

FOLKLORE AND LANGUAGE AS IDENTITY MARKERS IN THE VLACHS' COMMUNITIES FROM ALBANIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract: *This article aims at analysing the role of culture and language in defining and preserving ethnicity and identity in the Vlachs' communities from Southeast Albania and North Macedonia. Starting with setting the terms of research for a further project on cultural identities it underlines the role of the dialects that encode the culture of these diasporic ethnicities or oases of Romance speaking communities in the Balkan Peninsula. Using the concept of text defined by anthropology and functional linguistic as a modality of evoking events and representing realities in cognitive frames or scenes, this article brings together some cross-cultural perspectives on dances, oral stories, songs and religious manifestations as pillars of identity preservation for some communities found under the pressure of national languages and state ideologies. Folk material gathered recently in the fieldwork represents the empirical corpus for assessing the role of culture and language in preserving ethnicity.*

Key-words: *culture, language, religion, ethnicity, Romance speaking Balkans*

Introduction: Romance-speaking Balkan as a cultural construct found at the crossroad of civilizations and empires

As a space of cultural interferences, the Balkans have gained great importance in research carried out by anthropologists, archaeologists, folklorists, historians and linguists who have introduced in the national literatures (Beissinger 1998: 74) or in unwritten sources numerous images from their folklore and languages. Balkan studies include some main traditional fields of research like history, linguistics, literature, folklore, mentalities and all modern approaches to the field clearly speak of a cross-cultural perspective on a territory with unclear borders reflecting a succession of empire dominations (Curta 2016, 2020). Defined back in the 18th century, by the first Romanian anthropologist and ethnologist (Cantemir 1972: 96) who formulated the first

ideas about the specificity of the Balkans, this field of cultural studies has grown and extended to a plethora of studies on the cultural and linguistic connections among Albanian, South Slavic languages (Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian) and Romanian.

In numerous articles and books, the Balkans are seen more like an imaginary space than a real one (Todorova 1998, Jezernik 1999, Jezernik & Mursić & Bratulović 2007), a metaphor of defragmentation and unity (Bjelic and Savić 2002) that preserve some cultural strata reverberating in the multilayer construct analysable as a result of cultural interferences, congruencies and convergences mutually reinforced and dispersed from the centre to the margins. This paradigm of trying to assume the role of the centre of diffusion resulted in a sort of cultural dispute in modern times over who was the first, whose kings and tsars were the founders of medieval states and what identities they belong to. Starting mostly from the “travel literature”, an entire field of Balkan anthropology, linguistic or social, has developed since the 19th century through the writings which evolved and split into different subfields, such as political and ethnic studies (Bjelic and Savić 2002), folklore and literature (Beissinger 1998, Muthu 2002, 2004), ethnology and mentalities (Olteanu 2004, Mesnil & Popova 2007) and a plethora of linguistic studies. Todorova (1997) generated new views on the imagining and imaginary Balkans (among others Jezernik 1998, Jezernik, Mursic and Bratulovic 2007).

The Romance (-speaking) Balkans are viewed as an offspring of Latinity and have preserved concepts and words under the assumption of the continuity, preservation and unity of Romanian, born and developed on both sides of the Danube river. Existential aspects encoded or reflected in *culture as a form of communication* (Duranti 2007: 54) costumes, dances, cuisine, transhumance, occupations, traditions, transportation remain the main elements that bring together the Balkan cultural and linguistic league (Rosetti 1986: 392-296, Friedman 1986a,b; 1997, 2000, 2001) or led to the space being perceived as a *land of defragmentation* (Bjelčić and Savić 2002: 15) with the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and new national states and languages being formed. The studies based on ethnographic and dialectal field work are quite recent (from the 20th century on) and are marked rather by cultural attempts than linguistic ones: *Romance Speaking Balkans*, the last book published in the field, is fully garnished with culture as communication and identity topics (folklore, Facebook, identity, ways of thinking). As a nation or an ethnic community might be defined by culture and language, DNA took second or no place in defining its cultural and national identity (Alexe 2021: 82). A cultural approach to etymology implies using it as an epistemological tool to explain this role of languages in dealing with the history (origins and evolution) of words as relevant for ethnicity.

Romanian-speaking Balkans

The hypothesis of a Romance continuity in the Balkans has been formulated at the beginning of 20th century (Pascu 1913), supported by linguists and ethnologists (Weigand 1895, Capidan 1925, 1942; Papahagi 1967, Nastev 1988, Atanasov 2007) and stressed by North Danube scholars who defined Romanian language as originating and having been spoken on both sides of the Danube (Rosetti 1986: 27). It is believed that the mountains and the national borders split even the communities of Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians who are now living in various Balkan countries such as Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, but their isolation also helped with preserving language and traditions. Even though these communities are struggling to preserve their identity and their traditions were included in the UNESCO Intangible Heritage, they are still threatened by the pressure of national cultures. In this contiguous cultural context of the Balkans, these two ethnic groups named by others Aromanians and Meglenits have exchanged and shared with the new nations and ethnicities numerous beliefs and traditions, which were reinforced and re-symbolized by Christianity and other faiths. Due to contact with other cultures and religions, the traditions of the Balkans received different influences blurring realities in *anthropological scenes* (Crapanzano 1998, 2004) or *cognitive frames* (Duranti 1997: 33). Hybrid and syncretic genres of performative arts (dances, costumes), cuisine and traditions, folklore genres like carols, customs, incantations, legends, divinatory and magical practices, rites of passage have become discourse samples having a great relevance for defining the cultural identity and ethnicity of Romance-speaking Balkan communities.

Vlachs communities in North Macedonia

Two main communities of Vlachs, an ethnonym that applies to different groups in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia and Serbia, are still surviving under the pressure of the culture, language and national identity of dominant populations. The Aromanians are mostly found in areas such Bitola, Kurshevo, Ohrid, Sveti Nikole, Shtip as different regions in North Macedonia while Meglens moved from the village Huma (Uma in Macedonian) to Gevgelja, the only town which is home to the last old people speaking this dialect in terms of performance (Atanasov 2007: 54). This cultural and ethnic community of Meglens also inhabits North Greece and South of Macedonia (Capidan 1925: 27, Atanasov 2007: 243). The number of people who declare their Vlach identity in terms of language and culture has dramatically decreased and, with every census, cultural transmission and the willingness to declare themselves as part of this ethnicity is dropping. If at the beginning of the 20th century Bitola, the cultural capital of North Macedonia, was still believed to be inhabited by a large community of Aromanians, the second

town, Krushevo, was supposed to have been set up in 17th century by people who moved from Moscopole (nowadays Albania) and settled down there, while a significant part of them continued their journey to Bucharest (Capidan 1942: 115). Therefore, at least from a cultural and historical point of view, we can imagine an *ethnic continuity* because, over the generations, families and groups of people followed the milestones of this spiritual journey.

The anthem recorded in the past (Capidan 1942) and used as a foreword in handbooks of Aromanian dialect today (Nikolova & Mihailova 2012:6) is still performed during the important events of the Vlachs in North Macedonia and it speaks about the power of language as a symbol of ethnicity. Some ancient motifs such the ancestor cult, the belief in the purifying force of fire appear in a song whose lyrics have some reverberations of traditional genres such as curses and hint at the healing and vindicative power of music that should survive over the generations. Moreover, when reading between the lines, echoes of the myth of home as hearth and centre of the world reverberate in the lyrics of this old song:

<i>Părinteasca dimândari</i>	<i>The will of our forefathers</i>
<i>Nă sprigiurā cu foc mari</i>	<i>Commands us with a great flame</i>
<i>Frats di mumā shi di-un tatā</i>	<i>Children of the same parent</i>
<i>Noi, Armānji di eta toată.</i>	<i>We, the Aromanians from immemorial time.</i>
<i>Di sum plocili di murmintsă</i>	<i>From beneath their gravestones</i>
<i>Grescu a noșci bunj părintsă:</i>	<i>Our good parents cry out:</i>
<i>Blăstem mari s-aibă-n casă</i>	<i>We curse you if you have at home</i>
<i>Cai di limba lui s-alasă,</i>	<i>Someone who leaves his language</i>
<i>Cai s-alasă limba lui:</i>	<i>For whoever leaves his language:</i>
<i>S-lu ardă pira focului</i>	<i>Let him be burned by flames</i>
<i>Si s-dirină yiu pri loc</i>	<i>Let him be destroyed alive where he stands</i>
<i>S-ăi si frigă limba ăn foc</i>	<i>Let his tongue be burned in fire</i>
<i>Năs ăn vatrălj părintească</i>	<i>Before his ancestral hear</i>
<i>Pi fumealjă s-nu s-hărsească</i>	<i>Let him not enjoy a family</i>
<i>Di fumelă curunji s-nu bași</i>	<i>Let him not see a family get married</i>
<i>Nat ăn leagăn s-nu ănfășe</i>	<i>Let him not rock a child's cradle.</i>
<i>Cai fudzi di a lui mumă</i>	<i>For whoever leaves his mother</i>
<i>Și dit părinteascălj numă:</i>	<i>And his ancestral name:</i>
<i>Fugă-i doara Domnului</i>	<i>Let him ever lose God's grace</i>
<i>Și dultseamea somnului!</i>	<i>And the sweetness of sleep!</i>

(Translation from Aromanian into English by Ana Presh)

In addition to the veil of the curse, one can identify the *benefit of ill* which underlines the commitment of the community to preserve the ancestors'

language and the song purely becomes the expression of love for the native language which includes all the representations of life, such as the divine grace and the rites of passage as signs of the existence of this ethnic community united in language and traditions.

Dances are activities comprising ‘purposeful, intentionally rhythmical movement and encoding patterned sequences of non-verbal body movements’ (Hanna 1987: 17) distinct from other motion performances by the time, space and implicit effort, having inherent aesthetic value and mimetic potential. The main dimensions of dances are defined in the text (as designed movement) but also in the cultural context (the meaning conveyed from performer to audience, cultural and ethnic specificity and social relations). Dances are also marks of cultural ethnicity and convey multiple meanings and ideologies being a window to the groups’ worldviews. It is supposed that rhythmical movements accompanied by music create ecstatic states of divinities, imply performers’ intensive emotional participation, increase and spread around energies, protect delimited spaces and link parts of the world such as the earth and sky. In the multiple layers of dances one can decode different meanings such as concrete (the movement itself), iconic (the properties of images displayed by personages’ movement and phases of the dance and swing), stylized (the conventional meaning of gestures involved in motion), metonymical and metaphorical (the concepts, cognitive frames, magic and representational functions encoded in every gesture and movement). In this intermesh with other indirect means of communication (adornments, attires, costumes, decorations, jewellery) the dances became vehicles that mediate contact between spaces and have the magic function of changing the world order. In the Balkan cultural contexts, dances and swing are rhythmical movements with specific functions as inducers of fertility, initiation strategies of archaic societies. Round dances performed either only by men or by virgin maidens in the wheat field in midsummer when everything is parched around are meant to enforce the ears or to revive the heroism of the ancestors. Some specific female and male costumes and decorations can be found in the daily life of Vlachs’ communities all over the country and they still promote the specificity of ancient images throughout the songs, dances or daily habits. The time for tea together with a piece of locum or different sorts of pastries resulted from different influences such as the Ottoman who have controlled the entire Balkan Peninsula over the centuries. In the annual parades organized in Krushevo and Shtip by the cultural associations and official administration of these municipalities, the traditions of costumes, dances and songs are preserved and passed on from the old generations to the young ones.

According to the *Linguistic Atlas of the Aromanian Dialect, Vol. I*, Krushevo is the most important town with Aromanian population in the Republic of North Macedonia, half of its population being Aromanian.

According to the same source, it is an old town founded at the end of the 18th century by the Aromanian families coming from Moscopole, which was destroyed under the Muslims' attacks. Later on, Gramostean groups (coming from Mount Gramoste) settled down too, being "accepted" (i.e. tolerated) by the existing Aromanian population (Saramandu 2014: XX). The Gramosteans were shepherds owning large flocks of sheep, whereas the Aromanians coming from the Moscopole, a metropolis at that time, had already adapted themselves to the urban lifestyle, and they were merchants, goldsmiths, silversmiths etc. From a linguistic point of view, the informants interviewed in Krushevo by the authors of the *Aromanian Dialect Atlas* presented the characteristics of the Farsherot speech (the variety spoken by the Aromanians of Albania), which demonstrates the linguistic influence of the Moscopole group. As far as the Aromanians of Albania are concerned, including those from the Korçë area, according to T. Papahagi (1920), Th. Capidan (1931), N. Saramandu (1984), M. Nevaci (2011) they all belong to the Farsherot group speaking this variety of the Aromanian dialect. Nevertheless, from all the Aromanians, the Farsherots are the only ones who keep their ethnic name without its prosthesis *a-*, but with an initial apical trill, *rrămăñ*. Their mother tongue gives them ethnolinguistic awareness, as it is precisely this idiom that makes them homogeneous. In Aromanian families the mother tongue is always spoken. Usually, the grandparents who, with the desire to transmit their idiom not only to their children but also to their grandchildren, allowed only their own idiom to be spoken in the home environment. As the family is more conservative in rural areas and the connections between people are closer, the mother tongue is also more sensitively preserved and inherited. In urban areas where social life is more open, patriarchal ties are fading, multi-member families are shrinking, work is being done outside the home, and people are increasingly rushing to modernize and get immersed in other cultures. These are the results of economic development and globalization. Under these circumstances, the preservation and heritage of their mother tongue has been more and more difficult.

Vlach heroism in the Romance-speaking Balkan communities

In the Balkan area cross-ethnic characters standing among boyars, outlaws and villains became models of fighting against authorities after the dissolution of the regional states' power during the Ottoman Empire rule. In this space, the crisis of the Phanariot regime led to showing the outlaws as an institution struggling against other religions and system of values. These fighters are young people having military abilities acquired during the local battles and became revolted people living in the forests. They were famous for taking from the rich and giving to the poor and displayed their deeds of bravery and generosity performed in border spaces located between the wilderness of the

forest and populated areas of followers. Folk imagination pictures these brave men at the border of bandits' and justiciary actions as main forms to share the property and the wealth. The revolt makes these half-bandits or thieves, half-heroes deserving people's sympathy because they are signs of folk justice and the protectors of the land against the Ottomans. Moreover, from a cultural and ideological point of view, these kinds of villains come out from a contemplative attitude to nature and acts as warriors for social rights. The fight of the young lad with the enemies continues the metaphorical encounter of Saint George with the monster and make a picture of a struggle for equality and survival. A prototype of Aromanian fighter staying somewhere among outlaw, villain and partisan is the one called *komit* 'hajdouk' who has become a symbol of heroism in the battles against the Ottomans. According to the urban legends a character of this type called Leonida was living in a cave not too far from Krushevo quite similar to a monk but he took part in some incursions against the Ottomans. Other heroes like Nikola Karev and Pitu Guli, who were of Aromanian origins are found in the folk songs about the uprising of Ilinden, which took place in Kurshevo. Pitu Guli is the main character here and his name is still very cherished in Krushevo. He was pure Aromanian and died during this uprising. Nikola Karev was the third leader of this battle and although he ran away by his horse to Bulgaria his memory was recovered in the recent times and he got a huge monument placed in front of the Macedonian Parliament. As every outlaw they were perceived in the local folk(lore) view as being good or bad. These people left their families and places, ran away to mountains, attacked rich people and shared the goods with the poor. They also fought against the Ottomans during some battles and this uprising. Pitu Guli's and Nikola Karev's descendants are still living in Krushevo and about 10 years ago, in this town began one manifestation called Krushevo - Ethno City where men and women were wearing traditional Aromanian clothes. The whole city is decorated on this event in the 1900's spirit and every evening there was an entertainment program, representing life then and the bravery of *Komiti*. In the same series of events a parade of Aromanian folk costume is organized every year in the process of tradition revival and tourism branding. Both female and male wear during performing dances and during the parade similar costumes to those that are used in communities of Aromanians North of Danube (especially in Dobruja). Some samples of *Komitis*' costume are to be found in the Museum of Bitola, another town where the Aromanian culture it is well preserved through church, school, and the activities of this ethnic community.

The songs collected in Korce area speak about similar Aromanian outlaws from Frashër (an old place inhabited by the Aromanians from Albania, often associated with their place of origin, thus many of them calling themselves *fărșiroț, fășiroț*), who refused to pay the extra taxes imposed by

Haide frate țin- mi minti o ti gini, o moi Vasil *Remember good things
about me, my brother*

Haide când avdă șcreta di nviastă, o lele *When my poor wife heard
about me*

E more băgă zghicu ș-intră- n casă, o moi Vasil *She cried and went inside
the house*

Haide Petraç tini ți o ti am frati, o moi Vasil *Petraci, you who are my
brother.*

Haide s - nji mutrești ata o cu tati, o moi Vasil *Look after our mum and dad.*
(Translation from Aromanian into English by Daniela-Carmen Stoica)

If music, in general, is a permanent companion of Aromanians' happiest and saddest moments, iso-polyphony is a test and evidence of an early art. It is a clear overview of the historical, artistic and aesthetic aspects that have withstood the ravages of time:

"Polyphonic singing is treated as an icon of Albanian popular culture. Albanian collective identity is linked to polyphony, although the tradition of polyphonic singing is common mainly in the Southern part of the country."

Albanian authors consider Albanian polyphony "an ancient practice" (Kruta 1981: 161) and assume that its roots lie in the Illyrian past. In 2005 it was declared by UNESCO part of the Oral and Intangible Heritages of Humanity.

Although it is considered an Albanian influence, Aromanian polyphony is part of the cultural and artistic identity of this community living in Albania. It is considered to be highlighting the cultural and spiritual wealth of Aromanians, representing a repertoire that is still performed by the older generation of Aromanian singers (60 years old and over), demonstrating how music manages to mark the life of a person, of the community, being at the same time an indicator of culture in general.

The polyphonic song accompanies every moment of their lives: at births, engagements, weddings, or when they go on a pilgrimage, on a journey, but also at deaths, as they accompany their loved ones to their last home. Even when we compare men's songs with women's or the songs from the countryside with those from the city, we come to the conclusion that every fragment, every thought, every stanza is directly related to the social status of the Aromanian man, to the lifestyle of the Aromanian community, to the joys or sorrows they experience. Furthermore, in the past, women were expected to speak very little to men (including their husbands), and when they did, they were not supposed to address them by their names. Through the polyphonic songs, they both

"talked", both their voices being heard, while men expressed their manly nature and their dominant role in the family, as well as the gender division of jobs.

The characteristics of the Aromanian polyphony fall under the Albanian Tosk iso-polyphony, but with certain differences, which are related to the historical, social and problematic aspects of the Aromanians' life. More than that, their singing is closer to Tosk polyphony due to the fact that the Aromanian polyphonic singers use their voice as an instrument. The term *iso* is related to the *ison* of the Byzantine church music and refers to the drone which accompanies the polyphonic singing. During the singing, Aromanians from Albania have individual elements that reflect their world, such as calling, ringing sounds that qualitatively enrich the singing ("o", "o lele dado"), sometimes strongly, sometimes sadly. But regardless of the content, the narrative power is articulated through a polyphonic musical discourse. This is widespread mainly in the South-Eastern part of Albania and consists of three voices: recipient, incisor and iso; the first receives the melody, the second responds to it by entering into a relationship with it and the third holds the iso with the vowel *-e*. Over the last decades, the rise of cultural tourism, along with the growing interest of the research community in this particular folk tradition, has contributed to the revival of Aromanian iso-polyphony in Korçë area. Here we would like to mention the significant contribution of Prof. Josif Minga and his daughter, Mihaela Minga, by means of recording an album containing songs interpreted by the iso-polyphonic chorus of Drenova and promoting it and the group in Italy.

Religion and ethnicity

One of the most interesting local religious traditions performed in Krushevo is called *Deva*. It is a complex tradition happening the night before Christmas Eve and announcing the birth of Jesus Christ. This tradition kept its originality and holiness only in two places in the world, Bethlehem and Krushevo, a town inhabited nowadays by Aromanians, Macedonians and Albanians. In the past, only men of all ages did gather with a big red star which, according to the Bible, was the star that announced the birth of Jesus, that the old shepherds followed due to a prophecy and that is how they knew Jesus was about to be born. Then they went from house to house singing the song *Deva, Devane* informing people from the Aromanian community that the Saviour is going to be born. Then, the housewives gave the men money and sweets, to share their joy with them, and, in the following days, they waited for the big beautiful news - that Jesus was born. This recently reinvented tradition is still performed nowadays in Krushevo and added a choir of girls wearing lamps and some elements of fire symbolism. Nevertheless, the custom performed by females resembles the masculine tradition called the Star (*Steaua*) in Romania.

In the Aromanian community from Korçë, this Christmas tradition used to be performed two or three days before Christmas Eve particularly by school children, both boys and girls, who usually competed to build the most beautiful star out of coloured paper. Nevertheless, the most popular Christmas tradition was that of singing Christmas carols (*colinda*) on Christmas Eve, when children of all ages, carrying traditional wooden sticks and bags were going from house to house singing Christmas songs announcing Christ's birth to the members of the community from whom they were receiving special cakes (*colindă*, *colindi* or *culacu*), nuts, chestnuts, apples, pears and sometimes money.

*Colindi, merindi,
Dă-ni maie culacu,
Că s-află Hristolu,
Tu păhnia bonlu.*

*Christmas carols, Christmas carols
Grandma', give us the cake,
Because Christ was born
In the manger.*

(Translation from Aromanian into English by Daniela-Carmen Stoica)

The most important traditions in the Aromanian communities were related to the main Christian holydays around the year: Christmas and New Year's Eve, Saint Dumitru's and Saint George's Day, Saint Mary's Dormition. Each family used to be under a saint's patronage, depending on the name of the family's head, who was celebrated on that saint's day. The community traditions were connected mainly to the shepherds' lifestyle, the profession of the shepherd being the main one in these communities.

An interesting aspect regarding religion is that after the 90's (i.e. after the fall of the communist regime in Albania) many Christian Orthodox Albanians from Korçë chose to baptize their children in the Aromanian church from Korçë, Aromanian baptism certificates being issued in the Aromanian dialect. We can only account for their choice through the Aromanian model of an old and solid Christian Orthodox faith which they have never abandoned, not only during the Ottoman Empire, but also during the Albanian Communist regime which officially banned the practice of any kind of religion in Albania for almost 30 years. This model of Christianity continues today, even though some of the old traditions, such as singing Christmas carols or songs from house to house announcing Christ's birth, carrying the Star or the special sticks and bags on Christmas' Eve, have faded away or disappeared almost completely especially in the city.

Love is felt in the air of Krushevo

The town of Krushevo still hosts the biggest Aromanian community in North Macedonia supposed to have come from Moscopole in 18th century when they

founded the Vlach church and settled down in a place shaped as an amphitheatre around the centre. It is said that Vlach language has been spoken here ever since its foundation and now the Aromanians occupy the southern part of the settlement and live in harmony with Macedonian locals and Albanians who arrived later. A song of a subtle local patriotism projects the space as the heaven of Aromanians which brings joy and makes people fall in love with their town right from the moment somebody enters this place. A mythological heavenly landscape is sketched by mentioning the main places of the town and its surroundings covered and protected by love in the paradisiac original space. The church, a fountain and a stone have become in the eyes of a prototypical beautiful Aromanian girl (*feata mușata*) cherished by the lover and singer places of initiatic origin restoring the primordial love story in the local setting of the homeland. The song mentions a place called the Bear's Cave suggesting the fight where Pitu Guli and his group of komiti tried to defend Krushevo against Turkish troops coming from Bitola. The whole gang and its leader significantly called “voivode” perished in this battle.

Recovering Aromanian folklore in a song performed during his successful musical career, a famous singer from Krushevo revealed through his masterpiece the powerful traditions of family ties in the Vlach communities. Both characters of the song are female whose images are recreated by the voices of their lovers and husbands playing a seminal role in the traditional Aromanian families:

<i>Nveastă jilosă</i>	<i>A wife in pain</i>
<i>Tsi nj-eșci nveasta</i>	<i>Why are you my dear wife</i>
<i>Ahăt jilosă, ș-cu mare dor?</i>	<i>So sad my darling in huge pain?</i>
<i>Ti-cai jileșci?</i>	<i>Who are you grieving for?</i>
<i>Ș-ahăt uhtedză?</i>	<i>Why are you sighing so deep?</i>
<i>Ș-lăcărnje veșci pi tu ubor?</i>	<i>Why are you wasting so clear tears?</i>
<i>Maca mi-ntreghi, io va tsă-spunu</i>	<i>If you are asking me, I will be telling you</i>
<i>Io nj-avem gione, ș-multu mi-vrea</i>	<i>I have a man and he loved me so much</i>
<i>Tu xeane greale, năș ănj-si duse,</i>	<i>Now, he is living far in the land of forest</i>
<i>Ș-mine ănj-armașu laia fără di năș.</i>	<i>Where he had to go and he left me alone.</i>
<i>Carte nj-u loi, ș-tu carte scrie;</i>	<i>I got a letter the other day, and in the letter, he wrote to me:</i>
<i>Io nj-escu lăndzit, ș-cu mare dor</i>	<i>I am now so far of you and in a great pain</i>
<i>Ti tine nveasta, ș-featile a noastre</i>	<i>You my wife take care of our daughters</i>
<i>Ti laia dada, ș-frate cu sor.</i>	<i>My mom, my brother and my sister will be taking care of you.</i>

(Lyrics of a song performed by Teodor Proevski, Translation into English by Ana Preș)

The tragedy of leaving family for the sake of the community's fight for independence is expressed by the sorrow of the lyrical voices found in a distant dialogue and experiencing the dedication to family and traditions as forms of supreme sacrifice. An interesting way of communication through letters is mentioned in this dialogue on love, respect and family traditions.

The lyrical verses of the Aromanians from Albania stand out for their originality because they are directly related to their mood and lifestyle. The lyrical song dominates the epic one. Most of the texts we recorded are about transhumance, the hardships Aromanians went through along the way, the hardships of women fleeing with their children on their backs, the women fleeing loaded with wood and pulling mules, the men carrying the burden of transhumance on their shoulders. At the same time, they depicted the beautiful landscapes they met on their way (mountains, fields, birds, spring water). Love does not appear in the form of passion, but as a feeling that young people try to keep hidden. It appears that it is in the Farsherots' character to keep a low profile even when it comes to love affairs since most of the couples got married not out of love, but as a result of matchmaking done by their parents ever since they were children. The love between two young people is expressed against the beautiful nature, in the meadow, at the spring while taking water, under a tree or, if we take into account the Aromanian urban songs, at school.

Another element contained in love songs are stories intertwined with great delicacy, even with humorous notes, in which, at the village fountain or in the beautiful lawns or in the narrow streets of the neighbourhood, girls and boys wait for hours to meet. The following song, quite popular among the Aromanians from Albania, illustrates this topic at its best:

<i>Stau ună dzuă tu livadhi, ...</i>	<i>I am sitting one day in the orchard,</i>
<i>Treři-un dzoni ș- mi vedi, ...</i>	<i>A young man is passing by and sees me</i>
<i>Bună dzua la mușată, ...</i>	<i>“Good afternoon to the beautiful girl”</i>
<i>N-am vidzută ahtari feată, ...</i>	<i>“I have never seen such a beauty before”</i>
<i>Dzăsi zboru ș-tărcu cala, ...</i>	<i>He said that and went away,</i>
<i>Mini laia mutram vala,...</i>	<i>Poor me, I was watching the valley,</i>
<i>Mutram vala ș-lăcrămam, ...</i>	<i>I was watching and crying,</i>
<i>Tut la năsu mintia u-aviam, ...</i>	<i>I couldn't stop thinking about him,</i>
<i>Γini dzăsi laia mumă, ...</i>	<i>Well, my poor mum said,</i>
<i>Stă feată că u s-iasă numă, ...</i>	<i>Be careful girl, you'll make a fool</i>
	<i>of yourself,</i>
<i>Nu la mumă, la mărată</i>	<i>No, dear mum,</i>
<i>Că nu escu d-ahtari feată,</i>	<i>Because I'm not that kind of girl...</i>

(Lyrics of a song performed by Ollga Zguri from Moscopole.
Translation into English by Daniela-Carmen Stoica)

Conclusions:

The two dialects of the Romanian language encoding the cultures preserved in both North Macedonia and Albania remain the main tools of expressing ethnicity and cultural identity. As forms of discourse, cuisine, dances, films, music, paintings and other performative arts have become modalities of heritage preservation and promotion. The communities of Vlachs in North Macedonia and Albania have the right to assuming and preserving their cultural identity in the areas they inhabit in the two countries.

The spread of nationalism in the Balkan Peninsula led to reinvention of traditions and history mythologizations just to justify the presence of national states in the modern times. Therefore, the Vlach dialects (Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian) spoken in North Macedonia are endangered by the pressure of national language and ideology of cultural policies. Some representatives and organizations are still fighting for preserving all these dimensions of Balkan spirituality in spite of the conflicts induced by those with separatist views. Even though in Albania the Aromanian dialect appears to be more compact, younger generations have the tendency of abandoning it in the process of cultural assimilation and globalization. Traditional culture and folklore are being lesser and lesser cultivated or transmitted because they are being rapidly replaced by elements of modern culture, especially in urban areas.

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