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“Both Man and Woman”: The Third Sex/Gender Role in Roma Community in Skopje

Abstract: “Women” (*buljashi*) play a third gender role in the Roma community in Skopje, Macedonia. Their important role, “both man and woman”, in the Roma community is realized through economic, social, and ritual community of close “sisters”. Within the Roma family rituals, in the life cycle rituals of the men and women community members, they take a significant ritual – magic function. They are “mediators” between the divine and the community.

Key words: women, third gender role, Roma community, Skopje, sisters

The Macedonian ethnological and anthropological literature contains no research of the men – “women” in the Roma community in Skopje from the aspect of the local conception “both man and woman”. We can say that even in the Balkan and global anthropological literature they are rare. Certainly, we cannot say that there is no research on the Roma. They are numerous and they cover various aspects. Usually, they revolve around the social and cultural marginalization of sexual workers, men who have sex with men or LGBTQ persons (Zikić 2008, Maksimović 2009, Radoman 2017), including individuals from the Roma community in the modern social context in Serbia. There are also studies about the ethnical identity inherent to various aspects of the contemporary Bulgarian society (see, Marushiakova and Popov 2007), the traditional Roma culture in the Macedonian context (Petrovski 2013, Elsie Ivancich Dunin 2006), and they are very important for our research regarding the local conception of „both man and woman“ in the Roma community in Skopje, Macedonia.

Starting from the position of the author Catalina Tesar (Cătălina Tesăr) (2012), who analyzes the gender building in the Romanian Roma, Korotorari, “as a process that revolves around folk conceptions of bodies and their lived ex-

perience in the culture”, and of the author Gay y Blasco (1997), who points out the importance of physical bodies for Roma conceptions of gender, we would also like to refer to the author Serena Nanda (1986, 1999), whose research contributes to the understanding of the origin of the cultural conceptions in the Roma community in Skopje, Macedonia.

Identification terms in context

A common feature of the interviewees in the research relates to the term *buljashi* (from “bulja”, human bottom), a term which they find offensive, unless used among themselves. Another term, albeit much rarer, is *kulale(i)ja*, *kulalo* which also offends when used publicly by others. The interlocutors use it during their gatherings when joking. As a politically correct term they use a local version of the term “gay”, or in “gayci” in Macedonian plural, i.e. men who like dating “men” for pleasure and work sexual work “as women” – “sexual workers”. “As women”: *they date, make, use, want to be* (VN850123, 2013) with a “man”, *sell themselves for money* (VN850124, 2014), for *compensations* or *rewards; service* (the client) (VN850124, 2014). In the context of sexual work, the “men” are called *clients* or *customers*. The modern context emphasizes the economic aspect using the term *boyfriend* (or *children*), closely related to *client*. N: *boyfriend who pays us, sometimes buys us what we need and bring it to us. If he cannot pay us money, he will buy us something, he will contribute with something* (VN850123, 2013). The “client”: *is fucking you for benefit (koris)* (VN850123, 2013), *gives* (for example, money) *to take advantage of me* (VN850123, 2013). Unlike other Roma, the interlocutors provide their services “covertly”, far from public eyes.

The “men” in the Roma community consider sexual workers who provide sexual services “as women”, as “neither man, nor woman”. This term may be found in the Serena Nanda’s research on the Indian “hijra” – “neither man nor woman but contain elements of both” (Nanda 1986). She suggests this term about the individuals she observes constitutes a main term, since it explains the concept that the individuals have built “for themselves”. In our research’s examples, this term corresponds to the concept built by the “men” in the Roma community, with whom our interlocutors have regular contacts. We think that the concept which our interlocutors built for themselves “both man and woman” is important since only such a concept helps realize the identity characteristics of the subjects of interest. This concept, found in the Roma community arises from biologically “male children” who, based on the idea of congenital and acquired bodily characteristics of *buljash*, later become “women” in the male community. Thus, sexual work now becomes increasingly important. Therefore, this activity

in time will become important just as Bojan Žikic writes in the study about the sexual work in Belgrade when “the individuals who do that have adopted that term and use it in a sense of self-expression and self-description” (Žikić 2008, 39). That shows that the local conception of “both man and woman” depends of modern globalization processes and depending on the social context in Skopje and/or abroad, transforms in new forms.

The ethnographic materials referring to the local concept of “both man and woman” confirm the fact that “the representations of gender rely on the pro-creative capacities of the sex-differentiated bodies summoned to enact a set of moral prescriptions in social behavior, relative to categories of age and kinship (Tesar 2012, 113)

Personal conception of “both man and woman”

Consequently, our interlocutors’ examples, in the Roma context in Skopje, show that the personal conception does not exclude anything from one’s body. They build the perception for themselves not by excluding parts of their personal bodies, but rather by including all the congenital and acquired parts of their bodies and they constantly compare themselves with the bodies of the “sisters”. They see themselves as a *whole entity*, i.e. that they do not object their “male” organ which they can use to service their “boyfriends”. For example, our interlocutor L. does not consider his penis an obstacle in his work, he even thinks that, in certain scenes, such as Italy, the ones with penises have a higher price. Secondly, our interlocutor E. considers it dangerous to have the penis is removed, since he may feel sorry. *E: Remove it? No. That, here, no chance. It does not happen here. E: Noooo. Sometimes you may be sorry for anything. I: Is sorry? E: Of course, he is sorry. There is somebody for anything. I don’t hide, but sometimes.... You cannot live like this whole life* (VN850127, 2014).

Our interlocutors exhibit a certain fluidness about their personal sex/gender and in the ideas about themselves, and their practices. Namely, all the interlocutors know that they cannot have a penis removal operation in the Macedonian healthcare institutions. Even if it were possible, some of the interlocutors would do that only if they “settle” abroad, far from the Roma community where they live with their families: parents, their own sons and daughters, where they are born and live as men (brothers, fathers, sons). This procedure “to settle” represents an ideal social, economic solution for all our interlocutors. Only then would they be able to afford hormone therapy to reach the bodily ideal of feminine beauty and, according to them, the highest satisfaction among the “children” and “clients”. However, in our interlocutor’s stories about their settled friends abroad, I did not find any examples of some of their close “sisters” or distant

friends who had surgically removed their “male” sex organs. Our interlocutors, consider the “boobs” as the focus in reaching the feminine beauty, contributing to their sexual work as “women” on the street on the open scenes abroad. This helps them improve, i.e. charge higher rates, just as the other European sexual workers. That may be noticed in the interlocutors’ narratives in an example about a Roma person who came from Italy and who had a hormone therapy in order to make physiological and, more importantly, body changes in order to become a “real woman”. Examples suggest that the interlocutors see themselves as “both man and woman”. They live for their *business* which provides subsistence for them and their families, biologically and socially within the Roma context. Sooner or later their work becomes an essential part which sustains their sex/gender identity at the expense of the other segments of their social community role. Cornwall basically suggests this when he states “that shifting discourses have produced variant sexualities and gender over time” (Cornwall 1994, 123).

However, Marjorie Garber’s idea that a single sex/gender determination can be seen as a “method of expression”, a “way to describe the space of the options” (Garber 1992), then for the conception of the Roma “women” sexual workers in the Roma community in Skopje, suggests that it is an integral, local way of expression. These “women” function as biological “men”, expected to perform the role of “fathers”, as well as through a symbolic relation system of “sisters”, supporting each other in their socializing for *pleasure* and providing sexual services *for benefit (koris)*, which benefits both families. This system of local economy of “sisters” and “sexual workers”, enables these men to earn for their families. Thus, their children, parents who in a sense support them, tolerate their absence. This particularly applies to S., a single father living with and looking after his children and his mother, while he works.

Trying to understand the concept of a male Roma “woman” as a sexual worker earning for both families (within the Roma community there is a third gender “both man and woman”), we notice that, in many ways, we can compare it to the way of third gender social organization in India known as *hijra*, described by Serena Nanda – the Indian “institutionalized third gender role in India ‘neither man nor a woman’, containing elements from both” (Nanda 1986, 35, see more on hijra in Nanda 1986, 1999). Just like the hijras, the Roma “sisters” developed a system of relations at all levels in the Roma community, i.e. social, economic and ritual level.

“Sisters” relation system

“Sisters” are associations of biological men who, based on the segment of their personal and sex/gender identity which they identify as feminine – “of a female”, engage in “practices of commensality” (Papataxiarchis 1991, 156). They say that

they need to *date* men for *pleasure* or for *benefit (koris)*, thus the men from the Roma community identify them using the local term *buljash*. This “practice of association” plays a very significant role for the “sisters”. This reflects in their desire and need to function as a symbolic family community, in short or longer time periods (depending on the needs and circumstances), regardless of whether they live with the family of their parents (such as L., N.), with their own family with children and mother (such as S.) or alone (such as E.).

L. We gather to relax and to be free (VN850126, 2013);

L: We are like that, sweetheart! For example, if there is vacant space somewhere, woohooo!! If the space is vacant for a year, we will go there for a year and there will be no problem because we are relaxed. For example, here, at this place (at their friend’s home in the settlement of Vizbegovo, neighboring Shuto Orizari), we are very relaxed. No one comes, no one to bother or attack, or something... most relaxed, we talk peacefully, we are not ashamed nor anything. We do what we want. No one restricts us. Nobody tells you, for example, that you cannot dress up now or don’t do this, don’t do that, you know? We are free there.... Like at home. Same as at home, same. Anywhere we go, we make an impression among people, feel the same as at home. And the people, as soon as they come to us for the first time, they say: ‘Feel like at home. Anything you want, do what you want, don’t bother at all’. That’s our karma (VN850124, 2013).

These associations have a great social significance for the interlocutors. They find it important that the associations happen in a closed space where people can act like they feel “on a commonality of character, on the enjoyment of being together, and on the reputation they have for being emotionally involved in what they do” (Papataxiarchis 1991, 160), share their company and support themselves.

Our interlocutors see themselves “as a woman”. That makes the construction of their personal sex/gender identity.

S: I say, I mean, I had a shape, face, talk, everything as a female. If you see me for the first time, you will think that I’m a girl, you will not call me a boy, but a girl. To see me, and to look as female (...) naturally, I was very delicate, in my hair. I had long hair (to my waist) (...) I felt as a woman. The feeling I had and wanted to behave... If I was free. I would dress as a woman, in skirts, dresses – I had measures, very, very much. I adore him. Even I dreamed about him... (laughing). That was odd. Every day, since I was very young, I prayed... I said: ‘God’ – I said, during my sleep, ‘make me a woman, to wake up as a woman’. I prayed for that for years. It is the truth. I prayed for that for years (VN850121, 2013).

Most of the interlocutors, when talking about themselves “as women”, relate their identity mostly to dressing “as women”. Lately, they do that on certain dates or occasions, when the organizations visiting them organize “parties”... *when we have parties, on 18th or 17th December we dress as women, ...we dress up. We put make up freely (...)* S: *That’s what happened they introduced us to the*

organization .O., when we have parties ... (VN850121, 2013); at house parties in their free time or at home celebrations, when they spend their time with more "sisters", "girlfriends" and "colleagues": ... When we celebrate something in our homes ... (VN850121, 2013). N: In a room... like that, at friends' homes. S: at some friend's home, for example, you know I'm gay. I have feelings too. I like to dress up. 'Give me some dress, give me... to dress up', we will play, you know, because I feel nice. Entertaining. We do that, then, in someone's free time. When we are having some parties (VN850121, 2013).

In the example of our interlocutor L., she with his close "sisters" most often join to live in a house or an apartment, where they spend their common time mostly to have fun and enjoy. They spend the free time together since their working hours as sexual workers are flexible. Sometimes they bring their boyfriends and clients to the place where the "sisters" live temporarily and provide their services for *pleasure* or for a fee there – for benefit (*za koris*). If the "sisters" cannot stay in some closed space, then they socialize during the weekends. For the "public", the functioning of the sisters' community is closed, but for the ones that permanently meet the conditions of potential members of this community, it is "open". It means that the *closeness* among the individuals reflects the consistency and loyalty to the "sisters'" community. The field research also corroborates this. During the preparations for the field research, I also appeared as a financial supporter. This earned my first introductions since my "interlocutors" were their close "sisters", i.e. my assistants with whom I arranged to find more interlocutors. The first ones they called were their "close sisters". The "ban" of sexual intercourses between themselves confirms the idea of symbolic relation between the "sisters". This applies to the symbolically related "sisters", between the individuals which feel a *sisterly closeness* between them, "as women". The interlocutors consider it not possible to have a desire for emotional, let alone a sexual relationship with an excuse that they are all the same. Their symbolic sex/gender, makes them all "women", which precludes same sex and incestuous relation between them. *I: You were not in a relationship, but... N: No, no, no. We were not in a relationship, not that. That is not possible, we don't do that, only with men (VN850121, 2013).*

The symbolic relation system permanently renews the relation structure by the principle of continuous inclusion of new, younger "sisters". It is essential for the functioning of the system. The older ones acquire the status of *old sister*, while the oldest one becomes *chief*. The position within the hierarchy is identified with the status of *mother*. This also explains the status of the mother in the two gender family formations in the Roma community, i.e. *older sister*, whose word is respected. When he is present, the younger "sisters" have the status of "daughters" who "learn" from the older ones how to be "themselves". More frequently in the past, and now only as a joke, they address the oldest which is still in the center as "mummy", "mother", "mum", "nana", "big sister", "sister", "prinja" in Roma language (VN850123, 2013). *I: who will be the leader?... N:*

we call her chief (laughing) S: we say who the chief is. N: The big one. S: The biggest. S: It's her... the oldest gay... we respect her, because she is the oldest... (VN850123, 2013). "The oldest" i.e. the "mother" calls all the "sisters" from the younger generation "daughter".

This system of relations also has a significant role in the sexual work of the "sisters". The sisters' experience determines and maintains the direction in the global processes and in the market oriented sexual work in the Roma community in Skopje. It means that we should learn from the examples of sisters who work on the scenes in the cities in Western Europe.

I: ...she is called 'old sister', right?... L: That is because when she came from Italy, she gathered all at her place. Headquarters was opened at her place. The all are at her place and she... In fact, we sit at her place, talk about the thing there, are there problems, she tells us, for example, what happens with the clients, understand? That. We exchange information, how the things are in Italy, here in Macedonia. When I came back from Switzerland, when I came here, we talked, I was telling them. (VN850124, 2013).

The talks about the sexual work are most often led during their parties, organized by some of the sisters especially as in the example of the "old sister" which during the summer month came "for a vacation" from Italy to Macedonia, and the socializing takes place in her house. Since the party is at her expense it lasts until her vacation is over. I: ...you hang out together for a longer period, sit at her place, or? L: Whooa! We can stay at her place while she is here, we can be there (VN850124, 2013).

The "sisters" organize their parties in any occasion, but the party organized by the "old sister" for her 48th birthday was especially impressive for the younger sisters. The "old care" who "works" in Italy and is financially better standing, made efforts to mark her birthday in a way which is not usual for the sisters which has become an example for the other sisters from Shuto Orizari (Shutka) how such an event should look like. This idea was realized by the long term close "sister" of N. who works in Italy on "the strada" and she organized and celebrated her 48th birthday in that manner. N. and other "sisters" participated in the preparations for that event. The event was recorded on CD. The CD provoked a great interest, but it was almost impossible to access it, especially for the male population. There were even attempts to copy the CD, to be sold. These examples, representing the trends in the arrangement of the *parties* – as a most important forms of "enjoyment" of the "women" in the male community, show that the "sisters", especially the *older ones* doing sexual work abroad for longer periods are deemed successful in their work, have great authority and strong influence on the local system of the "sisters" and drive the market oriented sex work in the Roma community in Skopje, either for the ones who sell/provide services or for the ones who use the services.

The “sisters” as an economic community

During these “gatherings” of the sisters, except that they live “together”, the space they are sharing becomes an economic aspect of the community: all the costs are covered by the one who has funds. *I: ...and, for example, while you are where you are, let's say for a few days, the economy in the house... what are the arrangements? Are you all giving money? L: If I have money, I'm paying. If B. has money, B. is paying, If S. has money, S. is paying* (VN850126, 2013).

There are no special agreements around providing personal funds. *I: Do you have any special agreements about...? L. No, no, no! We don't have any agreements. If you have money, for example, B. may not have money, but we could have money. Maybe I don't have money, B. and S. may have money. It means that we don't have any agreement for that. The one who has.... Whatever he must provide – that, it is not a problem for that* (VN850126, 2013). The funds spent for expenses during the “sisters” gatherings cannot be refunded to the provider. All sisters share this money equally and use them to buy food, coffee, beverages, and cigarettes. If the interlocutors do not any have or have spent all of their money, the “sisters” call *clients* to whom they offer their services.

The close “sisters” help each other financially and in other ways. Then these funds are considered as “loans”, and they expect the borrower to repay it. Our interlocutors suggested that “lending” applies more to clothes used in their sexual work as an important instrument in building the sexual worker identity and in the sexual work itself. Usually they lend only things they consider their *personal belongings*, earned through their personal sexual work endeavors. Unlike the monetary “loan”, supposed to be repaid, the “loan” in the form of clothes does not have such a material value and the return may be delayed.

I: And, do you lend something else? L: Clothes. We land clothes. Only clothes: wigs, make ups, those types of things. Everything is ours, personally, now, and if you like it you can lend it, it's not a problem. We have no problem with that. For example, she will tell me: You have beautiful trousers! No problem, I take them off and give them to him immediately. Give me something to put on, anything... sweats or a blouse: It's very beautiful, give me something to put on and take it, wear it, you can return it whenever you want. It's not a problem for me. We don't exchange only our panties. Only that, we exchange everything else. Only items for personal hygiene. There is no problem for other things like garments, socks, etc. Sneakers, jackets, anything you want, you can take anything (VN850126, 2013).

This example shows that they perceive these clothes as personal belongings since they bought them with money that they earned. This type of exchange in a form of a “loan” within the sisters’ community greatly contributes to maintaining the social relations in the family community which sometimes does not exist on a single location.

Ritual and Magic Role of the “Sisters” in the Family Ceremony in the Roma Community

Other adopted ideas and practices, as a confirmation of the presence of “either feminine or masculine” in the manifestation of the personal sex/gender identity, include the practices of the “sisters” at a symbolic level as well as the examples that show us the concept of Nanda for the Indian hijra and its ritual and magic role “traditionally (to) earn their living and receive payment for performances at weddings, births and festivals... and the traditional beliefs in their power to curse or confer blessing on male infants” (Nanda 1986, 35).

They, as women’s ritual processions “lazarki” participate in the rituals of transition from the lifecycle, wedding and circumcision, in order to bless those who are subject of the ritual, but in the same time, also the younger “lazarka” is legitimized in front of the community which can be found in the lazar ritual in the Republic of Bulgaria where “special attention is paid to the age difference.” (Petrovska-Kuzmanova 2016, 95).

Before we return to the interlocutors and their narratives in the context of their role in the collective Roma community, let us turn to the question “Which religious and cultural conceptions have influenced the creation and dynamics of the local Roma sex/gender system that functions now, and how?”. First, I would like to say that the idea to relate the Roma communities and the communities of the *hijras* in India is not something new. Namely, Suthrell (Suthrell Charlotte), in the nineties, when she researched the hijras in India, also researched the Roma communities in England since she saw „some remarkable similarities between the position of the *hijras* in and out of the Indian culture, and of the Roma people in England” (Suthrell 2004, 75). Thus, in the past research, the local concept of the interlocutors to be “both man and woman”, concept in which the interlocutors recognize either the masculinity and the femininity in a whole, we consider the basic references as similar to the ones that can be seen in the concepts of Hinduism where it is claimed that “all persons contain within themselves both man and female principles” (Nanda 1999, 21). Certainly, this concept of dual gender put in function of the rituality in order to achieve wellbeing of the collective community, was realized by the authors also in the local folk systems in Macedonians and other Slavic people in the Balkans (see, Risteski 2002, 113–129). In short terms, the author Risteski locates this concept of dual gender in a completely another context from the one we can notice in the rituality in the Roma community where the role of the “women” in the male community is to take part in the rituals of passage from the life cycle where “males take female roles” (Svetieva 1996), when the androgyny – ritual travesty (Bojadzieva 1999) in the ritual is in function to prepare the male member of the community for the next phase of his life and make positive influence on the reproductive

capacity – fertility of the boys, which permanently supports and maintains the male potency to the period when it should be put in a reproductive function in which the boy will create its own family and will be realized as a real “man” in the Roma community. This shows that “ritual serves to bridge the relationship between biological individuality and social collectivity” (Bloch and Parry 1982, according to Hastings, Magowan 2010, 52), when, “balances male and female sexual aspects of life by containing pollution and shaping the sensory effects of menstruation, pregnancy, sexual intercourse and childbirth”. According to Nanda, in the Hindu mythology, the rituals and art are “important vehicles for transmitting the Hindu world view—the power of the combined man/woman is a frequent and significant time” (Nanda 1999, 20), not only when it comes to the deities but also when they are a base for building the social and cultural concepts in the communities. In that context are the sex/gender systems which constitute were appropriating and performing potent symbols of one or another locally powerful femininity and that it was these latter appropriations and performances, rather than a “less politically motivated” combination of male and female, that helped them establish or bolster their ritual prowess and overall spiritual potency (Peletz 2006, 313). Consequently, according to the archetypical concept of dual gender, represented in the supreme divinity as a total, ideal gender – intersexual body which comprises of male and female sexual organs, was a base for the smaller religious communities, and later the other communities, to build their relation to the dual gender as a concept that can be found in divinities. Thus, according to certain religious communities, crossdressing was a precondition for their salvation or according to other, by imitating women they are realizing the women in themselves (Bullough 1976, 260; quoted in Nanda 1999, 21). Even after certain Hindu myths, the male divinity takes female form through the experience of sexual acts with another male divinity (Nanda 1999, 22). What is important for us is this very approach in the mythical – religious concepts relating to the sex/gender and consequently with the sexuality, important for the realization of the individuals in the society. This approach to the dual gender continued to function between the Islamic concepts. Since the Islamic societies have created a relation to the category “eunuchs” who had a role to keep the women’s world in the royal court, but also of “mediators” between the two divided worlds, male and female, the Islamic and Hindu concepts in the communities where they have had mutual influence have become intersected despite the differences between them (Nanda 1999, 22), in a sense that the communities had equal relation to them. Consequently, this category “both man and woman” had functioned freely irrespectively whether the category has been created or happens in a “new” territory and in “another” context. The local Roma sex/gender system functions in that sense, where the relation to the mythical – religious category “both man and woman” has found its place as an option in

the building of the sex/gender identities in the local Roma system of sex/gender and are in function of maintaining of the Roma community.

In the context of ritual and magic roles in the communities, the “sisters” have an important role in the family rituality connected to the rituals of transition from the life cycle “wedding”, especially if we consider the importance of the sisters in the “circumcision” rituality or small wedding „tikno bijav“ (Petrovski 2013, 214) of the Roma male children. Then we can see the magic and ritual function within the community. According to the folk tradition it is believed that the existence of a group of individuals which are “both man and woman” is important for wellbeing of the male child, of the newlyweds and their families, thus the wellbeing of the wider community – attendants at the big wedding and the small wedding (circumcision). The families and by the Roma community support the sisters due to their important function at collective level. At the event, the attendants, especially men, publicly tolerate their presence, which does not happen during other days. For example, then the “sisters”, as a group or individually, are not allowed to move through the center of Shuto Orizari (Shutka). The host rewards their presence at the event, with payment for the agreed activities. The ethnographic materials show that their ritual and magic function is not concentrated only in the context of Roma family rituality. Their function for the longer term is expressed in relation to the established Roma collective norm which regulates premarital sexual relations of the girls and boys. The girls are obligated to keep their “honor” and the honor of their families by keeping the girl “čhaj“ (virgin, innocent, honest) (Petrovski 2013, 217) until her engagement when she says about her that she has „panljaripe lafi“ (engaged, betrothed) (Petrovski 2013, 216).

According to the Roma folk tradition, for the Roma girl it is especially important to be “lassie”, “girl”, “with a cherry” until the moment when “she will be asked” and will come to the groom’s home as a bride. This collective norm connected to the sexuality of the women is especially rigorous since the girl is on her way to be realized as a “woman” who, once she gets married, can be sexually active in a function to become a “mother”. According to this view, there is no space for tolerance of the girl’s sexual freedom. But, according to the ethnographic materials, the girls will comply with this norm in a way that they will have anal sexual intercourse which in the Roma context is not considered as a sexual intercourse under assumption that there is no danger that the girl will lose her “honor”. These regulated rules for the girls do not apply to the boys. According to the ethnographic material gathered from the interlocutors, we can notice that the Roma community tolerates certain sexual relations of the boys in the premarital period in order to maintain their male potency which maintains the potency of the collective Roma community. Simultaneously with these regulations regarding the sexuality of the females, there is greater tolerance in the Roma community, especially for

the ones who are “real men” who practice inserting position in the sexual intercourse no matter whether they do it with women or men who are “also women” (“dress like women”), with whom, if they are younger they practice kissing and oral sex and if they are older they practice anal sex.

“Sisters” as “lazarki” – women’s ritual processions

The “sisters” take care about the honor of the girls and of the potency of the male members of the Roma community in Skopje in the long run. Their ritual function can be seen through their specific activities during the family rituals and the rituals of passage “wedding” when they transit from girls and boys to married “women” and married “men”, expected to have children and participate in the biological and social reproduction of the Roma community. In that sense, within the big wedding, we can talk about the activities of the “sisters” in the act of the small wedding, i.e. circumcision of the little boy when it transits into the world of adults. Their presence at the family events, more often in the past, now less often, may relate to the idea of their divine function in the collective rituality in the Roma community in order to keep and maintain the reproductive potency of the Roma community. Consequently, during the big wedding, the hosts invite the “sisters” as “lazarki” to dance and seat on the main table where the bride and the groom and their families are, called “bride’s table”, to the health of the newlyweds and the wedding attendants. At the small wedding, the “sisters” make the preparations for the circumcision of the boy, preparing cocktails, food and beverages, but they are mainly responsible for the decoration of the bed of the newly circumcised “adult” male member of the family. The “sisters” prepare the bed by ironing decorative sheets and making special decorations in a form of big bows hanged on the bed. Only the women from the host family and the “sisters” who lend clothes from the host family women and dress like women participate in the decoration of the bed. The party together: playing tambourine, sing and dance together with the women honoring the wellbeing of the future adult family member.

Conclusion Remarks

The “women” *buljash* play a significant role of a third gender in the Roma community in Skopje. Their important role “both man and woman” in the Roma community can be seen in the everyday life. This is confirmed by the family rituality, the rite of passage from the community male members’ life cycle, when as “mediators” between the deity and the individual, with their presence, they bless the act of creation of the marital community between a “man” and “woman” as a unique regulatory concept for biological and social reproduction of

the community. The following day, during the circumcision, they bless the first phase in the symbolic order of building of the masculinity, the ritual transition from a small child to a “boy” which determines their function in the everyday life of the “males”– “men”, responsible for maintaining the male potency to the moment of the biological and consequently social reproduction, of the individual, the family and the Roma community. This symbolic undertaking of the responsibility to maintain the male potency indirectly relates to the maintenance of the purity of the “feminine” reproductive potency. She, within the system of values has the highest place as a an “honor of the girl and her family”, preserved until the moment when her “purity” and “honesty” is going to be confirmed and put into reproductive function of the family and the wider community. In that sense, the individuals “both man and woman”, as a “mediator” in the collective community have the role to protect and maintain the collective reproductive capacity of the Roma community in Skopje.

The interlocutors build their sex/gender identity of “women” within the male community “jointly” with their sisters, when they party and enjoy. The symbolic relation system of the *sisters* is confirmed by the existence of a ban of sexual relations between them, but also by the hierarchic structure lead by the oldest and most experienced sister *chief*, called *mother*. She calls the younger sisters with the familial term *daughter*. This hierarchy emphasizes the significance of the “mother” as personification of the dual gender deity, responsible for creation of the world seen through the act of reproduction. The importance of the “mother” in the communities is identical which is also shown in the narratives of the interlocutors. The “mother” is the real “woman” whose “honor” was confirmed, and her reproductive potential was put in function of the communities and later “she” is the one who undertakes the responsibilities and protects her “children” in the family.

In certain periods the sisters live in one house, family community with their *boyfriends* when they are asked to take care for their “women”. More often, they live in one house, family community with their *sisters*. Then, they have joint home economy and in case of lack of material assets, they earn them with sexual work. The identity which is built “in the community” of the sisters is built as a sex/gender identity of pleasure, when they are in a relationship and which comes from this “community” is made “for pleasure”.

The local concept of “both man and woman” is built in that way and it is realized through the local system of sex/gender, responsible for protection and maintenance of the reproductive potency of the Roma community in Skopje and mediation for achieving wellbeing in the process of building of the masculine/feminineness, masculinity or femininity with which any member of the community will find his/her place in the Roma social order, where he/she will realize his/her sex/gender identity like a real “man”, “woman” or “both man and woman” and will contribute in the Roma community in Skopje.

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*„I muškarac i žena“: Uloga trećeg pola/roda
u romskoj zajednici u Skoplju*

„Žene“ (buljāshi) imaju ulogu trećeg roda u romskoj zajednici u Skoplju, Makedonija. Njihova važna uloga „i muškarca i žene“ se u romskoj zajednici realizuje kroz ekonomsku, društvenu i ritualnu zajednicu bliskih „sestara“. U okviru romskog porodičnog rituala – rituala životnog ciklusa muškaraca i žena, oni imaju značajnu ritualno-magijsku funkciju budući da su medijatori između božanskog i zajednice.

Ključne reči: žene, treća rodna uloga, romska zajednica, Skoplje, sestre

*„Femme et homme à la fois“: le rôle de troisième sexe/genre
dans la communauté rom à Skopje*

„Les femmes“ (buljāshi) ont un rôle de troisième genre dans la communauté rom à Skopje, en Macédoine. Leur rôle important „de femme et d’homme“ se réalise dans la communauté rom à travers une communauté économique, sociale et rituelle de „soeurs“ intimes. Dans le cadre du rituel familial rom – rituel du cycle de vie des hommes et des femmes – elles ont une fonction rituelle et magique importante étant donné qu’elles sont médiatrices entre le divin et la communauté.

Mots clés: femmes, le rôle de troisième genre, communauté rom, Skopje, sœurs

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