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### RELIGIOUS MIXED MARRIAGES IN KOSOVO

**Abstract:** The paper deals with an interesting social phenomenon, which is at the same time a sensitive issue and refers to marriages between Albanians of different faiths: Christian Catholics and Muslims. During the elaboration of the topic, materials were collected through field research conducted in several villages and towns in Kosovo. The text aims to offer a specific approach to mixed marriages, especially when it comes to two different religions, and to see the general norms that arise from a religious point of view.

The current research on mixed religious marriages in Kosovo recognizes the period after the Second World War as the period when most religious mixed marriages took place and marriages between members of different nationalities. In Kosovo, in the socialistic period when it was part of SFR Yugoslavia, intercultural, economic, and social communication developed between the various groups living in the area. It was a period of a severe general crisis, a period when the vast migration from village to city began, mainly due to economic reasons and the need for labor, which, in addition to employment, created conditions for more significant social emancipation and modernization of society, which contributed people to meet, mingle and enter into mixed marriages.

**Keywords:** marriage, mixed marriages, religion, Catholics, Muslims, families.

#### Interfaith marriages in Kosovo

Kosovo's multiethnic and multireligious structure, no matter how symbolic is its meaning created opportunities for marriages of members of the same nation, but with different religious affiliations or marriages among the members of different nations but same religion.

Historical circumstances have allowed several ethnic communities to live in Kosovo: Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Jews, Roma, and others. These communities, from a historical perspective, have realized mutual coexistence, sometimes more, sometimes less. Most often, the communities' social norms influenced relations to one of the most strongly controlled spheres of family life - marriage. Interfaith marriages were often done secretly, aiming not to be the subject of public debate or condemnation. Ethnologist Mark Tirta regarding interfaith marriages, says: "There have been attempts for some changes into marriages' rules in the past. There have been cases of love marriage, marriage between members of different religions. However, these were only attempts, because the social circumstances and time were against them like religion, patriarchal laws, and morals, and the social mentality created in such circumstances "(Tirta 2003: 273-274).

There were times when the social phenomenon of religiously mixed marriages in Kosovo was more pronounced. In the period after World War II, there were some mixed inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages. Mixed marriages mostly took place between an Albanian man and a Bosnian woman and less often between Albanians and Serbian women. Thus, this kind of marriage was rarely desired, and the girl herself chose without the family's consent, which resulted in "her expulsion from the family." Marriages between Albanian, Serbian, or Montenegrin communities were not accepted and were not so frequent.

In most cases, the woman formally converted into her husband's religion and ethnicity. Such marriages have reflected the heirs in many aspects of life and behavior in social settings. Mixed marriages between Albanians belonging to both religions, Christianity and Islam, are especially interesting. Speaking about marriages between members of both religions, it has been concluded that there is an increasing trend compared to the past, especially among individuals living in Western European countries. Also, the number of mixed marriages is growing day by day in Kosovo and other regions where Albanians live. We believe that since the society in Kosovo is part of the global processes of globalization, this phenomenon will be propagated widely. This process indicates that Kosovo nation is becoming more open to accepting mixed marriages. Such marriages are justified because they are entered into between members of the same ethnic community with different religious affiliations. Religious tolerance contributes to the understanding of Albanians' ethnic and national identity and "puts aside religious issues and focuses mainly on the ethnocultural and linguistic characteristics of the Albanians" (Sokolli 1997: 7).

### **Marriage according to the Islamic faith in Kosovo society**

Marriage, especially religious marriage, is considered one of the man's most serious life decisions, and therefore its realization should not be allowed without a well-arranged plan. Every aspect of an Islamic life is determined by the Qur'an and the recommendations of the prophets. In Islamic society, marriage is not a sacrament, a sacred secret, as it is in Christianity. A religious representative who is supposed to formalize the marriage does not have to be present when concluding an Islamic marriage. According to the Islamic faith, engagement precedes marriage in order for the spouses to get to know each other. They then marry in front of the witnesses, preferably the parents or tutors and the two witnesses, whose presence is mandatory at the marriage; the marriage ceremony can occur in a mosque or elsewhere. The wedding ceremony takes place later. So, in Islam, priests are not a mandatory part of the marriage rite, and the notion of the sanctity of marriage does not exist. As a result, the faith has determined the generally accepted procedures for the wedding ceremony (Faruki 2007: 132).

Marriage is preferred in Islam since it is considered to be a tradition of the prophets, and the praises and messages contained in the Qur'an and other holy books convey many messages that do not prefer celibacy but encourage marriage. The Islamic religion attaches particular importance to marriage as a tough decision of a person's life. The Prophet Muhammad once said that "marriage is half faith." The woman's important

role in the performance of marital responsibilities, raising the children, their education is highly emphasized. Therefore, the life partner and the educator of the children should be carefully chosen, alluding to the wife. This indicates that the choice of the spouse, more precisely the wife, is based on different criteria. Some make particular demands in advance, looking at their physiognomy, prestige, and background. However, according to religious ideologies, the Prophet Muhammad, in his messages, says that faith should always be taken into account when choosing a life partner.

*A woman marries in the name of four things: her wealth, her social status, her beauty, and her faith. So, choose a religious woman, and then you do not get lost!*

According to the Islamic religion, the choice of a wife should first be based on religion, and only then is the attention paid to other characteristics, such as wealth, beauty, prestige, and economic stability. All these values are considered the excellent marriage value, which corresponds to the folk proverb “the peak of good.” So, this is an ordinary people, spiritual leaders and, even prophets’ common practice. In this regard, verses and hadiths say that when a Muslim marries, he perfects half of his faith. The Prophet Muhammad says, “Marriage is half of the faith.” At the same time, various Muslim scholars consider marriage to be a significant issue, and many books have been written about it. Muslim jurists, who interpret the Qur’an, say that marriage is a religious obligation, both as a defense of morality and as a social obligation. For religiously mixed marriages, specifically for the marriage of a Muslim to a Christian, it is said:

*The term mixed marriage means marriage between a man and a woman belonging to different religions or ideologies. For example, under Islamic law, a Muslim woman is allowed to marry only a man belonging to the Islamic faith, while Muslim men are allowed to marry other women of other faiths, Christian or Jewish. Islamic jurists base this legal fact on mixed marriages on the provisions of the primary source, the Qur’an, and the secondary source, the Hadith. In addition, Islam and Muslims recognize the Christian and Jewish faiths as divine religions revealed by God and the prophets Moses and Jesus, sent by God in their mission of religious proclamation<sup>2</sup>.*

I have conducted this type of marriage interview with several interlocutors. In the following statement, a mixed marriage is discussed:

*For Christians (I am talking about my wife), marriage is sacred; they believe it is a gift from heaven. It is considered a symbol, a contract, a sacred institution, and a connection of rage. Our Islamic faith is considered a blessed relationship between a man and a woman, where the couple will have love,*

<sup>1</sup> Sahihul Buhari, (Hadithet e papërsëritur), Përmbledhje e fjalës dhe veprës se Muhammedit a.s, <http://buhariu.com/buhariu/?h=1835>, accessed on: 15.11.2020.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mediaelire.net/lajm/1038/martesa-sipas-drejtjes-islame/> пристапено на: 22.10.2019.

*mutual understanding, and tolerance. In both cases, more or less to eternity, in my opinion. I support marriages between the Catholic and Muslim faiths, and when I support them, my family will not have any opposition. Maybe society and the environment had opposing attitudes, but we have a good time, then all the opinions of others fall into the water. So, there is no need to convert into the partner's faith. Marriage works without going too far into the religious aspects. We are free in our religious beliefs. As a husband, I have neither proposed to her nor pressured my wife to convert to Islam, nor do I think I will ever influence her. She is free to practice all religious rituals, and I will not become an obstacle because I knew from the beginning that she belonged to another religion. I need to have a good time together.*

*Moreover, I do not practice many religious rituals, mostly the holidays. The holidays are reunions, dinners, visits to loved ones, especially the love of the wife, her loved ones, family visits; so, the religious holidays are important to us, with a lovely atmosphere. I do not think that interfaith marriages end with divorce. It seems to me that the love I have for my wife is even more robust, especially because she has another religious affiliation, it is a fantastic feeling. Loving someone to death is the greatest blessing God can give you, even though it belongs to another religious belief, this is my specific thinking<sup>3</sup>.*

The Islamic faith encourages and recommends marriage. The Qur'an and the Sunnah consider marriage in various forms, as an argument for the existence of God, as a tradition of the prophets. Marriage is also seen as a family peace and a legitimate institution to leave offspring.

The marriage of a Muslim woman to a man of another faith is forbidden due to the rituals and traditions of these religions. This is how Faik Miftari poses the problem:

*In this marriage, it is considered that a Muslim woman can risk her faith in this way. However, Muslims also have some specific religious rules, e.g., the rule of gusla (washing), ablution, taharet (purification), prohibition on the consumption of certain food products, pork, and lard, prohibition on the consumption of certain beverages, beer, alcohol, and wine. From this point of view, a Muslim woman in a mixed marriage will face other difficulties, such as educating the children, where the man will want to educate the children according to his religious affiliation, which is his logical and natural right. In contrast, the Muslim woman, to one or in another way, if not directly, then she will indirectly pass on her religious beliefs to her children, which will naturally create problems in the marriage<sup>4</sup>.*

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Isufi, 50, from Bujanovce. The interview was conducted in Pristina, May 2019.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mediaelire.net/lajm/1038/martesa-sipas-drejtës-islame/>. accessed on: 22.10.2019.

## Marriages according to the Christian Catholic religion

The crown of marriage, or the mystery of marriage, is one of the seven mysteries for Christian Catholics; The marriage has great and vital significance, which theological-ly is explained as love between Jesus Christ and the Church. "This secret is great. But I speak unto you of Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32), as love, fidelity, and mutual giving. This marriage is not the only natural, like all, or like most, but it becomes a call to know, accept, and fulfill God's plan in the Christian life, not only as a person but also in married and family life. A Catholic marriage, then, acknowledges that love has its source in God, in His presence and influence, without which man strives in vain but does not attain it.

The Catholic Church distinguishes marriages between members of the Catholic faith and those belonging to other Christian denominations (Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican) and members of other non-Christian religions (Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist). Church law also gives the possibility of marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. All of these marital relationships are different from each other, although they have common elements. When discussing mixed marriages, we can say that the church allows such marriages under certain conditions. These conditions are acceptance of the principles of marriage, such as monogamy, exclusivity, indivisibility, and unity of marriage; acceptance of children in marriage and the promise of a spouse of another religion that the children will be educated according to Catholic doctrine.

Regarding the position of the Catholic Church on mixed interfaith marriages, it should be emphasized that there are Catholic churches and Catholic priests in Kosovo who have a more tolerant attitude. Foreign missionaries (priests) tried to persuade Catholics not to marry Muslims. However, local Albanian priests, who knew that there were mixed families with Muslim and Catholic religions, tried to give legitimacy to mixed marriages (Krasniqi 2007: 59).

The Catholic Church pays special attention to mixed marriages between Catholics and Muslims, given the assumptions that such marriages result in many difficulties due to different traditions, religious laws, mentality, and Islamic rules regarding the roles of wife and husband as spouses within of the family. However, even though these laws and religious rights are strict and should be respected, our interlocutor, a Christian Catholic who is married to a Muslim man, says about the functioning of their marriage:

*I can say at the outset that mixed marriages work if the spouses show or demonstrate mutual respect for the husband or wife's religious beliefs, both before and during the marriage. Only in this way can the final decision to get married be reached. I am a Christian, and I am married to a Muslim man. Our marriage works wonderfully; there is an intense love between us that makes it perfect. It projects our life. I fully support marriages between Catholics and Muslims, but I do not support marriages of the same faith and different nationalities; that is unacceptable. I have the family's full support; although the reactions in the society may not have been positive, the support of the family was significant. At the same time, I do not think that a person must convert to another religion to get married.*

*On the contrary, we are pleased with the religious tradition we have; we rejoice when we celebrate all the celebrations that are part of our religions. My husband nor I have mentioned conversion during our relationship. We are not so obsessed with converting to the faith of another. We are free. Today, there is tolerance and coexistence between religious communities, which is reflected in the close family. I mentioned the family's reaction in the previous question. There is great respect among our families. In general, I think that the reflection of mixed marriages is positive and reflects the positive approach to tradition<sup>5</sup>.*

Regarding the rituals, giving a name to a child has a special meaning, while other religious aspects, I expect, the children to express when they grow up. For example, to choose or not which religion they will belong to. There should be no problems. This is when both parents are Albanian, but it is another thing when one of the parents is a religious extremist, then problems occur. Rituals, as well as performing rituals, I expect that children will express when they grow up. I practice the rituals and holidays of both religions, but I am more inclined to my own rituals (ha-ha-ha). The husband is less devoted to religious holidays but celebrates them with special care. I disagree that such marriages fail and end in separation.

## MIXED RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES IN KOSOVO

### Attitudes towards mixed marriages in Kosovo

In addition to the tradition and religious norms associated with marriage, the views and opinions of young people about marriage are also fundamental. However, whereas in the past these views and opinions of young people themselves about marriage were influenced by social circles, i.e., family and social institutions such as kinship or religion, today, in the era of globalization and the massive influence of modern media, young people are influenced by other factors that can be classified as elements of global culture.

From a survey of young people in Kosovo, we understand that “the vast majority of young people interviewed (89%) imagine themselves in a happy marriage with their family in the future. Only 7% see themselves living informally with a partner, and 2% prefer to be free and without family or partner responsibilities in the future. “The percentage of those who want to have a family in the future is even higher among young people aged 23 to 27 and is 92%.” Habitat and gender have no bearing on projections of the marital status of Kosovo youth. According to the majority of young people who have declared marriage (56%), the main advantage of marriage over informal cohabitation is that marriage “increases the responsibility of spouses towards each other.” Another 17% of this group believe that marriage increases “the spouses’ responsibility in raising children,” and another

<sup>5</sup> L. Sedaj, 45, from Pristina. The interview was conducted in Pristina, May 2019.

er group of 19% believe that marriage takes precedence over informal living in the eyes of Kosovo society. Perceptions of the main priority of marriage do not differ according to a place of residence or gender. Young people in Kosovo generally believe that both men and women should get married at a young age. The most appropriate age for marriage, according to Kosovo youth, is 24 years for women and 26 years for men. What is surprising is that, according to young women, the appropriate age for marriage is slightly higher than what young men consider appropriate. Girls believe that the most appropriate age for marriage for women is 24 years (as opposed to 23 years as expressed by men), while for the opposite sex, it is 27 years (as opposed to 26 years for men).

## CURRENT SITUATION AND PERSPECTIVES OF INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES IN KOSOVO

The family institution, like most other social institutions, is undergoing profound changes. These changes are mainly due to the effects of the globalization process. Rapid technological development, increasing opportunities for communication, and short-distance travel leave deep impressions on the family and the family organization. One of the main factors currently affecting family life is a large number of employed married women. Even in Kosovo, the family institution is undergoing profound changes, either due to the impact of globalization processes or due to the transition phase that the Kosovo family is going through. These changes are also noticeable when it comes to the issue of interfaith and interethnic marriages in Kosovo.

Globally, the family institution is undergoing several processes of change. Among the most important is the reduction of the influence of gender and kinship family communities, there is a tendency towards the free choice of husband, women's rights are increasingly recognized, higher levels of sexual freedom are developed, and more children's rights are recognized.

Currently, the phenomenon of interfaith marriage is not very pronounced in Kosovo society. However, it should be borne in mind that most Kosovars are not very committed to their religion. The vast majority of Kosovars in the first place consider themselves members of the Albanian nation and less so members of a particular religion. So, the connection of Kosovars with the nation is much stronger than the connection with the religion to which they belong. Therefore, in the case of mixed interfaith marriages, it can be said that the different religious affiliation of the spouses is not expected to be a significant problem because religious affiliation is not the essential part of their identity. Both men and women consider themselves Albanians in the first place. Even the wedding ceremonies and rituals that accompany them are predominantly family and traditional, and non-religious. It is not common in Kosovo for weddings to be religious ceremonies. They are usually performed in the family or social settings, such as various hotel rooms, etc.

Regarding interethnic marriages, it can be said that this social phenomenon is sporadic in Kosovo. Interethnic marriages were more common in the former Yugoslavia. Those marriages were mainly Albanian marriages with women of other ethnicities, such as Bosnians, Serbs, or Croats living in the same country. Cases of Albanian women mar-

rying men of other nationalities were much rarer. This is due to the powerful traditional and religious norms that prohibited and prevented the marriage of Albanian women with men of other nationalities. Later, Albanians from Kosovo married women of other nationalities and religions, but these marriages took place mainly in Western Europe and were made to pursue various material interests. Most of these marriages ended in divorce.

There are almost no interethnic marriages in Kosovo today, although the minority communities in Kosovo are pretty well integrated into political and social life. There are also no significant conflicts between individuals from the Albanian community and those from other communities, but it can be considered that interethnic marriages do not exist in Kosovo. However, an interesting phenomenon has begun to emerge in recent years. It is the marriage of young women from northern Albania to Serbs, mostly older bachelors from Serb villages, mainly Serb villages located near Kamenica and Gjilan in Kosovo. The phenomenon began earlier when young women from northern Albania married Serbs in southern Serbia and the villages of Montenegro. These women are considered to come mainly from low-income families who lived in challenging economic conditions. It is believed that these marriages take place with the approval of the male relatives of these girls, who receive material compensation from the Serbian grooms to give consent for these marriages.

## Conclusion

The phenomenon of interfaith marriage in Kosovo has been known for a long time. However, it has not been expressed on a large scale, seldom in history. Nevertheless, there have been times when this social phenomenon of interfaith marriage in Kosovo has been more pronounced. One such period was after World War II, when some interethnic and interfaith marriages were observed. These marriages were mainly between Albanians and Bosnians and less frequently between Albanians and Serb or Macedonian women.

Regarding the phenomenon of interfaith marriages in Kosovo, it can be concluded that this phenomenon is not very widespread. The two religions, predominantly Kosovar, Muslim and Christian Catholic, have their own rules on marriage. The Muslim religion allows a Muslim man to marry a non-Muslim woman if she belongs to one of the monotheistic religions but does not allow a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man. The Christian Catholic religion does not prefer mixed interfaith marriage, but at the same time, it does not forbid such a thing. It is recommended to avoid these marriages because of the difficulties and problems that may arise later in married and family life. Although the Church may accept them, interfaith marriages do not belong to the canon law, so if they do not follow the rules of the church, this type of marriage is not considered a church secret. The surveyed citizens expressed their views and opinions regarding the phenomenon of interfaith marriage in Kosovo. Most of the respondents are open to the idea that one of their family members can marry someone from another religion.

Regarding the respondents' attitudes towards this issue, there is no significant difference when compared with the variables such as religion, gender, age, or education of the respondents. However, respondents in the age group of 25 to 35 years are more

against the idea of one of the family members marrying a member of another religion than other age groups, which are more open to this idea. Most respondents believe that cases of mixed interfaith marriages can affect the preservation and cultivation of religious tolerance.

When it comes to relationships between different generations in the family in mixed marriages, it is considered that they can become a source of many problems and difficulties. Generational conflict is expressed in all families. However, in cases where the parents belong to different religious denominations, then additional problems may arise between them and the children due to disagreements regarding the naming, education, upbringing, and connection with the religious norms and institutions.

Mixed interfaith marriages affect not only marriage but also the immediate and extended family circle. The effects of mixed marriages are palpable and even more noticeable in their children. Almost half of the respondents think that mixed marriages do not have any particular impact on the relationship between a woman's family and a man's family. However, approximately one-third of the respondents express their opinion that mixed interfaith marriages can significantly influence the preservation and development of the tradition of religious tolerance, for which Albanians are known in the world. Approximately another third of respondents believe that these marriages can contribute to the maintenance and development of religious tolerance.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that interfaith marriage is not very widespread in Kosovo. Citizens show a certain amount of openness to these marriages and do not expect them to cause significant problems in the couple's life and their close family circle. In the case of mixed interfaith marriages, it can be said that the different religious affiliation of the spouses is not expected to pose a significant problem as religious affiliation is not considered to be the most crucial part of the Albanian identity.

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