

The Diversity of Decorative Clothing Popular Textile in the Highlands of Gjakova



Keywords: Wide variety of decorations, garment-textiles, colors, combination of motifs, the art of embroidery, ornaments and decorations, aesthetic function.

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Abstract

In this paper we will present the diversity of decorative clothing and popular textiles in the Highlands of Gjakova, which not only remains an area with a bulk amount of data, but the great work has been and remains the selection and harmonization of the data in order to avoid repetition and to create a whole perception within their beauty. Textile ornamental motifs are used to decorate traditional village houses or popular folk costumes. Colors are usually optimistic, emphasizing a rich world of contrasts giving a zest and significance not only the clothing but also the environment. The combination of motifs and maintaining their symmetry is done in such a way as to bring decorative diversity within a certain sense of fantasy and within certain vocations, which sometimes aims at simplicity and sometimes at complexity of the details. An endless range of colors in bold combinations that form contrasts and interesting approach to the presentation of these ornaments and motifs, give them proper splendor and importance. Carefully studying embroidery in the area of Tropoja and in the region of Dukagjin notice that they present interesting aspects of embroidery. It is interesting to note that this world was built on knitting yarns and their combinations, which form a diverse motif base. In conclusion we can say that the decorative variety of popular clothing and textiles in the Highlands of Gjakova and their aesthetic function is associated with a creativity which is inherited from early days and followed in centuries to come today. A creativity that has continued, even though today is a little faded.

The diversity of decorative clothing and popular textiles in the Highlands of Gjakova, which not only remains an area with a bulk amount of data, but the great work has been and remains the selection and harmonization of the data in order to avoid repetition and to create a whole perception within their beauty. In this way the descriptive and analytical character itself has naturally called for the aesthetic criteria of the popular clothing, focusing on those categories of aesthetics that behave naturally and represents details from antiquity until today. For this reason I have read different papers from distinguish authors and I was also based on my experience as a painter and visits to various ethnographic exhibitions. The values of popular aesthetics in clothing are widely studied and their refined taste which comes through the diversity of motifs and colors, always remains an endless space, where we can study many cases of the representation of beauty in the popular art of clothing, bedding and covering. The aim was and remains the same to better understand these values and see how they have been carried out the imagination of the popular creator and different techniques from which I have also learned through decades as a textile painter.

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Decorative diversity constitutes a particular aspect of these popular clothing that has to do with decoration and ornaments, from which we understand all the arsenal of means of expression through different motifs and drawings. This diversity always brings in focus all the popular creators fantasy manifested in centuries until nowadays. The motifs base ranges in geometric motifs.

According to researcher Andromaqi Gjergji, *"The Albanian folk textiles, techniques work itself leads necessarily to geometric motifs. However, ornamental motifs of textile that adorn traditional village houses or popular folk costumes, make up one of the richest categories of Albanian ornamentation folk."*⁴⁶.

Ornamental motifs adorn traditional village house environments or are part of popular folk costumes. In this precise definition of the well known researcher Andromaqi Gjergji, we must also pay attention to the diversity of motifs and expressions through a timeless reality. We must not forget that in the design plan, these ornamentations, with a great variety of motives are always brought colorful. Colors are usually optimistic, emphasizing them, which represents a rich world of diverse contrasts, giving a zest and signification not only the clothing but also the environment.

Always according to researcher Gjergji, *"Folk motifs of textiles, in terms of their deployment, are organized in defined positions, called "ornamental areas". Almost always these take shape of a rectangular with different dimensions, depending on the object that is being adorn. For example let us recall that, in bedding and covering in the region of Has, they only adorn their upper side"*⁴⁷.

By grouping these motifs we can see and define simple combination of lines and colors. We could see the base color, which is the background and other colors drew in stripes and motifs grouped and composed in different ways. Groups of motifs can be placed symmetrically or asymmetrically, and combinations thereof are numerous and represent all the decorative variety within a holistic harmony, according to clothing or its practical function.

Compression of lines and their repetition, the combination of motifs and maintaining the symmetry is done in such a way as to bring diversity within a specific meaning of fantasy and experiences, which sometimes aims at simplicity and sometimes at complexity and abstraction. So we figured out that on the fabric we sometimes have designed repeated motifs which create a harmonic combination and sometimes motifs that vary from each other depending on the thematic choice, or a certain spectrum of motifs. In this way, the popular maker want to express all the new possibilities of their combination. Folk textiles are not understood without this variety and incandescence of decorative designs on fabrics and clothing, that have served for centuries not only in their practical function, but mostly in their aesthetic function.

All this diversity and rich world of motifs appear consistently in the Highland of Gjakova and beyond at various aspects of creative and fantasy. Geometric figures and shapes that these motifsuses and their vertical repetition, also bring in an alternating repetition needed that leads to contemplation of a rich world full of colorful lines and shapes.

⁴⁶ Andromagji GJERGJI, vep. e cit., f. 187.

⁴⁷ Po aty, f. 188.

The design of geometric shapes is done through a series of design steps and leads to an enrichment of this world and make it more beautiful.

So we find floral motifs represented using geometric shapes, which prove an exquisite technique to the limits of a realistic presentation and the poetic weight of the combinations. In folk textiles made from wool or cotton we constantly see how lines are styled and combined with each other, opening and closing in a certain combination, in this way these motifs fill the entire surface of a carpet or a bedding or a covering. Floral motifs show an early tradition, something that comes from antiquity and has become rarer nowadays. For this reason this is seen as an important theme to be study. These motifs are found in rugs, carpets or coverings.

It is interesting to understand this whole world of drawings and presentation of motifs to understand the reality of human life in relation to and correlated with nature, we can also mention here the elements of animal world. Birds, eagle, dove, turtles are some of the animals and birds that come with certain elements, being brought to an outline of an idea-emotional world. These motifs sometimes are presented at their whole meaning and form and sometimes fragmented, in their quadrangle ratio. Anthropomorphic motifs are rare and not usually used nowadays. They date back at antiquity and people, popular artists don't use anymore these motifs, this has come through time as they better knew themselves and the surrounding environment.

*"Although there are varied motifs and there is sometimes footage of similar elements from the surrounding area, the decorative textile system of the Highlands of Gjakova in general is distinctive. This is not because of the ornaments and colors used, but the expression of inner world and outstanding artistic values. The ornamentation provides diverse views being developed through certain decorations. These images can be enthusiastic, cheerful and bright, but can also be quiet and contained "*⁴⁸.

An endless range of colors in bold combinations that form contrasts and interesting approach is brought to the presentation of these ornaments and diversity of motifs, giving them proper splendor and importance. Colors have also been developed through times. If we can define them, we can say that if motifs are explosions of fantasy, colors are their charm and beauty. We must say that colors are borrowed from humans in a metaphorical way as an expression of the surrounding environment and from this environment he learned how to adjust and emphasize colors in this variety of motifs. In this way, we have all kinds of colors and tones in accordance with the emotional acceleration of movement of motif, spiritual disturbance and characterization of seasons, all those related to the geographical environment where the people lived. As it is known, the geographical environment of the Highlands of Gjakova is a mountainous terrain, where there is a large variety of plants and animals. In a mountainous terrain, we must say that the tones of colors aim cleanliness and lucidity, and in the same way the presentation of color through the game of contrast and fantasy, what naturally is found in this specific geographic environment,

⁴⁸ Agim BIDO, *Arti popullor në veshje e tekstile (Malësitë e Shqipërisë Veriore*, monografi, IKP-ASH, Tiranë, 1991, f. 164.

already known for its environmental diversity. In this way, we use colors to represent the geographic environment and vice versa. The white becomes the dominant color, also black and red and other colors to the achromatic colors. Generally, we are dealing with a white background and other colors placed on it.

The art of embroidery is a specific field. Handicrafts, as they are called, are found in every area of Albania and is a very preferable profession from girls on this mountainous terrain, which plotted there all their dreams and desires. These girls and women spend different time doing handicrafts, it was not determined and there was not a clear boundary, but they used to embroider walking down the street or while sitting in their free time. It was also a way of being practical, for answering needs and requirements of life in a practical way, but also to escape the monotony and to spend free time because of a poor social cultural life. Embroidery was generally done on cotton fabrics or fabrics woven on loom. They were skillfully worked, in a cross, half-cross or fill technique of work.

Carefully studying embroidery in the area of Tropoja and in general in the Highlands of Dukagjin, we notice that they represent interesting aspects of embroidery and elaborate on the need for deepening in their study; it is interesting to note that this world was built on knitting yarns and their combinations to understand the motive base, the diversity of motifs and their combinations which are of interest and are a world apart (fig.52). It is also of interest to study embroidery in folkloric costumes having a *xhublet* (black felt cloth, thick and strong, without sleeves, tight in the middle and wide like a bell in the end). Such are the *pështjellaku i prapëm* (kind of tight apron worn in the back part, smaller than *pështjellaku i përparëm*) and *pështjellaku i përparëm* (kind of tight apron worn in the front part), which are worn one in the back part and the other in the front part respectively. The dominant color used is black, while other colors are used less. The repertoire of motifs is different, varied and interesting. Originality of colors, the way how they are used, using one color as background and other elements make this work distinguished and of great interest to be studied. Likewise, we can talk about *krahola* (kind of coating vest embroidered with purl) and other clothing.

“A transitional phase from geometric motifs to more refined forms, represented by floral elements, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic ... To this group belong also the embroidery on shirts and aprons of women clothing in the region of Kukës and Highland of Gjakovë. Their early material has been twisted thread of wool and spiku (a kind of thick thread of wool); later they started to use other materials brought from other countries, such as different gajtanet (thick threads, sometimes glossy or mat, used to adorn different part of clothing), cotton thread and beads. Spiku and strand of wool were hand made by women”⁴⁹.

Of a great interest is also the world of floral and zoomorphic motifs in these areas. It should be emphasized that the floral motifs are related to a rich flora in this region. This rich flora

⁴⁹ Ikbale BIHIKU, *Motive të qëndisura në veshjet popullore*, artikull studimor, botuar në revistën: Kultura popullore. Nr.1, viti 1983.

world has influenced with its diversity in the stimulation of human picturing, in order to best accomplished the embroidery and other art works in the Highlands of Gjakova and beyond in all Albanian territories. By studying the world of composition of lines, we notice that these compositions carry in themselves and show us the strict adherence of distances and a surprising symmetry, which shows and reflects the harmony of the human soul poured into those colorful embroideries. Exquisite aesthetic taste is defined as a need for its own reestablishment bringing remarkable works at the same time. Purl embroidery is another special technique which show the refinement of these tastes and placing them in a more elevated and evolved plan. The lace embroidery is another interesting branch of popular embroidery which deserves a thorough study and a lot of researches who deal with the study of material and spiritual culture of our people have make interesting researches about it, particularly the researcher A.Gjergji in her scientific work related to this. The laces (or “ojnat” as we call in Albanian), which are knitted, have their own elements that make them interesting and easy to combine with different other elements and a variety of clothing. They begin in the center outside out of alignment and are combined with a variety of colors, from yellow to blue, from the color of roses to green, from purple to orange color etc.



Women jerkin, embroidered with thin wire thread (*tehëri* - a kind of material used to adorn clothes, a thin twisted strand; *kllapedan* - a thin strand made from gold or silver used to adorn clothes) and different colors.



Kind of tight apron worn in the front part Kind of tight apron worn in the back part, smaller than the front part

Fig.52. Variety of embroidered folkloric clothing in the Highlands of Gjakova and generally in the Highlands of Dukagjin. (photo by H.Danjolli)

Laces were used to adorn different collars, sleeve of shirts, women neckerchief and these laces express finesse and delicacy, which make you like them. Researcher Andromaqi Gjergji thinks that these are an impact of Oriental culture in the material culture of the Albanian people, which had a strong influence around the seventeenth centuries and later.

Knitting were an interesting reality of these mountainous regions that corresponded with different aspects of everyday life, like practicality and a great way to compensate the of lack of materials that come from a lack of industry, or the penetration of various materials for clothing and footwear as lack of a developed trade. Women used to knit socks, gloves, shirts, vests and a lot of other clothing.

Ornamental motifs that were used to adorn socks in the Highlands of Gjakova are a way to express a rich spiritual world, where the interesting combination of colors provide a reality of senses and a skillful knitting process.

Preservation of these regional features, especially in this region, has to do not only with being conservative, but also with its expressiveness and a rich spiritual world that it possessed. It should be emphasized that various knitted clothes as socks, meste (short socks, without a band, adorned with flowers and stripes), gloves, various sweater made from sheep wool (a specific kind of sheep called Rude), fit not only the nature and the seasons, but also the surrounding environment, exploiting the richness and diversity of colors, flora and fauna found in these regions.

*"The design of motifs was defined by both the technique used to create them and the materials. Among the most popular materials used by women has been the wool strand, silk strand, cotton strand, spiku (a kind of thick thread of wool), various types lacings (gajtani - thick threads, sometimes glossy or mat, used to adorn different part of clothing; tehërija – a kind of material used to adorn clothes, a thin twisted strand; bikmja – a thin twisted silk strand used to embroider clothes etc.). The beads were also widely used"*⁵⁰.

Relying on the decorative diversity of these works, we can say and can cite various researchers who has widely studied this subject and its elements and have made a comparison between the different areas of Albania, have spoken and written about various techniques of popular handicrafts and embroidery, but one thing remains certain and creates the need to further enhance these topics: This diversity can't be understood outside the social contexts or the time space, without considering shared experiences, although in those days people did not possess the information they have today and didn't had the contacts that have today. The need for socializing expressed and reflected that material force associated with a specific economic state, which was dominated by farming and livestock trade.

⁵⁰ Ikbale BIHIKU, vep. e cit.

"The great variety of our folk costumes, related with specific regions is not a result of changes in structure, but is a product of colors, decorations and many combinations within the same type. Decorative elements of folk costumes sometimes are simple and sometimes more complex, sometimes are used quite colors, sometimes strong colors. The women clothes and costumes, as it is the tradition, are the most adorned and decorated clothes, especially their shirts, head coverings, aprons, their decorated socks. While about the men's clothes the most adorned and decorated clothes are shokat (kind of embroidered wool belt, woven on looms, the colors were put longwise on stripes, the most used colors were red, black, yellow, green), especially xhurditë (a man upper clothe, long until mid, made from felt) and embroidered socks"⁵¹.

The composition of motifs, as it was mentioned above, consisted of a perception that was connect to individual skills and were these individual skills which created certain typologies. These motifs reflected the originality of the whole region typology and were also an individual reflection.

Inside the typology of the region, we can see that the topology of the Highlands of Gjakova have a wide influence, considering the fact that the highlands of Gjakova is an oasis of values between Gjakova as a city, the Highlands of Dukagjini as a whole, between Malesise se Madhe which is almost Catholic, Dukagjin region in Shkodra and Has region. In this geographical location, we can see it as an integral part of Gjakova and Dukagjini although it was separated from them by the Great Powers in 1913. The design of motifs, their diversity, thematic and compositional structures clearly show a precocity and practicality in embroidery and knitting in this area.

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Many trinkets and spangles, different gold or silver coins, are used as decorative element sand simultaneously resonant in adoring costumes as we have already mentioned. Generally, popular costumes retain a sense of mass in the decoration they use and the plastic connection with various parts of the body. Likewise, aesthetic categories that they express, like transcendent beauty and refined aesthetic tastes, imposes us love toward them and reflect a rich spiritual world and fantasy. Despite poverty or other problems, refined aesthetic tastes in designing and composing motifs and colors has never missed and this is the reason for liking our popular costumes and having a great interest to study them, both the local researchers and those from other countries.

In conclusion, we can say that the decorative variety of popular clothing and costumes, and popular textiles in the Highlands of Gjakova and their aesthetic function is associated with a creativity that follows in centuries until nowadays. A creativity that has continued even though today is a little faded.

⁵¹ Andromaqi GJERGJI, *Mbi disa kritere të vlerësimit të veshjeve popullore*. Konferenca Kombëtare e Studimeve Etnografike, (28-30 qershor 1976), f.399.

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