

## Short response No. 7

### Culture sets couples up to fail

#### References:

Kilborn, Peter T. (2004). An All-American Town, A Sky-High Divorce Rate. *The New York Times*, 2 May 2 2004 ((Internet source))

Malinowski, B. (1978). *The ethnography of Malinowski: the Trobriand Islands 1915-18*. London: Routledge.

I wish I knew Ellen Brown from Roanoke, the divorced mother of three who was in 2004 at 52 and could tell her: Ellen, you are right. Culture sets couples up to fail. But what to do?

As a cultural anthropologist, the words of Ellen make me feel physically the painful everydayness that so many have been going through being divorced. Even the word divorce has the spilling effect and in Past it was one of the most resentful, while today there are even divorce parties.

The article of Peter t. Kilborn (2004) is not outdated although probably the statistics today would provide even more sad data about marriage and divorce. However, divorce is not an invention of the 19 or 20<sup>th</sup> century. We need to believe that the divorce has existed since the marriage had been invented. This is for instance, the way one of the most prominent anthropologists in the world, Bronislaw Malinowski, describes the divorce by Trobriands (after the Trobriand Islands):

“The formalities of divorce are as simple as those by which marriage is contracted. The woman leaves her husband’s house with all her personal belongings, and moves to her mother’s hut, or to that of her nearest maternal kinswoman. There she remains, awaiting the course of events, and in the meantime enjoying full sexual freedom. Her husband, as likely as not, will try to get her back. He will send certain friend with “piece offerings” (koluluvi, or lula) for the wife and for those with whom she is staying. Sometimes the gifts are rejected at first, and then the ambassadors are sent again and again. If the woman accepts them, she has to return to her husband, divorce is ended and marriage resumed. If she means business, and is determined not to go back to her wedded life, the presents are never accepted; then the husband has to adjust himself as best he may, which means that he begins to look for another girl. The dissolution of marriage entails in no case the restitution of any of the inaugural marriage

gifts exchanged, unless ... the divorced woman should re-marry" (Malinowski 1978: 133).

Today our life is more complex, but many of the structural components of the divorce from the traditional society do exist although the complexity creates the illusion that not the people but it is the culture that makes the couple up to fail. As a matter of fact, what I have learned in the US where I have been living since 2000, we, the people, are responsible for our life. The main reason of divorce is not the social or cultural environment but the relationships between the couple and the absence probably of enough knowledge on how to keep the love and friendship in our everydayness despite all provocations of life.

For the 21<sup>st</sup> century generation could be helpful if everybody knows that the divorce is as old as the marriage. Also, during more that at 8-10,000 years the human society has been improving the marriage as the most successful form of social and cultural reproduction. Today even the gays want to marry! Can especially the young people look in the best instances of the happy marriages before making final decision? I think so. We all are not always perfect performers on the social stage of life, but we all can be wise in the most crucial moments of our life. And if after all divorce happens – well. There is a cure – we know from history that divorce is just a twin of the marriage. And in the way the mother loves all her children, we obviously also need to love the divorce and to believe that it gives a new chance for improvement of the humankind.