

# ALBANIAN WOMEN IN MACEDONIA BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN WAY OF LIFE

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## Abstract

Nowadays Albanian women in North Macedonia face different challenges. Albanian families in 21<sup>st</sup> century have various challenges including social, political, economic etc. The main theme of this essay is the contradiction between living in a traditional, and difficulties to adopt in, modern way of life. In this paper we will treat the economic, social, cultural difficulties that women of this regions encounter. Using survey as a quantitative method, many women with different social and marital status have been surveyed. The samples of this tutorial are traditional and modern families including their level of education, working status and the number of family members.

**Keywords:** *Albanian women, traditional, modern, family, values, challenges.*

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## Introduction

The position and role of Albanian women throughout history is a topic that requires serious consideration, taking into account the special importance it plays in the development and building of society in general. With the evolution of society, the family has also evolved, so that with the change in the family, we understand that the role of women has also changed. But whether it has really changed, during my analysis, I can say that this role may have changed in urban areas, but the same does not apply to deep rural areas.

This work focuses more on the role of women in traditional and modern families among Albanians in North Macedonia. In the past, we see that Albanian women have been treated in the worst possible way to the point where at some point she was not considered as a human being but was only seen as a tool of labor who had no right to oppose the kind of life she was living. The disrespect of women's fundamental rights is a quite complex phenomenon, which encompasses several sharp aspects of historical and social development in our country (Kastrati, 2014). This is a result of inequality between men and women and demonstrates serious discrimination against women in North Macedonia society. Backward traditions and customs further reinforced that she had no rights and was always subordinate to the man. Unlike the past, today I can say that the role of women within the modern family has advanced, she is now quite active in the public sphere in addition to the private sphere. Today, the Albanian woman in North Macedonia is present in different institutions ranging from primary schools to universities, medicine, courts, in the police, etc. She is also active in politics today but compared to men, she is less active and present in this field.

Considering all the hardships she has gone throughout history, I can say that women even today remain under the shadow of men even today, for the only reason that Albanian society still suffers from the consequences of the past. Albanian society continues to be male-dominated, and

for this reason, it is difficult to establish normal gender boundaries. The battle of our society should focus on several masculine social building about women, which are very rigid and with great difficulty reflect the changes of time, the structure of the modern family, and the changed role of partners in it (Giddens, 2002). Within this paper, the following methods were used: the literature study method, the historical method, the comparison method, and the development of quantitative research with 200 respondents. The research was carried out through the virtual form Google Forms, then the data were systematized in the SPSS No 24 software. The target municipalities that participated in North Macedonia are Tetovo, Gostivar, Skopje, Kicevo and Debar.

Some of the research questions that we presented during this article are: What was the position of the woman in the traditional family? Today, what is the role of women in the modern family? The difference between traditional and modern family?

### ***The traditional Albanian family and the role of women in it***

The traditional Albanian family is also known as the patriarchal family because the father was at the head of the family. In the society of that time, the family was part of or a cell of a large and numerous family. In this type of family, there was complete power of men over the women, the power of the head of the house, division of labor, and internal organization as well as solidarity among family members. Regarding the roles within the family, we can freely say that being born a female or being a woman in a traditional family was a kind of curse, because women, unlike men, had almost no rights and their role within the family compared to men was very faded.

In the traditional family, men were more privileged even by the fact that being born male was a privilege. Unlike women, they had the right to education and were considered sole heirs in the family. When boys grew up and created families, they built their own hut in the family yard, perhaps in a separate house or room. The father divided the wealth according to the principles that he set as the owner of the house. This makes it clear that roles within the family were more or less inherited.

As for the woman within the patriarchal family, she had almost no rights. In the traditional family, her role or position was valued based on two factors:

- destined to perform household chores,
- destined to be seen as a reproductive member for the addition of family members.

So, the only role she had within the family was to take care of the upbringing of children, in addition to preparing food, taking care of her husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law, and all household members, in short, everything related to the house. Regarding the role of the woman seen under the yoke of motherhood, the French philosopher Simon De Beauvoir expressed: *"The role of the woman seen only through the 'yoke of motherhood' is the shackles that prevented the woman from developing as a free individual who decides her own fate, decides on life and being with full awareness. The 'role of the mother' is imposed by society from the very first lullabies sung to the baby girl, and until the woman sees that role as just one of the possibilities, the woman will not take her rightful place in society." "The woman must look beyond her reproductive role, she is more than that. Marriage is one of the possible options for young women, but it is not essential, access to property and capital, empowering women through employment is the path to freedom. The talent of women is lost in the routine of daily household chores"* (Beauvoir, 1949).

Another element was education, the majority of whom were illiterate because education was only a right for males, so they were only allowed to engage in some craft that only applied to

females. Based on the work "Sworn Virgins," the author emphasizes that the practice of favoring one gender over the other for regular education in some Albanian environments has no long tradition. Therefore, the author emphasizes that education in Albanian areas has been very delayed and initially realized through religious institutions. According to him, these institutions excluded girls where this discrimination against one gender by religious institutions preceded the phenomenon of parents' selection of children. The logic of continuing the tradition of favoring sons, parental supporters to keep them in old age, since daughters must marry another door, are foreigners and investment in them is useless, prevailed until a few years ago (Berisha, 2016). From this, we understand that she was treated more as a servant within the family than as a member of that family. Among other things, she has been treated as a slave of men or as their property, and sometimes as a source of entertainment or as a game of male embellishment.

In the traditional family, she will be subject to many backward customs and traditions as well as written and unwritten laws. In traditional Albanian society, the important role of suppressing or avoiding and not identifying women was also played by the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini. The unwritten laws and customs of the Albanians have had female discrimination at their core.

### ***The role and position of women according to Kanun***

The Albanian woman, under the shadow of the Kanun, has been seen critically by many people and has been valued and characterized as contempt and degradation of the dignity of women. Based on the provisions of the Kanun, she was seen as an object without the right to express the values she possesses. Although she performed the most difficult tasks both at home and in agriculture, the normative character of the Kanun, with its pronounced conservative and patriarchal character, considered all women's work as supplementary work of men.

According to the KLD, she was considered something of a second hand and was treated equally with animals. In the following, I will quote some parts of the Kanun where the role and position of women as well as the rights of men over them are clearly seen.

#### *The husband's rights on the wife*

##### *The husband has the right:*

- a) *to advise and rebuke his wife:*
- b) *to beat and tie his wife himself, if she is to humiliate his word or order (Gjecovi, 1999)*

From this, we can conclude that violence against women is supported by traditional and patriarchal thinking and as a result, Albanian society has been dominated by men for a long time and women have been asked to obey men and accept the role of the submissive, and these two norms have shown a violation of freedom of expression, even if the woman had the right, she could not object.

Another characteristic of the traditional Albanian family is early marriage and the buying and selling of female gender. The Kanun clearly emphasizes the price paid for the sale of women and girls. *The price paid for women ranged from 50, 100, 200 to 400 beans, depending on the period. Later Kanun prices were fixed at 1.500 beans, the same as the bride price (Gjecovi, 1999).*

From all that we have mentioned above, we can conclude that in the traditional Albanian family, the woman is seen as a secondary part compared to the man, which has made her subordinate, suppressed, and even sold. In addition to physical violence, in the Albanian reality

there are also forms of psychological violence such as ignoring the feelings of the wife, humiliation in public or in private, etc.

In the traditional family, it was impossible to talk about gender equality, let alone seek equal rights between men and women.

***The modern Albanian family and the role of women in it***

The family today, based on general culture and civilization, stands above the old patriarchal family. It is experiencing many major changes in consolidating new social and economic bases of progress and development of people in general. As a sociological and historical-social category, it has emerged and developed historically, changing forms within its own society. According to Luis Morgan, the family is an active element that never stands still but evolves from low forms to high forms in proportion to the development of society from low to high levels.

Just as society has evolved, so has the role of women within and outside the family changed. This change has also begun to be noticed in modern Albanian families, where the role and position of women are different from in traditional families, but we can rightfully say that we have not yet completely stripped ourselves of the stigma of the traditional family. Women have not yet escaped completely from the gender and sexual fate that are the product of the masculine males of society, the price of which women still pay (Gjergji, 1990). Despite the changes that the Albanian family has undergone on its road to transformation and democratization, it unfortunately remains a cradle of male masculine despotism in the behavior of men towards women and their children. The liberation of women from male determinations and the narrow frameworks of their traditional roles cannot be achieved without the necessary liberation of men from their distorted concepts, often destructive roles towards women and their children. In other words, our society's battle is and should focus on some masculine male social constructions about women that are very rigid and that reflect the changes of the times, the structure of the modern family and the changed roles of partners in it (Berisha, 2014).

However, in addition to the norms that the modern family carries from the traditional family, it also brings changes in terms of the position of women. By analyzing the different contents related to the role of women in these two types of families, I have tried to identify the similarities and differences that have existed and continue to exist today. In the table presented below, we will see what those similarities and differences were.

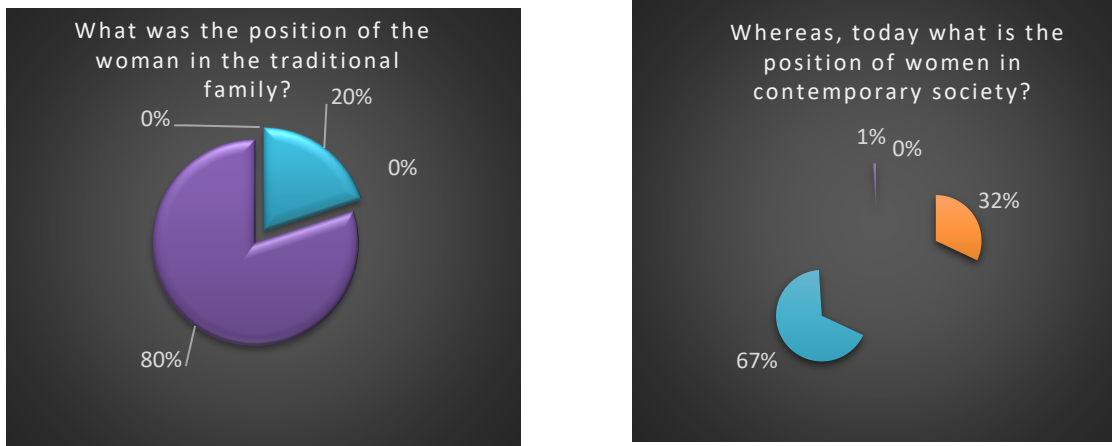
Traditional family	Modern family
<b>Father, Husband (primary authority)</b>	Dad (primary authority) Mother
<b>Denial of free speech</b>	Limited freedom of expression
<b>No education</b>	Right to education
<b>Not inheritance</b>	Inheritance rights (in case the woman is the only heir)
<b>Denial of choosing the partner</b>	Freedom to choose a partner
-----	Right to participate in public life
<b>Full control (of life) by the man</b>	Trying to keep everything under control
<b>Moral criteria and the strength of opinion</b>	Diminution of the moral criterion
<b>Full care for children</b>	Not finding free time to care for children
<b>Economically dependent on the husband</b>	Economic independence (not full)

**Figure 1:** The difference between the traditional family and the modern one

Seen from above the table, the difference between the traditional and modern family regarding the role of the woman is clearly seen. In the traditional family, the father/husband was the first authority in the household, while with little difference we see that the same has been transmitted in the modern family, despite the equality that prevails in this type of family, the father is still the main authority within it. Another interesting element that pertains to these two types of families is the right of inheritance, where in the past, neither daughters nor wives had any right to inheritance, which is almost the same in modern Albanian families, where the female as an heir is seen in the case where she is the only child within the family, otherwise she only gets a portion. But considering the traditions and customs of Albanian society, it is shameful for her to take part in the father's property. Another very important thing is that in the past, the only advantage that women had compared to the men of today was their role as mothers and their full care for the children. Women in modern families, due to the many commitments, seem to be diminishing their role as mothers. The care of children is entrusted more to educators and grandmothers.

But what is worth noting is that modern families made it possible for women, in addition to the only role they had within the traditional family, as a mere housewife and educator of children, to have a say in public life and at the same time to be more economically independent.

Today, women, in addition to their roles as mothers, wives, and partners, are quite active in various social institutions, starting from elementary education to the highest levels, including their involvement in medicine, police, various courts, etc. Among other things, today, women are active in political life, although with a very low percentage of representatives. Despite all the roles that she possesses in the modern family, we cannot say that equality has been achieved in Albanian society, as women continue to be discriminated against and oppressed by society.



**Figure 2:** The position of women in the contemporary and traditional family

As we can see from the role and position of women in the traditional Albanian family, it is low compared to the contemporary family, where about 67% think that women have a moderate position in the modern family, and 32% think that her role within the contemporary family is high, compared to the traditional family where 80% think that the position of women has been low and 20% moderate.

This not very positive reality for Albanian society can be concluded with a quote from Simone de Beauvoir: *"All of humanity identifies with masculinity, the world is identified as masculine, and women are always identified through their relationship with men, according to*

*the criteria established by men. He (the man) by placing himself as a subject created a superiority with which women must agree without objecting" (Beauvoir, 2002).*

## **Conclusion**

Based on what we have elaborated above, we have concluded that the role and position of women in the Albanian family, whether traditional or modern, has had its importance. From this analysis, I have concluded that in the traditional family, women were subject to backward traditions and customs that have been transmitted in Albanian families for centuries and unfortunately some of them continue to be transmitted even today. Another factor for the subjugation of women was economic causes, which are still evident today. In my opinion, the economic factor is the basis for a proper functioning family.

While women in the modern family have a role and status both within and outside the family, she still faces discrimination and subjugation by men. Although she is more independent today, she still faces different problems as a result of the patriarchal mindset and spirit that still prevails in Albanian society. In between two worlds, that of the emancipated Western woman, who enjoys rights and privileges, and that of the old one, where women are ordered and subjugated, the Albanian woman, still trapped in the patriarchal spirit, continues to serve as a "tool" of society in the service of male interests.

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