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„ЕЗИЦИТЕ“ НА ЛИТЕРАТУРНАТА ТВОРБА

“THE LANGUAGES” OF THE LITERARY WORK

INSIGHTS OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN WRITERS INTO THE FAMILY CONCEPT AND GENDER ISSUES IN ALBANIA IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

Benita STAVRE

“Fan S. Noli” University, Albania
E-mail: bstavre@unkorce.edu.al

ABSTRACT**:** The Albanian reality of the first half of the 20th century was very intriguing for foreigners who visited it at that time. Trying to understand the unusual circumstances, most of the visitors dared to grasp a sense of truth in Albanian life. Then, they did not hesitate to share it in various publication forms.

The writings describe in detail many life aspects: the way geography had shaped the Albanian character, social and religious relations, linguistic peculiarities, economic developments, governmental enterprises, and foreign relations. The approach in which these aspects are outlined defines reliable literary resources for further studies from a modern perspective. This article focuses on the concept of the Albanian *family* and *gender* issues of the time. The article aims at throwing light on the Albanian conception of these two elements, by reviewing writings of British and American writers on Albanian family relations, the way they were reflected in gender issues, the relationship between generations, and fanatic bindings. Their description is so carefully handled by every writer, that for the non-Albanian reader it becomes clear why the terms *shtëpi* (house/household) and *familje* (family) were essentially different from the European understanding of both concepts.

KEYWORDS: literary resources, foreign visitors, family, gender issues, polygamy, levirate, terminology

Introduction

The Albanian reality of the first half of the 20th century was very intriguing for foreigners who visited the country at the time. It was even more involving for those who reached it from a much more modern context, given the very particular social context it displayed to the visitor. The latter found in this small southern European corner a realm of principle-ruled social values, almost forgotten elsewhere. Trying to understand these unusual circumstances, most of the visitors dared to enter deep into Albanian life and grasp a sense of its truth. Afterward, they did not hesitate to share it in the form of a diary, a journal, a letter to a relative, a newspaper article, a photo album, a sketchbook, analytic reflections, and even published studies of the research carried out while living in Albania. The material they provided to the reader at the time seemed curious and attracted even more travelers, who did not hesitate to visit that reality despite the mystic touch of disorder and a vague feeling of insecurity that mantled Albania in the second quarter of the past century. Such writings describe in detail many life aspects, including the way geography had shaped the Albanian character, social and religious relations, linguistic peculiarities, economic developments, governmental enterprises, and foreign relations. The approach in which these aspects are outlined defines reliable literary resources for further diachronic studies carried out in the modern perspective. This article focuses on the concept of the Albanian *family* and *gender* issues of the time. The article aims at throwing light on the Albanian conception of these two elements, by reviewing works of British and American writers on Albanian family relations, the way they were reflected in gender issues, the relationship between generations, and fanatic bindings. Their description is so carefully handled by every writer, that for the non-Albanian reader it becomes clear why the terms *shtëpi* (house/household) and *familje* (family) were essentially different from the European understanding of both concepts.

In the modern perception at the time (the 1920s – 1930s), the Europeans considered *the family* a unit *per se*, with the focus on the core membership: the parents and the children (therefore two generations). The Great Depression had given women a different social status from that of fifty years earlier. Especially during the 1930s, the role of the man as *a husband* and as *a father* was changed.

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Faced with unemployment, the men mostly depended on the work of their wives and sometimes even on that of their children. This had deprived them of the official status of *the head of the family*, *the income provider*, and *the decision-maker*. Furthermore, both in Great Britain and in the United States of America, women had involved themselves actively in social life. Feminist movements had already been key developments in both nations and the right to vote (provided with the 19th Amendment in the USA in 1920 and with the Parliamentary reform of 1928 in Great Britain) had made women more independent and open-minded. The number of divorced couples increased significantly, which meant that women had definitely set their social status, aiming at having legal equal rights with men. This was more or less the background that the visitors from both nations carried with them when they entered Albania in the 1920s or the 1930s. Nothing could prepare them for the remote situation they found in this little country and they were bewildered. The crash of realities is reflected in the tone and the language they chose to describe the large families they met, as well as in the way they tried to explain the strange bond that kept generations together so tightly in these families. No matter how neutral they tried to remain, most writers found it hard to understand the woman's status, the man exercising an anciently recognized power over her, and the reason why features of an overwhelmingly patriarchal society were perspicuously reflected in either wedding or bereavement rites in the country. Nigel Heseltine, for example, commented on the state of the female in the Albanian family and society: "It was the kind of state in which women were directly or indirectly stripped of all their power; they had no power over men legally or politically, and no access to institutions where their opinions might be voiced (…) As prisoners, the women would have never submitted themselves so long, had they only been bound by the authority of their men; it was the far strongest religious taboo that kept them submissive. While they might have resisted men, they dared not resist God." (Heseltine, 1938, p. 158-159)

As can be seen, at the beginning of the 20th century, Albania still reflected centuries of patriarchalism in its family relations. The relations varied between Gheg[1] and Tosk[2] family members. It was mainly defined by the social organization in both Gheg and Tosk societies, the geographical relief and its influence on tribal blood relations, the impact of the religion, and the influence of either written or unwritten laws. In this sense, none of the authors attempted to generalize a pattern of the Albanian family in a national frame; the life models of the Ghegs occupy entire pages of elaborated descriptions of taboo and honor safeguards.

The Albanian woman of the 1920s - 1930s

"Village women grow up with the belief that the man needs to be considered their lord and their owner, therefore they need to be perfect wives for them. Husbands are generally faithful to marriage and treat their wives well, as long as they do not misbehave and obey them." (Heathcote, 1925, p. 258) Most writers chose to start their descriptions of the tribal divisions of the North, by revealing their relationship to the geographic features. That would somehow facilitate the reader's understanding of such quotations as the above. Ian Whitaker, for example, explained that each clan lived in its well-defined territory, which in most cases extended along a valley by a water source. (Shryock, 1988, p.146) While serving as tribal boundaries, such geographic features also defined the relationships between them. In most cases, these relations did in no way overcome isolation policies and the tribal intercourse was only limited to what was intended to strengthen the power of the chieftain. This was directly reflected in intertribal marriage arrangements and the fanatic preservation of the fatherhood line. "Patrilinear inheritance" was an indisputable concept and the Albanian Ghegs were so patriarchal that they were able to trace the deeds of their male ancestors back to twenty generations, while those of the female line faded away by the third generation. The birth of a girl was a disappointing calamity because she was not considered a future safeguard of the family name. (Fischer, 1999) The Albanian concept that "sons were more closely tied to the family than daughters" added to the idea that parents should rely on the male heirs for their old age since daughters became part of the husband's family once married. (Federal Writers' Project of the Work Progress Administration, 1939, p. 105) Girls were not even called by names in the highland families, even when sons were educated abroad; every woman was someone's wife, someone's mother, and someone's daughter to the point that it was hard to get to know her proper name. (Durham, 2001, p.

[1] inhabitants of northern Albania
[2] inhabitants of southern Albania

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145) Margaret Hasluck summarised The Unwritten Law in Albania states that the man signifies *blood*, while the woman only *gender*. It means that the man carries his ancestry, while the woman only inherits relativeness (…); she may come from anywhere and carries no ancestry line. (Hasluck, 2005, p. 36)

Lifestream in mountains had given the woman a twofold social and family role. On the one hand, she was judged as incapable of handling the important family issue and, therefore, she had to hand on this exclusivity to the father, the brother, and her future husband. On the other hand, she was recognized by the unwritten law of the north as a reliable family income provider. Since most of the males were *të ngujuar* (unable to leave their home premises, because of the thread of the blood-feud) in their *kulla* (typical houses of the Ghegs, mainly built with thick stone walls and small windows), handling blood inheritance issues, women were obliged to ensure survival resources for their families. (Fisher, 1999) Their blood was not considered worth it, therefore the vendetta spared them. This counter value was probably the only freedom for a woman. She could go from place to place without fearing harm or insult; she could carry messages from village to village even though the journey involved regions with which her husband was *në gjak* (in blood); furthermore, no one hurt a man if he was in the company of a woman. (Swire, 2005, p. 91)

Despite this, deprived of all social rights, the Gheg woman had to supply her social modest significance to a life fully administered by such a patriarchal society. It is interesting to see how the Canon of Lek Dukagjin defines workload division between the man and the woman. All heavy household chores (…), welcoming guests at the house, and preserving the family honor were duties of a man. Women, on the other hand, were fully responsible for all of the following: childbirth and childrearing, cooking, housecleaning, provisions for their husbands and welcoming family guests (including washing their feet), carrying water and firewood in the house, dairy processing and trading, food provision, and preservation, cloth mending, washing, sewing and preparation of the dowry for their daughters. They were also in charge of all men's duties when these were in blood (Whitaker, 1981, p. 150) Being only valued for the way she added to the quality of the family honor, the woman lacked awareness of the individual values she embodied and her perception of personal identity vanished with the years. She accepted the man’s imposition and self-offered devotion as morally-correct behavior and loyalty. She even accepted the fact that her parents sent her to her husband's home, with a bullet in her dowry, a sign of their concession to shoot her in the back in case of betraying or dishonoring her husband. (Young, 1988, p. 58). The Albanian reality of the 1930s could even be harsher when it came to a woman daring to attempt some family status. When endless vendetta conflicts had deprived a family of male heirs and the father’s property was in danger of being inherited by the closest man relative, a woman *swore virginity*, never married, and was considered a man. Colonel W. F. Stirling wrote that he had met half a dozen of such women while inspecting various military stations in the North. (Stirling, 1953, p. 134) Virgjëreshat e betuara (sworn virgins) could hold a rifle and smoke in the same place as men. That seemed a very complicated issue for foreign visitors. Edith Durham explained that swearing virginity was the only way to break a childhood betrothal without generating a vendetta line between families: If she found twelve old men from her tribe that would swear for her, she could swear virginity. If she forswore then the honor of the twelve men was perjured and the vendetta was unavoidable. (Durham, 1990, p. 490) For that Melville Chater, an American journalist that visited Albania in 1931 blamed old-fashioned customs, which were still very influential in the middle of the 20th century: The betrothal (…) dates back to the 18th century when living together was not celebrated in marriage before the woman had given birth to a son. (Chater, 1931, p. 175)

Cases of sworn virgins were also common in families that did not have any sons. At this point, one of the family’s daughters had to take up the role of the family’s male offspring. This solved the problem since the new male representative was now a member of the Council of the Village and could participate in decision-making meetings, where property issues were also discussed. "The He-She" seemed the most devoted shackle of the dutiful chain of the family honor; it was the link that Andrew Shryock defined as "asexual," reflecting an unwillingness to get married and be a female; in other words, she was culturally considered "a male." (Cited in Young, 1988, p. 60). Yet, since this new role did not entitle “a pseudo-male” to give birth to heirs, the family name died with her death, and the family property was inherited by the closest relatives on the side of the father. According to Carleton

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Coon, other similar communities had thought about a more logical and pragmatic solution; the groom of the family daughter would come to live with his in-laws and be entitled to full property rights. In this way, the family line and property were preserved in the family for generations. Despite the very close analogy, this was not a case encountered in northern Ghegëri during the first half of the last century. (Coon, 1950, p. 25) Its trust in the family male line gave the sworn virgins the status of a social mechanism that went beyond economic motivation. Despite providing very little freedom to a woman, it was "generous" enough to allow female wisdom to claim decision-making in an exclusively male convention.

The Family concept

One common perception all writers share about the Albanian family was that it was sacred for the Albanians. In the Gheg regions family (blood) relations dictated most of the social structures and marriage arrangements of the northern tribes. Since each tribe was generated from an early male ancestor, all of the successors of this male line were considered "brothers" and "sisters" and could not marry one another. According to Edith Durham (1928), the tribes that arranged the largest numbers of marriages between themselves were, in fact, following the female line, since they only received brides from each other. However, since the blood of a female was not relevant for the vendetta issues, "a newborn child" did not carry any blood characteristics from its mother. Therefore, partners exchanged between the tribes were not considered cousins and were allowed to get married, despite the very close blood relation they carried. During her stay in Albania, E. Durham discussed blood-related marriages with a Franciscan friar. Confused between his religious background and his tribal principles, the frier judged that if cousins of the fourth or fifth grade on the father's line married, it would be like "marrying people of the same blood;" even though the original was quite distant, it was still considered incest. Fortunately, in his region, there had not been such occurrences, and "he hoped that he would never be challenged by such awful circumstances." (Durham, 1990, p. 434) It explains why most of the phenomena that will be outlined below, were more frequently encountered in the north of Albania, rather than in other parts of the country.

As mentioned above, for an Albanian, *the family* did not just mean *a husband*, *a wife*, and *one* or *more children.* Hard life, miserable home conditions, and lack of social communication had enlarged the concept of the families in the north, by multiplying their functions and therefore, their size. Description of the writers, visitors, and guests, talk about families with numerous members, from different generations, living under the same roof. (Lane, 2004, p. 56) Coon considered the Gheg family similar to the ancient Israeli people. Due to very limited life resources, the tribe members were obliged to regulate their income on the limited agricultural, farming, and craft opportunities available to them. In this context, the *family* concept turned into *a household* and included "the husband, his wife/wives, his sons, his unmarried daughters, and his sons' children." (Coon, 1950, p. 21) They all lived and worked in the same house or nearby houses. In Dukagjin, Coon found families with up to thirty or forty members. To define them the word "*mëhalla*" (neighborhood) was used (Coon traced its origin as "military camp" in Arabic, and influence of the Turkish language during the Ottoman invasion). Large Gheg families also attracted Margaret Hasluck from 1926 to 1929. She noticed that the malissori chose to keep married brothers in the core family, tied either by a strong family feeling inspired by the economic benefit of a united family. There were more working forces in an extended family and this also provided more agriculture and farming possibilities. (Hasluck, 2005, p.63)

Such an organization required balanced power within the family unit, which was regulated based on the workload division between sexes. No family member could function within "this economic unit" regardless of the other. If a husband died, his place was immediately occupied by another; if a wife could not bear children, she was substituted by another who could. The scope was to have as many male heirs as possible, to compensate for the loss of the other adult males that were victims of the vendetta. The fact that the family functioned as an economic unit was the main reason why marriages in northern Albania were arranged by the heads of the tribes before the child was even born. Since at the time there existed a completely wrong idea about the role of a male in the definition of his child gender, wives were the only ones to be blamed when the couple produced no heirs or only had daughters. Because of this, families whose female line had given birth to boys after marriage were highly demanded in cases of marriage arrangements. (Whitaker, 1981, p. 149)

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The Gheg grooms had to “buy” their future brides. Joseph Swire described these marriages: “Bethrowal is a common phenomenon in Albania. Women were promised marriage while unborn yet, by the head of the family (who considered them his property), and based on the future transformation of their service(s), they were given a purchase price, part of which was paid upon the agreed contract and the rest at the wedding.” (Swire, 2005, p. 43) Such a purely economic deal would reflect consequences in the life of the couple since the price of a bride was defined by her ability to be a good housekeeper and farm dealer. The contract was agreed upon faith and the priests were civic testimonies. (Federal Writers’ Project of the Work Progress Administration, 1939, p. 118) Such terms were agreed upon while the child was still unborn (or still too young) and most future couples did not know each other at all before marriage; in case the groom refused his bethrowed wife, a vendetta could start between respective tribes. (Fischer, 1999) The groom usually saw his bride on the day of the wedding. Since then, she belonged to him and would always walk behind him carrying on her shoulders "the physical and moral burden of her family life." (Mann, 1969) The payment was handed to her father in a leather socket. The American press of the time used the term “*bride bargain*” and James A. Mills, a journalist for The Central Daily Chronicle traced the phenomenon back to the Ottoman invasion when young women were brought to auction and bought by the one that offered more for them. (The Central Daily Chronicle, August 27, 1928) The money paid, should be spent on dowry expenses and not for other needs of the bride's family. The purchase sum was not refundable even when the marriage was not consumed, nor when the bride-to-be died early. Ian Whitaker estimated the price as “18-19 golden napoleons, almost half the price of a kulla.” (Whitaker, 1980, p. 152) That is the reason why in families with many sons, the youngest ones had to wait long before being engaged; little money was left for them after the marriages of the older brothers. They were sometimes destined to marry their brothers’ widows whose price, given their unfortunate status, was very low (these ill-fate maids remained at the house of their husbands, and had to justify their share in the household life by entering the service of a man who provided food and shelter for them).

It seemed that it would need long before the norms of modern civilization could penetrate through the northern mountains. It seemed that the female lost herself under the burden of such rocky traditions. Whitaker named the Gheg woman “a sack for carrying things” (under Article XXIX of the Lekë Dukagjini Canon, which explains her projected role – the ability to bear children). (Hasluck, 2005, p. 36) After marriages, women almost finished their life cycle. Poverty, discrimination, inequality, hard chores, and the almost brutal treatment, remained key Canon words, which also predefined their destiny even before they were born.

Polygamy and levirate

Most literary resources describe the Albanian family as *monogamous* and observers agree that the Albanian males, in general, preferred to live their life with only one wife. Yet, some visitors were intrigued by some cases of *polygamy* on both sides of the Shkumbin River, which made them wonder, why in Albania the cases of polygamy among the Muslim community were the rarest compared to other Islamic nations. (Ibid.) Furthermore, they failed to understand why there was a different perception of the phenomenon from the one recognized in the western world. It reflected harsh friction between what was accepted among the life practices of *the malissori* (inhabitants of the Ghegnia) and what was preached in the Catholic Churches of their villages. In other words, it reflected a crash between “The Law of Lek” (the unwritten moral code which ruled the life of Ghegnia) and “The Law of Rome”.

In his study, Coon (1950) noticed that the statistics of his research in the highlands in 1939, 256 Gheg males had more than one wife. In 82 (or 32%) of these cases, the husband had been obliged to take another wife given the inability of his previous one to give birth to children/sons (28 of these had been remarried because their wives had given birth to only one or two daughters). (p. 26) When asked further, these husbands claimed that a malissori could "untie" himself of marriage bonds when it did not provide male heirs and when the Catholic Church prevented him from divorcing to fulfil his main custom dictation – having sons. In the case of Muslim families, it did not constitute any religious concern; however, it went “diametrically counter the Catholic rules" which did not tolerate such polygamy forms. According to Coon, since Catholicism failed to fit the economic needs of the northern Albania family, it was no wonder that many of the malissori converted to “a much more satisfactory faith” in this respect, Islam. (Ibid.) *The levirate* (marriage within the family) was another

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form of polygamy among the Gheg families. It was a means to avoid the creation of smaller social units, which would function as economic units on their own, regardless of the structure of the large family. This mechanism arranged the ratio between the number of kinsmen and their workload ability, by keeping "the precious working arms" of a woman still in the family.[3] If the widow had children, her brother-in-law, her husband's uncle, or any of his kinsmen, would keep her in their family without declaring her as a wife. According to Bernd Fischer (1999), this did not break any of the monogamy rules, since the children were legitimate; in some cases, they were even considered "heirs of the first husband" even though they were born after his death. These were cases that, according to Coon did not constitute any ecclesiastical difficulty in Moslem regions. In Catholic ones, however, the priest at least hoped that the new union was not consumed even though the woman was taken into the new household and the new caretaker took the responsibility for her and her children. (Ibid.)

In this way, under the careful conduct of the head of the family, all together, brothers, their wives, and children worked the family lands and took care of the family farm. They all merged into one unit, striving for the tribe's economic survival, a process in which everything was commonly owned by everyone. Private ownership was an indecipherable concept for the malissori of the time; land transaction was not a common phenomenon at all. Within his tribal frame, a malissori did not consider himself an individual and, as such, could not function as an independent economic unit. Coon tried to provide a logical explanation for this. In his research during the winter of 1929 and spring of 1930, he noticed that 1060 Gheg malissor males had married 1375 women. While 75% of this focus-group men declared being monogamous, the rest claimed being married to 2-6 wives. Religiously speaking, 1/3 of the Muslim interview men stated that they had been married only once; which was higher than the 1/6 of the Catholic men who declared polygamous. Coon claimed that this had a demographic explanation. Since the Muslim community mainly populated the eastern Gegëria (in which the soil was fertile and provided better economic resources), a man could afford to keep more wives and therefore feed more children. The lands on which the Catholic tribes were set (Mirdita and Dukagjin) were too poor to provide a decent living for a large family, which is why the chiefs of these tribes chose not to add to the number of the family units. (Ibid., p. 26) In territories where both religions merged, husbands were reported with the same number of wives, which meant that polygamy in the case of the malissori was not a religious issue. This supports the idea that marriage was an economic mechanism and that its workload ability defined relations between the Gheg family and kinsmen. The third reason that leads to marriages with more than one wife emanated from the need for power growth. As it had randomly happened in earlier civilizations, marriage arrangements with powerful tribes were considered by the Ghegs a mechanism to boost territorial influence or to set up alliances between tribes. In 9/10 intertribal marriages reported by Coon, five of the men had had polygamous fathers; in Has only he came across four men, three of whom were brought up in polygamous families. (Ibid.) All these reasons, including even the fact that mothers would die young at childbirth given numerous pregnancies, offer a chained pattern of traditional, religious, geographic, economic, social, and political interventions in the concept of *polygamy* in the Albanian life of the 1920s and 1930s. The central government itself considered them a negative influence on its efforts to set up the basis of a national Civil Code. To bring uniformity in the northern and southern social life and family structures, in 1929, King Ahmet Zog I issued a ban on polygamy regardless of the religious background of either Muslim or Christian families.

Government enterprises to improve the status of women in the Albanian society

The image of the Albanian woman of 1920-1939 would not be fairly described if it remained in the frame of the above portrayal of the malissori females. The Albanian woman of central and southern Albania is also very interesting to describe, given her very different reflection on social life. Rose Lane, for example, includes veiled Muslim women in her depiction of the Tiranë tableau "crying behind their veils, tiptoeing on high heels." (Lane, 2004, p. 243) In the meantime, it was also common

[3] When, as a result of the vengeance, the husband died, in the luckiest (but at the same time the rarest cases) a childless widow would be free of her in-law family obligations by being "resold;" the prize was shared between her and the in-laws. In the worst of cases, when the widow was a mother of daughters, she would be taken back to her maiden family with no support; this meant no further marriage perspectives for a stigmatized woman, mother of female beings.

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to see women walking unveiled, and showing off their brand clothes that their husbands had bought for them abroad. The south witnessed a more European attitude to the social status of women. Its impact was not widespread; however, progressive steps were noticed by foreign visitors in the 1930s.

Owen Pearson, for example, published part of an interview with King Zog I on June 25, 1930, in his book "Albania and King Zog." The interview was granted to A. L. Easterman, who was correspondent for the *Daily Express* at the time. Among the outline of the King's ambitions, the journalist also quotes: "I am for the freedom of women, but I do not think they should be involved in politics. I would like women to attend schools and be educated, but also to be good mothers and diligent household keepers. I would like all Albanian women to be good – like my mother. By law, I have banned child bethrowing and I can see it has been accepted despite ancient traditions." (Pearson, 2005, p. 317) To increase the popularity of his reforms, the king encouraged his own sisters' public appearance. He sent "three of his unmarried and unveiled Muslim sisters on a tour to extreme northern sections of the country – including Shkodër, cores of the remaining Muslim fanaticism in the country." (Vicker, 2001, p. 135) He aimed to show how convenient was the unveiled outfit for women. The Princesses, Myzejen, Ruhije, and Mexhide, in modern European dresses, with knee-length skirts, designed to fit the body, wearing make-up, (Tomes, 2003, p. 139) were able to visit schools, churches, and hospitals; they walked around even in northern markets. Their tour was impressive, but not enough to convince the heads of the tribes to allow their wives to put on "à la franca" clothes. Yet, Ahmet Zog I was convinced not to let the matter vanish under centuries of mental backwardness. He lobbied for clerical support and an *ad hoc* Muslim Council approved the report delivered to the head of the Islamic Community in Albania, which stated that "the Muslim law did not oblige women to cover their face or head." (Fischer, 2004, p. 262) This enterprise of government had a modest effect mainly in Tiranë. Its impact went further; one could see around southern territories orthodox women dressed in knee-length skirts, tights, and shortly-cut hair. (Chater, 1931, p. 133) In the early 1930s, a new stratum of young educated men occurred in Tiranë, as the center of government administration. Their Muslim wives enlightened the social life of Tiranë and Durrës (Ryan, 1951, p. 324) and uphold the market prestige of Royal street with blocks of stores on both sides. (Tomes, 2003, p. 108) Lord Donegall wrote in 1938 "The selling of French perfumes is thanks to Queen Geraldine (…) and partly to the new royal decree banning the veil. Muslim women have already shown interest in such European things." (Gazeta e Korcës, October 13, 1938). These women also enlivened the social life in the capital and main southern cities. Their outfit could not be left unnoticed at the balls and dance evenings. They are even involved in charity works. Under the guidance of the wives of foreign diplomats in Albania, rich family women, educated abroad, founded some associations. The most famous was the Association for Animal Protection. It was administered by a Committee, whose members were women whose family and social status could promote the mission of the Association. A few months before the Italian invasion, its presidency was assigned to Sasha Libohova, whose fundraising activities provided a vet hospital in Tiranë. Both reforms of banning the veil and the legacy of divorce cost King Zog sharpening correspondence with the main religious communities in Albania. The Muslims felt that the new Civil Code, which entered force on April 1, 1929, prevented women from covering their faces and banned men to have more than one legitimate wife. The government aimed to make the Albanian aware of her being a citizen equally submitted to common law, regardless of the religious divisions. It was quite difficult, however, to convince either husbands or wives living in rural areas that the veil was illegal. Even when challenged by police fines, in some cities, women dared to hold a handkerchief in front of their face when they crossed men on the road.

The state administration, however, was not as moderate as the King inspired; it was challenged by the idea that women could perform even other duties besides the household chores. Despite proclaiming emancipation, the government did not provide women with any administrative functions. (Tomes, 2003, p. 109) The Albanian population of the time reached one million, but only 668 women had a job: among them, there were 21 teachers, 2 doctors, but no engineers, agronomists, or chemists. The fact that only 2.4% of the pupils in the Albanian schools were females, did not give any further hope for the future. The power of Kong Zog depended much on the support of the Muslim great landowners in the south and the chieftains in the north. Neither of them could accept reforms to go this far and the King would not exhaust his little gained power to protect the rights of the women.

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He turned his head to higher priorities like home safety and power extension over the whole territory. As a result, the minor changes in the status of women in the late 1930s remained mainly superficial. (Fischer, 1999)

Conclusion

All of the above represent only a selected outline of the circumstances in which the concepts of the family and gender were perceived by British and American writers. It would be fair to say that all of the writers who entered the reality of Albania in the 1920s and 1930s describe the same social and family patterns, which means that it was an inherent reality, whose patterns had been defined long ago by principles of honor and power. Marriages were tools to arrange economic and military intercourse between tribes. Such rooting relations would naturally not inspire any love and affection between the members of the couple. The relationship would either lead to full neglect of the wife as an important family member or render such significance to her childbearing and workforce skills. As a result, phenomena like the sworn virgins, polygamy, and levirate went beyond religious principles in the north of the country and inspired curious insights by foreign current or future anthropologists. Despite the efforts undertaken by the central government of King Zog I to restore the status of women and their role in marriage and family, it seemed that The Canon had deeply rooted in such regions and it would take long before any attempt at modernization, already taking place in the central and southern Albania, were accepted by the malissori Ghegs.

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