

### Review: Managing ambiguity: how clientelism, citizenship, and power shape personhood in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Book Review:

## Managing Ambiguity: How Clientelism, Citizenship, and Power Shape Personhood in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Muhammad Azizuddin\*

*Managing Ambiguity: How Clientelism, Citizenship, and Power Shape Personhood in Bosnia and Herzegovina* by Brkovic Čarna, 2017, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has witnessed a growing trend of social anthropology worldwide, especially in Europe. Accordingly, a variety of work is being undertaken both in academia and research. This book is a product of the Association with the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) Series, which intends to present the best of the work produced by members of the organisation, both in monographs and in edited collections. The studies in this series describe societies, processes, and institutions around the world and are intended for both scholarly and student readership.

This volume includes qualitative academic writings on managing ambiguity with public service and delivery, based on personal observation and memoirs from a specific country case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a timely initiative and the outcome of an academic study related to ethnographic imagination and practice in a conceptual as well as an ethnographic and physical sense. It centres broadly around 'clientelism', a term under which many different practices are placed together, and the concepts of personhood, citizenship and power. These concepts were specified further and embedded with personhood, ethical citizenship, and power and ambiguity. They have been applied in practice and discussed in the intricacies of state, society and community with a real-life scenario in Bosnia and Herzegovina for local welfare system of *veze* and *stele* for social protection.

Why do people turn to personal connections to get things done? Exploring the role of favours in social welfare systems in post-war, post-socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina, this volume provides a new theoretical angle on links between ambiguity and power. It demonstrates that favours were neither an instrumental tactic of survival, nor a way to reproduce oneself as a moral person. Instead, favours enabled the insertion of personal compassion into the heart of the organisation of welfare. The volume follows how neoliberal insistence on local community, flexibility, and self-responsibility was translated into clientelist modes of relating and back, and how this fostered a specific mode of power. It suggests that clientelism and contemporary globalised forms of flexible governance do not contradict one another but are often mutually constructive.

The author clearly presents a scenery of clientelism and narrates it with the real-life context of Bosnia and Herzegovina for welfare support with theoretical configuration and practical insights. Managing ambiguity is a useful metaphor for conveying that some people can do something with the ambiguity of social protection as both a gift and as a right. A range of issues came to the discussion: locating, knowing by sight and the ethnography of creating knowledge about others; favours reproduce social personhood; neoliberalism reconfigurations of social protection of local community and ethical citizenship; pursuing favours within a local community; managing ambiguity in social protection; the moveopticon of navigating ambiguity; morality, interest and sociality in the global post-colonialist condition.

The volume comprises three parts entitled Personhood, Citizenship and Power, with two chapters in each part. Each chapter has a strong beginning and ends with a constructive summary.

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Throughout, the text is interspersed with detailed evidence from primary and secondary sources. A bibliography and, finally, detailed indexes are provided at the end of the book to substantiate the research sources.

The first section has a comprehensive introduction detailing the pathological relationality of clientelism and theoretical perspectives on favour and practical field research, with a constructive conclusion in the final section that summarises the study with morality, interest, sociality in the global postcolonial conditions and recommendations for future research. In chapter one, the author argues that personhood was in practice derived from connections and relations to other people. The second chapter narrates social welfare with a metaphoric link in Bosnia and Herzegovina and takes something from systemic and moral arguments, to make sense of the gap between people's dissatisfaction with favours and their persistent pursuit of favours. He suggests that *veze* and *stele* persist in the country because they shape people's social personhood and in so doing, these have implications for the reproduction of power. The significance of *veze* and *stele* in the country sheds some light on how global changes in state-citizen relations have been undertaken and to what effect. Chapters three, four, and six concentrate on the system and people who needed welfare support, with little choice but to navigate their way through their changing social worlds, hoping to stumble upon the right person to help them. Chapter five explores the practices of persons who were able to manage ambiguity, rather than just navigate it – they were able to intensify, reduce, or resolve it in a particular direction. As the author argues, ambiguity was neither a quality of social relations that potentially illuminates alternatives to the modernist organisation of the world, nor was it an unforeseen by-product of translating welfare policies in an unstable country. Ambiguity was the product of neoliberal restructurings of welfare that could be actively managed, while its management was inextricably linked with the reproduction of power.

The book has mirrored the dynamics of how clientelism, citizenship, and power shape personhood in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whilst retaining clarity and simplicity. It has a paramount importance in the fields of politics, administration and society. The book is aesthetically pleasing and well-presented. The availability of print and electronic versions makes it easier for general, scholarly and student readership.

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