

KEITH DOUBT | Wittenberg University, USA

Multiculturalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Wielokulturowość w Bośni i Hercegowinie

Streszczenie

W eseju podkreślono istotne wnioski z badania nad zwyczajem ucieczki młodych w celu zawarcia związku małżeńskiego [ang. *elopement*] oraz stopniem pokrewieństwa noszącego tytuł „Through the Window: Kinship and Elopement in Bosnia-Herzegovina” [*Dogłębne spojrzenie na zwyczaj ucieczki młodych i stopnie pokrewieństwa w Bośni i Hercegowinie* – przyp. tłum] wydanego przez Central European University Press w 2014 r. Psychologiczne, kulturowe i socjologiczne znaczenia zwyczaju ucieczki młodej kobiety, która „zdobywa się” na zamążpójście, rozważane są z perspektywy wpływu, jaki czyn ten, popełniany w zмовie z zalotnikiem, ma na całe społeczeństwo. Zwyczaj małżeństwa rozumiany jest w kontekście powszechnego wzorca pokrewieństwa, w którym małżeństwo uznawane jest za ważniejsze niż więzy krwi, a powinowactwo wynikające z małżeństwa za ważniejsze niż pokrewieństwo w linii ojca, co dowodzi, że ucieczka, a następnie spotkanie rodziców pary młodej połączone z ceremonią ustanowienia stosunku powinowactwa są uzupełniającymi się rytuałami przejścia. Esej kończą rekomendacje na potrzeby przyszłych badań zarówno w Bośni i Hercegowinie, jak i w większym regionie.

Słowa kluczowe: wielokulturowość, Bośnia i Hercegowina

Abstract

The essay amplifies the important findings in the study of elopement and kinship titled “Through the Window: Kinship and Elopement in Bosnia-Herzegovina” published at Central European University Press in 2014. The psychology, cultural, and sociological significances of a young woman “stealing herself” to marry are reviewed in terms of how the social action in collusion with her suitor eventually gives character to the larger society. The marriage custom is understood within the dominant kinship pattern that gives emphasis to marriage rather than blood or affinal relations rather than agnatic relations, the point being to demonstrate how elopement and the subsequent affinal visitations that immediately follow are complementary

rites of passage. The essay concludes with recommendations for future research in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and the wider region.

Keywords: multiculturalism, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Uncountable books have been written about Bosnia-Herzegovina since the war that ended in 1995. Many seek to understand the violence that wrecked havoc on the country: its inhabitants, its communities, and its institutions. Some seek to understand the country: its collective self, its shared identity, and its social solidarity. Although some may argue that these commonalities do not truly exist in Bosnia-Herzegovina, *Through the Window: Kinship and Elopement in Bosnia-Herzegovina* seeks to understand a common cultural heritage of the country and its inhabitants (Doubt, 2014).

The study, through the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, examines two rites of passage practiced widely in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The rites of passage function together as complementary rites of passage, holding together communities and society (Van Gennep, 1960).

The first rite (studied through in-depth interviews and survey research) is elopement, where a young woman leaves her parent's home to enter with her future husband into marriage. The marriage custom has been previously studied (Hangi, 2009; Erlich, 1966; Lockwood, 1975; Bringa, 1995). One of the earliest is Anton Hangi's (2009) *Život i običaji muslimana u BiH, Sarajevo* [The Life and Customs of Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina], written before 1900. Then, during the Yugoslav period, William Lockwood (1975) conducted an ethnography in a remote Muslim village in central Bosnia-Herzegovina and reported "By far the majority of marriages, easily ninety percent are formed by elopement" (1974, p. 260). In the eighties, Tone Bringa (1995) carried out a similar study in a Muslim/Croat village located in a valley in central Bosnia-Herzegovina and observed "The most common form of marriage during my stay in the village and I believe over the last thirty years was marriage by elopement" (1995, p 76). While elopements among the poor were common for pragmatic reasons, Lockwood (1974, p. 264) observed that the wealthy households also practiced this custom.

To be clear, elopement (*ukrala se*) is different from bride abduction (*otmica*) (Bates 1974; Lockwood 1974). Bride abduction is when a girl is unwillingly kidnapped into marriage; the abduction is rape. In contrast, elopement occurs with a decision and the collusion of the young woman albeit without her parents' consent. The marriage becomes couple-initiated rather than family-initiated.

There are several findings to be emphasized. First, while elopements seem transgressive within the patriarchal society, they occur frequently. In a survey of self-reported marriage practices delivered by Mareco Index Bosnia to a representative sample of the country's population, more than twenty percent of the respondents said their marriages were established by elopement (Doubt, 2016). With a population of a little less than four million, this means three or four hundred thousand inhabitants married by elopement. After elopement, there is sometimes a traditional wedding feast to celebrate the marriage. Elopements are more normative than deviant in the society.

Every family in Bosnia-Herzegovina has at least one story of a member's elopement. The stories are lively and dramatic, perhaps comedic, perhaps tragic. The telling of the story bonds family during gatherings. The family folklore anchors families as families, especially during times of conflict and trauma (Dundes, 2007; Baker & Kotkin & Zeitlin, 1982). The stories are passed onto younger generation, whose members may or may not choose to follow the marriage custom.

A second finding from the book is that elopements occur within each of the three major ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina, among Bosnian Serbs, among Bosnian Croats, and among Bosnian Muslims and in Roma and Jewish communities. The ethnographies in single villages of Lockwood and Bringa suggest the custom is particular to Muslims. The marriage custom, though, is a national one, a heritage shared in a transethnic manner and found less frequently in Serbia and Croatia. During the Yugoslav era in Bosnia-Herzegovina, elopement could be a way to marry a Yugoslav from another ethnic group especially if one's traditional parents opposed such a marriage. Thus, a traditional Bosnian custom was sustained in a modern Yugoslav culture.

The third and most important finding is that the young women who elope assert their right to choose their marriage partner, a right the community respects, sometimes begrudgingly. In rigid patriarchal societies, an elopement could likely result in families not speaking to each other for a long time and perhaps never making peace with each other (Bates 1974). The young women who elope are protofeminists, asserting their right to choose their marriage partner. The risk reflected in their action typically leads to what Eric Erikson (1980) calls a strong ego identity, something positive and healthy, a step in an adolescent's maturation into adulthood. No longer is there a dichotomy between individuality and membership; the two reside interdependently.

To turn to the second rite of passage studied in the book, affinal visitations are an important kinship structure. After marriage, the families of the bride and the groom establish relations through ritualized visitations called *pohode*. This kinship is important within the community bringing status, prestige, and social capital. The in-lawship is called *prijatelji*, a word that is also used for friendship, thus having two meanings in the language. The kinship visits involve a series of gift exchanges and are bilateral (Bringa, 1995). The in-lawship is not established automatically, but needs to be enacted, performed in a dramaturgical manner (Goffman, 1959).

Marriages in Bosnia-Herzegovina strengthen not the agnatic group vis-à-vis another agnatic group, but the affinal group, creating the opportunity, if not the imperative, to establish relations between non-agnates for their own sake (Donia & Lockwood 1974; Lockwood, 1975). While marriages in general are couple-initiated (Erich, 1966, p. 183), whether formed through an elopement or a traditional wedding, after marriage marriages are family-sustained through affinal visitations. The custom is practiced with no variation by the three major ethnic groups in the country, reflecting a strong transethnic identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina (see Doubt, 2016).

As anthropologists show, the kinship structure of every community is vertical as well as horizontal. The vertical structure is the descent line, the family bloodline, called *bratstvo* in former-Yugoslavia. There is also the horizontal structure, either formed through affines called *prijatelji* or through fictive kinship called *kumovi* (godfatherhood, baptismal or marriage sponsorship). In former-Yugoslavia, fictive kin are not

drawn from the family blood like or from in-laws. *Prijatelji* (affinal kin) and *kumovi* (fictive kin) thus serve the same function: they create an important and necessary horizontal kinship. Eugene Hammel (1968) and Milenko Filipović (1962) study how *kumovi* hold communities together in Serbia and Lockwood (1975) and Bringa (1995) study how *prijatelji* hold communities together in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Every community needs a vertical and horizontal kinship structure. If there is only a vertical kinship structure, the community implodes on itself. Narcissism and incest demean the vitality of the community. If there is only a horizontal structure, the community assimilates and disappears. Such is the dilemma for immigrants and diaspora.

The key to understanding the society of Bosnia-Herzegovina is to understand how the marriage custom of elopement and the ritualized visits between in-laws are complementary (Van Gennep 1960). Each takes on importance through its linkage to the other. Neither makes sense without the other. Elopement functions as a catalyst to create affinal ties between families that might otherwise not be connected. Society becomes more open through the impetuous love of young people; society is enlarged. When a couple elopes, they seem to be jumping over a cliff, but the couple knows there is a safety net (a social network and cultural heritage) to catch them as they leap. Each rite of passage is incomplete if it is not connected to the other. It is difficult for the Bosnian diaspora to maintain their cultural heritages when one rite of passage occurs without the other.

The book seeks to understand Bosnia-Herzegovina as a country more clearly. A recommendation for future research is to replicate the study's questions on marriage and kinship along with its representative sampling in countries that were part of former-Yugoslavia and surround Bosnia-Herzegovina, namely, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Kosovo, and Montenegro (Doubt, 2016). The goal would be to measure the variation and non-variation among national identities and ethnic identities. For example, there are a half million Muslims in Serbia living in an area called Sandžak around the city of Novi Pazar. Are the marriage customs and kinship structures of Muslims in Serbia comparable to the marriage customs and kinship structures of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Orthodox Serbs in Serbia? Preliminary conversations indicate that the kinship customs of Muslims in Serbia are more like Orthodox Serbs in Serbia. In turn, Lockwood suggests that the kinship customs of Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina are more like Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina than Orthodox Serbs in Serbia. National identities override ethnic identities.

The replication of the survey study could occur throughout East Europe as well. In Bulgaria, for instance, *prijatelji* and *kumovi* (ritual kinship) are important kin relations, and the same words are used to identify the relations. How do these relations structure Bulgarian society and its different ethnic groups? A multinational study would address the interrelation of ethnic and national identities as they are reflected in the country's marriage customs and kinship patterns, which are not just symbolic but also functional.

It would also be informative to study the marriage customs and kinship structures of both Slavic and Baltic post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe. How are marriage customs and kinship structures in Slavic and Baltic countries both similar and different vis-a-vis Western Europe? Such a multinational study would provide a basis for

understanding the complexity of social and cultural identities in Eastern Europe; its framework would be objective and transcend politics.

A second recommendation for future study is the question of whether Catholic women in Bosnia-Herzegovina elope more frequently than Catholic women in Croatia, reflecting a national rather than ethnic identity. The Catholic Church discourages elopements of young women in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A priest will not want to have a wedding ceremony in a church if a young woman eloped to the groom's house without the knowledge of her parents, although sometimes the priest capitulates on this matter. It is therefore surprising that a significant number of Bosnian Croat women eloped to marry, reflecting the importance of folk culture in their lives.

One overlooked casualty of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is its collective commitment to a pluralistic and integrated society (Lovrenović, 1996; Mahmutćehajić, 2000; Mujkić, 2008; Tufekčić, 2014). Unconscionable violence and vicious propaganda were brought to bear against its heritage, cultural convictions, and social practices. The tragedy is that although the society has a strong trans-ethnic history and culture, today there are few functional institutions to support, respect, and sustain its traditions, which makes it difficult for Bosnia-Herzegovina as a society to re-establish the inclusive, transethnic institutions it needs. The signing of the Dayton Peace Accords established a constitution and federal structure that reifies ethnic particularism at the political level and denies the historical and cultural transethnic realities of the country and civil society. Today political institutions continue to structure Bosnia-Herzegovina along nationalistic lines, and the cultural practices that sustain the poly-ethnic society as a poly-ethnic society are at risk. This study raises inconvenient facts for academics and ethno-politicians who view the country through nationalistic paradigms and atavistic historical narratives from which to predict an inevitable partitioning of the country. The hope is other scholars will want to look through the windows the book opens and find still other windows in other countries to open.

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Keith Doubt

Professor of Sociology
Wittenberg University, USA
Synod Hall 6B(937) 327-7504
e-mail: kdoubt@wittenberg.edu