

# MACEDONIAN AGENDA



**16 essays on the development of Macedonian culture in Australia. Includes cultural values, language, religion, arts, identity, women's issues, the elderly, immigration, politics, the "child refugees", human rights and more**

**Editor  
Victor Bivell**

**MACEDONIAN  
AGENDA**

# **MACEDONIAN AGENDA**

**16 essays on the development of Macedonian culture in Australia. Includes cultural values, language, religion, arts, identity, women's issues, the elderly, immigration, politics, the "child refugees", human rights and more**

**Editor  
Victor Bivell**

# MACEDONIAN AGENDA

Published by  
POLLITECON PUBLICATIONS  
PO Box 324  
Five Dock NSW 2046  
Australia

ISBN 0 646 22162 0

Copyright 1995

*Front cover: February 2, 1960, Bitola Railway Station, Macedonia:  
Mr Aleksandar Kolupacev is farewelled by his village, Gjavato, as he  
sets out for a new life in Port Kembla, Australia.*

Printed by Southwood Press Pty Limited  
80-92 Chapel Street, Marrickville, NSW 2204

# CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Macedonian Values in Multicultural Australia <i>Zoran Coseski</i>	9
Some Observations on the Speech of Bilingual Macedonian- Australians <i>Betty K Stewart</i>	15
The Australian-Macedonian Drama Group <i>Stefo Stojanovski</i>	27
The Macedonian Orthodox Church: Its Role in the Moulding and Maintenance of Ethnic Identity in Australia <i>Dr Christopher Popov and Michael Radin</i>	36
Barriers to Social Change for Macedonian Women <i>Malina Stankovska</i>	53
A Study of Women Activists in the Macedonian Community <i>Malina Stankovska</i>	62
The Macedonian Elderly: A Needs Study of the Macedonian Elderly in the Western Region of Melbourne <i>Macedonian Community Welfare Association of the Western Region Inc</i>	74
Features of Settlement in Australia by Macedonians from the Aegean Region <i>Michael Radin</i>	113
Proud of the Macedonian Heritage <i>Faye Kolev</i>	132
Assimilation and the Public and Private Identity of Macedonians: A Dialectical Expose <i>Pandora Petrovska</i>	135

<b>Declaration of the "Child Refugees"</b> <i>The Association of Refugee Children from the Aegean Part of Macedonia</i>	<b>185</b>
<b>Submission on the 28,000 Ethnic Macedonian "Child Refugees"</b> <i>Aegean Macedonian Association of Australia</i>	<b>189</b>
<b>A Political Strategy for the Macedonian Diaspora</b> <i>Victor Bivell</i>	<b>204</b>
<b>The Political Future of the Macedonians in Australia</b> <i>Zoran Coseski</i>	<b>213</b>
<b>Australian Law, International Treaties and the Government's "Slav" Prefix</b> <i>Risto Balalovski</i>	<b>215</b>
<b>Why Australia?</b> <i>Bob Spasenovski</i>	<b>223</b>
<b>The Authors</b>	<b>226</b>

# **Barriers To Social Change For Macedonian Women**

**Malina Stankovska**

*This paper was written in 1991 as part of a Graduate Diploma in  
Community Development*

## **Introduction**

In order to understand the barriers to social change faced by Macedonian women, it has been necessary to define the various sources of oppression which Macedonians in general face. The most obvious of these in Australia pertains in the first instance to their ethnicity as well as to their experience as migrants. These aspects tend to draw Macedonian males and females together in a common struggle thus submerging the oppression of women deriving from a gender base.

The relationship between capitalism, immigration and gender is briefly explored to give insight into how one's status as a migrant affects one's class position and this, in turn, is shown to be determined by the needs of capital and the effects of racism. Again, both males and females are affected by discrimination generated by this form of oppression although the position of females is marginally worse. The reason for this is gender bias, but because the patriarchal influences in both Macedonian and Australian culture work so effectively, the manifestation of this bias is concealed from general awareness.

The various types of racism suffered by Macedonians is also examined so that insight is given into the complexities of applying community development principles to this group. Further, in order to be able to make some assessment of the potential for social change among Macedonian women, I have drawn on some research which I recently conducted with Macedonian women activists and this bears out some of the issues which I have observed over the period of my involvement with the Macedonian community.

It is the analysis of this research which has also enabled me to conclude that a systematic attempt at raising the awareness of the Macedonian woman must start with those who have some awareness of the forces to be overcome and that a Freirian approach would be most effective in achieving social change. The content of information and the

strategies employed to deliver it must be relevant so that "feminism" becomes redefined and relevant.

The Women's movement in the past thirty years has made significant inroads in uncovering reasons for the dominance of males over females and for the perpetuation of this phenomenon. Many types of feminist theory have developed which focus on various factors as explanations for the cause of gender based oppression.

There appears, however, to be an enormous dearth of material concerning the oppression of minority women, such as migrants of non-English speaking background, in the context of a country such as Australia. Indeed, it has only recently been realized that the feminism defined in the 1960s and 70s was mainly a phenomenon of the white, educated, middle class woman who had the time and opportunity to discover her oppression and to realize that it was gender based - a situation vastly dissimilar to many other women who experience other forms of oppression more keenly than sexism. White middle class women were able to define their oppression. It is similarly up to all other women to define their oppression and to develop their own "feminism" even though this may include issues which extend further than the term "feminism" normally encompasses. As Ramazanoglu states, "it is not clear how sexual oppression can effectively unite women whose lives, work, life expectancy, and children's futures are structured by the hierarchies of racism, ethnicity, nationalism..." (1. p127) and I would add class.

With this paper I hope to make a modest beginning in acquainting the reader with the complexities involved in defining the oppression of Macedonian women so that the potential for social change can be examined. It must be accepted by the reader that the focus is not entirely on oppression resulting from gender. This is because gender based discrimination is not as problematic for Macedonian women as other forms of oppression, particularly racial oppression. The development of the "womanist" approach becomes significant in this regard as it recognizes that women, "along with ... consciousness of sexual issues ... must incorporate national, cultural, racial, economic and political considerations into [their] philosophy." (2. p266)

If feminists are really serious about women becoming empowered, they must accept that the latter have to deal with a large number of issues which may not be directly a result of subservience due to gender.

\*

Macedonians in Australia are migrants. As such, they have to deal with problems associated with settlement. This includes adjusting to a

system and bureaucracy which is totally different from those in their country of origin. They must find lodgings, secure an income and accustom themselves to a new lifestyle (with many coming from a rural lifestyle to an urban environment). They find that new values surround them (as reflected and espoused by the dominant culture here) and that often they must learn to live in a different family structure where the support of the extended family is no longer available. They have to adapt to a new climate and all this in a system based on an unfamiliar and incomprehensible language. These requirements divert their energy, time and attention from apparently academic concerns such as defining their oppression. Indeed, we are confronted with a powerful contradiction - on the one hand, migrants are so busy ensuring their physical survival they do not have time to worry about their oppression, while this fact only serves to highlight the level of their oppression. Being a migrant attaches a low status and so the first form of oppression is exposed - that of class.

In discussing the class position of Macedonians in Australia, there is little difference to the situation of migrants generally from Southern Europe, the Middle East and more recently, Asia. They were permitted into Australia to provide industry with a cheap and expendable pool of labour and it is upon this that Australia's immigration program is based. As Collins explains, the role of immigrant workers is to provide "a reserve army that alleviates labour shortages and will accept wages and conditions rejected by indigenous workers. This decreases the price of labour power and produces artificial divisions within the working class facilitated by racist ideologies between privileged and less privileged workers. Consequently, male and female immigrants are concentrated at the bottom layer of Australia's proletariat." (3. p1) They tend to become employed in industries which are vulnerable to market fluctuations and in jobs which are often dirty, dangerous and repetitive.

The situation of migrant women is worse than that of many migrant men because, by virtue of their gender, they are paid relatively less than their male counterparts and have less opportunity to improve their positions. The plight of Macedonian women is consistent with this.

The next problem faced by migrants in general is that of "the in-built racism of Australian society [where] our institutions and most practitioners are Anglo-centric, constructed by and for the English speaking population." (4. p3) This originates from the racism of the colonialist tradition which assumes that other cultures and values are not valuable and thus should be changed. With this attitude implicit in Australia, racism also becomes a consideration in determining one's class position.

Awareness by Macedonians of the oppression of their class position is

negligible. Most of these migrants came from rural, agrarian backgrounds and have little formal education. Their social mobility in the countries of their origin has been largely restricted and that immobility has been perpetuated here in Australia. As Ramazanoglu reminds us "the majority of Southern European women in Australia are socially ... distant from the urban bourgeoisie in their country of origin..." (1. p99) The position of the Macedonian male is also consistent with this. Macedonians feel that because they enjoy a superior standard of living in Australia to that which they had in Macedonia, other difficulties they must contend with are compensated for.

What we are confronted with then are two forms of oppression (class and racial) which are shared between both Macedonian males and females. This creates a solidarity between them and renders invisible the problem faced by women and which are peculiar to their gender.

This process is assisted by the patriarchal nature of the Australian and Macedonian cultures, both of which ascribe roles for men and women in society which ostensibly relegate women to private, domestic life, whilst the role of males is in the public arena. Although this is slowly breaking down, these assumptions are still internalized into our culture and accepted as truths. In this way, life becomes ordered and people live out their roles unquestioningly.

The Macedonian woman is generally unaware of the patriarchal influences on the culture and the way in which these are reproduced. She performs her role according to social mores and because it is, she believes, natural for her to do so. Empathy and understanding from similarly burdened women creates a network of support, but there is no conception of "sisterhood" as presented in feminist theories as there is no consciousness of oppression. By raising gender issues, the order which defines the roles of people is questioned and this is threatening for many people.

Macedonians in Australia face additional difficulties which other migrants do not due to the unusual political situation which exists in their homeland and the response to this situation by bureaucracy in Australia.

Macedonia is a nation which occupies a region in the Balkan Peninsula and which, since 1913 and the Treaty of Bucharest, has been located within the borders of Greece, Bulgaria and (until 1991) Yugoslavia. Albania later annexed a section of western Macedonia. Macedonians, despite the artificial divisions, share the same culture and language. The Macedonians in Australia tend to come predominantly from Aegean Macedonia (Greek dominated) and the Republic of Macedonia (formerly Yugoslav dominated).

The division of Macedonia has been re-enforced by the Australian

bureaucracy which bases service delivery for migrants on one's country of origin. The result of this for the Macedonians has been the lack of recognition by government of their uniqueness (which has impacted on the ability of the Macedonians to define themselves) and all this in a purported environment of multiculturalism. The upshot is that Macedonians have not had the same access to services as other migrant groups. For example, information is often not translated into Macedonian; or when in need of interpreters people are asked their country of origin and are allocated either Greek or Serbian interpreters. Similarly, Macedonians cannot be recorded statistically with any great accuracy and so their numbers are enormously understated. This impacts heavily on the distribution of resources to them.

A further problem Macedonians have to contend with is the promulgation of misinformation as to who they are - that is, like many other oppressed peoples, they are defined by others who have power over them. It is the power of this racism that Macedonians are most aware of and sensitive to, and this is as a result of their history. The oppression from this form of racism arises and is inextricably linked to the struggle in expressing oneself as Macedonian.

As Macedonians in their homeland have been subjected to policies of denationalization, subordination and even genocide, many have developed a negative Macedonian identity vis-a-vis the dominant culture in the homeland. When placed in the Australian context, this negative identity impacts upon the ability of the Macedonian community to develop in community development terms.

This form of oppression is also shared by both males and females and also serves to unite them in another common struggle, again with the result of making awareness of gender oppression negligible. "As both males and females share this form of oppression, relations between them are not reducible to sex oppression ... but [are] often characterized by solidarity in resistance to racial oppression." (3. p266)

In analyzing these two forms of oppression, it becomes clear that racism and sexism both have a number of parallels. In the same way that males have defined the parameters of life according to their perspective and in a relationship where they have power over women, so those who have had racial superiority over the Macedonian people have been in a position of power in defining who the Macedonians are, their history, culture, etc. Both these instances have resulted in the subordinate group (in this case women and Macedonian people) having a limited consciousness of their oppression.

Another interesting parallel which I noted is the ready applicability

of the participatory "feminist" approach to conducting research and its easy transferability to racial concerns. In the same way that feminist research seeks to investigate social change so that gender based oppression can be arrested and overcome, so these same processes can be utilized to arrest racial oppression. The result is that social change is able to occur only after the development of the consciousness and the resultant political mobilization. This conforms to Freirian theory, where Freire says, "it is ... essential that the oppressed wage the struggle to resolve the contradiction in which they are caught." (5. p42) This simply requires that the oppressed define their reality - not have it defined inaccurately for them, as has occurred with both women and Macedonians. As Freire further says, "Each man [read and woman] wins back his right to say his own work, to name the world." (5. p13)

When all of the above factors are taken into consideration, it is not surprising that the Macedonian community has encountered considerable difficulty in effectively organizing and developing along the same lines as other ethnic groups. This creates obvious problems in terms of social change not only for Macedonian women, but for all Macedonians.

In order to focus on the issue of social change for Macedonian women, it has been mentioned that there is little general awareness of gender oppression by Macedonian women. An exception to this exists with women who are educated and professional and this was borne out by some research I recently conducted.

The research, entitled A Study of Women Activists in the Macedonian Community, was participatory and feminist in approach and was designed to investigate the motivation, experiences and constraints of women activists in the Macedonian community. An informal meeting was held with six women activists, most of whom were university educated and employed as professionals. (This in itself shows a denature from the type of people which we normally include in the category of women of non-English speaking background.)

One of the most significant themes to emerge from the research was the struggle of some of the activists to come to grips with their Macedonian identity during their younger years. A woman from Aegean Macedonia and another woman from the Republic of Macedonia both expressed that before they learnt of their heritage, they believed that the Greek and Serbian languages, culture and people (respectively) were superior to that of the Macedonian. This is significant in a sample of only six people. Both of these women have since developed a positive identity (which seems to be a pre-condition for community involvement) and this seems to have occurred through their learning of the history of

Macedonia.

It is evident that the eighty year division of Macedonian territory and the resulting racial oppression has taken its toll on the identity of the Macedonians such that they have a solid private identity, but are often insecure in expressing their Macedonian identity publicly.

With regard to their consciousness of the oppression of women deriving from a gender base, the women in the project had a solid awareness of their oppression and they expressed frustration about the rigidity of sex roles within the culture and how this created difficulties for them in their activism.

The most significant outcome of the research was that it enabled the women to articulate and affirm their achievements in the community and to obtain a more holistic view of their contribution. Further, it put into motion a strategy to raise awareness of the importance of women's contributions and provided the impetus to do this. A number of the participants have begun a series of interviews of Macedonian women who have made considerable achievements in their professional lives as well as in the community. These will appear as features in a Macedonian newspaper with a view to having a book compiled of "Macedonian Tall Poppies" so that the contributions of women within, and outside of, the community can be recognized by both women and men. This is important in contributing to the breakdown of stereotypes within our culture regarding the appropriate role of women. Further, there are plans under way to raise the consciousness of other Macedonian women by delivering feminist papers at certain social events, for example, after a fashion parade. Although these initiatives may seem modest, they are a starting point in making feminist issues relevant and for raising awareness among Macedonian women.

The research made clear that differences in social class, education, opportunity and control in one's life all contribute to divisions within the same ethnic group, thereby limiting sisterhood. The contribution of feminism has been its recognition that personal is political; that production in "the private world of the home, while invisible under capitalism, is economically and socially critical; and that our culture, as well as our economic system, give some people power over other people's lives..." (6. p129) Recognition of all of these facts give us a starting point in our bid to instigate social change.

## **Conclusion**

The racial inequality of all Macedonians results from racial and class

imbalances and is shown by their lack of freedom to define themselves. This leads to the political impotence of Macedonians in this society. For this to be addressed, recognition of this fact and a program of awareness raising for the purpose of social change are necessary.

In community development terms, the issues arising from the lack of profile of this ethnic group in Australia and their negative Macedonian identity are immediate and must be confronted by the community. The current events in Macedonia, where independence from Yugoslavia has been declared, can only contribute to a strengthening of the public identity of the Macedonians and thus strengthen their political position.

The barriers to social change for Macedonian women with regard to gender imbalances lie in the attitudes of their men folk and the women themselves and are a product of a patriarchal culture and the sexual division of labour.

With regard to awareness of gender based issues, it is necessary for Macedonian women to develop an awareness of this concept. Awareness raising among colleagues must be the first step in achieving this, followed by a concentrated and ongoing strategy for all Macedonian women.

### *References*

1. C Ramazanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, New York, 1989.
2. C Jennet and R Stewart, *Three Worlds of Inequality - Race, Class and Gender*, Australia, 1987.
3. G Bottomley and M de Lepervanche, *Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Australia*, Sydney, 1984.
4. G Bottomley, *Mediterranean Women in Australia: An Overview*, Greece, 1984.
5. Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968.
6. A Jaggar and P Rothenburg Struhl, *Feminist Frameworks*, USA, 1978.

### *Bibliography*

7. M Radin and C Popov, *Contemporary Greek Government Policy on the Macedonian Issue and Discriminatory Practices in Breach of International Law*, Melbourne, 1989.

8. Minorities and Mother Tongue Imagery, GL Gold ed, Canadian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Social and Economic Paper, No 13, 1984.
9. E Hood, Black Women, White Women: Separate Paths to Liberation, in Feminist Frameworks, A Jagger and P Rothenburg Struhl eds, Mcgraw Hill, USA, 1984.
10. Culture, Ethnicity and Identity, W McCready ed, Academic Press, New York, 1983.