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Book Review: Leeds-Hurwitz, *Wedding as Text: Communication Cultural Identities Through Ritual*

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Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, *WEDDING AS TEXT: COMMUNICATING CULTURAL IDENTITIES THROUGH RITUAL*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002; pp. 320, \$69.95 hardcover, ISBN: 0805811419; \$29.92 paper, ISBN: 0805811427.

Despite the popularity of wedding ceremonies as subject for nearly all popular entertainment genres, communication scholars have largely overlooked them as a site for research. With the publication of Leeds-Hurwitz's book, *Wedding as Text: Communicating Cultural Identities Through Ritual*, this lack has been partially remedied.

Leeds-Hurwitz uses ethnography to explore and interpret weddings as rituals that can provide insight about meanings that are co-created by participants. Specifically, this research deals with "intercultural weddings held in the United States" (p. 10), which are defined by the author to include weddings that are international, interracial, interethnic, interfaith, and interclass. Having defined her research subjects, she dedicates the remainder of the book to exploring four primary topics that she believes are essential to the reading of a wedding act: community, ritual, identity, and meaning.

In the chapter on community, Leeds-Hurwitz considers the ways that individuals from different communities come together to create a wedding ceremony. She frames this as a problem of conflicting community expectations and offers four possible solutions: 1) presenting one culture to the exclusion of the other; 2) presenting two cultures as separate but equal in two distinct ceremonies; 3) avoiding the presentation of either culture; or 4) combining the cultures in a single ceremony. Leeds-Hurwitz accepts only the latter of her four possibilities as "facing the difficulties head-on and seriously attempting to resolve them" (p. 51). Individuals who choose one of the other three possible solutions are dismissed as ignoring or avoiding the issues inherent in their union.

When exploring the notion of ritual in relation to intercultural weddings, the author emphasizes the creative aspects of intercultural wedding ceremonies over the more traditional, cultural bound aspects of the rite-of-passage. She appears most interested in studying the way that symbols can be altered in intercultural weddings so that they provide meaning for parties from both cultures. For example, she describes the way that symbols such as the bridal gown, wedding rings, wedding vows, and wedding cake have been utilized in intercultural weddings to reflect more than one cultural tradition. When researching the identity conceptions of the participants involved in an intercultural wedding, she prefers ceremonies that reflect the self-identity of each party.

Finally, in the chapter devoted to meaning, Leeds-Hurwitz identifies five possible ways that intercultural wedding participants can manage the multiple meanings suggested by the event. These approaches included polysemy (symbols that convey multiple meanings simultaneously), intertextuality (the idea that all texts rely on prior texts for their meaning), bricolage (bringing together previously used signs into new, unexpected combinations), redundancy (matching symbols regardless of their origin), and ambiguity (uncertainty that can result from the previous four meaning management options). In all of these ways, Leeds-Hurwitz suggests that wedding symbolism can be read in ways meaningful to all participants.

One of the book's highlights is the "Interludes" section between each chapter. These sections are engrossing, in-depth descriptions of particular intercultural weddings included in the study. Each "Interlude" emphasizes and illustrates one of the four primary concerns of community, ritual, identity, and meaning. In these sections, Leeds-Hurwitz's writing is truly ethnographic, allowing the participants' voices to be heard without the imposition of authorial interpretation or evaluation. Unfortunately, this claim cannot be made of the way in which Leeds-Hurwitz presents the majority of her findings.

I found the reporting of her study's results to be rather judgmental and biased, mostly because she failed to position herself as the researcher in this ethnography. There is no self-reflexivity in this research, which makes the reader feel intensely the place of privilege from which Leeds-Hurwitz writes. For example, her justification for the text's shallow treatment of interclass weddings is that class differences are easily resolved because "the family with more money generally pays for the event, thus creating an event displaying the higher of two class identities" (p. 219). In dismissing class differences so easily, she fails to note that these participants are actually choosing to present one culture to the exclusion of the other, a choice that she frowns upon earlier in the book.

In doing ethnography, Leeds-Hurwitz appears to have been lured by the notion of the "exotic other" into making claims that are confusing or contradictory. For example, although she studies only marriages that occur in the United States between partners of different national, ethnic, class, race, or religious affiliations, she makes a dichotomy between these events and what she calls "dominant generic mainstream American weddings" (p. 59). Leeds-Hurwitz describes the mainstream wedding as "relying on the lowest common denominator, and thus they are often quite bland" (p. 59). Given this premise, she criticizes an American Catholic bride and an American Greek Orthodox groom for avoiding the issue of their intercultural status as a couple when they choose to have a mainstream wedding. Yet, despite their religious differences, this couple was American, making me wonder exactly what they were avoiding by failing to include the ethnic preferences of their ancestors. Ultimately, American weddings might be bland only to Americans; a bride from Africa might find American wedding traditions as exciting as Leeds-Hurwitz finds African wedding traditions. Seemingly, Leeds-Hurwitz values that which is exotic as interesting, but these categories are relative. And, because the author failed to position herself in this research, a reader might assume that she was unaware of this important bias.

Despite these concerns, the research itself is a valuable step in the study of social ritual as communication shaping the meaning of ourselves and our cultures. That Leeds-Hurwitz's book provides us with more questions than answers is a good thing if it inspires other communication scholars to explore ethnography as method and intercultural communication settings as potential research sites.

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Karim H. Karim (Ed.), *THE MEDIA OF DIASPORA: MAPPING THE GLOBE*. New York: Routledge, 2003; pp. 224, \$90.00 hardcover, ISBN: 0415279305.

The term "diaspora" often has been used simplistically to describe the migration of non-White peoples from the South to the North, and their difficulties as strangers in new lands. In turn, diaspora media are often thought to be solely the cultural artifacts produced by these various groups, for example, ethnic-language publications or radio stations.

The Media of Diaspora dispels such superficial notions of the complex processes of diaspora media and the people who both produce and use them. The editor of this anthology, Karim H. Karim, writes that he set out to provide an "extended conversation" (p. xv) on the media of diasporas. He has succeeded admirably. This volume brings together both established and emerging scholars from different disciplines to examine how diasporic communities use communications media to form and maintain their ties on a transnational level. The result is a fascinating immersion into the literature that synthesizes and, ultimately, extends the research on the topic.

An excellent first chapter written by the editor, who is on the journalism faculty at Carlton University in Ottawa and has written extensively on diasporic communication, sets the tone and framework for the following essays. His thorough literature review pulls together seminal scholarship on the various ways to map diaspora, problematizing any closed set of characteristics. The dynamics of identity formation and the overlapping relationships with other diasporic groups are shown to be complex and shifting. In turn, the mediascape (Karim borrows Arjun Appadurai's term) of cultural production in the diaspora is equally complicated and multilayered in an age of global media networks, where physical place has been replaced by a shifting "imaginative geography" (p. 6).

The book is divided into two parts. Eight chapters are devoted to film, radio, and television. The remaining six chapters are devoted to computer-mediated communication. Therefore, the contrast is set between "old" and "new" media. The reader is led on a rich world tour of diasporic communities and their cultural productions. Essay topics examine Middle Eastern television in Los Angeles and its audiences of both Jews and Palestinians, the introduction of satellite-transmitted television and other new technologies to the cultures of Canada's indigenous peoples, the varying cultural flows of the Spanish-language diaspora in the U.S., the stateless Kurdish people and their media use, the hybrid forms of cultural production in Vietnamese diasporic communities, the construction of "Greekness" on the Internet, and Rhodesian identity formation in hyperspace. The Bollywood film industry and its fabulous success with Hindi-speaking audiences around the world plays a starring role in several chapters, one of which looks at how Australia's various Indian communities maintain their heritage and another that describes the cultural dynamism of the Indian community in Fiji. After reading these 14 essays, one is left with a sense of human beings and their cultural expressions on the move in the information age.

With its multidisciplinary approach, this book successfully overviews the body of research exploring diaspora communities and cultural flows, making it useful both for scholars and graduate students already studying or interested in learning more about diaspora media.

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