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## **Blame it on patriarchy! (Gender as identity in Macedonian culture)**

**Abstract:** The paper deals with the concept of identity, which is defined as something fluid, flexible and variable in various manifestations, numerous positions and different moments, as well as with gender as identity, which is being defined as social construct with multiple and more complex categories of identity in comparison to biological determination.

The theoretical considerations are consequently followed by applicative analysis hence, the paper aims at defining gender as an identity within the frames of the Macedonian folk culture. Namely, by using illustration from a number of folk creations, the paper presents the image of the socio-cultural challenges of construction of gender identity, putting emphasis on the most frequent stereotypes and prejudices rooted in the patriarchal milieu. At the same time, the paper points out the cases which evidence some personal struggles against the collective notions such as cross dressing or open-minded approach towards eroticism and sex. Consequently, the paper concludes that the construction of one's personal gender identity is being significantly influenced by the collective identities, however, sometimes it is being modified and transformed in compliance with the individual perceptions.

The last chapter briefly addresses the contemporary situation in the Macedonian culture on this issue, and research models of departure from the patriarchal milieu. Finally, this image is set within a European context.

**Key words:** identity, gender, Macedonian culture, patriarchy, personal identity, collective (social) identity

## Identity

Identity is one of the fundamental concepts in contemporary social sciences and humanities, a concept that covers comprehensive meanings and a number of components within different areas and disciplines, ranging from psychology and sociology, through theory of literature and imagology, to cultural studies, postcolonial and feminist criticism. In the broadest sense of the term, identity refers to the general characteristics of an individual, or a group. Therefore, when referring to identity, we think of either personal, collective, or social identity, although it is quite evident that their distinction is almost impossible, because each individual holds both personal characteristics, such as physical attributes, or values that he/she believes in, combined with the qualities arising from his/her social i.e. racial, ethnic, national, religious, professional, gender, sexual, cultural and other types of identity; at the same time united with group belonging and solidarity, which may, but need not be dependent on the personal identity.

Furthermore, the personal and social identity relate to aspects of one's identity that are exceptional and unique compared to the ones arising from someone's belonging to a particular social group, or community. "Every individual has a repertoire of identities (social and personal); each identity notifies the individual who he/she is and what this identity indicates. Which of these identities is more outstanding for a particular person varies depending on the specific social context. "(Велева, 2011: 174)

In addition, our effort to define the concept of identity is taking into consideration that there are

two perspectives in parallel, which don't meet on the issue whether identity is something given, fixed and unchangeable or, on the other side, it is something flexible, constructed and variable in different events and different positions people have in certain moments. This paper corresponds with the second position, in which the biological determination is not crucial for the construction of an identity, but on the contrary, it is actively constructed, changed and transformed in the course of a series of social processes. This perspective of the socially constructed identity implies that it constantly redefines itself through the process of socialization and interaction with the others, i.e. through adopting the other's experiences and their acceptance in accordance with their interests, as well as through the transition in the various roles that each individual takes in different moments, or different life situations. Or, as Stuart Hall says, identity is subject to constant transformation, it is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'... Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power..." (Hall: 225). It is a production that is never complete and always constitutes within, not outside, representation.

This implies that, while trying to define identity as a social positioning of oneself and the others, one need primarily to talk about the similarities and differences, for the reason that only through these two features one can illustrate the essence of this concept without a doubt. Identity actually reveals itself and reflects

through alterity (difference), i.e. “Through what it is not, indicated by polarization, or by the inclusion/exclusion in a group of insiders versus outsiders i.e. we against them” (Woodward, 1997: 9).

Simple determination of similarities and differences of one individual or group over another confirms the thesis that identity is constant negotiation between oneself and the others rather than something permanent and fixed once and for all. It requires a balance in calling attention either to the similarities or differences, as two equally important principles for construction of identity, because too much pushiness and forcing the similarities may result in nationalism and similar dangerous theories of uniqueness and superiority, while insisting on differences may lead to labeling, marginalizing others, prejudice, chauvinism, segregation ...

### **Gender**

In accordance with the above mentioned position on the flexibility of identity, which is perceived as something that vary at different events and different positions that an individual or group hold at a given moment, is the very concept of gender as a social construct which incorporates numerous and far more complex categories of identity in comparison to the biological determination. The gender concept “aims to free women from cultural plot associated with sexual identity, prompting discussion of the overall structure of thought, and shaking the structure, not only the structure of the division of roles, but the structure of the traditional opposition man/woman. So, this theory goes far beyond the views of the

school that adheres to the differences and radically opposes to the patriarchal culture. Moreover, the term gender, which is not synonymous with sex, in fact, is allowing the sexual identity of the subject to be theoretically placed in the broader variety of genders in relation to those designated by sex. For example, the UN officially recognizes five: heterosexual man, heterosexual woman, homosexual man, homosexual woman, bisexual.”(Гајери, 2006: 284)

Driven by the logic that identity is best articulated within the system of similarities and differences, it would be expected that gender and gender identities are reflected primarily by differences between man and woman, in order to “understand relations between men and women, their access to resources, their activities and constraints they face when they connect with each other.”(Ивановска, 2007: 68). But one should not forget that feminism sought not only for the essential difference in the historical specificities, places, bodies and discourses in and through which women live differently from men, but from each another. “Few would deny that feminist theory does not apply fully to the essential difference, invincible difference, although not the difference between men and women, nor the difference characteristic of female nature (in woman as a nature), but the difference in the feminist concept of woman, women and the world.”(De Laurentis, 1993: 308)

### **Gender as identity in Macedonian folk culture**

Caught between the similarities and differences, between common positions and distinctiveness, the awareness of the issue of identity and gender related

issues differ in various cultures, time periods and traditions. Hence, gender as identity in Macedonian folk literature and culture ought to be considered in the context of the overall socio-political, economical and cultural situation on this ground and the specific conditions of the creation and development of gender identities among the people living in Macedonia.

However, in our effort to determine those identities, it is constructive to start from the universal facts, and largely focus on cultural variations of gender identity in Macedonian folk tradition later. Namely, since 1974 Sherry Ortner in *The Proceedings "Woman, Culture and Society"* tried to reveal the fundamental logic of perspective that assumes cultural inferiority of women, which is considered universal fact for all cultures.

"The universality of the subordination of women, for fact, exists in every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of varying degrees of complexity, points out that here we are facing something very deep, very persistent, something that we can not defeat by a simple rearrangement of several tasks and roles in the social system ... "(Ortner, 2003: 147). Declining the theory of biological and genetic determinism as a possible explanation for the marginalization of women, Ortner is trying to find the answer to the opposition between categories nature/culture. She actually claims that secondary position of women in all cultures could be explained simply by the assumption that women are identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men who are identified with culture. Having in mind that culture is always trying to suppress and conquer nature, by that logic, the culture in the face of the man is always

trying to suppress the woman. Although at first glance this conclusion looks like oversimplification, Ortner defends her thesis with examples and arguments that explain the equalization of the female body with its physiology and reproductive function. This thesis has been remarkably demonstrated by Simone de Beauvoir in *"The Second Sex"* (1949), the first comprehensive study that looked into the position of women and the origin of their social and sexual inequality.

Guided by the physiology of a woman and her psyche on the other side, and primarily motivated by her pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and motherhood in general, the social function of women is also limited to the context of the home. The man is left with the favorable option of self realization in the wider context of public life of the community or society. In this way, the difference of the domestic/private and public space is established between men and women, which are treated equally to the opposition between nature and culture from the time when Claude Levi-Strauss wrote *"The basic structures of kinship"* in 1969.

However, Ortner acknowledged that this kind of simplification and schematization is exaggerated. Therefore, at the end she reconciles her position of woman as nature vs. man as a culture (hence the question mark in the title of her text) and notes that: "At the same time her functions of socialization and cooking in the domestic context demonstrate that the woman is a powerful factor in the cultural process as she continually converts raw natural good in cultural products. Belonging to the culture, but nonetheless acting as if she has stronger and

more direct relationships with nature, the woman is once more perceived as located between these two areas.”(Ortner, 2003: 167).

Trying to detect the local variation of this global phenomenon and illustrate that the Macedonian culture and the patriarchal model of appropriate behavior are important factors in the social construction of social, cultural and gender identities in these areas, we reach for verification in examples from the Macedonian folk (oral) literature. Namely, at first glance obvious identification model of patriarchal behavior proves that the Macedonian case is no exception to the rule that a woman is assigned to the private sphere and the male sphere to the sphere of the public action. “The line of separation of these two spheres is the female reproductive system that occurs as the main reason for establishing the role of mother as the most important social role of women in traditional community”(Цветановска, 2001: 547)

Indeed the motherhood is the strongest element that personal female identity is based upon, which is later used in the traditional system in many situations to determine also the collective identity and the status of women in folk culture. So, on the one hand, we have this glorification of her sacred maternal role in a number of works from different genres, and on the other hand, we have unhidden terms of social condemnation and excommunication from the environment for the childless woman who gets abusive names as futile, barren, infertile and so on. Women are usually considered as main cause for the childlessness in the family, and it goes to such extremes that the cause of sterility is even looked for

in her allegedly immoral and promiscuous behavior.

It is believed that the childlessness leads to economic regression of the family, as in the ballad “Stojan and Stojanka” (Пенушлиски, 2004: 326). There are hardly any works that blame or locate the responsibility in men, but in rare instances there are songs where the guilt is located in external factors, that is, they are transferred to the curse which was addressed to the young bride, as in “Jana the childless bride” for example (Пенушлиски, 2004: 322). In this ballad Jana even agrees that her Stojan may find another woman, who will give him children, and she offered to take care of them, indicating that unfair attitude of the community towards the childless woman is often simultaneously accompanied by her own despair and self-pity, driven by her learned knowledge of her own identity, blaming herself for failing to fulfill her role in marriage and family, and feeling like she fails her “nature”, so she voluntarily places in the role of a victim.

The close relationship between the woman and her physiology is evident in the fact that women are considered “unclean” during the menstrual period, debatable attitude also suggested by Julia Kristeva, which includes the period in the internal threats to identity, as a condition, same as motherhood, for life and for gender diversity, and thus jeopardizes the relations between the sexes. That connection is also obvious in the common understanding of a woman’s honor tied exclusively to her virginity (where from arises the common practice of inspection of results of the loss of virginity after the first wedding night and punishment for the dishonored bride such as

sending her back to her father on a donkey sitting upside down), as well as the utterly incorrect behavior toward the adulteress woman, and woman-mother of bastard child. In the latter case, if a girl gives birth to a child born as a result of extramarital sexual relations, it is considered that not only did she embarrass her family, but the prejudices go a step further and accuse her that “her sin is the source of danger for the whole village. It will be destroyed by snow, or it will be exposed to drought, which could seriously put in danger the existence of the whole community” (Цветановска: 7)

Thus, these examples confirm that the Macedonian folk literature and culture applies what Elizabeth Grosz has defined as follows: “patriarchal oppression (in other words) justifies itself, at least in part, linking women closer to the body than men and, through this identification, reducing the social and economic role of women only on the (pseudo)biological one. Relying on the essentialism of naturalism and biologism, misogynistic thought restricts women to their biological needs for reproduction based on the assumption that because of their biological, physiological and endocrinology transformations, women are somehow more biological, more bodily and more natural than men.” (Грос, 2003: 42)

Thus, the Macedonian woman becomes not only responsible for reproduction and family, but she becomes indirectly responsible for the socio-economic status of the entire community, a fact that irrefutably determines the inseparable knot between her personal and social gender identity. This patriarchal installed framework follows women in all her life cycles from

birth to death, and can be confirmed by examples of many other Macedonian folk creation with different motives, like the ballads about the “built in” or sold bride. These ballads “ show how unequal the position of women in the past socio-family circumstances: in these folk-songs woman-wife is almost equaled to the goods, she is treated as an object that can easily be sold, given away! (...) Indeed, it was a disturbing sight: mother and her children standing next to each other on the market and wait for a buyer to take them in uncertainty!” (Саздов, 1989: 39). These described procedures are trying to find their justification in the social aspect, because allegedly the man was forced into such degrading act of selling his wife as a result of poverty and lack of money resulting from the obligatory unfair tax introduced by the Ottomans. In fact it is apparent illustration of the triple marginalization of women, equally social, ethnic and gender.

These examples are certainly extreme, but even in the traditional images of family and gender relations within the framework of typical Macedonian families, it is clear that in the ruling hierarchy the man (father, husband, brother) has a privileged position with the highest rights regarding the supervision of the property and businesses, as well as making decisions on behalf of other family members. Patriarchy is accompanied by patrilocal residence i.e. married couple living in a man’s family house, usually with his parents, while man living in woman’s house is laughed at; then patrilineality or inheritance of property, names and titles exclusively through the male kinship line; the absolute authority of the father or husband in the family; double standard for men and women; higher

valuation of the male children and so on. In addition to the latter, we take into account the motif of a woman who gives birth to nine girls, so her husband threatens to kill her if their tenth child is also a female, a motif that is found in songs like “Todor’s daughter” and in stories like “The fortuneteller and the woman with nine girls” (Пенушлиски, 2004: 45). This irrational need of the patriarchal environment to hold woman responsible even for genetics is probably what can be acknowledged under the term “paradox of women” of Alkoff, so we believe it needs no further comment.

In spite of this, it seems that there is another side to the medal. As Svetieva shows, the male principle often dominated on the manifest level, while the woman always found alternative ways to participate in the decision making. Namely, “inside, in the family structure, on the existential level, the position of women has not been so unfavorable ... Rather, we can accept as true the opinion that female family group held important positions in the internal family system. However, regardless of the actual situation regarding the roles of both sexes in internal family relationships, the woman always says the man is the leading figure of the family” (Светиева, Женски сениорат...: 4). Svetieva interprets this condition implying an ideal model of traditional culture where men dominated the most general rights and obligations and realistic model of traditional culture in which women, through the mechanisms of the female subculture were adopting a latent rights. It refers to the situation “wife rules, but doesn’t run” (Brill, 1993: 163) or as a saying that our people use even to this day claims, “man is the head, but woman is the neck.”, which we have

already addressed previously.<sup>1</sup>

But if this kind of perception of gender relations is to be considered as really inherent to the Macedonian folk culture, how should we interpret the examples, whose number is not unimportant, which, despite the restrictions of the collective conservative gender identity, speak of a different relationship to corporeality and sexuality of women within the same patriarchal environment? Namely, although the coverage of her body is considered a sign of decency as desirable female characteristic, if women’s breasts in public perception can be directly mentioned only in their breastfeeding function (as in some riddles), and only metaphorically make allusions to sexual attraction (usually displayed as two apples or quinces under arm), still we can not reject the layer of works that are considered as part of the so-called erotic folklore, which open some different topics related to sexual life of people. Thus, topics like infidelity of spouses and servants or priests as women’s lovers, sexual inability of some men and cases of virginity in marriage, widows with huge sexual appetites, voyeurism, masturbation, incest, homosexuality and even nudity can be found in Macedonian folk stories, songs and other folklore from this corpus. The attitude of the Macedonian people to eroticism as part of our traditional culture, reveals both positive and stimulating, and patriarchal and critical aspects (Мартиноска, 2007: 14). It leads to the conclusion that the construction of personal identities are not just built upon the assumptions of

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<sup>1</sup> Мартиноска Ана. 2011. Мажот е главата, ама жената е вратот, УНЕСКО, Институт за македонска литература

collective understanding and socially constructed identity, but, instead of a binary set, black and white schematization, it is subject to modifications and transformations depending on individual beliefs and specific living situations. In this context, the above mentioned distinction public / private, which is taken as analogous to male / female, subject / object, culture / nature, etc. in the traditional culture of the Macedonians have not always been consistently followed. For example, as a consequence of migrant workers in Macedonia in the late 19th and early 20th century, the historical evidence encounters many cases of women who were village chiefs. Particularly illustrative are the works of women-dukes and among them especially the motif of a “girl soldier,” which includes the motif of cross-dressing from men to women or vice versa that is the subject of a temporary change of gender identity. Kiril Penušliski locates this motif in several epic poems, stories, anecdotes, drama and dance sequences, and thus suggests that “in some cross-dressing stories ends with gender metamorphosis, i.e. with actual change of the sex.” (Пенушлиски, 1992: 40). Such is the case with the stories like “King’s daughter who turned into a boy”, “Girl who became a man” or “Girl that turns into a hero”, all of whom have a similar motif as the above mentioned works for the mother who has only female children, so she cross-dressed one into a boy, which eventually results into a magical sex change with the help of a golden apple, or some fortunetellers. However, it is difficult to bring such examples in relation with the contemporary gender transformations made by medical-surgical means, regarding transgender,

transsexual or intersex people.

Citing previous interpretations of the motif by the Russian scientist Kzhizhanovski as transvestism, Penušliski still goes to more practical assumptions about such changes in gender identity. Indeed, in the Macedonian folk creations they are justified with specific reasons such as the release of the captured man from prison, or to escape living in one household with the evil mother-in-law in the case of female *kjehaja*, or on the other hand, with subordinate relations of the villagers who had to give in one member of the family to serve in the military, even unwillingly. Reviewing the Macedonian, Albanian, Vlach and other variants of the motif, Penušliski summarizes that “it should be taken into consideration that the motif “girl soldier” belongs to the broader theme “women heroes” that complements the apparent tendency to point out that every occupation in society that is seemingly reserved only for men, can be successfully performed also by women, even better than men. Therefore, from this point of view, the meaning of “girl soldier” motif can be qualified - to use modern terms - as a kind of striving for emancipation and equality of women with men. However, if we have the age of the motif in mind, created in conditions of medieval or older times, such a tendency seems really revolutionary.” (Пенушлиски, 1992: 45-46). Opposite cases of a male cross-dressing are less common and “especially used in erotic stories. Thus, they easily manage to get closer to the desired women.” (Пенушлиски, 2004, 2: 445).

Certainly we could have followed the male side of this gender story through examples from the Macedonian folklore, or to try to determine how

much and in what ways gender affects masculinity and construction of identity among men, but such endeavor exceeds the ambitions of this text. After all, it is certain that many other aspects of gender identity remained intact, such as the image of woman as guardian of the identity in Macedonian folk culture or the right of women to education and economic independence, but as noted by acad. Kulafkova "It is not necessary to follow all individual projections and textualizations on women to draw more general and valid knowledge about stereotypes of women and their identity" (Кѹлафкова, 2006: 145) in folk culture and tradition.

### **Gender as identity in Macedonian culture**

Due to the specific historical and socio-political circumstances, Macedonian folk culture is not just a predecessor of the present-day literature and culture, but rather it is an ongoing spiritual and creational potential and in destroyable collective memory in full swing. It is also what Macedonian contemporary culture is largely built upon. Therefore in Macedonian case, folk culture needs to be perceived as an integral part and one of the key elements in the growth of the overall culture. At the same time, it is essential to point out that it is not the case where one system totally replaces the other, but it is more accurately to say that both systems exist parallel. Namely, the collective notions of past and present folk culture together with the individual artistic expressions create the whole of the contemporary Macedonian culture. That is why this section will try to address the present-

day culture not just as illustration of literature, theatre, art, media etc., but in the view of the cultural studies, as the "the overall way of life" (Hall). Hence, we'll look into questions like the following: What is the Macedonian present-day culture's standpoint on the matter of gender identity? What does Macedonian culture reveal on the issues of subordination and marginalization of women? What is the position on patriarchy, its' conventions and exceptions? How are female body and sexuality represented in popular culture?

In order to do so, we have to stress that after the fall of communism and the break-up of former Yugoslavia, the new countries that emerged from it, among which is Macedonia, have been going through transition from the socialist system to democracy. What's more, they were all manifesting serious identity crisis, which led to the emergence of new forms of national, ethnic, religious and cultural identities. That is entirely understandable in the line of the definition of identity as a dynamic process rather than a fixed and permanent category (McMillan: 145)<sup>2</sup>, but also it proves that identity is mostly debated when in crisis. In the late-modern societies this two terms of identity and crisis seem inseparable. In Macedonia too.

In a condition of two decade's continuing struggle for defining and verifying one's identity on national and ethnic level built largely upon stereotypes and canonized representations, and even in extreme cases of nationalism, ethnic chauvinism and cultural intolerance, gender identity was usually found as

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Jovanović:72

not so essential and significant. Certainly we're not suggesting that no step forward has been made, but the common position is that Macedonia is yet to deal seriously with gender related issues. And it is our estimation that this counts on a broad-spectrum level, starting from academic debates, through art and media representation, to everyday life.

In Macedonia in principle, the genders are supposed to be equal (by law). In practice, men still have much higher status, and although they both work outside the home, women are still responsible for most domestic labor and are more likely to manage the family and the household.

In academia, men dominate in the sciences and engineering, whereas women are more visible in the humanities. Gender research and education on gender issues were introduced only in the last couple of years. There is just one recently established (in 2005) gender department on the Philosophical faculty at the oldest state university "Ss. Cyril and Methodius", than there is one postgraduate program on the self-standing Institute "Euro-Balkan" (with subprograms M.A. in Philosophy and Gender and M.A. in Sociology and Gender), as well as several other departments or institutions that teach gender as one of the available courses (such as Postgraduate Cultural Studies organized by the Institute of Macedonian Literature). There are several scholars that show long-term interest in gender topics, to name a few: Katerina Kolozova, Jasna Koteska, Natasa Avramovska, Loreta Georgievska-Jakovleva, Ana Martinoska, etc., but unfortunately none of them is exclusively dedicated to gender themes, but noticeably they all

work on other correlated disciplines (literature, cultural studies, sociology etc.) as well. Out of the universities, the researches made are more of an incident than an indication of a permanent and committed scientific interest.

On the non-academic level, there are quite a few NGOs promoting gender equality and addressing particular problems of Macedonian women today. Some statistics even claim their number goes up to 70, most of which work on domestic violence, issues like women's education, legal issues regarding their rights etc., but the problem is they are mostly voluntarily run, with small budgets and lack of governmental support. One of the latest women's initiative is called "Women unlimited Macedonia", and it is "ready to bring a new positive energy to all women regardless of their age or ethnic and cultural background." On their first opening meeting in July 2011 in Skopje, held under the motto "Inspired! United! Strong!" women from Macedonia opened up many topics which are important and which are a part of their world such as the economic (in)dependence of women, their career, the perceptions and stereotypes which are still present in their lives. Using excellent design and organization, being interactive, fun and primarily educational, Macedonian women committed to equal opportunities, strengthening the empowerment against discrimination of any kind. Their campaign undermined stereotypes of women whose identity should be determined by their culture and (their) men, and said loudly "I can be what I want."

As we already noted in an article about it, "probably the biggest problem lies in the question

who heard them? Large audience was mostly composed of precisely those women who, privately and professionally, are dedicated to the fight in this field. Those who need to learn from their experience, unfortunately, were fewer. There were almost no men present, with compliments to the exceptions, even though they were mainly responsible for the organization or technical details. As if we forget that gender issues are not intended only for women, but we rather need parallel emancipation and empowerment of both men and women.” (Мартиноска, 2011) This initiative as many others before and after it, proves the necessity to expand the circle and touch as many marginalized groups, believing in the possibility to change things. Every effort counts, but needless to say, there is still so much more to be done.

This counts in particular for the public domain and the media, where we're still facing sexism and gender blindness on every step. Despite the well-known power of media, no serious analysis have been made in this area, other than several individual papers regarding the stereotypes on women, their mistreatment by the media and their degrading representations as sex objects in popular and mass culture.<sup>3</sup> Both in printed or electronic media, there are numerous examples of discrimination of women, explicit or implicit. It is in relation with the general cultural context, which based on the patriarchal system shown previously in

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Бадаревски Боби. 2008. Кодот на родовите улоги во медиумските текстови: мокниот маж и сексуализираната жена во регионалниот медиумски контекст, *Низ перспективата на жената*, Приредила Катерина Мојанчевска, Скопје, Мултимедиа, стр. 27-30

this text, is creating representations and stereotypes which are difficult to fight against. There are some media which are trying to be objective and neutral on gender issues, but very few succeed to do so, and even fewer have a strong policy on the educational impact of the media, or make a considerable effort in favor of the change of the gender relations and roles. In that context, we need to point out the weekly magazine “Globus” which was publishing a column on gender issues for almost 4 years, written by Jasna Koteska in the first 23 editions and later written by Ana Martinoska for the next 173 issues (till January 2011). Martinoska is currently writing columns in the daily newspaper “Nova Makedonija” and it is, without any false modesty, the only column printed on regular weekly base, which is dedicated exclusively to promotion of gender and sexual equality.

Talking about art, two positions should be considered, the female artists and their status in the society, as well as the gender representation in art. It is indisputable that the canon of the Macedonian art is male, as it is the case in most European countries. Despite the tradition of the female artists from the Macedonian folklore famous by their gifted singing, storytelling, dancing, needlework, embroidery etc., their work is rarely appreciated enough, they mostly remain anonymous and their names are in most cases forgotten.

Some authors, such as Jasna Koteska, in her attempt to make the periodization of the Macedonian female writing, in the book by the same name, claims that these women are the first authors in the history of Macedonian literature. Koteska suggests that there is

“a little talk about women as writers, although their work constitutes a part of all collected folklore (especially lyrical) ... it almost never deals with the folk singers of the last century, and it is due to insufficient information on the proceedings of folk wisdom. “(Koteska, 2003: 88) But, it is a fact that the Macedonian folk singers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are considered as “non established and non-professional women artists who, although they are the forerunners, are not a part of the systemized periodization of the professional female artists in Macedonian literature” (Koteska, 2003: 92). It is certainly something that needs to be changed in the canons of the Macedonian literary history, because if we agree that the folklore is the first stage of the development of literature and an unavoidable part of the totality of the literature of people (Ќулафкова, 2006: 27), we can see no as to reason as to why folk singers should not take a corresponding place in the canon of the history of Macedonian women’s literature. Later on, Koteska follows the Macedonian female writing in all genres – poetry, prose and drama, and proposes the first Macedonian periodization of female writing.

The position of a female writers today is somewhat improved, but still they are largely outnumbered by men, both in the Association of Macedonian Writers and on the book shelves. The Macedonian literature remains a men’s world (Koteska finds that among 1990 names mentioned in the History of Macedonian literature by Miodrag Drugovac only 2,7 % are female), even though persistently enough, female writers are fighting their battle. There are several names that made their names into the public, even

received some awards such as Olivera Nikolova, Kica Bardjieva Kolbe, Lidija Dimkova, Elizabeta Bakovska etc. In the last decade, women also increased their visibility and empowerment by writing on pro-active female topics such as women’s body and sexuality, for example Olivera Kjorvezirovska in “Lu’s locked body” or Irena Cvetkovich Alena in “Orgasmic letters”, which is the first Macedonian novel on lesbian topic.

Nevertheless, these examples are more of an incident, than a rule. Talking on gender topics in contemporary literature – numerous authors (we’re stressing once again – they’re mostly men) were writing novels where we can trace the same patriarchy strategies for the stereotyping of space, similar to the ones we witnessed in the folk culture. For example, the Zhivko Chingo’s novel “Silver snow” and Luan Starova’s “Ervehe” can be read as illustrations of femininity (which) “is expected to reveal the oppression, religiosity, expressing concerns about her moral character of the patriarchal past and socio-economically less developed areas. She is more oriented towards family and home, unlike the man who is looking outwards oriented towards material security. Masculinity is represented by the strength, protection, determination associated with the dominant power, heroism and adventures.” (Мојсиева-Гушева, 2011) This traditional model of femininity can be opposed to the modern model, as in the analysis of Petre M. Andreevski’s novel “Pirej” and the above mentioned, “Ervehe” by Starova. As Georgievska-Jakovleva suggests, in these two novels the female model implies subordination of women to men, her placement in the private sphere as wife and

mother, her treatment as wonderful subject whose function is reproduction, and her main source of satisfaction is identified in her complete commitment to the other members of her family. “Both novels mark the beginning of the dialogue to overcome the anthropocentrism which creates the image of man as the center of the universe. Although the perspective from which cultural events are presented is patriarchy, they succeed to achieve a certain reform in the rigid patriarchal morality. That reform does not bring revolutionary ventures without departing from the tradition of type of the moral-allegory female images, but indeed discreetly argues with it, asking question of fairness as a key benchmark in the performance of symbolic meanings. (...) The wisdom characteristic for Ervehe, and the diligence characteristic of Velika, is symbolic representation of the idea of justice, reason and natural benefactions. They symbolize justice, they teach and save. Fulfilling the maternal function is the most important area of the female authority. While acting in the private sphere, they still possess mobility, independence, activity.” (Георгиевска-Јаковлева, 2011)

Regarding drama and theatre the situation is very much similar. One of the latest research on the models of femininity in Macedonian drama, made by Biljana Durakovska-Velickovska claims that generally there are two such models: patriarchy (present in the early drama text in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but slightly present even today) and the model of its’ deconstruction. Debating over seven most representative cases, she concludes that patriarchy model is more persistent and “Only after the shocking

drama plays at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, things start to move in favor of women and their empowerment. At that point Macedonia is a transition society, which tends to leave the old socialist system behind and to join Europe, so therefore it will start to take some of the European way of life and culture into account... (Дураковска-Величковска, 2011: 115)

That the gender identity is pretty much the same in the film department, proves the study of Mishel Pavlovski, who is locating the differences in the Macedonian films made in the 1960s, 1970s and later, compared to the ones made in the last two decades. Pavlovski is analyzing the masculinized discourse and the way it is being shattered, although an entirely different, female discourse is still just being anticipated. Hence, he is posing the question if the Macedonian cinematography is still waiting for an active woman, who is not at least a bit marginalized, who is aware of her actions and does not become a subject. Putting forward the film ‘Before the Rain’ (the first and only Macedonian film ever nominated for OSCAR), he suggests that perhaps “is it then possible that there exists, simply, a cinematic discourse, one which is neither exclusively male nor female.” (Pavlovski, 2011). Paraphrasing Goodman and De Gay, he ends that film as an institution is neither patriarchal in its essence, nor a complex structure which is used to project the dominant ideologies.

The same debates and issues are present in all the other art forms – painting, sculpture, photography and other visual arts, where female artist are trying to find their place under the sun and solve the problems of their public visibility, and where everyone is, more

or less, trying to break away from the dominant patriarchal model. The analysis of all these separate fields and more examples go beyond the limits of this text, but we're positive that they would also lead us to the same conclusion that patriarchy is hard to fight and it's traces are still very much alive, although there are numerous attempts for it's elimination.

### **Concluding remarks**

Gender as identity in Macedonian folk culture contributes to completion and enlightenment of the image of the patriarchal model that ruled in the Macedonian society for ages, and whose features are still visible even today, together with the departures from it. We believe that the conscious of the numerous limiting and discriminating patterns that were characteristic for the society, economic and cultural relations between genders, in addition to the level of resistance towards alteration of the traditions (by men as privileged), contributes to their continuing transformation, and all that as a result of the changes in the cultural, economic, political and social circumstances we live in. That way, the gender blindness typical for the larger part of the Macedonian folk culture slowly turns into condition of overcoming the discriminations. Therefore, the pointed aspects of the gender analysis of the Macedonian folk culture play a role in the deconstruction of the traditional stereotypes and patterns and creation of far-reaching gender sensibility. Yet, even a brief analysis of the present-day culture proves that although a step forward has been made and there are examples of new

trends regarding women and their position, we have to work further on deconstruction on female images and stereotypes present in notions of women's personal identity as well as in collective gender identity visible via art, media and everyday life.

This subject of gender as identity in Macedonian culture needs to be associated also with the Europeanization process and the creation of so-called European identity. Bearing in mind that each particular country becomes part of the European legal, social, economic and civilization milieu, it provides an authentic identity of belonging to a higher general level. (Jovanović: 82) But let's not forget that the identities of higher-level generalizations are most acceptable to those who have already confirmed their identity at a lower level. For the identities that are not sufficiently established and reliable at a lower level, most general identity may represent an empty concept. (Jovanović: 77) So, having in mind all we said so far about fragility of the gender identity in Macedonian case, the real issue is whether Macedonian woman can be considered as a European woman, a question that still searches for its answer.

Of course, it is not a matter of simple comparison to the varying national levels of other European countries or with a European Union as a whole, specially while it is consisted of multiple approaches and huge differences between (for example the northern and southern parts), but rather it is a matter of positioning ourselves in that broad spectrum. In Macedonia, motherhood is still perceived as the true meaning of womanhood (unlike fatherhood); the female roles in the households are still dominant even if there is

increased visibility of her public role; there are still a number of gender blind patterns in everyday behavior of both men and women and numerous fixed ideas of masculinity and femininity; the issues of sexuality (and specially homosexuality) are still not being detaboo-ized; women need to increase participation and visibility in politics, economy, leadership etc.

The various efforts that are being made so far in order to improve the conditions and the gender inequality are not sufficient enough, specially while

there is a strong conservative tendency supported by the government and the majority of population. With the intention of enhanced gender sensibility and more European quality of the gender identity issues, Macedonian women need to continue their fight for equality of life and lifestyle, regardless of race, nation, age, social class, sex and gender, and specially against implicit and explicit models of patriarchy until this word is erased from our vocabulary, or until we finally see the end of it.

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**Ана Мартиноска**

## За се е виновен патријархатот! (родот како идентитет во македонската култура)

**Резиме:** Трудот се занимава со концептот на идентитетот, дефиниран како нешто флуидно, флексибилно и променливо во разни манифестации, во бројни позиции и во различни моменти, како и со родот како идентитет, кој се одредува како социјален конструкт со побројни и посложени категории на идентитетот во споредба со биолошкиот детерминизам. Теоретските размислувања потоа се проследени со апликативна анализа, каде што трудот има за цел да го дефинира родот како идентитет, најпрвин во рамките на македонската народна култура. Имено, користејќи како илустрација голем број умотворби од народното творештво, трудот претставува сликата на социо-културните предизвици за изградба на родовиот идентитет, со акцент на најчестите стереотипи и предрасуди вкоренети во патријархалното опкружување. Во исто време, трудот укажува на примери со кои се докажуваат некои лични борби против колективните ставови како што се преоблекувањето од маж во жена и обратно, или отворениот пристап кон еротиката и сексот. Така, трудот заклучува дека изградбата на личниот родовиот идентитет на секоја единка е под значително влијание на колективните идентитети, но сепак се менува и трансформира во согласност со индивидуалните перцепции. Во последното поглавје трудот накусо се задржува и на современата состојба во македонската култура по ова прашање, и ги проследува моделите на отстапки од патријархалното миље. На крајот, ваквата слика се поставува во европски контекст.

**Клучни зборови:** идентитет, род, македонска култура, патријархат, личен идентитет, колективен (општествен) идентитет

