269

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WINDOW: GENDER AND DIFFERENCE IN PRESPA, REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
Aleksandar Boskovic

in loving memory of my aunt Rodna

Brasília
2000

The other side of the window:
Gender and difference in Prespa, Republic of Macedonia*

Aleksandar Boskovic

EXERGUE: CONSTRUCTING MACEDONIA

In this paper, I intend to outline ways in which concepts of gender (especially in an idealized sense: *what does it mean to be a man* or *what does it mean to be a woman*?) are constructed in Prespa, in the southwestern part of Macedonia (see Gramatnikovski, Markovski and Daskalovski 1993). Although it is often claimed that gender relations are based on a strict hierarchy, recent research (like the one by Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991) points that perhaps these relations should also be seen in terms of complementarity.[1] My own data support this view.

The term "Macedonia" refers to the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, a country which gained its independence from the SFR Yugoslavia in 1991. It has a territory of 25,713 square kilometers and approximately 2.2 million inhabitants.

The issue of Macedonian statehood, national identity and national symbols has created quite a stir in the international relations as well as in anthropology — especially since the Cambridge University Press (CUP) in 1994 refused to publish a book by a Greek anthropologist Anastasia Karakasidou. The decision was made at a very late stage and the whole Editorial Board has been bypassed. The CUP claimed that it feared for the security of their staff in Greece and that their fears were supported by a report commissioned from the MI5 (the British Secret Service). The MI5 responded promptly saying that they did not issue any such opinion and that no one even asked for it. As a result, there have been calls to boycott the CUP, two prominent anthropologist left the CUP Editorial Board in protest (Jack Goody and Michael Herzfeld), and Karakasidou's book has been eventually published by the University of Chicago Press (Karakasidou 1997). Since I was just an onlooker in this whole mess, my reaction was a mixture of amusement (I thought that anthropologists operate with some sort of observable "facts," not only with political day-to-day decisions) and puzzlement (all one needs to see that there *are* Macedonians is just to get there — should not be too difficult for an anthropologist). After all, having grown up there, I have ample reasons to believe that the Macedonians do exist, and, having met on numerous occasions Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians, I also have good reasons to believe that the people who (mostly) inhabit the Republic of Macedonia are distinctive from these nations. (For some of the characteristic Balkan ways of constructing and deconstructing identities, see Boskovic 1997.)

The data in this paper refer to the "Macedonian" (or "Upper") Prespa.[2] Although I will also be using examples from Greece and a few other South European/Mediterranean areas, the focus of my research is on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia only. The data are based on my observations and interviews conducted among the mostly Slavic Macedonian population (that is to say, whose first language is Macedonian) of Prespa (the municipality of Resen, population around 16,000) in the summers of 1993 and 1994, as well as on the published sources

---

[1] Also (and following a remark by my friend and colleague, Mariza Peirano), one should take into account Dumont's view of the hierarchies structured horizontally. At the same time, speaking of complementarity, I a,m very much aware of the criticism of Seremetakis (1994) directed at the Loizos and Papataxiarchis volume in general and at authors like Herzfeld in particular. In the case of Prespa, I believe that I am presenting observable"facts," but I also need to stress that complementarity is *not* equality in any way! Unfortunately, I might add.

[2] Therefore, a notion of *complementarity* as an important characteristic of the gender relations should not be extended for the rest of Macedonia.

available. Wherever possible, I have used comparisons with recorded examples from neighboring regions, as well as from personal experiences — since through all my life I have spent on the average at least a couple of months per year in Resen. My examples from the rural communities are from the different villages around Resen, although the town itself (despite some recent developments) is still much more rural than urban — a view shared by a majority of the population. Therefore, most people have land outside the town and working this land forms a very important addition to their income.

The extent to which "ideal" descriptions are merely sociocultural constructs will become obvious throughout this paper. What makes this situation particularly interesting from my point of view is the notion of "double reality" (or *hyperreality*, as I would prefer to call it) where both sides know that what is being presented as the "official story" has nothing to do with "reality." At the same time, both sides play along with this.

INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTING GENDER

At the 1994 Forum Against Ethnic Violence conference on Macedonia,[3] Teuta Arifi, then secretary of the Albanian League of Women,[4] used the analogy of the window to refer to the situation of Albanian women in Macedonia. In Albanian communities, it is normally the men who discuss important issues and make decisions in the main room of the house. Women do not have the access to these rooms, but only serve the men (coffee, biscuits, tea, etc.) through the small rectangular opening in the wall. Their "proper space" is the kitchen, washing area, or wherever the small children are. They are symbolically excluded from the decision-making and (supposedly) have no knowledge of the "important" debates that go on. Of course, as Arifi clearly demonstrated in her paper, this is not the case — even to the point that the women are able to sometimes "take the matter in their own hands" and break the deadlock that men frequently create (Arifi 1994). But this is still much more an exception than the rule; by and large, the role of women in Macedonia can be referred to as "someone from the other side of the window."

This is a situation fairly typical of the rural communities in Macedonia. Despite the fact that a significant number of people live in cities (more than one third of the country's population in the capital, Skopje), the connections (both on the family and on the broader economic level) with the rural areas are very strong. These connections go so far that the young people that were born, raised and live in foreign countries (like Germany or Sweden, for example) will still come to marry in the villages that they (or, more precisely, their families) are from.[5] *The main sense of*

---

[3] The conference was held on November 11 and 12 at the Embryology Theatre, University College London.

[4] And now (April 2000), a minister in the Macedonian government.

[5] This is primarily the case with males. Girls that live abroad are given more choice. Although some form of family pressure exists in these matters, it seems that decisions to marry "at home" are influenced by a sense of responsibility for the creation of family. In this sense, and especially in the rural communities, males are still regarded as "heads of the family," so they try to make sure that the family will function smoothly. Stories about failed marriages between Macedonians and non-Macedonians (primarily those cases when a Macedonian man marries a foreign woman) are an important part of local folklore; at least

identity is the one that people get from their family. When people meet for the first time, they are often identified in relation to their parents or some other close relatives[6] ("son/daughter of so and so," "nephew/niece of so and so," "grandson/granddaughter of so and so," etc.).[7] If people of marriageable age meet for the first time, they frequently try to establish whether they are related. This influences and to an extent suppresses the notion of individuality, since a person is immediately aware of her or his family background, and family's reputation very much influences anyone's individual reputation. This becomes obvious in relation to the honor/shame code (cf. Campbell 1964; Bourdieu 1977; Archetti 1994[8]), when a bad thing that a single individual does can relate to (that is to say, ruin) the reputation of all the family members — including third and fourth cousins and so on. Being from a "good family" means primarily being from a family whose members live by this code, who do not have any "shame" attached to their name. "It's a shame!" (*"Sramota!"*) is an exclamation that expresses pity and disgust, as well as something morally wrong. Even little children are taught not to do certain things because "it's a shame."

THE RULES OF MARRIAGE

Although in Prespa, just like in European Mediterranean societies, there are no specific rules about most favored or prescribed marriage partners, it can be said that "[t]he main principle governing marriage strategies are the maintenance of the family's position in the local hierarchy[9] and avoidance of all practices that may jeopardize this position" (Milicic 1995: 134; footnote added). Therefore, family pressures regarding the choice of the partner for marriage are quite frequent and difficult to ignore. In many cases, it is preferred for a girl living in Macedonia to marry "at home," thus enabling her to remain in close contact with her parents. Bilateral descent is the rule, with either patrilocal or neolocal residence. Even in cases of neolocal residence, it is expected that the newlyweds' parents will provide

---

one of these stories formed a basis of a TV documentary made 20 years ago, but relatively recently (1994) re-broadcasted as one of the best documentaries made by the Macedonian TV.
[6] The concept of the close relative is somewhat different to the one that is present in the West. For example, not only immediate family, but also second and third cousins are considered to be close relatives. This notion of "close relatives" can sometimes be extended to people related five generations back. The Macedonian Orthodox Church prohibits marriages between people related nine generations back or less. Although this ruling does not have any legal sanction, in practice it seems to be strictly followed. Marriage between people who are related (like first or second cousin, for example) would be considered as incest.
[7] For the examples from rural Greece, cf. Roger Just in Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991. Of course, I have to note that relations between kin in Macedonia do not exhibit the same amount of ambivalence and perplexity as Just cites. On the other hand, Ford (1983: 21) notes the importance of interpersonal connections (*vrski*) in the capital, Skopje.
[8] Of course, following the critical remarks by Herzfeld (1987: 5 ff.), I do not wish to imply that this is *the* code around which all the society is structured — just the fact that many (if not all) relations between families are closely related to the issues that have to do with honor/shame.
[9] Milicic studied the village Selo on the island of Hvar, Croatia. I am not sure that I would use the word "hierarchy" to refer to the social stratification in Prespa, since the egalitarian principles are very strong. Of course, everyone knows which families are "well off" — so that potential marriage alliances might be arranged.

most of the funds necessary for the building of a house, with labor (and some materials when possible) provided by kinspeople.

Concepts like "neolocality," should be understood in a specific context. Couples in Prespa (and in Macedonia in general, as well as in other Southeastern European countries) are not as mobile as their counterparts in some industrialized Western countries (US, United Kingdom, etc.). Throughout the South European/Mediterranean cultures, the concept of "neolocal residence" implies several important things. First of all, it is easier to build a house closer to where one lives. If the land is expensive or difficult to get, the easy way out is to build it on land owned by the groom's or bride's parents. This new house might even be adjacent or the extension of the one owned by the parents, but this is still a new residence — *a new locality* (Baskar 1993).

Matrilocal residence is very rare, and it usually happens in cases where the bride's family is much better off than the groom's. Since most people tend to marry within their social groups (i.e., rich marry rich, middle class marry middle class, and poor marry poor), this is rarely the case.[10] Remaining unmarried is still considered very bad, especially for girls.[11] Of course, the fact that more girls nowadays attend high schools and universities has contributed to the increase of the age at marriage — not so long ago, a girl who did not marry by the time she was in her early twenties would remain unmarried for the rest of her life, or marry some widowed octogenarian.

This is somewhat puzzling, since the marriage age between the two World Wars was slightly higher. In fact, it seems that the reduced age at marriage is a relatively recent (post-Second World War) phenomenon, not unlike the situation that Segalen mentions for the rural France, where between 1825 and 1975 the average age of men at marriage fell from 28.7 to 25.03 years , while for the women in the same period from 26.1 to 22.91 (Segalen 1986: 118, 140).[12] I have observed that people in their 70s and 80s (the exact age is sometimes difficult to determine — see footnote 8) have children in their 30s and 40s — which is very different from the couples that got married in the last 20 or 25 years. It seems that the relative affluence of the post-1945 Prespa did push the age at marriage downwards, although the recent changes in society, higher percentage of women in education and employed women is pushing it back again.

Being married is "the norm" — quite similar to the situation in rural Greece (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991). To quote an example based on the Greek material, but the same applies to Macedonia: "(...) it is obvious that a Greek man cannot achieve full adult status until he is married. In a sense then, it is through his connection to a woman that a man takes his place in society. It is his 'destiny' also

---

[10] On the other hand, it is socially acceptable for girls to marry into families that are better off — which is normally not the case for boys.

[11] However, in some instances it can be justified by "higher motives" — nuns and scholars come into this category. Homosexuality is not even considered as a possibility.

[12] Unfortunately, it would be impossible to gather comparable statistical data for Prespa. Since what is today the Republic of Macedonia was occupied by Serbia from 1912 until 1941, birth certificates for boys were frequently forged — to prevent them from being conscripted into the army. In the years right after the Second World War, most of the churches in Prespa were burned in a zealous display of the new (communist) faith, so the existing church records were also destroyed.

to be married (Dubisch 1991: 45).”[13] Therefore, unmarried people arouse a certain amount of suspicion (if not curiosity); the fact that they are unmarried is considered with some apprehension — attributed to their unorthodox lifestyles (in the case of teachers or scholars) or perhaps to some hidden misfortune in the family.

Chastity is (at least in conversations and in public discourse) very highly regarded where girls are concerned, but not boys — so clearly there are double-standards regarding sex life.[14] On the other hand, although regarding chastity highly *as a principle*, people (especially those born after 1950) rarely expect this to be a fact where the lives of their own children are concerned.[15] In communities like Resen, it is understood that a high school couple that starts a serious relationship (the community is too small for such things to be successfully hidden) will eventually marry. The expectations might not materialize if they choose radically different paths in life (i.e., one chooses to go to the university to Skopje or Bitola, while the other one stays "at home") or if their families have very bad relations.

Family pressures (at least the ones expressed in a more overt way) tend to be especially strong regarding the non-Slav Macedonian population — in Prespa, Turks and some Albanians. Of course, these pressures can be ignored, but with a heavy price: in one instance, an Albanian woman from a nearby village refused to follow her family's choice and ran away from home to marry the man she loved. As a consequence, her family cut off all ties with her — and this was especially harsh regarding the girl's inability to financially support herself at the time. This was no ordinary family, since the woman's mother was a famous healer (in Macedonian: *mestac*, literally "bone setter"[16]), so the whole story was widely known. Even when the woman's mother got very old and was living alone, she refused any contact with her daughter, receiving some help only from her Slav Macedonian neighbors, to whom she eventually left all her belongings (she was quite wealthy).[17] This is just one example of a "strong woman" — an example that should join others in defying the stereotypical image of dominant men and subservient women in Mediterranean and South European cultures (cf. Milicic 1995).

Among the Slav Macedonian population, family pressures are very strong as well: I know of several relationships which could not end in marriage because of the

---

[13] Women in the Greek village where Dubisch did her fieldwork felt sorry for her for being so far away from her mother. The mother/daughter relationship is a very strong one in Macedonia as well. Furthermore, I was introduced to people in Prespa as the son of my mother. In my case, my mother is an ethnic Macedonian, while my father is not — however, I encountered several examples where people whose both parents were ethnic Macedonians were introduced in the same way.

[14] Herzfeld (1987: 11) notes that the prudishness that Balkan peoples today display regarding sex may be of quite recent origin — not much earlier than the 19th century!

[15] Pejoska (1993: 98 ff.) gives numerous examples from Macedonian oral literature that include and illustrate attitudes towards sex, virginity, marriage, etc.

[16] She used to "fix" broken bones and dislocated joints in such a way that they would heal much quicker than if put into plaster and immobilized by doctors. (For example, if a broken arm would heal in three to four weeks after being "set" by the doctor, the "bone setter's" treatment would heal it within a week.)

[17] The power to heal is regarded as a gift — children are never taught it, unless they display interest by themselves — and it is regarded as an insult if one tries to pay the healer. On the other hand, it is considered appropriate to leave some amount of money (usually the equivalent of a price of beer or a coffee in a restaurant, or "instead of buying a chocolate for the children") for the good luck (in Turkish: *adet*, literally *"peace"*).

opposition of parents. "It is for the good of the child," is the usual answer by the family members opposing "bad" relationships. Most recently, particular pressures are exercised on multi-ethnic couples: it is preferred (socially, as well as within the family) that a girl or a boy chooses a partner of the "proper" (i. e., their own) nationality.[18] This should be seen both as a consequence of the prevailing Orthodox Christian teachings (since Slav Macedonian population tends automatically to get identified with the Orthodox Christianity as opposed to Muslim Albanian or Turkish population[19] — the fact that very few people practice religion is of no relevance here), as well as one of the problems facing all small newly emerging (post-1991) countries in the attempts led by nationalists to preserve the ethnic "purity" of the nation.

Almost as bad as remaining unmarried is being without children. In a culture that emphasizes (and is structured around) family so much, not having anyone to inherit the family name is considered quite a disaster.[20] In a metaphysical sense, this leads not only to a family gradually "dying out," but to a rupture in the whole system of the kinship network. This network heavily relies on the mutual help and cooperation between kinsfolk — especially on the occasion like the building of a house, preparation for a wedding or some other important family ritual, etc.

The marriage also enables closer economic ties between the two families (since marriage in rural and suburban communities is primarily *a contract between the families*): the groom is supposed to help his bride's family when they work their land outside the village or town. In the case of Resen, a great majority of households own small tracts of land outside the town.[21] A tract of land is called *bavca* — which roughly translates into English as "garden," and the people usually use them as orchards.[22] Most townspeople are fully employed, but after coming home in the afternoon (except in the winter months), they go and work the *bavca*. In cases where men are fully employed and women are housewives, women do most of the work in the orchards. The work is usually divided in such a way that men care more for the trees in the orchards (or for vineyards), and women for the vegetables. The responsibilities for domestic animals are normally evenly shared. However, there are no strict rules over the division of work — everyone works based on the time that he/she has, abilities, etc. The only gender-specific area seems to be household chores

---

[18] I use the words "ethnicity" and "nationality" synonymously. My preferred term for "nation" or "tribe" is "ethnic group."

[19] What is today the Republic of Macedonia was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire from 1371 until 1912. This plays well for nationalists when they try to evoke anti-Albanian feelings (Albanians, considered as Muslim, being identified as Turks) as the rallying cry for the national (in this case, Slav Macedonian) unity and salvation.

[20] However, there is a way around this: some people can adopt a child (or children) of their close relatives (brothers, sisters). The children are then considered to be theirs in both legal and biological senses. Children are offered for adoption in case of death or illness in the family, but also in cases when a family is too poor to take care of them (usually a family living in a village), in which case they would send them to town (or city).

[21] However, the older houses (as well as some on the town's outskirts) do have these tracts of land in their own courtyards, in the town itself.

[22] They also grow vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, watermelons, etc., as well as a variety of fruits (apricots, peaches, various kinds of plums, cherries, etc.). Some people also have vineyards. Domestic animals are quite frequently kept in the *bavcas*.

Prespa is the biggest apple-producing region in Macedonia. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of the break up of Yugoslavia was the loss of the most important market — a situation that is felt very much throughout the region.

like cooking (women are expected to cook) — although I think that this has to do with the simple fact that the women used to be around the house (home) much more, and that changes in the employment patterns will affect this as well. Also, when the visitors come, and if both spouses are at home, women are expected to prepare coffee and serve the *blago* (a thick and very sweet fruity jam), while the men are expected to cater for drinks.

There is a certain amount of ambivalence when one tries to collect narratives on the "status of women." On the one hand, women are considered as equal in terms of family contributions, work in and around the household, etc.[23] The "way of men" and the "way of women" is supposed to be different primarily because of biological differences. In and around Prespa there is a belief that "things have always been done in a certain way" — so that way should be followed. On the other hand, gender hierarchy is overtly very strong; until quite recently it was common for a married woman to be addressed by her husband's name plus the female gender prefix. For example, a woman married to a man called Bore would be called *Boreica*, the one married to a man called Krume, *Krumeica*, etc. In fact, the Macedonian language does have different forms of last names for men and women. For example, in a family whose father (and all the males) have the last name Petreski, the women's surname will be *Petreska*, where the male name is Nikolov, the female equivalent will be *Nikolova*, etc.[24]

SEX, POWER, AND VIOLENCE

The problem of violence against women is unfortunately a universal one (cf. Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project 1995) — and this goes for Macedonia as well.[25] *"Batina je iz raja izasla"* (lit. "The cudgel came straight from Heaven") is a Serbian saying that is frequently quoted both in the context of discussing children (implying usually that a little smack here or there can cause no harm) and women. In the latter context, the implication is that one must know who is "the head of the household" — and this general view is supported by both men and women.

In the summer of 1994, newspapers like the Skopje-based *Vecer* and *Nova Makedonija* and the independent weekly *Puls* widely reported on an incident that happened during a reception in London. The then mayor of Skopje, Goran Nikolovski, beat up his wife because he did not like the fact that she spoke to someone at the reception. (The fact that he had had a few drinks before might have contributed to his behavior.) The incident spilled over into a massive fight and police had to intervene. The fact that the journalists wrote about it was immediately seized upon by both the mayor's office (he belonged to the then main opposition party — and now the governing one —, VMRO-DPMNE) as some kind of a political ploy to discredit the young and gifted (in his early 30s) politician. However, no one seemed really interested in the issue of violence, its causes or the consequences. The mayor's wife, Vesna Nikolovska, wrote a letter to the media accusing them of

---

[23] Cases where a woman retains her own family name are extremely rare and in a suburban context something that is frowned upon.

[24] A great majority of Slav Macedonian last names finish with *-ov* or *-ski* for the males or *-ova* or *-ska* for the females.

[25] On the problem of violence in the Balkan rural communities,, see for example Denich 1974.

"sensationalizing" the "private life" of their family. So even the victim (and this was definitively not an isolated incident that took place "behind closed doors" or "in private"!) went along with the stance that there was essentially nothing wrong with violence. Or at least that there was nothing wrong where married couples are concerned. This is a dangerous situation when even the victim starts perceiving the world through the eyes of the perpetrator — somehow believing (genuinely believing!) that he has "the right" to resort to violence. Even when the violence gets so far that the police are called, the authorities are reluctant to intervene.

In everyday conversations, and especially among the older people, it is usually "understood" what the "ideal woman" should be like: hard working, tidy, clean, and capable of taking care of the children and the household.[26] If she fails in any of these aspects, some violence is seen as justified. ("She should know who is the boss in the house!") Of course, very few (if any) people would actually approve of violence against their daughter or sister or kin — although approving of it "in principle"! If a woman feels mistreated, she can just leave her household and go back to her own family. In some cases, male members of her family are likely to beat up her husband or boyfriend as a revenge. Younger women (and this goes for younger couples in general) seem less inclined to support the old sayings and beliefs, and this contributes to the higher divorce rates in recent years.

According to the data from the Center for Social Work in Skopje, there are currently 600 to 750 divorces per year (compared to 4,000 to 5,000 marriages per year) in the Skopje area, and in the majority of cases women initiate the divorce (Zlatanovik 1994). According to the official data for the whole country, in 1993 there were 15,080 marriages and 636 divorces (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 8) — which would mean that almost all divorces occur in the area of the capital.

Domestic violence is not recognized as a crime within the Macedonian legal system. This is part of the reason why most cases of domestic violence never get reported. The disparity between the legal and the real even goes as far as the penal code regarding sexual assault as a crime only if inflicted on a stranger! According to an investigative article by Macedonian journalists Suzana Ahmeti and Ljubica Balaban,

> [a] common complaint is that the existence of domestic violence in Macedonia passes almost unnoticed in the courts. It is not mentioned in the criminal law. Milka Risteva, a former judge and an advisor in the Ministry of Justice, is among those who believe Macedonia should adopt a domestic violence law following the American model, in which even threatening violence can be considered a crime. Such a law is not being considered now. But Risteva said that a proposal [which is] now [being considered] in the government would change the family law [in such a way as] to ban sexual violence in marriage, in love affairs and during the process of divorce.
>
> (Ahmeti and Balaban 1996)

The problem of violence is more present in highly urbanized areas such as the capital, where people are still searching for their "true" identity. Of course, this does not mean that when people find (or suddenly stumble upon) their "true" identity they

---

[26] It is interesting to note that these are also the characteristics for the "ideal man" — with the exception of the ability for taking care of the children and the household.

suddenly become non-violent — it only means that more violence tend to be produced under stress. Hardship is invariably a contributing factor.

In Prespa, the issue gets more complicated by the increased economic power of women as well as by the need of both sides of the family (as well as both families together) to coordinate their activities when issues like the working of the *bavcas*, vineyards, care of animals, building or repair of the houses, etc. come into play.[27] On the other side of the spectrum (or "the other side of the window"), the more rural communities take the more patriarchal (and pro-violence) view. According to Dusko Minovski, former director of the Center for Social Work in Skopje, the situation is especially bad for the Roma women, who seem to be mistreated almost on a regular basis (Zlatanovik 1994). In the highly acclaimed[28] film *Before the Rain*, an Albanian girl pays for falling in love with the person of the wrong nationality with her own life.

Somewhat surprisingly, [29] violence has nothing to do with the level of education. Highly educated[30] men tend to be as violent towards their partners as the less educated ones (Zlatanovik 1994; Ahmeti and Balaban 1996). Unfortunately, it usually takes a most extreme situation before the problem of violence is discussed in public. There were eleven murders in Macedonia in 1994, and in nine of them victims were women (Ahmeti and Balaban 1996). In a highly publicized case in the summer of 1994, a 101-year old Bitola man killed his 73-years old wife because he suspected that she was having a "fling."

However, it is still difficult to generalize on the problem of violence. All of my interviewees in Prespa born after 1950 were strongly opposed to it. I know personally of only one[31] younger couple where violence did occur — but the woman did put up with it (the fact that her family does not live in the region might have contributed to this). Violence is based on the notion of hierarchy: men are presumed to have "higher" status in society and violence can be seen as a way of reasserting their domination. But while notion of hierarchy has been often assumed, I found it difficult to notice it in the actual *ethnographic* context[32] in Prespa. In all the contexts that I have observed, one can speak about the notion of *complementarity*, quite similar to the examples that Segalen provides from 17th and 18th century rural France:

> The central hypothesis of the book is that the man-wife relationship in peasant society is based not on the absolute authority of one over the other, but on the complementarity. This relationship is determined by the particular nature of peasant sociability: before being a couple, the

---

[27] It has been pointed out to me (Ilka Thiessen, personal communication) that this might be the determining factor regarding the status of women in Prespa. In other areas (like in the vicinity of Prilep, for example) women are practically prevented from inheriting the property (by the family pressures and tradition according to which sons inherit everything). They are asked to take a token sum of money in return for the formal refusal of the right of inheritance, but it is considered "good manners" for daughters to refuse even this token sum.

[28] A film by Milco Mancevski won the "Golden Lion" award at the Venice Film Festival in 1994 and was nominated for the American Film Academy Award ("Oscar") in 1995.

[29] At least for me, since I did expect that the more educated people are, the less likely they will be to use violent means to resolve their disputes.

[30] That is to say, men with the university degree.

[31] Of course, even one is too much!

[32] For the notion of context, I refer to Holy 1994.

> man and wife form part of the male and female groups which make up the basic framework of human relationships.
>
> (Segalen 1983: 9)

This image that Segalen presents for rural France is to a large extent applicable to Prespa. There is no strict hierarchy in the family or in the society. Men and women are recognized as different — and these differences enable them to function together. Of course, in the case of Macedonia (and Prespa in particular), one cannot talk about "groups" in the same sense — but there are clearly defined categories in which men and women "fall" — and they seem to quite similar. The notion of *complementarity* rather than of *subordination* requires different attitudes. Women in cities, away from their families, are more likely to become exposed to domestic violence than the ones in rural and semi-urban communities.

Furthermore, while family pressures may be detrimental and highly oppressive in terms of choice of partner, they frequently serve as an effective deterrent against domestic violence (because, as already noted, woman's male relatives might just decide on revenge). Of course, only effective changes in the legal area can provide a significant step forward.

KEEPERS OF THE FAMILY: GENDER ROLES AT THE CROSSROADS

According to the 1994 census, women form 49.6% of the total population of the Republic of Macedonia. They also form 37.5% of the employed — the fact that 47.6% of women are capable of work shows that in many communities it is still considered "natural" for a woman to stay at home. On the other hand, the percentage of women among the unemployed has fallen to 48.5 from 50.4 since 1991 (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 15-17) — although this is more due to the fact that more and more men lose their jobs, than to some trend towards increasing employment of women. One of the most notable statistics is a large discrepancy in illiteracy rates: for the rural population, it is 5.1% for men but 15.2% for women (total 10%), and for the city population 1.75 for men and 5.7% for women (total 3.7%).[33] These numbers should be put in the context of age, since 75.58% of illiterate women were aged 55 or over — a remnant of the time when it was believed unnecessary for a girl to attend a school or even to learn to read.[34]

When it comes to education, there are "feminine" and "masculine" fields — based on the numbers of students that enroll for certain courses or colleges. Among the former ones are chemical-technological training courses, arts, services, textile, leather-processing and medical cares; while the latter ones include electrotechnics, mining, mechanical engineering, and wood-processing. When it comes to university-level education, the majority of students (52.8%) are women, but the majority of them still do not continue their education as far as their male counterparts: in 1994, out of 67 M.A. and M.Sc. degrees, 25 were received by women, while out of 49 Ph.D. degrees, only 18 were awarded to women.

The role of women is still traditionally regarded as something that has to do with family and children. Several women's organizations that were formed in the early 1990s are based either in Skopje (the capital, with around 700,000 inhabitants)

---

[33] The data are based on the 1991 census and cover people aged ten and over (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 12).

[34] My own grandmother was illiterate.

or its immediate vicinity (Tetovo) — so it is open to debate how much of an impact these groups (set up by educated, city-dwelling women) can have in the rural and suburban areas.[35] The women organized in these groups would definitively not accept the "family + children" equation as *the* definition of the place of women. However, in the last general elections (in 1994), only 3 women became MPs (in the 120-seat National Assembly), and of the 20 ministers in the Macedonian government, they hold only two posts (in the properly "feminine" areas: science and education).[36]

On the other hand, the "family + children" equation seems to be the one that women themselves are ready to accept. For example, a recent survey in a textile factory indicated that most workers (the majority were women) would (if given the opportunity) rather stay at home and take care of their children (Gjurovska 1995: 45). Much less than a longing for the "male-dominated world," I would interpret this as a reaction to the dramatic (and swift) changes in the politics and economy in former communist countries — confronted with the immense insecurity ("market economy" here means a 40% unemployment rate and more than half of the population living below the official poverty line) of the "brave new" (post-communist or post-socialist, as it is sometimes called) world, people simple want to be back to the basic unit of their society, the unit that always cares and provides for its members: the family.

Women are traditionally seen as the "pillars" of the family. Of course, it is through men that the family name is passed on,[37] but the role of women is recognized very clearly. In her 1995 paper "Women of the family, women of the nation," Anastasia Karakasidou traces the changes that occurred in the families of Slav Macedonians in northern Greece after 1903. Quoting from the 1931 book *Agrotika* by Kostas Karavidas, Karakasidou refers to the Slavic Macedonian women,

> as being of a 'special kind': they were individuals of great physical stamina, wives and mothers who worked not only for the family's land but also its cottage industry (...). Behind the superficial silence of the *zadruga* women, Karavidas saw human beings who were lay experts

---

[35] These groups are: Organization of Women of Macedonia, The Alliance of Organizations of Women of the Republic of Macedonia, Women's Organization of Skopje, Women's Club "Spark of Life," The Association of Vlach Women in the Republic of Macedonia, The Humanitarian Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women of the City of Skopje (Skopje), and Albanian Women League (Tetovo). These groups are fairly strictly organized along ethnic lines, and the cooperation between, for example, the ones that consist of Slav Macedonian women and the ones that consist of Albanian women is practically non-existent.

[36] This is comparable to the situation in Croatia, where women account for slightly more than 50% of the population, 43% of the employed — but only 4% of the members of Parliament (Scavina 1996). See also Einhorn 1993: 150-151 for the comparison with East Central European countries.

On the other hand, according to the data for 1992, more than half of all the employed in the Parliament (273 out of 495) were women (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 10). This probably signifies that if they are participating in politics and in decision-making processes, women's proper place is seen primarily as secretaries or low-ranking assistants.

[37] The curse "May your name be extinguished!" is one of the worst things that Macedonians can say to each other. Families without male children are frequently looked upon as the ones which are "losing" their name, and by extension, the ones that are in the process of disappearing. (A way out is sometimes adoption of the children of close relatives who are too poor to care for them.)

on religion, rituals, superstitions, songs, proverbs, legends, popular wisdom, and experience.

(Karakasidou 1995: 8, footnote omitted)

Karakasidou then mentions the example of *slava*. *Slava* is by far the most important family and religious holiday among many Orthodox Christian peoples. It commemorates the family patron saint and it is a ritual of great significance. It is the most important day of the year, when all the members of a family and their close friends get together for a meal and (in case of wealthier and more "traditionally oriented" families) a blessing from the priest. According to Karavidas, "by the second decade of the twentieth century, some families had rescheduled or recast their *slava* as a commemoration of a meaningful political event, such as 'the local revolution of 1903' " (quoted in Karakasidou 1995: 9). The 'local revolution of 1903' refers to the Ilinden uprising against the Ottoman Empire, started by Macedonian revolutionaries in and around Krusevo on 2 August 1903 — the uprising failed after some ten days, but the date is still celebrated as the Macedonian national holiday. Obviously, changing the date of such an important *family* ritual influenced by a major *political* event meant a very important step in the process of establishing the national identity. And it was the women of the family that played the crucial role in this process:

From pagan deities to Christian patron saints to national political movements, the *slava* provided a symbolic metaphor for the family's identity as well as an institutionalized forum for the ritual expression of the family's place in the cosmos, both secular and supernatural (...). Women played a critical role in this process, for while even though the decision to reconstitute the family *slava* as a political commemoration could very well have been made by the male family head, it was the women who controlled the 'hidden meaning' of the *slava* symbolism and taught it to their children.

(Karakasidou 1995: 9-10)

This combines well with my own observations that women are more likely to be involved with children and their homeworks, they will more often attend the teachers/parents meetings at schools, etc. Of course, this is again dependent on the amount of time that the parents have — men are more likely to be away from the household during the day — especially in the spring and summer, when the working of the *bavcas* is most important. In the cases when women work and men are more at home, they will attend the school meetings. This further exemplifies the notion of *complementarity* referred to in the previous section. Pejoska (1993: 123) notes the paradoxicality of the situation where women actually have some powers "traditionally" reserved for men (for example, the mother has a very important power to approve or disapprove of her son's marriage), but at the same time consciously abstain from using them. For her, this represents both the "support" for the patriarchal structure of the society, as well as the seeds of its destruction.

One of the most striking features of everyday discourses in Prespa is the fact that men like to present things in such a way as if they are "in charge." At the same time, they know very well that they are not "in charge" — the whole structure of the family collapses if the woman decides (or is forced by mistreatment) to walk away or

simply to abstain from family duties. However, men still go on with this kind of presentation and women let them get away with it, while at the same time both men and women know (and they know that at the same time "the other side" or "the other sex" knows it all too well) that what is presented as the "official story" has nothing to do with the way things are.

To conclude, both the concept of hyperreality and the concept of difference(s) plays a significant part in the understanding of gender relations in Prespa. Although superficially there *is* an established hierarchy (with women subordinated to men), in practice, this hierarchy seems to be a rationalizing illusion. I do not claim that men and women are completely *equal* (in particular, women lack significant political power), but their relations can be understood much better if one bases her or his observations on the concept of *complementarity*, where men and women *because they are different* provide different (and mutually compatible) elements that enable this community to function. And I believe that the first step in changing anything (or implementing steps towards a genuine equality) should be the basic understanding of the processes involved — in the case of Prespa, equality and difference.

REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmeti, Suzana, and **Ljubica Balaban**
1996   Women in Transition: Domestic Violence. MIC, 12 June 1996. ETS.

Archetti, Eduardo
1994   Models of masculinity in the poetics of the Argentinian tango. In: Eduardo P.
Archetti (ed.),*Exploring the Written*: *Anthropology and the Multiplicity of
Writing,* pp. 97-122. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Arifi, Teuta
1994   A presentation at the Conference on Macedonia, organized by the Forum
Against Ethnic Violence. 12 November 1994. University College London.

Baskar, Bojan
1993   Materina stran Mediterana. [A motherly side of the Mediterranean.]
Casopis za kritiko znanosti Nos. 158-159, pp. 147-162.

Boskovic, Aleksandar
1997   Virtual Places: Imagined Boundaries and Hyperreality in Southeastern
Europe. *CTheory* 20(3), Article 54. [http://www.ctheory.com/a54.html]

Bourdieu, Pierre
1977   *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, John K.
1964   *Honour, Family and Patronage*: *A Study of Institutions and Moral Values
in a Greek Mountain Community.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Danforth, Loring M.
1993   Claims to Macedonian identity: The Macedonian Question and the breakup of

Yugoslavia. *Anthropology Today* 9(4): 3-10.

Denich, Bette S.
1974   Sex and power in the Balkans. In: Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise
Lamphere (eds.),*Women, Culture & Society*, pp. 243-262. Stanford:
Stanford University Press.

Dubisch, Jill
1991   Gender, kinship and religion: "Reconstructing" the anthropology of Greece.
In: Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991: 29-46.

Einhorn, Barbara
1993   *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements
in East Central Europe*. London: Verso.

Ford, George
1983 "Za dusha": An interpretation of funeral practices in Macedonia. *Symbolic Interaction* 6(1): 19-34.

Gjurovska, Mileva
1991 Socijalnite ciniteli na vertikalna podviznost na zenata vo sferata na trudot vo Makedonija. [Social factors of the vertical mobility of working women in Macedonia.] TS. October 1991. Skopje.
1995 *Socijalnite ciniteli na vertikalna podviznost na zenata vo sferata na trudot vo Makedonija.* [Social factors of the vertical mobility of working women in Macedonia.] TS of the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Filozofski fakultet. Skopje: Univerzitet "Sv. Kiril i Metodij."

Government of the Republic of Macedonia
1995 *Women: Status of Equality.* National report of the Republic of Macedonia for the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995. Skopje: Government of the Republic of Macedonia.

Gramatnikovski, Vasil, Blagoja Markovski, and **Vasil Daskalovski**
1993 Prespa — nekoi osnovni geografski odliki i faktori sto vlijaat vrz etnografskite

promeni. [Prespa – some basic geographical characteristics and factors which influence ethnographic changes.] *Etnolog* 3: 177-185.

Herzfeld, Michael
1987 *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass*: *Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holy, Ladislav
1994 Contextualisation and paradigm shifts. Paper presented at the conference "Interpretation and Context," St. Andrews, Scotland, January 7, 1994. [This article has recently been published in Roy Dilley (ed.), *The Problem of Context,* Oxford: Berghan, 1999.]

Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project
1995 *The Human Rights Watch Global Report on Women's Human Rights.* New York: Human Rights Watch.

Karakasidou, Anastasia N.
1995 Women of the family, women of the nation: National enculturation among Slavic
speakers in Northern Greece. TS.
1997 *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Loizos, Peter, and **Evthimios Papataxiarchis** (eds.)
1991 *Contested Identities*: *Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Milicic, Bojka
1995   The structure of cross-sibling relationships: A Mediterranean case. *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 5(1): 129-143.

Pejoska, Frosa
1983   L'envers des apparences: miroir des pouvoirs. *Cahiers de Littérature Orale* 34: 95-128.

Scavina, K.
1996   Actively promoting women's rights. ETS. [Originally published in *Vecernji list* (Zagreb), May 22, 1996, p.5.]

Schwartz, Jonathan M.
1995   The petrified forest of symbols: Deconstructing and envisioning Macedonia. *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures* 4(1): 9-23.

Segalen, Martine
1983 [1980]   *Love and Power in the Peasant Family: Rural France in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Sarah Matthews. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
1986 [1981]   *Historical Anthropology of the Family*. Translated by J. C. Whitehouse and Sarah Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Seremetakis, C. Nadia
1994   Gender Studies or Women's Studies: Theoretical and Pedagogical Issues, Research Agendas and Directions. *Australian Feminist Studies* 20: 107-118. Summer 1994.

Zlatanovik, Mileva
1994   Koga ljubovta ke zgasne. [When the flame of love disappears.] *Nova Makedonija*, Skopje. [No data on the date, issue, or page number available.]

SÉRIE ANTROPOLOGIA
Últimos títulos publicados

260. CARDOSO DE OLIVEIRA, Luís R. Rhetoric, Resentment and the Demands for Recognition in Quebec. 1999.
261. CARVALHO, José Jorge de. O Olhar Etnográfico e a Voz Subalterna. 1999.
262. BOSKOVIC, Aleksandar. Virtual Balkans: Imagined Boundaries, Hyperreality and Playing Rooms. 1999.
263. PEIRANO, Mariza G.S. (Org.). Leituras de Weber. Textos de Luis Ferreira, Marcia Sprandell e Mônica Pechincha. 1999.
264. TAYLOR, Julie. Agency, Trauma, and Representation in the Face of State Violence: Argentina. 1999.
265. CARDOSO DE OLIVEIRA, Luís R. Legalidade e Eticidade nas Pequenas Causas. 1999.
266. CARVALHO, José Jorge de. Transformações da Sensibilidade Musical Contemporânea. 1999.
267. RAMOS, Alcida Rita. Projetos Indigenistas no Brasil Independente. 1999.
268. CARDOSO DE OLIVEIRA, Luís R. Individualism, Collective Identities and Citizenship: The United States and Quebec Seen from Brazil. 2000.
269. BOSKOVIC, Aleksandar. The Other Side of the Window: Gender and Difference in Prespa, Republic of Macedonia. 2000.

A lista completa dos títulos publicados pela Série Antropologia pode ser solicitada pelos interessados à Secretaria do:

Departamento de Antropologia
Instituto de Ciências Sociais
Universidade de Brasília
70910-900 - Brasília, DF

Fone: (061) 348-2368
Fone/Fax: (061) 273-3264/307-3006