Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

Living Legacy of the Ottoman Empire: The Serbo-Croatian-Speaking Moslems of Bosnia-Hercegovina

W. G. Lockwood

There exists in southeastern Europe a living legacy of the over four-hundred-year-long Ottoman presence–a combined population, excluding European Turkey, of some five or six million Moslem inhabitants. Of these, the second largest component (after Moslem Albanians) is the Serbo-Croatian speaking Moslems of Bosnia-Hercegovina (hereafter referred to as Bosnian Moslems). As of the 1971 census, there are some one and three-quarter million Bosnian Moslems, 8 percent of the total population of Yugoslavia. They comprise 40 percent of the Republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina, with a combination of Serbs and Croats making up nearly all of the remainder.

It is our intention here to present something of a "natural history" of this important group. The analysis is of two parts, the first primarily historic and the second, ethnographic. We will first trace the process of Bosnian Moslem ethnogenesis, the gradual transformation from religious converts to ethnic group. We will then look at the relationships between these developments and the cultural and social status of Bosnian Moslems, especially the Bosnian Moslem peasantry, in contemporary Yugoslavia.

Bosnian Moslem ethnogenesis was initiated soon after, first, the Bosnian Kingdom (1463), and, then, the Hercegovinian duchy (1482) fell to the Ottoman Empire. Over the following period of Ottoman rule in Bosnia-Hercegovina there were wholesale conversions to Islam, unlike any other area of Ottoman Europe except Albania. The source of these converts, and the reasons for their conversion, are still a subject of debate. The traditional view is that the landed aristocracy of the Medieval Bosnian and Hercegovinian states converted in order to preserve its economic and political superiority under the new regime and that the rank and file of the Bosnian Church, a heretical sect usually identified with the Bogomils; converted en masse in reaction to earlier excesses of Catholicism [1]. Both of these views have long been questioned and recent evidence [2] indicates not only that the Bosnian Church had been more or less destroyed prior to the Ottoman conquest, but that it was probably not even Bogomil after all. Similarly, the views of certain Croatian and Serbian writers that the converts were predominantly Croatian or, conversely, predominantly Serbian (and hence to be regarded as "Moslem Croats" or "Moslem Serbs" respectively) has little conclusive support in the data. The Bosnian Moslems apparently originated in a combination of

all these groups plus others, including Moslems from other areas (e.g., Albanians, Turks, Yürüks) who were subsequently Slavicized. The details of this origin, however, have relatively little significance in terms of what Bosnian Moslems are today. Regardless of what they might have been, the various components have amalgamated over the years into a distinct people.

What I would like to stress here regarding this origin is the individual nature of the conversion process. Except for the devşirme, or child levy, the Ottomans did not forcibly Islamize. It was not regions or villages, or probably even families that converted, but individual men and women. Each convert, regardless of his or her previous status, made the decision individually for reasons that were entirely rational at that time and place. Undoubtedly, the tradition of shifting religious affiliations in pre-Ottoman Bosnia-Hercegovina played an important role in this [3]. Changes of religion were a general and common occurrence at this time and, thus, Islamization was only one aspect of a broader phenomenon. The lack of a strong church organization in Bosnia-Hercegovina, either Catholic or Orthodox, made widespread conversion possible. The various material and consumptive advantages afforded Moslems must also have been very important–the special tax on non-Moslems, the restrictions on what a non-Moslem might or might not do. But most important of all, it must be remembered that during the earlier stage of the Ottoman occupation, the Empire represented the epitome of civilization, a major center of not only political and economic power, but also cultural and intellectual life. If we can regard it as such from our perspective, consider how it must have seemed to Balkan peasants of the period. It was natural to want to identify with this, and it must have seemed that the easiest way to do so was to accept the faith that was so fundamental a part of it. Anthropologists working in Oceania, Africa and elsewhere during the recent period have frequently noted the same effect and response upon conquest of a technologically primitive people by another which is far advanced [4]. In part, religious conversion was an attempt at supernatural identification with an improved status. Moreover, it was a pragmatic attempt at the same thing. Whoever wished to get rich quick in the expanding economic activities of the towns, or to advance in the administrative apparatus of the empire, or perhaps merely to demonstrate that he was a good citizen, converted to Islam. Conversion was far more common in towns than in the countryside, not only because the towns were the centers from which Islam was diffused, but because it was these same towns that provided the best context for social mobility. It was here that the economic opportunities lay.

The number of Moslems in Bosnia-Hercegovina increased steadily until they came to exert a significant influence on the political and cultural life of the Ottoman Empire. At one point in the mid-sixteenth century, the Grand-Vizier and two of the three Viziers were all Moslems from Bosnia-Hercegovina. The Bosnian influence was so strong in some periods that Serbo-Croatian became the second language in the Porte [5].

These converts, taken in the aggregate, did not immediately constitute an ethnic group in the anthropological sense. It is appropriate here to sketch just what it is that the anthropologist means by “ethnicity.” As most commonly understood by social scientists [6], “ethnic group” designates a population which

1. is biologically self-perpetuating,
2. shares fundamental cultural values, realized in cultural forms,
3. makes up a field of communication and interaction, and
4. has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

In other words, members of an ethnic group are more or less endogamous, marrying others of the group more frequently than outsiders. They participate in a recognizable subculture–with both material and ideological forms–that is identified with the group. They tend to interact with one another more frequently than with others and, because of this, there is an easier flow of information within the group than without it. And they, as well as members of other ethnic groups with which they are in contact, possess a group consciousness, described by some anthropologists in terms of "ethnocentrism" [7].

More and more, we have come to view ethnicity as a form of social organization rather than cultural organization, and as we have done so, it has become more and more obvious that it is this fourth point which is critical [8]. Ethnic groups are circumscribed by boundaries, invisible yet nevertheless recognized by both members and non-members, These ethnic boundaries are established and maintained on the basis of a very limited but critical set of diagnostic features. Most ethnic groups of the Balkans, for example, are defined by a single paradigm of language and religion. Thus, in the Bosnia-Hercegovina context, to be Serbo-Croatian- speaking and Catholic is to be Croatian, to be Serbo-Croatian speaking and Orthodox is to be Serbian, and so on. The persistence of the ethnic group depends on the collective recognition and evaluation of these critical traits, although through time or from locale to locale, the remainder of cultural content associated with the group may vary and given individuals may pass from one group to another. This specific cultural content which can vary as to time and place is nevertheless very important in that it aids the members of a multi-ethnic society in assigning one another within the ethnic boundaries. Thus, distinctive items of costume, dialect, etc., serve to signal one's ethnic identity to all knowledgeable observers.

Within the Ottoman Empire, the Serbo-Croatian-speaking Moslems were identified (to the extent they were identified at all) as Bošnjaci. Both the derivation of the term and the social group it had reference to were regional, not ethnic, and this accurately reflects the nature of Bosnian Moslem self-consciousness vis-à-vis the central powers of the Empire. Local Christians called them Turci (Turks), demonstrating their identification of Serbo-Croatian-speaking Moslems with the ruling group. Moslems would sometimes even use the term Turci themselves, when it was necessary to distinguish themselves from Bosnian Christians. True, they spoke a distinct language but language was not yet considered a significant criterium of group affiliation. All the less so in this case, since it was shared with the Christian inhabitants and thus not unique to the social category. Because of the international makeup of the ruling Ottoman apparatus (including prominent Serbo-Croatian speakers), there was no official differentiation–no formalization of a Bosnian Moslem ethnic group. A primary explanation for the development of nationalities based on religion in the Balkans is that "the organization of Christian subjects into millets, each a different religious

denomination constituting a separate community organized under its own ecclesiastical authorities, stressed the distinctiveness of the various non-Moslem peoples" (Stavrianos) [9]. Undoubtedly, this was so. But note that this did not effectively define the Serbo-Croatian-speaking Moslems. They were no different in this respect than other Moslem subjects of the Empire, including the Moslem Albanians, Gypsies, and Turks that they might come into daily contact with. They were considered by both Christians and other Moslems, and thought of themselves, as the establishment, and an integral part of the Empire. The analogy that comes to mind are the WASPs–White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants–of the United States. WASPs are not an ethnic group, though they have all the potential of being one. The objective criteria for an ethnic boundary exist, but it is not recognized. WASPs in the U.S., like Serbo-Croatian speaking Moslems in the Ottoman Empire, are apt to think of themselves as the norm, the standard, which all others deviate from.

The Bosnian Moslems were not, of course, a unified group socially, culturally, or conceptually. One significant distinction to which we have already made reference was between rural and urban components. Even today, a disproportionate percentage of Bosnian Moslems are urbanites and townsmen, as compared with the Serbs and Croats of Bosnia-Hercegovina. Moslem peasants, as much as Christian peasants, perceived the predominantly Moslem townsmen as "a clique which exploited them economically and ruled them politically . . . an opportunistic group of people who had a common response to daily issues and behaved as a class conscious of its own interests" (Vuchinich) [10].

An even more significant distinction was between the land-owning aristocracy, the beys and agas, and the Moslem peasantry, including both the majority of Bosnian free peasants and a much smaller proportion of serfs. In 1878, at the time of the Austrian annexation, there were in Bosnia-Hercegovina from 6000 to 7000 beys and agas in control of some 85,000 serfs. Of the latter, 2000 were Moslem with the remainder either Serbs (60,000) or Croats (23,000). There were also almost 77,000 free peasants, nearly all of whom were Moslem [11]. It is difficult if not impossible to conceive of aristocracy and peasantry as constituting a single, meaningful, social category during the feudal period, regardless of specific context. Social boundaries between aristocrat and peasant were a sharp as between any two ethnic groups. There was little way in which a Moslem peasant could ever become a wealthy landowner in Ottoman society. Each constituted an endogamous group, although the social network for the aristocracy was much more widespread. This reflected a much more dispersed settlement pattern; some beys and agas lived on their own lands in lowland villages, others in the towns, with a gradual shift over time to the latter. The aristocracy also participated in a distinct life style, in their cases much more closely related to the Great Tradition of international Islam than to the highly localized Little Tradition of Moslem peasants. This was true even when inhabiting the same village. But the major boundary between the two groups of Bosnian Moslems was, of course, based on economic status. This was altered somewhat by the expulsion of the Ottomans, but they maintained their privileged position up to World War II. Finally, in the land reform measures enacted after the War, they lost the traditional base of their higher status. It is to be expected that this social differentiation was more pronounced

in the past, when the feudal system still functioned. This is confirmed by oral history. It is less expected, but nevertheless true, that the various distinctions between the two groups hold forth in large degree even in modern Yugoslavia. Even today, there is a high degree of self-consciousness among members of the two groups (except in urban, modernizing contexts where it is beginning to break down). Moslem peasants still refer to the descendants of landowning aristocracy as begovi ("beys"), in contrast to themselves whom they characterize as balije (originally "trans-human herders"). Moslem peasants with whom I have spoken explicitly describe the two as distinct ethnic groups (nacije), each possessing its own distinct God-given attributes. Outside of the urban context, at least, there is still little intermarriage between the two groups. And begovi, especially in the smaller market towns, still tend to maintain a well-to-do life style in the Moslem manner. Although no longer large landowners, their advantageous economic position of the recent past allowed them educational opportunities denied to most of the Moslem peasantry. As a result, today they are frequently professionals–doctors, lawyers, teachers, administrators. Others, less fortunate, have used their better education to acquire jobs such as clerks in local bureaucracies. Social relations between Moslem peasants and descendants of Moslem aristocracy tend to be limited to a very few hierarchically structured patron-client relationships. Some peasants have thus perpetuated a traditional relationship to acquire useful leverage with the outside world through the new social positions taken by these descendants of aristocracy in modern Yugoslavia. What is significant about all this is that the contexts in which Moslem peasants and Moslem aristocracy for their descendants act together as a single social group are relatively few, although gradually increasing since the Ottoman decline and, especially, after World War II. There has been an unfortunate tendency for Western historians to write of the Bosnian Moslem elite as if they were describing all Bosnian Moslems. We must remember that the considerable Bosnian Moslem peasantry represented (and continues to represent, to a large degree), a distinct group with its own special interests often closer to those of the Christian peasantry than to their fellow Moslem elite.

With the development of South Slav nationalism in the 19th century, all Moslems came to represent the overlords–urks and Moslem Slavs, beys and peasants alike. This undoubtedly had the effect of not only emphasizing the boundary between Moslem and Christian, but was also a first step in coalescing the various components of the Slavic Moslem group. After the Austrian annexation, the process of ethnic differentiation quickened. This was a period of heightening ethnic consciousness for the Bosnian Moslems. On the one hand, the circumstances of the Austrian occupation led them to differentiate themselves even further from Bosnian Christians. On the other hand, they also began to think of themselves as a people distinct from the Turks and other Moslems of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. As a Moslem minority in the Austrian colony, they became more clearly set apart as a distinct group. This was probably aided by selective factors as wave after wave of Serbo-Croatian-speaking Moslems immigrated to Turkey. Although evidence is lacking, we can surmise that these emigrants included those Bosnian Moslems most inclined to identify with the Turks, leaving behind those who had reached some accommodation with their new ethnic status.

Ethnic differentiation was also promoted by political developments within the Austrian colony. The Habsburg administration followed their traditional pattern of divide and

rule and took care to stress the religious and ethnic differences within Bosnia-Hercegovina. When a parliament for the province was established, the various religious faiths were represented in direct proportion to their numerical strength in the country. But when the Moslem aristocracy and their urban allies tried to organize a Moslem political party, they were unsuccessful. In part, this was the result of the Austrian policy of not disrupting the Moslem elite. Their old economic status had been perpetuated under the Habsburgs and thus their cause continued to lie with the establishment, even though this was now in new hands. Even more important, Moslem peasants were not yet ready to think of themselves as a single group having unified interests with the old aristocracy, especially in view of the continuing economic differences.

This increase in ideological distinctiveness was paralleled by an increase in cultural differentiation as well. From the Austrian occupation onward, cultural differences between Moslems and the Christians of Bosnia-Hercegovina were accentuated, especially in the cities and towns, as non-Moslems more readily accepted elements of western European culture. At the same time, events in Anatolia–the final collapse of the Empire, Ataturk and his reforms–resulted in increased cultural differences between Bosnian Moslems and the Turks. The veil, for example, was legally worn in Yugoslavia until 1950 and the fez is still seen today on many Bosnian Moslem peasants; both were, of course, prohibited in Turkey in 1922, along with many other culture traits which the Turks traditionally shared with the Bosnians.

Beginning with the establishment of an independent Serbia, and increasing after the Habsburg annexation, there was an intensification of competition of Serbs and Croats over Bosnia-Hercegovina. With Ottoman administration gone, the Bosnian Moslems became pawns in this struggle. Up to World War II, both Beograd and Zagreb claimed national kinship with the Bosnian Moslems, this being only one of many bones of contention between the two groups. Thus, it was that certain Bosnian Moslems, nearly all beys or urban elite who perceived their personal interests as lying with one or the other, would declare themselves Moslem Serbs or Moslem Croats, in effect a religions minority of the respective national group. But the great majority of Moslems, particularly the Moslem peasantry, declined from affiliating themselves with either one; whatever they might once have been, they had evolved over the years into yet another ethnic community. One product of the Serbian-Croatian competition was that when the fascist Ustaši government was formed during World War II, Bosnia-Hercegovina was incorporated into a “Greater Croatia.”

After World War II, the fact that there were large numbers of nationally undecided Serbo-Croatian-speaking Moslems was a major reason that Bosnia-Hercegovina was made a separate republic of Yugoslavia. Although their religions beliefs were tolerated, the Sheriat courts were abolished and Moslem women were by law unveiled. In the earliest censuses after the war, they were given the choice of registering as Serbs, Croats, Yugoslavs, or Undeclared, the official opinion being that they constituted a religious rather than an ethnic minority. It was even anticipated that Bosnia-Hercegovina, with its mixture of three different religious communities all speaking a common language, would provide the earliest development of Yugoslav nationalism. Bosnian Moslems, it was thought, would lead the way. By this time, however, they had come to think of themselves as a distinct people. On the census,

nearly all declared themselves “Undeclared.” The position of the Bosnian Moslems was altered with the gradual shift in Yugoslavia during the 1930s from an official Yugoslav nationalism to the concept of Yugoslavia as a community of nations. In the 1961 census, they were allowed to register as “ethnic Moslems” (Muslimani etnička pripadnost) for the first time, thus conceding that they constituted a separate ethnic category. This status was more formally given them by the Bosnian constitution of 1963 and in 1964, the Fourth Bosnian Party Congress declared explicitly that Moslems had the right of self-determination. Thus, gradually, a Bosnian Moslem nationality was created, or, rather, raised from de facto to de jure status.

Currently, there is something of a nationalist movement taking shape among the Bosnian Moslems. Like past nationalist movements of Eastern Europe and elsewhere, it is almost wholly confined in these early stages to the intelligentsia, in this case mainly from the lower and middle echelons of the Communist Party. The developing middle class of Bosnian Moslems and, especially, the Bosnian Moslem peasantry have so far taken relatively little note. A number of Bosnian Moslem writers [12] have taken upon themselves the task of providing a nationalist ideology. They stress the Bogomil origin of Bosnian Moslems (in order to trace ethnogenesis prior to Islamization), attempt to explain away the fact that the aristocracy was the only politically active Moslem group prior to World War II, and, in general, interpret Bosnian Moslem history so to emphasize vertical divisions based on ethnicity rather than horizontal divisions based on class [13].

Let us now turn to Bosnian Moslem ethnography and some principal features of Bosnian Moslem life in contemporary Yugoslavia [14]. The Moslem peasantry and the Christian peasantry of Bosnia-Hercegovina are much more alike than either is like its counterpart elsewhere, even within the Balkans. The subculture of any given Moslem village in Bosnia is much more like that of the neighboring Croatian or Serbian village than a Moslem village in Turkey or even Albania or Bulgaria. The obvious exception is in religious practice.

Although religious affiliation is the criterion by which the ethnic boundary is fixed, each religious grouping is also set off from one another by a distinct subculture unrelated to its religious activities. When one encounters a peasant on the trail or in the market place, there is no mistaking his affiliation. And he would have it no other way. Although these cultural differences prevail in almost every aspect of life, they tend to be very small in scale. Differences between different ethnic groups in a single locale tend to be closely related variants rather than totally different traits. Yet the differences, small as they may be, are most significant and are greatly appreciated. They prevail especially in the expressive aspects of culture—dialect, dress, music and dance, cuisine, house type and furnishings, the ceremonial calendar, oral literature, and so on. A particularly graphic example is provided by men’s costume in Skoplje Polje, a valley in Western Bosnia with a tri-ethnic population [15]. It is nearly identical for all three groups, differing only in the color of the sash (red for Christians, green for Moslems), the color of a narrow embroidered trim at the cuff of the pants (red for Croats, white for Serbs, and lacking for Moslems), and the style of headgear. Little Tradition (the culture of the village, as contrasted with the Great Tradition or culture

of the elite) is, by its nature, very highly localized. Consequently, in the next valley over, the basic pattern changes and while the same degree of ethnic differentiation continues to exist, the code is liable to change as well. In this particular example, the pants are of a slightly different cut, and it is the Croats (in the absence there of a Serbian population) who trim them in white. We have in effect, then, three separate Little Traditions superimposed on a single region, each a slight variant of the regional culture.

It must be emphasized that many of the cultural differences between the Moslem peasant and the Serbian or Croatian peasant do not result from differential diffusion of Ottoman culture. There is in the Balkans a veneer of Turkish culture that extends across the entire area of Ottoman occupation and even beyond. Turkish influence was greatest in the urban centers where the Turks ensconced themselves and in many aspects of culture, Turkish influence follows a rural-urban dichotomy rather than a Moslem-Christian one. This was subsequently obscured in larger urban centers as it was overlaid by western European influences, but it is still the case today in and near the smaller market towns of Bosnia-Hercegovina. Thus, for example, Turkish-style foods are perhaps most commonly prepared in the homes of urban families descended from aristocracy, but they are also more prevalent on the tables of small town Christians than those of rural Moslems.

Such cultural differences between ethnic communities, no matter how minor or insignificant they may seem, have great importance. Most probably, they result from historical differences of origin and contact. Their persistence, however, is due to the interaction of two characteristics of ethnic groups which were discussed earlier in this paper. The first of these is that they exist within relatively closed communication systems. A primary feature of multi-ethnic societies everywhere is an easier flow of information within each ethnic group than between them. With time this inevitably results in unequal diffusion and cultural differentiation. The second important feature of these cultural differences is their conscious maintenance as markers of significant social categories. They constitute, at one and the same time, focal points of in-group sentiment and criteria of out-group identification. Such differences, then, serve an important function, marking the ethnic boundaries.

To illustrate, let us return to the folk costume of the area. Many peasant Moslem men, especially older ones, still wear the fez. But younger ones, most of whom have switched to modern dress, wear a beret instead. Even though this is purchased in the same shop where the Serbian or Croatian peasant gets his own specific type of cap, neither the Moslem nor the Christian would consider wearing the type thought appropriate for the other. Even with modernization of dress, then, the cultural distinctiveness has been preserved. People want to be identified.

We've been discussing a process of cultural syncretism—the combination and reinterpretation of elements from both Turkish and South Slav sources. Elsewhere [16], we have demonstrated that this same pattern extends also to social organization, the very fabric of Bosnian Moslem society. The argument is worth repeating here, very briefly, because it demonstrates an important point.

The basic unit of Bosnian peasant society, whether Moslem, Serb, or Croat, is the

patrilocally extended family household. Similarly, in all three ethnic groups the links between these households are based on residency and kinship, including patrilineal, affinal and fictive kinship. But the Weight given these various criteria for affiliation varies from one ethnic group to another. Moslem peasants of Bosnia give much less emphasis to patrilineality and to groups based on patrilineal kinship than do either the Croats or, especially, the Serbs. For example, since patrilineal kinship provides a charter for social relations, it is typical for both Croatian and Serbian peasants of Bosnia to be able to recite from ten to fourteen generations of their genealogy. Bosnian Moslems, on the other hand, can almost never provide anything beyond their own grandparents' generation, and are usually very hazy about this. In other words, they are about the same in this respect as modern Americans. Contrary to what one might expect, Bosnian Moslem peasants also give less emphasis to patrilineality than do Turkish peasants. Thus, with regard to emphasis on patrilineal kinship as an organizing principle, they are neither like nor intermediate to the two societies from whom they received cultural influences. The slack seems to be taken up by an increased emphasis on affinal relations, or those formed by marriage.
Fictive kinship (kumstvo), in the form of baptismal and wedding sponsorship is an extremely important form of affiliation among Bosnian Christians. Bosnian Moslems have only one type of fictive kinship of much significance, formed on the basis of sponsoring the first haircut of a male child (šišano kumstvo). This is used almost exclusively to reinforce and formalize one of those rare social relationships with a Christian or a member of the Moslem elite, in other words, to forge ties across major social boundaries. Bosnian Christians do not practice this form of ritual kinship, except with Moslems, and I know of no precedent in the Islamic world.

Christian patrilineal kin groups are strictly exogamous, even more so in practice than is stipulated by either Catholic or Orthodox church regulations. In contrast, Turks and most Moslems outside of the Balkans practice an endogamous pattern with preferred marriage of one's father's brother's daughter. As in other respects, the Bosnian Moslems have evolved their own marriage system, neither one nor the other. Marriage to kinsmen is permitted as long as the relationship cannot be actually traced. In practice, this means that there is no sanction against marriage between second cousins [17].

The point I am trying to make here is that the social organization of the Bosnian Moslems—and by extension, Bosnian Moslem society and culture as a whole—is not Turkish, nor South Slav Christian, not even some intermediate form. Elements from both contributing sources were integrated, in line with the unique history of the Moslems in Bosnia-Hercegovina, to create something new and distinctive.

The cultural differentiation that I have been describing is very pervasive, but it does not extend to the economy of three largest three ethnic groups. This is a highly significant point since it influences the type of interethnic relations that exist in Bosnia-Hercegovina.

Cross-culturally, there are at least two different ways in which multi-ethnic relations can be structured. (Both must be considered as ideal types, since few societies conform wholly to one or the other.) In one case, there is an ethnic division of labor and each ethnic group is strongly identified with a particular occupation or set of

occupations. A system of such ethnic groups with interlocking occupational specializations achieves an organic interrelationship. A mutual interdependence is built up between the members of various ethnic groups. Perhaps the best documented examples of this are in the Near East. The Indian caste system of hierarchically arranged, highly structured, occupational statuses seems to represent a specialized case. Some ethnic groups of the Balkans are so organized, at least on a local basis. For example, in Skoplje Polje (the region of western Bosnia whence most of my field data has been drawn), all blacksmiths are settled Gypsies and all settled Gypsies are assumed to be blacksmiths. The term for blacksmith – kovač—has come to signify the ethnic group with which the occupation is associated. There is a similar association in this area between coppersmithery and Cincars (a romance-speaking minority of the region), and kalajdžija, Serbo-Croatian for coppersmith, is used to denote the ethnic group.

Another possibility is a situation where different ethnic groups compete for the same ecological niche. Such is the usual case with Moslem, Serbian, and Croatian peasants of Bosnia-Hercegovina. In contrast with most other aspects of culture, peasants of all three religious groups practice almost identical economy. All tend to gain their subsistence in the same manner, from the same plants and animals, using the same tools and techniques. Differences that exist are regional rather than ethnic. The primary, if not the only, exception is the absence of pigs from the Moslem complex. Otherwise there is a greater degree of contrast in economy between highland Moslem peasants and lowland Moslem peasants than between highland Moslem peasants and highland Serbian or Croatian peasants. It is a matter of simple ecology. Settlement pattern in Bosnia-Hercegovina is thoroughly mixed; Moslem villages are interspersed among Serbian and/or Croatian villages, with a lesser number of villages having an ethnically mixed population. This means that members of different ethnic groups are in direct competition for the same scarce resources. At the same time, mutually beneficial contact tends to be limited. In a given locale, each village tends to produce the same surpluses and have the same needs. Non-commercialized exchange systems are made up almost exclusively from members of the same ethnic group in different ecological zones. Interaction between ethnic groups is conducted in a relatively small number of contexts—the weekly market, and such overarching institutions as the army and schools. Because each ethnic group is a relatively closed social system, there is almost never any need to interact with peasants of another ethnic group, even though their village is directly adjacent. As a result, each ethnic group tends to be an even more closed social system and opportunities for communication or interaction between them are even more strictly limited than in a multiethnic society where an economic interdependence is the case.

Bosnian Moslem ethnicity, developed gradually over a several-hundred-year-long period, will persist for the indefinite future. The structural relationships based on ecological factors are but one reason that three separate cultural traditions have endured so well, even though they are superimposed on the same geographical region. Cultural differentiation will lessen with continuing modernization in contemporary Yugoslavia. Gradually, a feeling of Yugoslavness will replace ethnic identification in certain contexts, as when thrown together with migrant workers from other regions of Yugoslavia in the factories of Western Europe. Even so, the Bosnian Moslems will continue to exist as a distinct ethnic group. There may well be, in fact, a resurgence of

ethnic consciousness as presaged by recent nationalist developments among the elite.

Published with the permission of the author. © 2009 W. G. Lockwood

From Ascher, Abraham, Tibor Halasi-Kun, and Bela K. Kiraly, eds. The Mutual Effects of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian Worlds: The East European Case. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn College Press, Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1979, 209-225.

Notes

1. Francis Dvornik, The Slavs in European History and Civilization (New Brunswick, 1962), p. 236; Aleksandar Solovjev, "Nestanak Bogumilstva: Islamizatija Bosne" [The Disappearance of Bogomilism and the Islamization of Bosnia], Godisnjak Istoriskog Drustva Bosne i Hercegovine, no. 1 (1949); L. S. Stavrianos, The Balkans Since 1453 (New York, 1961), pp. 62-63. ↩
2. John V. A. Fine, Jr., The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation (Boulder, 1975). ↩
3. Ibid, p. 886. ↩
4. For examples, see Sylvia L. Thrupp (ed.), Millennial Dreams in Action (The Hague, 1962), especially the chapter by Jean Guiart, "The millenarian aspect of conversion to Christianity in the South Pacific," pp. 122-88. ↩
5. Vladimir Dedijer, Ivan Bozic, Sima Cirkovic and Milorad Ekmecic, History of Yugoslavia (New York, 1974), p. 181. ↩
6. See, for example, Raoul Narroll, as summarized by Fredrik Barth (ed.), Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (Boston, 1969), pp. 10-11. ↩
7. Robert A. Levine and Donald T. Campbell, Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes and Group Behavior (New York, 1972). ↩
8. See especially Barth, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. ↩
9. Stavrianos, The Balkans Since 1453, p. 89. ↩
10. Wayne Vucinich, "'Some Aspects of the Ottoman Legacy," in Charles and Barbara Jelavich (eds.), The Balkans in Transition (Berkeley, 1963). ↩
11. Milan Ivsic, Les problemes agraires en Yougoslavie (Paris, 1929). For a general resume of the land-tenure system in Bosnia-Hercegovina during the Ottoman period, see Jozo Tomasevich, Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia (Stanford, 1955), pp. 98-107, or, for a more detailed account, Branislav Djurdjev Bogo, Grafenauer, and Jorjo Tadic, Historija naroda Jugoslavije [History of the People of Yugoslavia] (Zagreb, 1959) Vol. 2, pp. 116-20, 130-39, 583-87. ↩
12. Most notably Enver Redzic, PriIozi o nacionalnom pitanju [Contributions on the National Question] (Sarajevo, 1963) and Tokovi i otpori [Developments and Resistance] (Sarajevo, 1970); Salim Ceric, Muslimani Srpskohrvatskog jezika [Serbo-Croatian Speaking Moslems] (Sarajevo, 1968); Atif Purivatra, Nacionalni i Politicki razvitak MusIimana [National and Political Development of Moslems] (Sarajevo, 1972); Muhamed Hadzijahic, Od tradicije do identiteta: geneza nacionalnog pitanja bosanskih Muslimana [From Tradition to Identification: The Genesis of the Bosnian Moslem National Question] (Sarajevo, 1974). ↩
13. I am grateful to Robert Donia for his helpful observations on Bosnian Moslem ethnicity, particularly Bosnian Moslem nationalism. His forthcoming doctoral dissertation, The Politics of Factionalism: The Bosnian Moslems, 1878-1910

(Department of History, University of Michigan), will shed more light on the subject. ↩

14. This has been described in more detail in William G. Lockwood, “Converts and consanguinity: the social organization of Moslem Slavs in Western Bosnia” Ethnology 11 (1972.), pp. 55-79; “The peasant-worker in Yugoslavia,” Studies in European Society 1 (1973), pp. 91-110. “Bride theft and social maneuverability in western Bosnia,” Anthropological Quarterly, 47 (1974), pp. 253-269; “Social status and cultural change in a Bosnian Moslem village,” East European Quarterly 9 (1975), pp. 123-134; European Moslems: Economy and Ethnicity in Western Bosnia (New York, 1975). ↩
15. Lockwood, European Moslems: Economy and Ethnicity in Western Bosnia, pp. 49-50. ↩
16. Lockwood, “Converts and consanguinity: the social organization of Moslem Slavs in western Bosnia,” Ethnology 11 (1972), pp. 55-79. ↩
17. Cf. Milenko S. Filipovic, “Brak izmedju prvih rodjaka (bint amm) kod srpskohrvatskih Muslimana” [First cousin marriage among Serbo-Croatian speaking Moslems]. Sociologija 2 (1960), pp. 55-66. ↩

The preceding text is copyright of the author and/or translator and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.