invokes the spatial and temporal copresence of separated subjects. As David MacDougall summarizes nicely in “Whose Story is it”(1996), all films depend on the presence of three worlds: (1) the world of the filmmakers (2) the world of the subjects (3) the world of the spectators. The particular gravitational forces of these worlds create a contradictory status, which perfectly fits to Marry Louise Pratt’s definition of ‘contact-zones’; “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power”(Pratt, 1991) Therefore, cinema proposes journeys to foreign lands; transcending boundaries of time and space, films turn ‘different worlds’ into a spectacle and promote a shared experience. John Berger defines camera as “a box for transporting appearances” (1990:92), and as from this point of view, if we make a shift from Berger’s approach to photographs (1990:7), we may assert that a film is a meeting place where the interests of the filmmaker, those who are filmed, the viewer and those who are using the film are often contradictory.

In this paper, we focus on the notion of experience sharing by examining a particular wedding-video shooting event. Given the ‘transnational’ character of immigrant societies as well as the immigrant wedding ceremonies themselves; we take immigrant-wedding videos as cultural contact zones. It is important at this point to establish our intentions in combining cinema and event-videography under the same title. By home-mode of cinema, we refer to home-mode communication; “ a pattern of interpersonal and small group communication centered around the home”(Chalfen, 1982). Richard Chalfen distinguishes home mode communication from the mass modes of communication because of its personal and private features: “Mass modes include transient messages that have been produced through public symbol systems for mass distribution to large, heterogeneous, anonymous audiences. For instance, feature films (whether shown in movie theaters, on network television, or on home video recorders) are examples of mass modes, whereas home movies and travel films represent the home mode; still photographs published in popular magazines, newspapers and books exemplify mass mode, whereas snapshots collected in family albums are a part of home mode visual communication.” “(1982:8)

2.

This paper constitutes data from a wider study that we have been carrying out in Paris, France since 2008. In this study, we concentrate on wedding videos and how these videos function in production, distribution and exhibition stages, in order to explore how family ties were structured by the use of home video technology among Turkish immigrants. Along with the semi-structured conversations with our interlocutors (videographers and family members), we have produced an ethnographic video on how a particular

wedding video is recorded. In this particular case, we worked with Deniz and Turgut; two Turkish videographers who already were French citizens at the time we conducted our study. Like the other Turkey-oriented videographers we were able to reach, Deniz and Turgut frequently worked with different ethnic groups all emigrated from Turkey, including Armenian, Suryani (Syrian) and Keldani (Chaldean) communities, while on the other hand, Muslim Turks preferred only working with videographers from communities of their own.

In this study, like Chalfen's study on family photo albums, "we are interested in how people use a medium, as both "producers" of messages and "audience" members, rather than in the medium per se." (1982:9), and we aimed to study "how the camera is used by members of a particular culture" as suggested by Sol Worth (1977). In this paper, we aim to focus on how a contact-zone is built.

Arrival at the Reception Hall "Salle des Fetes Firat"



Richard Chalfen, examining "how to do it" tutorials on home movies, points that every tutorial involves a planning stage before the actual shooting. Actual home videos however, skip this stage, and practitioners tell they know when to shoot a movie. This was quite similar to our case; our photo/videographers had this job from the wedding musicians, and we didn't have a clue if this ceremony would be a circumcision, an engagement or a wedding until we arrived at the hall. All we knew was the ceremony belonged to a migrant family from Kahramanmaraş, Turkey and the event would be held in Firat Reception Hall, a reception hall in one of the suburbs of Paris. Deniz and Turgut –the actual photo/videographers- brought their standard set-up for the event; their equipment included a video camera, as well as two SLR cameras, a screen projector and a laptop. By the time we arrived at the hall, the groom's father informed we that the event would be a wedding. At that moment

preparations were still going on in the hall; musicians were busy doing sound check, and employees of the hall were adjusting tables. Groom's father, who was responsible from the organization of the whole event, made his only request from the photo/videographers at this stage; he wanted video to be 'in focus' and 'beautiful'. He also stated that we looked like professionals, and he trusted us in making a good wedding video. He did not give any further details, for he seemed very sure that the shooting crew already knew what to do.

Wedding Cortege & Outdoor Shootings



After one hour, the event owner told us that the couple was out from their home, and the wedding cortege was ready for the photo shooting. Turgut took a phone number of one of the relatives in the cortege, and by Turgut's car we began searching our couple in the autoroutes surrounding Paris. After a few phone calls, we met the cortege in a gas station, and we started searching for a park or some 'nicely' decorated open-air place that would have fair conditions for photo/video shootings. Deniz told that this stage of the shooting was always the worst part, for many times, photo/videographers had to improvise to find a proper setting for a shooting. Sometimes, he even had to shoot on the "any green" parts on the autoroutes. This photo/video shooting was held with the presence of the crowd of wedding cortege, which was not appreciated by the French traffic police for practical reasons. We were quite familiar with this type of photo shootings in traditional weddings in Turkey; however, these photo shootings often occurred in a professional studio, or pre-arranged places. There are also a number of photo studios owned by Turkish immigrants in Paris, however Deniz told that they were not suitable, simply because Paris traffic would not allow formation of such corteges. After the park was found, our photo/videographers were in control during the whole open air shooting stage. They shot the couple in many conventional poses, and gave them direct orders

on where to stand, how to behave. There were times when the couple was not happy with some poses they were requested to give, however, they fully participated our photo/videographers' requests.

Entrance and First Dance



After leaving the park, our photo/videographers took a 'fly on the wall' style as opposed to their central position in the outdoor shootings. In the two hours when we were out for outdoor shootings, the entire guests had arrived: The ceremony officially started when the wedding singer announced the couple's entrance. There were more than 200 guests in the hall; they all stood up and applauded the couple. The couple walked through the hall, and after the groom presented a "yüz görümlüğü" to the bride, they were invited to their first dance by the wedding singer. Apparently, the groom did not want to dance saying he was ill and tired, but the wedding singer nicely forced him by telling this wedding was recorded; that the groom's future children would like to see their parents' first dance. This was quite convincing for the groom, he accepted to dance with her wife for the cameras.

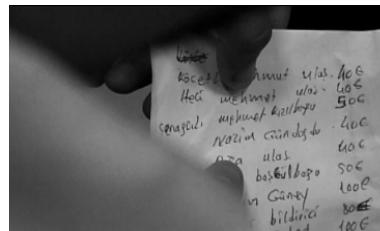
Lunch and Dances





After the first dance, the couple was seated to a special arranged table and close relatives came to congratulate them in this location. They also took photos with their own cameras; however, our crew was more interested in documenting the guest families. After taking establishing shots from the hall, Deniz and I began to wander around tables to shoot each family member. The orchestra began to play popular Turkish songs, and guests started to dance. This relatively 'loose' stage for photo/videographers ended when the orchestra began playing traditional songs. 'Halay's (regional traditional group dances) were at the center of attention; they had to be carried out properly for relatives, and photo/videographers as well. After a while, in one of the halay performed in this ceremony, guests formed two circles; Deniz informed us that young girls, who were at their ages of marriage, formed this inner circle and his shots could be used to choose marriage partners when watched in Turkey. He also told that, in some cases, guests directly asked the videographer whom to shoot in order to show her/him to their relatives in Turkey.

Gift Ceremony



When the time came for the gifts to be presented, the couple stood behind a table along with close relatives, who were in charge of counting and classifying the gifts. Here, Deniz stood right across the table and created a free

zone, in order to film the gifts and gift givers rightfully. Gift ceremony was the climax of this whole event. In this vital sequence, photo/videographers gained their central control back as they did in the outdoor shootings. We also observed that guests participated in the video making by taking the responsibility to prevent the children from cutting the camera angles. Although all the guests are acknowledged that they are being recorded, only in the park and wedding ceremony, they behaved like being so. Because of the crowd and chaos involved in a wedding, a videographer has to be very spontaneous; even the use of tripod is very hard because of these issues. Deniz informed us that, he was familiar with the ceremony halls surrounding Paris and after all the weddings he shot, he gained a spontaneity by learning what, when and how to shoot. He also told that he had a practical memory of each step and best viewpoints in most of the ceremony halls. Considering the number of guests involved in a ceremony, such knowledge becomes crucial for taking proper shots.

The transnational quality of this ceremony became almost tangible at this stage: the wedding singer, who was the leading entertainer of whole event, firstly announced the gifts from the hall, and then he passed reading the gift lists sent from relatives from all over Turkey and Europe. Here many gifts (including jewelry, cars, and cash predominantly) were presented to the couple, and the gift giving was recorded in detail with the guidance of the wedding singer.

Wedding Cake



After the gift ceremony, guests started to leave, and by the wedding cake, nearly half of the guests have already left. Although wedding cake is an attentive attraction in the ritual, given the long duration of the ceremony, it is turned into an obligation that only close relatives had to attend. After the cake, everyone relaxed, and soon the wedding singer announced that the ceremony was over.

After that announcement, Deniz consulted the event-owner first time: he wanted to know if he was going to shoot the couple's exit. The owner told us there was no need for such a shoot, since we would be leaving together, and the ceremony was over for our part too. We left the hall with the relatives.

3.

Our researcher Murad Özdemir was completely "equipped" regarding our purpose - the documentation of a wedding event held on a reception hall 12 km outside the Paris region-. He carried a Sony HVR-A1E camcorder and a tripod, as well as batteries, sound equipment, cables, some videotapes. Traveling with the official photographer and videographer as an embedded wedding videographer for this particular situation, his presence was not questioned from the beginning to the end: one probable reason was he was among the numerous amateur videographers who were actually guests in the ceremony. The wedding event was being digitized in many formats; mini DV-format, which we used –as well as the official videographer-, HD-cams, portable phone cams, digital SLR cameras were amongst the numerous digital image technologies used to document the event. After the wedding, which lasted about 6 hours, we had 4 hours of video footage; the official videographer had nearly 5 hours. At least 2 of the guests recorded the whole event with digital video cameras, tens of them recorded the climaxes, and hundreds of photos were taken during this single event.

As Jay Ruby suggests, "visual anthropology proceeds from the belief that culture is manifested through visible symbols embedded in gestures, ceremonies, rituals, and artifacts situated in constructed and natural environments" (Ruby, 1996). A filmmaker is also the subject –and performer- of a culture when arranging things and making choices to create a narrative; therefore, films also reflect "the value systems, coding patterns, and cognitive processes of their maker." (Worth, 1981). In this sense, it is possible to distinguish between three distinctive representation modes related to ethnographic films: (1) an observatory mode in where the film functions as mirror to subject worlds; (2) a reflexive mode, cooperatively produced films that offer a shared anthropology; (3) subject-generated films; films from the inside.

From this perspective, Richard Chalfen's study on *Kodak Culture* takes its place in the third category, for it refers to "whatever it is that one has to learn, know or do in order to participate in ... the home mode of pictorial communication" (1987:10) Chalfen includes in his approach, the examination of behavioral patterns that characterize family-generated visual media, namely, snapshots, home movies and home video. Nevertheless, he does not include event-videography to home-mode, like Roger Odin (1995), who excludes event-videography from his definition on "film de famille". One significant rationale behind this exclusion is the presence of /semi/professional videographers and

their industry-driven conventional modes. However, wedding videography stands somewhere between professional and amateur intentions. Defining wedding videographers as “hired ghostwriters” (2002:89) for example, James Moran suggests that wedding video production is a social and technological arrangement, and “wedding video production is a hybrid collaborative form that both facilitates and conflates autobiographical and ethnographical expression” (2002:90). We have observed in our study that wedding videographers were active agents in the collaborative form that Moran proposes. Moreover, we also observed that; being members of the same community, family members and videographers shared some common intentions in documenting the ceremony rightfully, in a manner beyond the client-service provider relationship

Although migrant wedding videos bear several problematic issues compared to the definition of “home-videos” as mentioned above, it can be asserted that these videos fulfill some basic needs for families. At a wider scope, these videos transcend time, space and serve as contact zones for the families. Wedding videos are not only the starting point for a familial history, but also they communicate further meanings. As Faye Ginsburg suggests, “The capabilities of media to transcend boundaries of time, space, and even language are being used effectively to mediate, literally, historically produced social ruptures and to help construct identities that link past and present in ways appropriate to contemporary conditions” (Ginsburg, 1991: 96) Migrant wedding videos perfectly fit to Ginsburg’s description. Likely, Patricia Wolbert suggests that migrant family pictures and videos create ‘virtual neighborhoods’, a term she uses to define the contemporary social networks of the “transnational communities”: “Transnational networks of family, friends, work mates, customers, acquaintances, old and new neighbors provide the connections not only to keep social relations alive but also to create new ones”(Wolbert, 2001:11).

In discussing wedding videos under the same title with transnational cinema, we are not advocating a displacement of cinema’s artistic values, though we benefit from what cinema connotes at first. On a larger scale, we are attempting to treat immigrant culture to understand cinema, as we quoted from Worth at the very beginning of this paper. For anthropology of visual communication, visual forms like fiction films, documentaries, ethnographic films, video-art, TV commercials, and home videos are all the same at one level: they all communicate meaning. In discussing these image communication forms together, we propose that the problem of cultural representation and films can be best understood with the anthropology of communication.

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