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TAKING OFF MOSLEM WOMEN'S VEILS IN REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In the period following the Second World War, the new communist authorities in Republic of Macedonia confronted the problem of faster emancipation of minorities, where the central problem was the problem of emancipating the woman with Moslem religion (especially the Albanian and Turkish minority). Through establishing legislatives, political propaganda, and sometimes with stronger administrative pressure and penalties, the authorities endeavored to surpass the existing conditions concerning the condition of the woman of Moslem religion, among which: wearing veils, selling and purchasing women, abduction of women, the husband's polygamy, shutting the female children inside the house after they turn the age of 10, the sexual misusage of married women, re-selling women and girls, etc. These characteristic occurrences of customary law of the Albanian and Turkish minority were among the most persistent and humiliating inherited customs relating the



Elections in November 1945

Moslem woman. They existed in the past, but in a great extent some of them are present today in Republic of Macedonia.

Communism and the new image of the woman

Taking off the veils was a representation of one of the most drastic political measures of the communist authorities in Republic of Macedonia in the first years after the Second World War. This measure generally emerged from the existing aims for overall emancipation and education of women. At the same time, the needs of such measure were ideological notions of the Communist Party (CP) for creation of a "new" man relieved of all "bourgeois" remains. A significant place in clearing these remains had the liberation of the religious consciousness and religious prejudice from which the inequality among the sexes resulted.

The change of bourgeois with communist authority during the year of 1945 and the years following, was accompanied with vigorous ideologization of society and many contradictories, where the equality among nations, religions and sexes was promoted; Tito and the CP were praised; the private property in the cities and villages was destroyed; the state economy and cooperative society was developed; every man and woman were asked to participate in the restoration and re-building of the ruined country, etc. The primitive egalitarianism and the physical labour was extoled and the common man became "a creator and builder of socialism" through this state-party propaganda machine.

In the framework of such ideological-political determination, the new image of the woman was being formed. The image of the new "socialist" woman represented a combination of a modest and self-denying worker, a mother and a political activist. She participates on the meetings of the People's Front and in voluntary mass labour until late in the night, showing her femininity with deeds (taking care of the wounded soldiers, the war-orphanths, her own children). Such woman has an ascetic appearance, since there are "higher aims" facing her rather than taking care of her face and body¹.

The antifascist national - liberation war (1941-1944) put the masses (the people) on the stage of political events. The processes of destroying the traditional

¹ L. Sklevicky, " The place and tasks of the AFW in postrevolutionary changes of society, N.R. Croatia, 1945-1953", *Development, dilemma and perspectives of Yugoslav socialism*, 1, Zagreb 1988, p. 249.

and closed rural society in Macedonia were opened with great force. The Macedonian woman was included in the process of intensive emancipation (political, cultural, and social) and she showed self-consciousness and preparedness to oppose all prohibitions imposed on her by the environment she lived in.

The first step towards her political emancipation was made with the Declaration of ASNOM about the basic rights of the citizen of Democratic Macedonia, brought on August 2 1944, with which the equality among citizens of all nations, sexes and religion was proclaimed². In the same sense, the article 24 of Yugoslav Constitution from 1946 says, "women are equal to men in all areas concerning state, economic and political life"³.

The legal equality of women to men was an act of magnificent importance because it happened in a patriarchal, rural civilization that had lived its life in age-long traditionalism about the place and the role of the woman, the religious backwardness and fanaticism, superstition and illiteracy. The state of Macedonia in 1944/45 consisted of $\frac{3}{4}$ peasantry, over 70% illiterate people, and up to 9/10 illiterates from the female population. Starting from that heavy inheritance, the state efforted to open equal possibilities for social affirmation, emancipation and self-confirmation of every nation. That is why, albeit it had modest possibilities and potentials, the state as one of the most prior tasks put forth the education and the improvement of general knowledge and the cultural level of the population.

Along with the overall changes in society, there was a great propaganda about the raising the self-consciousness of the Moslem woman. She was being showed that "the national authority since the beginning ... started towards full liquidation of inequality and suppression of women" and legalized "full equality of women in all areas of state, economic and social life". The woman got equal right to vote, equal right to work and "full equality between the spouses and voluntary marriage concerning both parties" was proclaimed⁴.

In the "new" time conditions, the Moslem woman was caught between the norms of the customary and positive law, between her micro-world and social

² V. Veskovich-Vangeli, "Declaration of ASNOM about the basic rights of the citizen of democratic Macedonia relating solution of the female question", *ASNOM in creating the statehood of Macedonian people*, Skopje 1987, p.391-400.

³ Archive of Macedonia (AM), fund (f): Head committee of the Antifascist front of women (AFW) of Macedonia - Skopje, Resolution of the I Kongress of KPM.

⁴ AM, quoted funds, Regulations and laws of the rights and protection of women, brought by the former people's council.

demands. On one hand forced to reject her traditionally dependent position, in which she was treated as means of reproduction, a thing that can be bought and sold, and on the other hand, frightened that she might be boycotted by the environment she lives in if she tries to pass over the limits imposed on her sex for ages, so the Moslem woman often accepted the stereotype of her female role and stayed what she had to be. Integrated in the traditional lifestyle, Moslem women were wholly directed to the relations inside the family and the neighbourhood, and they slowly and with difficulty accepted the new values of change of their role and the relations between the sexes.

The fight against wearing veils

In the fight for women emancipation, the communists undertook many actions, but unfortunately, most of them were insufficiently prepared and showed many negative effects. One such registered drastic action was the measure for taking off the veils.

Officially, this act was proclaimed an act of throwing away the agelong role of dependence and inequality of the Moslem woman⁵, and furthermore her leaving the darkness of the medieval⁶. On all the possible ways the Moslem woman was persuaded to "take off the veil, that is to say, to throw away the dark and black curtain from her eyes, and once and for all to live a happy and free life together with our women"⁷.

The campaign for taking off the veil was very intensive during 1950, just before the introduction of the special law (January 1951)⁸. The all propaganda-machinery during 1950 was directed towards the preparation of a field where the law concerning the prohibition- the face of women to be covered, was to be enforced⁹. Here, a special role had the organizations of the Antifascist Front of Women (AFW), where special minority commissions were formed. Some more progressive Turk or

⁵ Avdo Humo's speech, vice-president of the Government of PR Bosnia and Herzegovina, concerning the Veil Law, "Nova Makedonija", VII, 1787, 03.10.1950.

⁶ Mustafa Karahasan, *End of the darkness*, Narodna zadruka", VI, 184, 12.01.1951.

⁷ AM, f: Local committee of AFW - Stip, Minutes from the plenary meeting held on 16.02.1950.

⁸ AM, f: PRM Council, k-109, IV Conference of the First regular meeting of the People's committee, Law against wearing veils.

⁹ AM, f: Local committee of AFW-Stip, Resolutions from the meeting held on 13.01.1950.

Albanian woman often led the minority commissions and their aim was to work on faster emancipation of the Moslem woman¹⁰.

The first task of the minority commissions was to gain confidence of the minority women in the organization of AFW. That is why, the activists of AFW started visiting villages and places where the minorities lived. Besides, they instructed minority women on many practical things relating everyday life, such as: cutting out clothes, sewing, cooking, boiling soap and other domestic things. The minority commissions organized and sent teams of pediatricians, midwives and other doctors, they sent gifts for the children, organized conversion-groups on certain topics, helped in some seasonal-work, etc. It was especially insisted on intensifying the enlightenment as well as seeking possibilities to include a large number of minority women in production. It was considered a better way for their emancipation and an easier step towards their taking off the veils. As a starting task, the AFW committee had to find jobs where the women could work with their veils on¹¹.

The action for taking off the veils was conducted without organization and spontaneously, as most of the massive actions in this period. The campaign for revealing the faces started with "organized sending of signatures of progressive elements" to the Council of (at that time) People's Republic of Macedonia, with demands a Veil Law to be brought forth. Some women and somewhere whole villages understood this act correctly and voluntarily took off the veils even before the conduction of the law¹², but in most places, this action was greeted with resistance. Furthermore, it was understood as a personal impact on the honour of the Moslem population.

A specific plan for conveying this delicate and difficult action was not made and ordinary forms were used: political speeches and persuasion that took places at general conferences in villages and cities. But it was soon proved that such conferences were futile. The number of women that threw away the veils was really inconsiderable with certain exceptions, such as the examples in the regions of Debar and Radovish, where extended political preparations were undertaken.

Besides the obvious disturbance that this measure had caused, the People's Council of People's Republic of Macedonia, on 12.01.1951 brought the act that for-

¹⁰ AM, same, A three-month plan for the second semester of the Local Committee of AFW for the Stip district, concerning organizational strengthening of the AFW organization.

¹¹ AM, f: Head committee of AFW of Macedonia-Skopje, The tasks of the minority commission (1950).

¹² AM, f: Head committee of AFW of Macedonia-Skopje, The tasks of the minority commission (1950).

bidded wearing veils. The law was translated into Albanian and Turkish and sent to Macedonian villages in the form of leaflets.

The conduction of the law started immediately, although regularly, it was put in force a month later (14.02.1951). The law consists of seven articles that forbid wearing veils or any other cover of the face and that aim "to remove the agelong sign of dependence and cultural backwardness of Moslem women and to secure full equality and wide participation in the social, cultural and economic life in the country" (article 1). It is also forbidden "women to be forced pr persuaded...to cover their faces..." (article 2). Those women that will continue wearing veils, that is to cover their faces, as well as for those members of their family who will ask them to do it, are liable to the following penalties: deprivation of freedom up to three months or a penalty up to 20.000 dinars (art. 3). More rigid penalties - deprivation of freedom with reformatory work up to two years or a fine of 50.000 dinars was provided for those persons "who would force women to wear veils with means of force, threat, blackmail, or other means..." The same penalty was provided for those who "with misuse of the religious feelings, or using the prejudices and backwardness or any other way would propagandize that women should wear veils, i.e. cover their faces" (art. 4).

The Moslem population accompanied the conduction of the law with fierce and massive resistance. There were many fights even bloodshed. There were much organized protest in Kichevo, physical attacks on the agitators happened in the village of Djepishta (Tetovo region), in the village of Gorno Konjare (Kumanovo), massive resistance and incidents were registered in the regions of Struga, Prilep, Kumanovo, etc. Several delegations that protested against the law were organized and sent at the People's Council of PRM, and one of the delegations arrived at Federal People's Council to meet Skender Kulenovich. These delegations were sent from the regions of the following towns: Prilep, Krushevo, Brod, Veles and Bitola.

The disturbance of the members of Turkish minority who were previously dissatisfied with the expropriation measures and nationalization of private property culminated with this action. Not being able to develop their own personal initiative freely and frightened that they are going to lose identity and religion if they submit the Veil Law, they emigrated in Turkey¹³.

In the overall social and political changes that had happened in this period, in all the actions, the obligation of the communists was to be first in everything and

¹³ AM, f: CK SKM, Organizational-instructive department, k-29, Information on the course concerning the taking off of the veil, 31.01.1951.

to show credence in the authorities and their measures¹⁴. That was the way, the famous ideological and political differentiation was made, and the members of CP that were not prepared to follow and realize the directive of the actual politics and supreme authority were dismissed from the CP. But besides the rigid demand -the communists to be the first to convey certain measures, documents show that the taking off of the veils was not "fierce enough with the Albanian, Turkish and Shiptar members of the Party". The influence of Moslem priests and "the male chauvinistic education" was fierce in certain environments¹⁵.

The official party-bodies demanded the rebellion against revealing the faces of women to be solved with political measures whose aim was - "the minorities to perceive the correct politics of the Party relating the national question¹⁶. However there was violence from both sides¹⁷. Probably fearing the reprisals, in a period of one month (January-February 1951), with minor exceptions, Moslem women threw away the veils, that is to say 98.211 women revealed their faces and 3.355 left the veils on¹⁸.

For that swift revelation of faces there was the secret desire of the Moslem woman "to take off the black curtain off her eyes" because besides the isolation she was kept in, the new spirit and egalitarianism of the massive actions, even through a tiny hole penetrated her home¹⁹.

Further resistance in emancipating Moslem women

The revelation of the face, in itself, did not mean emancipation of the Moslem woman. The majority of these woman could not make such big step towards modernization, and so soon, almost over night, to get used to their revealed faces. They were ashamed of showing their faces in public, but also feared their husbands

¹⁴ AM, f: Council of PRM, k-109, IV Conference of the First regular meeting of the People's committee, speeches of Reis Shekiri, Nazim Firuz and Seit Mustafa.

¹⁵ AM, f: CK SKM, Organizational-instructive department, k-29, Information on the course concerning the taking off of the veil, 09.02.1951.

¹⁶ AM, p.o.Skopje, f: Regional committee of SKM-Skopje, k-4, doc.no. 118/2, To all party organizations (Circular letter), 1951.

¹⁷ AM, f: CK SKM, same, Information-the end of January 1951.

¹⁸ AM, f: CK SKM, same, Information on the taking off of the veils, 14.02.1951.

¹⁹ M. Menovski, *Even Mukades threw away the veil*, "Narodna zadruga", VI, 184, 12.01.1951.

who even fiercely forbid them to show up²⁰. In the beginning, the husbands even took over the field work of their women and hid them. So, Moslem women stopped moving outside their yards and were again closed up in their micro-world and under "the mercy" of the husbands. They changed the veils with coats and kerchiefs, which today is the most recognizable sign of Albanian minority women in Republic of Macedonia.

The authorities were aware of the unfinished process of emancipation after the measure for revealing the faces had been performed, and they sought ways for activating Moslem women. Thus, various cultural, educational and ideological actions were organized: performances, visits to the cinema and theater, lectures on various subjects, also the courses for enlightenment and reeading-groups were intensified. Still, all this with certain exceptions could not give visible results because of the deep-rooted religious prejudices and the resistance of the Moslem man relating the equality of women. On the other hand, every stronger insistence on conducting the rights of the woman guaranteed by the Constitution and Law, especially concerning the Albanian woman in Macedonia, was often declared as attacking the national rights. In fact it was only one thing - the man to keep the exclusive right to possess the woman, without excepting the norms established by the Constitution and Laws in the country.

During the social development in the city areas there was a greater emancipation of the Moslem woman, especially with the education of the girls that was imposed with the law for obligatory 8-year education. Every minority was enabled to study on its own mother tongue, and special schools and classes for the minorities were opened. But the religious indoctrination and exclusiveness were a great obstacle on the way of faster emancipation of minorities. They were not only conducted through the sermons in the mosques, but especially through the organized religious lectures. The children since their early childhood have to be believers of Islam, instead of making their own choice of religion as they grow up. In that sense they get their education and ideas about the role and place of the woman and man in the family and wider.

That is why it is not surprising that in R.Macedonia there still exist the custom for purchasing women, bigamy and several other remains of the customary law or more precisely *the right of the man*. In fact, the question of purchasing the woman

²⁰ AM, f: CK SKM, First Congress of SKM, k-27, Analysis of the Shiptar minority in PRM, 18.02.1952.

was one of the most sensitive questions in the processes of women emancipation after the Second World War, that was especially present with the Albanian minority (districts of Tetovo and Gostivar). The price paid for the woman, as for any other goods on the market, depended on whether the girl is beautiful, healthy, it was also important what is the economic power of the people in that area and it also mattered for the purchaser, i.e. for the traditions in that area. In making the transaction of selling and purchasing, main role had the mediators who for certain sum of money found families that could purchase a woman and families that have girls ready for marriage. The whole thing was performed in agreement with the head of the families, and the bride and the groom did not know each other until the day of exchange, or their wedding night. Some parents often advised their daughters to run away, just that they could sell them again. The family of the damaged husband took proceedings against the mediator or against the girl's family, demanding their money back. So, the courts in Macedonia had many unsettled proceedings, and the judges, in most cases, did not know how to settle them. They were in a dilemma about the ethnic question: whether to protect the buyer or the purchaser, but since it involved "a human being" the situation was much complicated and there were many unsolved proceedings²¹.

In some poorer villages (in the areas of Kumanovo and Tetovo) many cases of re-selling were registered. Namely the purchased woman who was not married with civil marriage but just with oral agreement between the heads of the families, was obliged to bear children (especially boys were valued), to serve her husband and work in the house or the husband's property. There were many cases of marriages of girls under age who were exposed to molestation. This was typical for the regions of Gostivar and Struga, where there were marriages with girls aged 12-15. There were also cases of under age boys to be married to adult women (14-15 years old boy to be married to 20-25 years old woman) just from economic reasons. Only in Gostivar out-patient care were registered 70 cases of heavy hemorrhages of under-age women, and in Kumanovo there was a death case²².

Another such custom that existed, or better to say a way some grooms used to acquire a bride. Helped by some close relatives or friends they abducted the girl. In most cases this was against her will and against the will of her father, and somewhere it all ended in fights and bloodshed.

²¹ AM, f: Socialist union of the workers of Macedonia, City Council-Skopje, k-1, Information relating the religious custom of the Shiptars for purchasing and selling women (1956).

²² AM, f: CK SKM, First Congress of SKM, k-27, Analysis of the Shiptar minority in PRM, 18.02.1952.

The juridical bodies in Republic of Macedonia conducted many disputes against those Albanian parents that broke the law for obligatory 8-year education. Besides the penalty provisions, with decades the most of the girls of Albanian minority went to school up to 4th grade primary school, i.e. 10 years of age, and then they were shut down in the houses, waiting to grow up and to be bought or sold, without the right of choosing their own partners. As a matter of fact the natality of Albanians is 23 ‰ and the natality of Macedonians is 4 ‰ which shows the degree of woman emancipation.

The right of the Moslem woman to choose her partner, the right of birth control, freedom of movement, etc, is a basic condition for overall emancipation of minorities in Republic of Macedonia²³. The national equality can only be achieved if in the framework of some ethnic community, the equality between the sexes is established and there is the same start in society for every child. Women carry a huge intellectual potential, which could not and should not be given up by any nation.

²³ V. Achkoska, *Emancipation of the Moslem woman and the international equality*, GINI, XXXVI/1-2, 1992, 17-27

РЕЗИМЕ

Виолета АЧКОСКА

СИМНУВАЊЕТО НА ЗАРОТ И ФЕРЕЦЕТО ВО РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА ПО ВТОРАТА СВЕТСКА ВОЈНА

Во периодот по Втората светска војна, новата власт во Народна Република Македонија се соочи со проблемот на побрза еманципација на малцинствата каде централен проблем беше проблемот на еманципација на жената од муслиманска вероисповед (особено кај албанското и турското малцинство). Во тие рамки, властите се соочија со карактеристични појави на обичајното право кои спаѓаа меѓу најтврдокорните и најпонижувачки наследени обичаи во однос на третманот и положбата на жената, како: носење на зар и фереце, купопродажба и препродажба на жени и девојки, насилно грабнување на жени, полигамија, затворање на женските деца по навршената 10-годишна возраст, сексуални злоупотреби на мажените жени итн. Овие обичаи опстојувале во минатото, но, во голема мера, некои од нив се присутни и денес кај дел од албанското малцинство во Република Македонија.

Симнувањето на зарот и ферецето во текот на 1951 година претставува една од најдрастичните политички мерки на државно-партиската власт, којашто, во глобала, произлегувала од присутните стремежи за сеопшта еманципација и просветување на жената. Но, набрзо станало јасно дека и покрај целата радикалност, мерката за симнување на зарот и ферецето, сама по себе, воопшто не значела и еманципација на муслиманската жена. Повеќето од овие жени не можеле така брзо да се навикнат на своето откриено лице, а во најголемиот број случаи нивните мажи им забранувале да се покажуваат, такашто тие речиси престанале да се движат надвор од куќните авлии. Зарот и ферецето муслиманката го заменила со мантил и шамија, што и денес е најчест знак на препознавање на Албанката во Република Македонија. Нејзината нерамноправност била и сè уште претставува една од најдрастичните појави на кршењето на човековите права во современата македонска држава од 1944 година до денес.