

everything nicely, and not like this with their house being subject of disgrace and shame. The guests most frequently argue youth and foolishness of boy and girl, explaining the host that they were also unaware of the plans of the youth and of what would happen. Furthermore, they ask the host what is wrong with their boy since he is refusing reconciliation so vigorously. During this conversation in the yard, each party points out its qualities and defends its actions and positions. The boy's family offers the host brandy brought for the occasion which he keeps refusing until the moment of reconciliation. After a longer or shorter conversation in the yard, the host invites them to the house telling them: "Well, since you came, do enter, there is room," showing them his status and position in that way. From the moment of entry into the house, it is considered that the families have reconciled and brandy is exchanged, accompanied by persuasion as to who will drink first and how much of the other's brandy. When they drink from one another, the girl's and the boy's father kiss each other and start calling each other in-laws. After that, the hostess brings coffee and food for the guests.

Now, in a friendly atmosphere, starts the second part of reconciliation related to discussions about the wedding. Future in-laws set the date of the wedding and number of guests.

Groom's father is the one to organize the wedding in his house and to decide about the number of bride's guests to attend the event. The discussion also concerns the obligations of bride's family. What she would bring as a dowry, what goods she should prepare and what presents should be given to guests.

Most frequently, the bride would bring some cattle, a field or a forest as a dowry. The goods that are being prepared from the childhood are considered the things necessary to future newly-weds for initiation of their new life and these are most often towels and linen. It was important also to give presents to wedding guests, therefore decorative towels were ordered for the occasion. Important guests had to be decorated with two of *prekršnjak* (embroidered towels reaching the floor placed over shoulders and crossed and tied on the waist), and other guests with one shorter and simpler towel. In case of failure to agree on details of the wedding, they would meet a few more times until agreement was reached, which was not very often. This act would complete the reconciliation and honor of both families would be restored, and the newly-weds could start their new life together in happiness and joy.

Irena Medar-Tanjga

9<sup>th</sup> KOZARA ETHNO



## *Reconciliation (Miridba)*

5-8<sup>th</sup> July 2013

Piskavica

## Reconciliation

In olden times, boys and girls came to be married in different ways. Regarding boys, the marriage would, most often, first be mentioned by his parents advising him to look at a certain girl. In most cases, the boy would succumb to his parents' influence, which would be followed by glancing, match-making, and proposal. Sometimes it was the other way around, i.e. the boy would talk to the parents and tell them that he would like to get married and which girl he liked. If the parents approved of his choice, proposal would follow, as well as wedding.

However, Serbian tradition knows also other forms of concluding marriage. Sometimes the girls would be abducted, i.e. the boy would take her away by force. The abducting can be real, if parents do not approve of their children's marriage or if a girl is promised to another boy, and in that case the interested boy abducts her either from her maiden's home or even from the wedding feast. There is also the apparent abduction, when the girl is taken away in agreement, in order to avoid wedding costs.

Abduction of a girl is accompanied by the custom of **miridba** (reconciliation), during which the parents and close families of the boy and the girl meet for the first time after the unfortunate event in order to find a solution for the new situation, which is not pleasant for any of the present. The custom of reconciliation was exercised also in cases when the girl would run away to the boy's house voluntarily, without the knowledge of her parents. The girls were getting married covertly for a myriad of

reasons: because her parents would not let her marry at that moment, considering her to be too young, because the parents did not like the boy she chose or they had agreed her marriage with another. This phenomenon is called stealing of girl in Potkozarje villages. In this case, the girl who only takes essential things with her is stolen at dusk, frequently with the assistance by someone from her family (sister, cousin, sister-in-law, or sometimes even her mother).

Sometimes, several months would pass between stealing of a girl and reconciliation, although efforts were being made for the custom to be completed as soon as possible in order to enable both families to return to their normal lives as soon as possible, since pending reconciliation families of the boy and the girl were avoiding each other. They never attended the same event in the village, and accidental encounters might end in a fight.

The boy's family was the one to initiate the reconciliation, since they wanted to rectify the injustice their family brought on to the girl's family (the same applied also in cases when the girl would voluntarily run away to the boy's house). They would choose the most suitable person to act as a contact with the girl's family. That person, called a **missionary** had to be someone of confidence, with good relations with future in-laws, articulate and capable to defend the interests of the boy's family and to present them to the future in-laws in best possible light.

It was irrelevant whether the missionary is a woman or a man, as long as it is the best selection for the achievement of the goal.

After selection, the missionary seeks most suitable person in girl's family to start negotiations on reconciliation. He or she goes to their house in order to set the first encounter between the families as soon as possible. He or she explains that their daughter left for a good house, that she is fine there, that she is treated well, and if that does not work he or she says that the damage has already been done and that it would be best to accept the situation as soon as possible, because a girl once abducted and returned to her home would not be taken for a wife by anyone else, so if they do not reconcile, the damage will be even greater. Such persuasion, in most cases, would result in a positive turn in negotiations and the girl's family would agree to meet the groom's and to talk about potential reconciliation. Then the missionary would set the timing for the families to meet and the number of groom's family members to attend the event.

On the set day, the boy's family would come to the girl's for reconciliation. In addition to the missionary, the company comprises: boy's father, mother, kum (witness), stari svat (second witness), djever (groomsman), uncles,... No girl ever joins this predominantly male company. The "undesired" guests are welcomed by the host in front of the house, where conversation starts about the reasons for their coming. The host rebukes them telling them that such a situation was not called for, that they could have agreed