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## **THE STATUS OF THE WOMAN IN THE MACEDONIAN TRADITIONAL VILLAGE COMMUNITY AND FAMILY**

*Abstract:* In relation to the status of the woman in the extended family and the village community, models from the past find their support in the data from the recent field research with informers from the oldest generation, compared with the examples from the short folklore genre (proverbs, sayings). In that context, we can talk about the ideal model of traditional culture where the male principle dominated with the greatest rights and responsibilities, as well as about the real model of the traditional culture where the woman adopted significant latent rights through the mechanisms of the female subculture.

*Key words:* woman, traditional culture, social status, ideal model, real model, latent rights, female subculture, male principle, female principle, Veles region, Macedonia, extended family, father's extended family, mother's extended family.

The research of the mechanisms of the female subculture(Dunja Rihtman-Augushtin, 1984; Ljiljana Gavrilovic, 1998) shows that it is impossible to see the participation of the sexes in the rights and responsibilities of the family and the village community in a black and white manner anymore and, in that context, numerous variants (models) have been formed which only partially (from the outside) coincide with the publicly promoted ideal model of the traditional culture: domination of the man - obedience and submission of the woman according to the example of the classical model of the patriarchal culture. In this occasion, we want to check if these conclusions were brought about on the basis of research in some Balkan countries, also valid for the traditional culture of the Macedonians.

Even Milenko S. Filipovic (Mil. S. Filipovic, 1991) noticed that, percentage-wise, the biggest number of heads of villages of the Macedonians from the end of the 19th and start of the 20th century were women. He gives 12 examples, such as: village of Drenok (Golo Brdo) with the head of the village "Milejca" (Stamena Gulimanovska), Debarska Zhupa with the head of the village Stoja, village of Jablanica (Debarski Drimkol), village of Elhovec (Kichevo region/Mijacs/), etc. Sofija Markovska was head of the village of Galichnik somewhere around 1932. The Kratovo region ,as well, had same woman temporarily appointed as a "kodjabashija" (village elder), but her name is not stated. The women of the Torbesh of Prizrenска Gora also performed this function, as well as other male activities, including the defense from the Albanians (Mil. S. Filipovic, 1991:124). This occurrence is explained with the inviolability of the woman according to the Albanian "kanun", as well as to the emigration and work abroad. The stated explanation of the author refers to a relatively close period of time (second half of the 19th and start of the 20th century) and a restricted territory (mostly Western Macedonia). In that context, it can hardly be fully accepted, especially considering the fact that we come across data about women carriers of different levels of power with the Southern Slav and the other Balkan population in the more distant past as well, which is called upon by the very same author as well in the historical data about the problem, similar to other authors later on (Mil. S. Filipovic, 1991: 115-118; Djurdjica Petrovic, 1986). Regarding the Macedonian woman, the author gave examples of female village employees, such as the village messenger (Debar region), church warden (Debarski Drimkol), village water-carrier (Dolna Reka - Mijacs), he also analyzed the folk poetry where data about female haiduk leaders (Sirma vojvoda, etc.) can be found, the dominant female rituality, etc. Somewhere around here the author directs that examples of

women heads of extended families could be found with detailed historical and ethnological research (Mil. S. Filipovic, 1991: 130).

In that direction, we will take a look at the place of the woman in the concept and organization of the extended family as a nucleus of the society with several prominent functions: biological, societal, economic, educational and ritual. The extended family existed up until the introduction of the village co-operatives (1948) by the communist government of that time, according to the "Soviet model". In some communities, for example in a part of the Muslim Macedonian communities, the extended family existed up until the 1960's-1970's. Today, there are remains of this form of family life in the three-generation expanded family /grandmother-grandfather, father-mother, children/ and in the reduced type of an extended family, while some examples of extended families can still be found with the Muslim Macedonians (Personal research in Veles region - R. Macedonia, 1999):

**Types of extended families with the Macedonians:** 1. father's extended family; 2. brother's extended family; 3. separated extended family; mother's extended family. The most common type of an extended family, while they actively existed, was the **father's extended family** which was governed by the oldest man the head of the family. The second type of an extended family, the **brother's extended family**, comes about when after the death of the father one of the brothers takes over the governing of the extended family. This situation can come about according to the choice and control of the aged parent, who is still alive. The **separated extended family** functioned in conditions when all of the male members were not in the village, but some of them were in another place (in another area /mountain/, in another community, country, etc.), but all of them recognized the single governing of the family and put all of their income in a mutual family cashbox. There are examples of the type **mother's extended family** when, because of the death or leaving of the man, the governing of the family matters is performed by the mother.

The **mother's extended family** does not belong to the widely accepted model of the **ideal** folk culture. The question "Who was head of the family?" is regularly answered with a statement that it was the oldest or the most capable man. However, the question "what happens if the man is abroad, deceased, very sick etc., while the male children are still young" is regularly answered with a statement that the mother governs in those situations and that she keeps the status of first "man" in the family even when the sons grow up. In that context, we can conclude that the **mother's extended family** was widespread and that it was a model of the **real folk culture**.

**Example no. 1 (village of Teovo, Veles region/Brsjacs/):** *Mother/Mother-in-law running a household:* She can, she can. There was one here, Petre Notalijata, he is alive, his mother. His father had died, she was running the house and she did it the right way. Over there, Pandul's wife, they called her Pandulika, she was left alone as well, she did not remarry, and she raised all of her children. ...There are women more capable than men, in villages as well.

**Example no. 2 (village of Oreshe, Veles region /Mijacs/):** *Mother/Mother-in-law running a household:* "Of course there were! Widows. A widow is left with her children and she runs all of the house hold matters. She looks after the money. There were several cases. I know, in the old days, three-four cases, widows with children, boys and girls, some of them only girls, and the mother takes care of everything. She divides the work just like the old man. There was respect in the old days. Well, I can even say that the children of the widows were more obedient than the children of the families where there was a father. ...If the husband dies, the mother is left a widow, and there was no remarrying in the older days, absolutely no remarrying.

**Example no. 3 (village of Melnica, Veles region /Torbesh/):** *Mother/Mother-in-law running a household (If the men are working abroad or the man is deceased):* "There are, of course there are. It is known that the mother-in-law stays. The age of the woman had the biggest importance with us in the older days. The oldest woman of the oldest man and the few older men left to work abroad, the mother-in-law is the mandatory head of the family. Our case was such. My grandmother that you now see shaking over there, she was one, and what a head of a family she was. She would give us the chills. I was scared to death of her. You should have seen her twenty years ago. She was a strong woman, physically very healthy and capable woman. She would even do male work. She was an absolute ruler, I can tell you. A healthy woman, financially she controlled everything, she said what will be bought.., The participation of our house in some village matters.. She negotiated directly.., I remember, she argued with men.. She has argued..,

about water for irrigation. I remember years, when my grandmother put the mattock on her shoulder and she has even fought with that man and with others similar to him. I was a small child. I mean, she behaved like a man, literally, she did not step back, she argued just like any man. She took part in village gatherings and argued there.

**Example no. 4 (village of Melnica, Veles region/Torbesh/): /Mother/Mother-in-law running a household/**  
"Beacause the head of the family died, I became head of the family. I was 39 years old. I had (three sons) and a female child, born after the death of the father. I did everything, I worked in the field, everything, I worked with rice, with tobacco: I picked, I planted, I stringed, everything; I worked at home when I would come home: cows, calves, house, milk, I worked everything. After that, when a need would arise, I also went for firewood... After that, I learned a little more. I kept the cashbox, I was the main one. When they would load the tobacco, I would bring mine, and I would take the money. I would buy everything that was needed in this house..., I would hide what was left from the money... I hid it in a chest. I went, for water, I fought (laughs out loud). I fought over there for the water, they would not give it to me. I would argue with men, I would fight, to take the water, to water the garden... When a village herdsman was picked, I meddled in everything. I would say: "I don't want this one, I don't want that one, this one should be picked..., I would argue with field-men..., with all of them... I would tell the women, the daughters-in-law what to do. I would say: "You will do this, you will do that...They listened to me, I can't say that they didn't.

**The status of the woman in the classical father's/brother's extended family** can be seen with a comparison of the ideal and the real model of the traditional culture on some key positions: with respect to the **rights, responsibilities** and the condition after the **division of the extended family**.

### **rights**

the woman that governs the female work: has a right to her own concept; right to divide the female work; right to give an opinion; if the husband died first she had the full right to command with the part of the property that he left for him and her: so called "pogrebnina", as well as with the family house.

Financial part: ideal model: the male head of the family runs the finances

Real model: the cashbox is often run by the woman. She accomplished certain rights by using mechanisms of the female subculture: theft, lying, duplicity, and especially through the female rituality as a source of power and protection.

daughters: ideal model: had no right to land when property was divided; had a right to a dowry; had no right to an opinion in relation to family matters; had no right to state a desire in relation to marriage.

Real model: had a right to a piece of the land, meadow, livestock if the family agrees upon it; ; had a right to the so called "majkin del" (mother's share) / "majchinija", "bashkalak" – property originating from the mother's parents; accomplished certain "forbidden" rights through the mechanisms of the female subculture, most often through the mother and through the female rituality as a source of power and protection: running away for the loved young man ("begalka"/ runaway), e.t.c.

daughters-in-law: had a right to dowry and a piece of property received from father or mother with a right to govern that property; right to stay in an extended family after the death of the husband; right to leave; right to a lighter work during pregnancy; had no right to take the children if they remarried.

Real model: accomplished certain "forbidden" rights through the mechanisms of the female subculture.

### **responsibilities**

**the woman that governs the female work: Ideal model:** to take care of the house; to be righteous and responsible; to properly govern with the mutual material and monetary means; not to be rough with the daughters-in-law; not to give power to the daughters; to suffer the consequences of the damages caused by the members; to look after the reputation of the family in the outside world; to look after the virtue of the daughters and the daughters-in-law; to obey the decisions of the husband; to take care of the dowry of the girls to be married; to teach the youngest about the family traditions; to teach the youngest about how to behave towards their elders; to teach them the family tree; to introduce them to relatives up until the seventh level of kinship, blood brothers and blood sisters; to teach them the folk religion; respect of the godfather and the duties and relationship of a godfather.

**Real model:** Quite often, the woman used mechanisms of the female subculture to preserve herself in the community and to achieve greater rights: theft, lying, duplicity, female rituality as a source of power and

protection, etc.

**women-extended family members:** *Ideal model:* each one does her share of the work; takes care of the birth and the raising of the children; takes care of the nutrition, hygiene and the upbringing of the children; teaching of the female children on female work and such things. *Real model:* Quite often, the women-extended family members used mechanisms of the female subculture to preserve themselves in the community: theft, lying, duplicity, female rituality as a source of power and protection, etc.

### division of the extended family

**reason for division:** change of life conditions; discord between the extended family members; dishonesty of some extended family member; over-sized extended family; improper work of the head of the family; **discord between the women (daughters-in-law):** the moving away of some member.

**manner of division:** it is divided among the males by drawing lots in front of witnesses or without them; a child draws the lots; with an agreement; with mediation of a court;

**the head of the family receives for himself and his wife:** part of property, so called "pogrebnina"; keeps the family house.

**second wife (Torbesh)** *Ideal model:* does not get a share *Real model:* gets a share

**widow:** the share of the deceased husband

**unmarried female children:** stay in the father's house up until marriage

**grown-up unmarried girls:** it was decided with an agreement.

**daughter-in-law:** if she owns "majkin del" (mother's share) she does not share it with the other extended family members

In order to evaluate the status of the woman from a different angle, we will use the folk proverbs and sayings as an expression of life stated through a **position and opposition** ("Everything has two faces" (Marko K. Cepenkov, 1972: ? 2193) which confirms the correlation between the **ideal and the real model of the folk opinion and action**. The chosen ideal-typical models relate to the categories: **1. useful woman, 2. subjugated woman, 3. bad - shrewd and two-faced woman, 4. man and woman as a whole.**

#### 1. *Ideal model* (publicly accepted category): **useful woman**

|  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| 1. The good woman opens the house, while the bad one closes it | 2. You might as well burn a house that has no woman | 3. The pretty woman soothes the eyes, while the smart one soothes the heart | 4. If your woman is faithful and hard-working, your house will be full |
|--|---|---|--|

#### 2. *Ideal model* (publicly accepted category): **subjugated woman**

|  |                              |   |  |
|--|------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. The man is stronger than the woman, that is why the woman should keep quiet | 2. A girl should not be born | 3. When a girl is born, it is better off dead | 4. The woman is blessed by God to help the man |
|--|------------------------------|---|--|

#### 3. *Real model* (publicly unaccepted category): **bad, shrewd and two-faced woman** (often signifies a latent recognition of the mechanisms of the female subculture)

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1. The man walks with the cross on his forehead, while the woman walks with the cross on the back of her head (meaning = the man is honest and the woman dishonest) | 2. A spiteful woman is embittered all the time | 3. May God save you from fire, water and a bad woman | 4. The devilish ways of the women are not even known by the devil himself |
|---|--|--|---|

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| 5. The women show their bottom half to the men, but not the upper one | 6. It seems like the woman and the fox were born from the same mother | 7. The woman is long-haired and short-minded | 8. You found your misfortune from the woman |
|---|---|--|---|

**4. Real model** (publicly unaccepted category): **dominant woman**

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Man, do not give the power to the woman | 2. Do not give a rein (control) to a woman | 3. The man comes from the same place that the woman comes from | 4. If I should fall, may I fall from a man, not from a woman |
|--|--|--|--|

**5. Real model** (latently accepted compromising model): **man and woman as a whole**

|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| 1. Women complain about the men, and men about the women | 2. Misfortune with a woman, misfortune without a woman | 3. He who beats his wife, beats his strength | 4. If you fight a woman and you knock her down, you will not receive great honors |
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The presented models from the past (Mil. S. Filipovic, 1991: 115-118; Djurdjica Petrovic, 1986), in relation to the status of the woman in the extended family and the village community, find their support in the data from the recent field research with informers from the oldest generation, compared with the examples from the short folklore genre (proverbs, sayings). In that context, we can talk about **the ideal model of traditional culture** where the male principle dominates with the greatest rights and responsibilities.

On the other hand, it can be concluded that the rights of the woman were not meaningless. The inability to take part in making decisions in a legal way, or the desire to attain the "forbidden" rights, had the woman seek alternative ways through the mechanisms of the female subculture. It can be concluded that through that means she adopted significant **latent rights**, which participated in the shaping of the folk culture of the Macedonians and influenced the structuring of **the real model of the traditional culture**.

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**Veles region - R. Macedonia (personal research in 1999):**

**Informers:**

1. Pavle Zareski, born 1926 in Teovo village
2. Negrija Dimovski, born 1923 and Mara Dimoska, born 1923, both of them from Oreshe village
3. Naser Luleski, born 1966 in Melnica village (high school education)
4. Zepa (Zejnepa) Luleska, about 90 years old, born in Melnica village (Naser's grand mother).