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Social Behaviour and Family Strategies in
the Balkans (16th – 20th Centuries)

Comportements sociaux et stratégies
familiales dans les Balkans
(XVIe-XXe siècles)

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The Status and Role of the Village Woman and Family Relations in the Republic of Macedonia (19th-20th Centuries)

(Based on the example of the villages in the
Macedonian-Albanian border area)

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Up until the beginning of the twentieth century the Macedonian village was characterized by a specific social organization based on a territorial principle, and consequently also featured a coherent economic whole.¹ The traditional way of life existed, almost without exception, until the Balkan wars (1912-1913), and in some cases until the end of World War I (1919) or even end of the Second World War (1945). It was rare for certain villages to continue functioning according to common village traditions right up until the 1960s. This way of living obliged each family to respect the rules of communal life. Adherence to the community, collective life, mutual production and consumption – all contributed to creating the highest level of unity among village members. Those elements that survived were passed from generation to generation as social village relics, useful habits and customs² that were especially important to populations living in naturally and economically isolated villages. Survival in a cruel mountain area that offers few privileges (apart from good livestock-breeding conditions) led to a perpetuation

of communal forms of living manifested through different social regulations and dictated by customary law. By analyzing the different aspects of the problem more carefully – cultural, social, legal, sociological, economic, historical, geographical – we would most likely be able to identify the reasons for the presence and survival of this model of collective life in the villages of the Western part of Macedonia.

The entire social life of the population in Macedonia is affected by customary law. The system of the customary law, on the other hand, is defined by the social structure of the traditional society and reflects and influences its sustainability and reproduction – i.e. it reflects the establishment of the balance of social forces.³ Thus, the only relevant norms and rules of behavior are those that have been imposed by life itself, as dictated by the need to survive in the only possible way. Although customary law is static by definition, since it is based on the structure of traditional ways of thinking, i.e. upon ideal models of behavior,⁴ traditional society is not. By analyzing a number of examples from various ethnic regions in Macedonia we see that the forms of customary law are resistant to change. In fact these models of behavior were formed within existing traditional culture, which is still seen in certain segments of human life, irrespective of whether this contradicts the positive law, i.e. the legal regulations unique to a territory of a state. However, some of these models of behavior are compatible with the legal norms valid in most states in the world. The fact that the traditional legal system of a certain society can be understood in its totality only when analyzed in relation to the social structure of its population is proved by the data gathered through field research.

* * *

According to contemporary ethnological research, the family falls into the category of those social phenomena that define the identity of a certain person, ethnic group, community or cultural environment. At the same time, the family is a social group within the framework of which a person passes most of his or her life. If we understand the family as a basic cell of organized human life, we can then fully understand the role and function of the family when it comes to human life and its influence upon personality and individuality.

According to contemporary authors who deal with the patriarchal, the existence of extended families is in fact a social and economic inevitability for the feudal and post-feudal villager who has been forced due to hardship to live in an extended family community that connects the work force through biological bonds. This is the only form of family that provides any possible basis for economic organization. This working organization was possible only in a situation of equal interests, a situation in which one member of the family who is powerful and deserves the trust of others manages everyone else. There are examples of certain “twists” on the “ideal” of communal life, much earlier than the emergence of the officially accepted reasons from most researchers dealing with this issue.⁵ Clearly, we cannot gain such information directly from the current field research. However, certain data have been recorded in the literature. We incline to the opinion that many of the accepted regulations related to practical communal life were not free of exceptions, not in the way they were defined, but that there were certain drifts in this sense. This is how we were able to gain information related to the changes that took place within the framework of the patriarchal community that could be analyzed as phenomena characteristic of a patriarchal community in transformation. Above all, such changes should be understood in terms of the relationship between the

patriarchal and the contemporary, where the former is constantly growing weak under the influence and penetration of the latter.⁶ Thus, the family as a patriarchal community exists as a reflection of the relations within the narrower social community, always and today, as a changeable organism.⁷

A basic cell of organized family life of the Macedonian population until the middle of the twentieth century was the *zadruga*, a form of extended family. The *zadruga* of the Macedonians in rural areas is a relic of an old form of clan social structure. Thus, the extended family or *zadruga* family, which encompassed a number of marital couples and their children (stemming from the same predecessor), was a key social organization, i.e. a specific social institute.⁸ In patriarchal culture only the large communal families were considered "real" houses and only their members had a good reputation. According to Valtazar Bogisic,⁹ the *zadruga* is a "village family, consisting of a number of brothers, cousins or related kinship with their wives and children". Mirko Bajraktarevic¹⁰ defines the *zadruga* as an "institution of a biological, kinship related, production and economic type, a social community and a traditional customary community". The very term *zadruga* applied to this type of communal life has never been used by the population in Macedonia, not even in the Balkans. According to some researchers, the term *zadruga* was introduced by ethnologists and lawyers¹¹ and was only later adopted through legal texts and other literature as a term defining a certain type of family life.¹² The Macedonian population usually uses the terms: big family (*golemo semejstvo*), *kalbalak*, *tajfa*, big house (*golema kukja*), *galabija*, *domakjinstvo*, *naednomesto*, *na kup* etc. The need for a communal life was conditioned by a number of factors. The primary and most important factor was security, something especially important in the west, along today's

Macedonian-Albanian border. Under Ottoman rule, and especially the final two centuries thereof, when penetration and armed robbery by Albanian groups increased due to the weakening of the Ottoman state, the population was forced to live in extended family communities such as the *zadrugas*. If the family was more numerous, it was easier to defend. The second reason was given by the fact that the basic occupation of the population was livestock-breeding, an occupation requiring a large work force in terms of milk processing and all other ancillary tasks. By living in this kind of environment and managing this economic activity the population was obliged to adopt this form of community. However, although they were an established form of living, in some villages the *zadrugas* were not so large or numerous. This occurred where the population was lower and the households also less numerous. Most often the *zadruga* consisted of the parents, their sons with their families, and any unmarried daughters. In such circumstances the number of members did not exceed 15-20. Still, almost every village had a few "large houses" with up to 50 members, for example the house of Manojlovci in Kichinica, which in around 1910 ran to 48 persons.¹³ In the village of Belichica, one of the larger *zadrugas* was that of Avakum Dimitrieski, which consisted of the parents with their three sons, three daughters-in-law, two of which had six and one of which three children.¹⁴ The same rules applied to all *zadrugas*, irrespective of size.

In the Macedonian-Albanian border area there existed only *zadrugas* of the kinship type. Each was based upon the affirmation of the male principle, i.e. they were patrilocal. The only rule upon which the *zadruga's* survival is based is that its male members do not leave the family. Sons, as well as their heirs, stay in the house at least until the death of the father. The female members, through marriage, become members of the

husband's *zadruga*. Thus, on leaving home, the daughter loses her rights to her father's property. Since girls entered into marriage relatively young, at 15-18 years of age, the extended families consisted only of younger girls. There were strict hierarchical relations and defined obligations for each member. Each *zadruga* had a "head", i.e. someone who took care of everything and everyone in the *zadruga*. This person had no special name: he was referred to only in the third person singular as the *glavniot*, *domakinot*, *stopanot*. But even without the special name, all members knew what his role was and how extensive his power and reputation. Each community selected the cleverest male member as its head, since the reputation of the family as a whole often depended on his honesty and rational behavior. Families with a higher number of male descendants enjoyed a higher reputation. A bigger family meant a richer and more powerful community that was able to take care of its herds by itself and continuously improve them. The head of the Macedonian extended family was without exception the oldest male member of the family, the father and grandfather of adult sons and grandsons. His position was both key to the patriarchal system¹⁵ while also being built on family hierarchy according to gender and age. The head or the *domakjin* is at the top of that hierarchy. We find proof of the role played by the age of the *domakin* in the use of language: he is often referred to as the "old man", not only as reference to his age, but also in the sense of his being "the first", "the cleverest". All male members of the community, including both sons and grandsons, were obliged to respect strictly and perform all the obligations created by him. It was not possible that any sons or grandsons do anything without the prior agreement of the head of the *zadruga*.¹⁶ The son was not even allowed to pose a question without prior permission from the "old man". The authority of the head was indisputable – though quite often it

was also well deserved. In the villages of Reka and Drimkol, for example, it was never the case that a head of a *zadruga* was a tyrant or that he worked against his clan, causing damage of some kind. Some heads made their community famous, enriching and enhancing it. The role of the head was not only to delegate tasks; he also worked along side his sons. He was the first among equals, delegating tasks to the female members of the *zadruga* only after agreement with his wife, who was called *stopanka*, *kukjnica*, *domakjinka*.¹⁷ He always had the last word, however: no one objected to his decision. Everyone respected his orders, since they knew they were for the good of the entire community. Many heads of *zadrugas* were simultaneously village heads. The extent of their reputations is given by the information that they had contact with the Turkish (Albanian) authorities and negotiated all the taxes that had to be paid. They also enjoyed a good reputation among the Albanian gangs, and on many occasions saved their villages from robbery, fire and murder.

Within the *zadruga*, the behavior of the members towards the head was determined by the unwritten rule. Each night he would discuss the next day's obligations with the sons and adult grandsons. Each knew his job in advance. This agreement referred to the larger agricultural or livestock-breeding duties – sowing, mowing, harvesting, sheep shearing, cheese selling – while going to market and buying products was the privilege of the head of the *zadruga*. The sons and grandsons reported each night on the work they had done and any difficulties encountered. On some occasions they would suggest something in relation to the work, but the head took each decision independently. One of his tasks was to choose brides for the sons.¹⁸ His decision could not be changed without good reason. The *domakinka* was at the same time his wife, but if she had died or was sick, her role was taken on by the eldest

daughter-in-law. The daughters-in-law never talked first to the head of the *zadruga*. Only he could initiate conversation, though this happened seldom, and each daughter in-law normally worked in silence. The women did not even talk to each other if he was in the room. Everything happened in silence. The daughters-in-law communicated through glances and gestures, often trying not to be noticed by anyone.¹⁹ Each night or during the day, the youngest daughter-in-law was obliged to bring water and a towel for the head to wash his hands. Women, including the *domakinka*, stood while he was seated. This also applied to the sons and grandsons. Sons could not light a cigarette in his presence, even if he was smoking at the time. The son could not be free in relations with his wife: he talked to her only when he had to, often in the imperative, while avoiding her eyes; and she followed his orders without a word. In many cases, the daughter-in-law has never had a direct conversation with the head of the *zadruga*. *"The old man was the head of the house. He had five sons, none of them had money. All of the money belonged to him. We sold wool, sheep, cheese, he took everything. When there was a need to buy something he did that. The sons only did their job, did not utter a word"*.²⁰ They received their tasks indirectly from the *domakinka*. She told them what would be cooked for the day, which of the daughters-in-law would do the washing, which would bake bread, which would go to the fields, and which tend the livestock. Everyone worked all day, there was no time to rest. Even pregnant women did all jobs: fetched water in buckets, harvested and dug the earth, preformed all domestic tasks. Each morning "she" would impart what had to be done. The youngest daughter-in-law was almost without exception the one to make bread. When a pie was to be made, she had to make 6-7. The mother-in-law could help, but often assistance was given by the girls who were still unmarried. Bread was

made 2-3 times a week depending on the number of members of the *zadruga* and the time of year. At harvest time there were many “helpers” (*argati*) and that meant more bread. Each house had 4-5 dogs for sheep-herding and these ate corn bread. The *sejmens*, who lived in the *sejmen* rooms and protected the house from attack by robbers also received food from the household. Thus, 10-15 round bread loaves would be made in one go. All households had sufficient milk and milk products but no one could take anything to eat without the permission of the *domakinka*:

My mother-in-law was the boss. “Mother, what are we going to do today for lunch, for dinner?” You had to ask her, you could not roast eggs even if your heart was crying out for roast eggs.. I had to fetch water, two buckets at once, my sister-in-law helped me. Our house was full. My mother-in-law made cheese, I did too. We had 190-200 sheep, horses, 5-6 cows. I made the bread but I wouldn’t eat, I would forget to eat, I was so busy and worried. We got up with the stars and went to bed at 12, at midnight. We lived together, my sister-in-law and I, she wasn’t married, but we didn’t even exchange half a word, not “What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink?”, neither in secret nor in public... First the children ate, then the men. Women, if there was place at the table, ate together with the men. If not they ate last.²¹

Still, if the woman was more capable, cleverer, she could exert huge influence over the male members of the *zadruga*, despite not be able to say anything in public. This was especially visible when it came to the selection of wives for the sons, and more so still when it came to selection of husbands for the daughters. Some women influenced other male members and the head of the *zadruga* so subtly that no one noticed. In fact, mothers

talked to their children much more than the father or the head, since their relationship with the sons was dictated by the special type of authority each had in the *zadruga*.

Each extended family had one or two sons or grandsons who earned money abroad. This type of economy was prevalent in the period after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, when nomadic sheep-herding was hindered by the establishment of the political borders between the Balkan states preventing the transfer of the sheep to the Thessalonica valley or the Adriatic coast in Albania. As a consequence, the number of sheep decreased and a surplus of labor was created. The population was forced to find new sources of income and many accepted working abroad (*pechalba, gurbet*) as their profession. Naturally, this had an influence on life in the *zadruga*. The *pechalbars* were especially respected since they were very important to the economic existence of the family. During their stays at home they enjoyed equal status with the head of the *zadruga*, including the same privileges. In the regions of Drimkol (near the town of Struga) and Reka, the woman were obliged to kiss the hands of the male members of the *zadruga*, especially those who worked abroad. Kissing hands was one of the ways brides, daughters, and daughters-in-law expressed their humility and respect towards senior male members. The bride kissed the hands of each adult guest during their visit. Contrary to the mountains villages, sheep-herding villages and villages with lots of economic migrants, this phenomenon was not present among the villages of the valley; or perhaps it simply vanished more rapidly.²² If the *pechalbar* was older and had married sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren his reputation was even greater. The most common destinations for these migrants were Istanbul or the other cities of the Ottoman Empire. Some returned home after years spent abroad.

Certain authors relate this phenomenon to the sheep-herding or former-sheep herding regions that had a strong clan culture with high domination by the father.²³ Generally speaking, the Muslims (Macedonians, Albanians and others) looked for work in Turkey, while the orthodox Christians (Macedonians, Vlach) went to Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Greece. Their families were divided economically: the male members of the *zadruga* lived in the village and took care of the herds, while one or two members of the same community lived and worked in another environment. This led to different attitudes to common life, marriage and the family. The migrants had an opportunity to meet people and families that were organized differently. This was one of the factors that helped the rapid dissolution of the *zadrugas*.

This type of economy was closely connected with the employment of helpers: *izmekjari*. Every well-off house had helpers who worked for and lived with the family. The families of the economic migrants (who had more money) always had an *izmekjar* to help the women with the herds or in the fields etc. Many had two or more boys employed as helpers. Some of these helpers worked for two or three houses simultaneously if the families in question were smaller and needed less work. The helpers lived in a specially built house or in a separate room. The head of the household paid them in cash and supplied food. They started as children of 10-12 years of age, and remained in the family until they got married, some remaining even beyond this point. Most helpers were Albanian, but there were also some Macedonians from the same region. In the village of Krakornica, Blagunovski Avram worked as a helper for Garip-pasha for 25 years. He in fact managed all the other helpers working on Garip-pasha's property.²⁴ Even if there was an economic migrant in the *zadruga*, the head of the *zadruga* was still the most powerful person. The *pechalbar* was

obliged to put all the income he earned into the mutual “money box”.²⁵ This money was then allocated according to everyone’s needs and the opinion of the head. We did not come across any examples in the villages of Gorna Reka and Drimkol where a head had been dismissed from his position due to drinking or overspending. A reason for dismissing a head, however, was often age, i.e. his inability to perform his duties due to old age. In such cases, the head of the *zadruga* would ask for dismissal himself, after which he would nominate a new head from one of his sons (often the eldest one). A grandson could also become the next head, especially if he had shown himself to be hard working and intelligent. The head also often used his physical inability to divide the *zadruga*, especially if it was a large one.

Although it happened seldom, a women could also take over the role of head. This happened in the smaller *zadrugas* and *zadrugas* where, due to economic migration, there was a lack of male members. Such a *zadruga* existed in the village of Kichinica. The women that ran the family had a husband, 4 sons and 4 daughters-in-law, each with 4 children of their own. After the division of the large *zadruga* she took on the role of head since her husband was sick and “more primitive”, “plain”. Since she managed the community well, even after their sons’ marriage, she remained head of the *zadruga* until she became very old and the *zadruga* divided itself. Divisions of these communities were numerous. They could be divided when they had grown so much that survival was no longer possible. Division for this reason was initiated by the head. The *zadruga* was divided without exception if the head died and its members had already formed their families. One of the sons would remain in the house of the father to take care of the mother and would keep a larger share of the property (the so called “father’s share”) compared with other brothers, who shared the father’s property equally. Any sisters who were not married would also remain

in the father's house until they got married. Their brother was obliged to take care of their marriage. Quarreling between the sisters and the wives of the brother could not be the main reason behind the dissolution of a *zadruga*, since the head and the male side of the community had the final decision on any dissolution. Communication between husbands and wives was also limited given their different obligations.

Communal life was neither easy nor simple. It required a high level of flexibility and tolerance and maximum mutual respect. The head of the *zadruga* was especially respected. In the patriarchal community, where all property was owned collectively, there was no place for individuality. Everyone behaved according to a set of pre-established rules. Any drifting from these rules was strictly sanctioned. In these conditions, individuality was not a priority, though it started to become so after the division of the *zadrugas*. Their dissolution is the first sign of the dissolution of the traditional way of life. Living conditions became easier to bear, and duties were reduced, especially for the families of the economic migrants where the parents lived with one or two sons in a loose form of community. Such families exist even today in the Western Macedonian-Albanian border areas. But in most cases the roles have been reversed. Now it is the sons who are the "bosses", who have the money, and the parents who take care of the livestock. Although in these families, consisting of three co-generations living together with the parents and one son, a daughter-in-law and their children, still, in a way, "everyone works for himself". Everyone has money and the parents feel secure. Those families that live in the villages together with the parents consist of a marital couple with children that live with the parents – the mother-in-law and the father-in-law.²⁶ In most cases the parents stay with the youngest son, according to the rule of minority, which is considered an old tradition and a

part of general Balkans customary law.²⁷ Later on parents would stay with the son who wanted to live with them, regardless of whether he was the eldest or the youngest. This phenomenon became prevalent after 1960-70 due to the education and employment of sons in bigger urban centers.

The rural family, as a basic cell of social life, has changed constantly, adapting to new social conditions but also adapting to the family, social and economic life of each individual community. On the basis of the empirical material presented here we can conclude that the father-type of *zadruga* prevailed in the Republic of Macedonia. This was the strongest type of *zadruga*, in which all members accepted the decisions of the father, i.e. the head of the *zadruga*. Although science posits two basic concepts of managing family relations (authoritative and democratic), in terms of the *zadrugas* in Macedonia the authoritative type was found to be present, though it also contained elements of democracy. This not only presupposes the reputation of the men in society, the reputation earned by a person who created or founded something, but it also presupposes that man's desire and ability to maintain his position. While this term contains other qualities, it also represents the prestige held in its environment, even the power to exercise social control over a certain social group.²⁸ Still, while the basic meaning of this term is the right to give orders, it also concerns the power to oblige any member of the community to carry out these orders. The words, "*the old man gave the command and we had to work as he said, we could say nothing to him*"²⁹ is a clear sign of the personality and power of the head of the *zadruga*.

The divided *zadruga*, which existed in parallel with the father-type *zadruga*, is another type of communal living. This type consists of male members that are always away due to migration or livestock-herding outside the home. There is also

a combined type of divided *zadruga*, where the *zadruga* is of the father-type but at the same time also divided. In fact most *zadrugas* were of this type during a certain period, when these two types of communal life existed simultaneously as a combined type of divided *zadruga*.

The brother-type *zadruga* also existed for a certain time. It was formed after the death of the father-head of *zadruga* and before the final division of the *zadruga*. However, the existence of this type can only be understood as a transitory type, since it did not prove very popular among Macedonian population. The brother-type *zadruga*, in which the eldest brother was the head, in most cases existed for only one or two years before dividing itself. The members of such *zadrugas* would wait one year after the death of the father, or even longer, especially if the mother was still alive or there were sisters that were still unmarried.

On very rare occasions there existed a mother-type of *zadruga*, in which the mother, due to the sickness of the father, would manage the family. These women were especially respected by the rest of the villagers,³⁰ because as heads they had a higher number of tasks and obligations, and they enjoyed the same rights and duties as the man-heads of other *zadrugas*.

Macedonians, especially those from the Western part of Macedonia, were respecters of gender-based hierarchy – however, age-based hierarchy was equally or, in some cases, even more respected. A young male, for example, especially if still a child, could not be respected more than his elder sister, aunt or mother. The male principle was respected more than the female one only in cases of similar ages, and it also depended on the status of the individual in the *zadruga*. Men and women became almost equal in status when they reached old age. In the Reka and Drimkol regions, women were especially respected when younger, albeit this was not shown

in public or verbally. In most *zadrugas* the male members were absent during the year. These economic migrants would not participate in family events and every-day tasks, sometimes for years on end, and consequently the entire responsibility for the house fell to the women: the wife, mother and daughter-in-law. The reputation of the family was also in her hands: she was responsible for obtaining respect and a good reputation for the family in the wider village community but at the same time also for casting "shame" on the family if she were to contravene the collectively and generally accepted rules of good behavior among the inhabitants of the ethnic area. Seen in this context, we are dealing with the matter of a realistic model of traditional culture in which women, through the mechanisms of female subculture, obtained an important share of latent rights. On the other hand, the women wore folk costumes of good linen (cotton, silk) decorated with imposing silver jewelry made by skillful artisans. This is a manifestation of the hidden respect women in traditional families of the past enjoyed from their husbands.

In general, Macedonians respect the *zadruga* way of life, especially the older male population (70-80 years of age), which experienced this type of community. Almost all stress that, at that time, "you knew how to behave, when to say something and, who should say what; not like now, when you have to take orders even from the youngest child". This was especially strong during the last ten years, when changes in family life also started occurring in the rural environments and radically changing the system of values. The female side of population, as opposed to the male side, justifies the current communal form of living through one of the sons. Women, when describing communal life in the past, complain of the hard labor; but it seems that for them the hardest part was that they could not tell anyone of their problems. The brides entered the family

zadruga through marriage and brought with them no dowry except for personal items of folk costume, linen items and some gifts for the husband and the members of the *zadruga*.³¹ Not even a bride who was an only child and had no brothers or sisters brought a dowry with her:

(...) my mother had only me, my father-in-law gave not even a dime, and she did not take a dime for me; while in the past they would have: 'bridalogs as it was called. My father-in-law wanted her to have something, but my mother didn't. I have no brothers or sisters. But I brought a dowry. I even had clothes. The chest was full, and even upon it there were different things.³²

A dowry was considered to create an unequal category among brides: "*If a bride brought with her a dowry she would separate from the others and she would not obey*".³³ If she was the only child the bride would inherit her father's property after the division of the *zadruga*. In the families with male and female heirs, the daughters did not inherit anything after the death of the father. They had the right only to a so-called "decent home" after they got married. This meant only a small part of the inheritance, much smaller than the inheritance enjoyed by the brothers and usually in the form of a dowry. The state laws did not have any role to play here, and this was therefore a manifestation of the power of customary law, especially in Western Macedonia. Under the same bracket comes the attitude that only male members of the community have the right to inherit the entire property, especially immobile property. Only sons have the opportunity to create progeny within the same family, while daughters create their progeny in another family. It is thought that if the daughter obtains a part of the immobile property then she enriches another family and not hers. Only

sons can enrich their family through people and property, they are the representatives of the clan, and it is for this reason that all land and livestock remains with them.³⁴ Such inheritance rules that take only the male side of the family into account are not only characteristic of the Macedonian population. They are also valid for most of other South Slavs and Balkan people and ethnic communities.³⁵

A widow seldom left the communal family of her late husband. If she was young, up to 25 years old, and without children she could still leave the community. But in the past (18th-19th centuries) a widow very often remained in the community until the end of her life, albeit without children. With regard to inheritance, following the division of the *zadruga*, a widow with male children has an equal right to a share of the property as her brother-in-law. This was especially true if the deceased son had his own sons that were raised by the widowed daughter-in-law:

(...) If the husband died early, she would seldom re-marry. The mother-in-law of my mother-in-law, her husband disappeared, these were rotten times (the period before the Balkan wars, my note), and she was left alone with one child. She did not marry, and my mother did not re-marry. They seldom get married again. If you don't have children, if people in the house like you, "Don't go...we'll take care of you, you'll stay, we will love you!"...Your father would accept you, but for you it would be a shame. My sister-in-law, she had three small children, she was a barite for 8 years (in 1983)... "Daughter of mine, life is not only today and tomorrow, think for yourself"... 'No', she said, "I will not leave the children". And she really didn't. That's how it was before, there was honor.³⁶

In the past if the daughter-in-law decided to leave the community, most often the children would be left with their father's family. This was especially true in the Gorna Reka region. Tradition, with its two components of religion and custom, presented a continuity of social life. Customs were highly respected by this population. The community of Gorna Reka has a strong awareness of its customs which results in a greater need to practice them. In fact, the root of their authority forms part of the awareness of every individual who obeys these customs and respects his predecessors who practiced these customs also.³⁷ According to current knowledge, custom establishes the authority of the husband over his wife and children. And finally, the traditional environment, as no other, shows resistance towards any modern legal regulation, which are unfamiliar and distant and do not take into account the current stage of development of the village society and family relations. Although the influence of tradition over all spheres of human life has fallen over recent decades, its impact on our research should nevertheless not be underestimated, since there are still elements that exist as relicts.

The contemporary Macedonian rural family continues to dissolve. The reasons for this are understandable, since this area does not offer many possibilities for economic development. In circumstances of almost non-existent agriculture (except subsistence level), low levels of sheep-herding, and a complete absence of employment in the industrial sector, the population is continuing to migrate to the adjacent cities. This leaves the villages with just a few two-member households consisting of old people. The young people, who live in the cities, return to the villages only during summer, from May to November. This reduces the number of members in a family to two, especially in the villages in the Reka and Drimkol region (around Debar). The villages in this area are almost entirely empty. By contrast,

the villages in Drimkol (around Struga), being closer to the cities of Struga and Ohrid, are more numerous, and there is almost no migration from the village to the city. In these villages, there still exist extended families consisting of parents, one son, one daughter-in-law and grandsons, who are usually minors, i.e. there is a three-generational structure to the family. They practice sheep-herding and milk production, while someone from the family (often the son) works in the city or within the village structures (at the school, hospital, police, shop, etc.). This allows contemporary Macedonian families to stay connected with the city family.

According to field work conducted in the period 1992-2000, for the reasons mentioned above, there are no father-type *zadrugas* consisting of more than 10-12 persons. Consequently, we cannot even speak of a *zadruga*-type way of life if the *zadruga* is defined as a specific community with strictly respected norms and rules valid for each and every member.



Family Bilbiloski from the Bogdevo village, Gorna Reka region,
(Macedonian-Albanian border area), year 1955.
Source: The author's own archives.



Wedding ceremony for Sara and Radovan Bilbiloski from Bogdevo village,
Gorna Reka region (Macedonian-Albanian border area), year 1961.

Source: The author's own archives.

NOTES

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- ¹¹ ERLICH, S. V., *U drustvu s covjekom*, Zagreb, 1968.
- ¹² KOSTIC, C., *Tri zajednicke institucije globalnog drustva Juznih Slovena*, ZMS, knj. 56, Belgrade, 1971.
- ¹³ Source: Lichkoski Alekso, village of Kichinica, lives in Mavrovi Anovi (Gorna Reka ethnographic region), personal field information.
- ¹⁴ Source: Rafajloski Kjrko, village of Belichica (Gorna Reka ethnographic region), lives in Gostivar but spends most of the year in Belichica, together with his wife, personal field information.
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- ¹⁶ CVIJIC, J., *Balkansko poluostrovo*, SANU, Belgrade, 1991; *Etnografija na Makedonija*, BAN, EIM, tom 1 and 2, Sofia, 1992.
- ¹⁷ Gjorgjeska Ilinka, village of Podgorci (Drimkol ethnographic region), personal field information.

- ¹⁸ Source: Serafimovska Cveta, village of Volkovija, married in the village of Sence (Gorna Reka ethnographic region). "We got married through mediators. My father-in-law saw me in Volkovija, they came to take sheep. I went out and said I won't give away those 2-3 sheep. And he sent mediators, my relatives, once and again. My mother said...ah, he is rich, he has sheep, you will have a father, sisters- and brothers-in-law. She agreed and I agreed too. I did not have a father, he died, and this is how I agreed". Personal field information.
- ¹⁹ MIRCEVSKA, M., *Struktura i funkcija na semejnata zadruga kaj Makedoncite (na primerot na zadrugata Blazevski od s. Inxikovo)*, Zbornik na vtoriot kongres na geografite na Republika Makedonija, Ohrid, 2000.
- ²⁰ Source: Serafimovska Cveta, village of Volkovija, married in the village of Sence (Gorna Reka ethnographic region).
- ²¹ Source: Serafimovska Cveta, village of Volkovija, married in the village of Sence (Gorna Reka ethnographic region).
- ²² MIRCEVSKA, M., *Struktura i funkcija na semejnata zadruga*, Ohrid, 2000.
- ²³ ERLICH, V., *Porodica u transformaciji*, Studija u tristotine jugoslovenskih sela, Zagreb, 1964.
- ²⁴ Blagunovski Avram was buried in the village graves in Krakornica, (Gorna Reka) he lived 100 years (1865-1965). The house of Garip-pasha can still be found in Krakornica, the Dolno maalo, although the clan moved to Istanbul and some of its members to America. Source:s: Rafajlovski Kjirko, village of Belichica, Josifovski Metodija, village of Krakornica, personal field information.
- ²⁵ BOGISIC, V., *Zbornik sadasnjih pravnih obicaja u Juznih Slovena*, Zagreb, 1874.
- ²⁶ During my field work in the Gorna Reka ethnographic area in the period 1994-2000 I did not record the existence of any extended families in the sense of parents living together with married sons (more than one). The number of such families fell after World War II (1945-6) and totally disappear after 1970.
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- selima SR Makedonije (razvitak i danasnje stanje)", in *Etnoloski pregled*, br. 11, Belgrade, 1973.
- ²⁸ KOSTIC, C., *O autoritetu u porodici*, Glasnik Etnografskog instituta, SANU, knj. IX, Belgrade, 1960.
- ²⁹ Rafajlovski Kjrko, village of Belichica, Josifovski Metodija, village of Krakornica, (Gorna Reka) personal field information.
- ³⁰ SVETIEVA, A., *Statusot na zenata vo tradiciskata selska zaednica i semejstvo*, EtnoAntropoZum, br. 1, Skopje, 2001.
- ³¹ VUJACIC, V., *Nasljedni i imovinski odnosi u klasicnoj crnogorskoj patrijarhalnoj porodici, s posebnim osvrtom na precedentno pravo muskih*, Obicajno pravo i samouprave na Balkanu i u susednim zemljama, posebna izdanja Balkanoloskog Instituta SANU, knj. 1, Belgrade, 1974.
- ³² Source: Serafimovska Cveta, village of Sence (Gorna Reka ethnographic region), personal field information.
- ³³ Source: Spirovski Bogdanov Aleksa, originates from the village of Volkovija, but moved to the village of Sence, personal field information. In the literature there is information that says that dowries in Macedonia were particularly rare (especially in terms of immobile property or stock)... "The girl seldom brings a dowry; when her father dies and her brothers divide then she gets her share, but only if she wishes to, which is a rare case. Usually the girl does not bring a dowry. Their husbands do not ask for one, since it is a shame that the wife bring with her a dowry. Macedonia, the area of Galichnik", quoted from ERLICH, S. V. *Porodica u transformaciji, studija u tristotine jugoslovenskih sela*, Zagreb, 1964, p. 174.
- ³⁴ ERLICH, V., *Porodica u transformaciji*, Zagreb, 1964. This was the answer given by all respondents to the question as to why their property is inherited only by the sons and not by the daughters. Personal field information.
- ³⁵ Inheritance was investigated by a number of authors that deal with the problems of family inheritance, but also all authors interested in the tribal way of life. For more on this subject see the Collection from the conference entitled "Subject and Methods of Research of the Patriarchal Communities in Yugoslavia", Titograd, 23-24 November 1978.
- ³⁶ Source: Serafimovska Cveta, village of Sence (Gorna Reka ethnographic region), personal field information.
- ³⁷ GUVILLIER, A., *Mannuel de sociologie*, v. I, Paris, 1958.