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**ROOTS  
ON ETHNIC  
IDENTITY OF  
ARUMANIANS  
IN BULGARIA**

## Roots. / On Ethnic Identity of Arumanians in Bulgaria

This is a case study of Aromanians ethnic identity. My initial intention was to present a momental photo of the basic ethnicity - markers of Aroumanians in Bulgarian diaspora at present in those discourses they are suggested in narratives, oral history tradition, life-stories, folklore. My aim was to study the role and functions of these elements, the particular ways they were used in the process of construction of identity patterns of Aromanians today.

My choice of Aromanians as a subject was by no means accidental. They represent an extraordinary and very peculiar ethnic phenomenon - an ethnic dispersion which challenges the researchers interest about the behaviour of an uninstitutionalised (in the terms of a state and nationhood) structure among established national identities in the Balkans.

Recently concepts and definitions of ethnicity and identity have been put down to revision and critisized. However, recent researches and case-studies suggest worthy its defining as a set of notions about self-identification of the members of the ethnic community, on the base of which the autho-stereotypical image of this community has been constructed. Relativist and instrumentalist perspectives prove profitable for our theoretical departure and especially Frederick Barth's classical study of ethnic groups and boundaries (Barth 1969; Barth 1996 :75-82).

A considerable part of the evidence is provided by field investigations of the author in the recent abode of Aromanians in Bulgaria - Sofia, Peshtera, Velingrad, Dupnitsa.<sup>1</sup>

When asked about their belonging the fellow-Aromanians, distinguished and called by Bulgarians generally „Vlachs,” give different replies with various connotations. They recognise as the genuine, essential and common proper name of the entire community from times immemorial, the name Arma\*ni and use it for their distinction and self-identification. It is known and intimate to all generations. It is frequent in Aromanian folk-songs as referring to different segments of the group, dispersed among Balkan nations and peoples (Caraiani / Saramandu 1982). The name Arma\*ni comprehends all the parts of Aromanian ethnies not only on the Balkans but also in Europe and all over the world.

Generally the meanings of the proper name are explained, especially by the elder generations, as „survivors,” „(hard, tough) people who stay/ resist/ persist/ remain at their place,” even as „remnants”(of an ancient people). Notably, part of these connotations implicate value categories and suggest archaic origin or essential virtues and dignities as aspects in the construction of the self- conception of the ethnies, in the creation of an autho-stereotypical image. Others - „non-Romanian”- accentuate the function of the proper name as a marker of ethnic distinction.

The name Arma\*ni is current among the members of the community in the family, kin and their inner mutual contacts. At the same time it is active for the distinction of the group from another greater in number romanian-speaking population in Bulgaria – the so-called Vlachs – inhabitants of the north-western part of the country – Timoc valley and the area along the Danube.

At the same time Aromanians in the Balkans and particularly in Bulgaria are best called and known as Vlachs, although this name entails a lot of problems (cf. Winnifrith 1987: 1). In Greek and Slavic languages „Vlach” most of all meant merely a „shepherd,” particularly – an „itinerant shepherd” (transhumant or nomadic), thus causing a confusion with other pastoral

migrants – the Saracatsans or the Yurouks (Winnifrith 1987: 1). But „Vlach” could also refer to the „Latin/Romanian- speakers” in the Balkans, due to the confusion between sedentary and pastoral populations, speaking different dialects derived from Latin, distinctive in ethnic identity and origin (Bulgarian Ethnology: 1995).

In some way and to some extent, commonly in the country, the denomination Vlachs as given by their Bulgarian neighbours, has been more or less adopted by Aromanians, limited in the narrow borders of the local community and mentioned as Our Vlachs (Velingrad, Peshtera, Rakitovo). Naturally it provides the opposition to The Other Vlachs (i.e. the „Vidin-”/ „Danube-”/ „Timoc-”/ „Northern-”/ „Romanian-” Vlachs), but what seems more important to me – the name Our Vlachs suggests a connotation connected with the origin – „from our root,” referring to the local community or the whole ethnue and representative for the link between the notion of „roots” (origin, descent) and identity.

One could easily understand the reluctance of Aromanians to adopt the name Vlachs for their own community, because as given by the neighbours, it bears various derogative connotations. Most of all these are due to the meanings of the term Vlachs as „shepherds,” „herdsmen,” but also „strangers”( „alien”) and reflect the viewpoint of the sedentary neighbouring population. The names (derogatives) by which The Other/the Stranger, the Alien is called as usual are entangled in chains of oppositions involved in the universal binary categorisation human beings/ non-human beings, or We/ The Others that is characteristic of inter-ethnic identifications. Accordingly, Vlachs are looked upon with suspicion as „wild,” „plain,” „savage,” „villains,” „rough,” „ugly,” „illiterate”(uninformed and uneducated), „foolish,” „backward,” „rude,” „dirty”(unwashed and tricky), „marginals”(highlanders, pastoralists, outside society and civilization, living only in the blank spaces – abandoned areas or in the mountains), „poor,” „outcasts,” etc.(cf. Mesnil/ Popova 1995: 76- 88; Winnifrith 1987: 1- 2; Gueorguieva 1994: 64-66).

Another denomination in use as a proper name, integrative for the whole community is Mac\*edoneni or Macedonian Vlachs, derived from the localisation of their ancient homeland – Macedonia, the area which during the last centuries proved to be a refuge after the destruction of Moschopolis, a secondary homeland and core for further migrations (Velingrad, Peshtera). Yet it has been influenced by the Romanians, who call Aromanians Mac\*edo-Roma\*ni and by Romanian historiography, scholarship and education.

We are not going to discuss here the various denominations referring to the different parts of Aromanian community in Bulgaria (Tsintsari, Moskopoleni, Bituleni, Gramusteani, etc.) for they have been already perfectly described and analysed by Th. Kahl (Kahl 2000; Kahl 2001), but what is more important - they are not active as integrative and distinctive for the ethnic community.

However, Aromanians are eager to distinct themselves from the other group of Latin-speakers – The Other Vlachs in the North, calling them with different names: Mokani (as the population of Romania), Roma\*ni (derived from the origin – Northern Vlachs are thought to be „true Romanians or their descendants, who crossed the Danube and respectively speak a different language– Romanian”) or surprisingly Bulgarians („citizens of Bulgaria, who like and choose to speak Romanian, because it was easiest for them!”- Velingrad), all the time claiming they have nothing in common (neither as origin, nor as mother tongue). Unsatisfied by the call Vlachs, they create their own derogatives for Northern Vlachs trying to explain the deep

and essential diversity between themselves and The Other Vlachs. So Aromanians call them Soggy Vlachs (having their feet into the Danube, oddly – a call, borrowed from Bulgarians), Peasants, Kopanari, Mechkari (Bear-keepers), Vlahut\* and even Gypsy. It deserves mentioning that Bulgarians call Kopanari a Roma group, speaking „Romanian” and producing wooden articles. Mechkari also refers to another Roma group with a Romanian slang. Thus having taken arguments from vernacular and occupation, Aromanians just reduce The Other Vlachs to Gypsy. The reverse of the same coin shows why do Aromanians feel deeply insulted when called Vlachs by Bulgarians. The daughter of my informant from Peshtera – a wealthy, well brought up and highly educated woman, exclaimed: „My dear father, I could never understand by what reasons, when we prove to be better and excel Bulgarians in all respects (implicating intelligence, knowledge, education, culture), why do they mistreat us as Gypsy?” And her father continued: „When they address us Vlachs they mean poor, many people, miserables, Gypsies. They treat us like Gypsy, because Bulgarians do not know whatever about our history at all!”

The distinction Aromanians versus Northern Vlachs is fairly well demonstrated by my interviewees not just at a personal level, but also by the representatives and activists of the legal Aroumanian structures in Bulgaria – Sutsata# Arma\*nilor in Sofia and its branches in the country (Peshtera, Velingrad, Rakitovo, Dupnitsa, Blagoevgrad). At the first stage of its constitution Sutsata# Arma\*nilor (in fact reconstructing a former Aroumanian association – „Unirea”) was subordinated to the Association of Vlachs in Bulgaria. This caused much disappointment and irritation among both activists and potential members from the country. They claimed against the appurtenance of Sutsata# to a common organization with the Vidin-Vlachs, insisted and carried out the emancipation of their own structure, explaining their point with „the lack of rationale for such a joint venture, taking arguments by the profound diversity between Arma\*ni and Vlachs in identity, origin, traditions, customs and speech.”(age 72, activist from Peshtera) This point was supported by many other members of the Aroumanian colony in Sofia, former attendants of Liceu Roman, who claimed that Aromanians themselves built the Romanian church in Sofia and found the Romanian school which much later was attended by Vidin- Vlachs as well, i.e. that Aromanians were in fact the initiators and founders of the religious, educational and cultural centre of Vlachs in Bulgaria (members of Sutsata in Sofia; cf. Kahl 2001: 16-17; Nyagoulov 1995: 67- 68; Barbolov 2000).

Notably, Aromanians developed an extended set of derogatives about all ethnic groups they encountered or lived together with, including Bulgarians, who were called „Vurga\*r - cap gros”(i.e. „Bulgarians - thick heads” meaning „dumb,” „stupid”).

Aromanians in Bulgaria fairly well distinguish ethnic identity from citizenship. Nevertheless in the period up to the 1960-ies, they preferred a passport registration (of identity) as Vlachs rather than as Bulgarians, because that was some way to exhibit their diversity within Bulgarian nation. Since 1960, when the registration as Bulgarians became compulsory for all citizens of the country, they felt deprived and suppressed – unrecognized by Bulgarian authorities and unrecognizable among Bulgarian neighbours by being mistaken with Northern Vlachs, Saracatsans or curiously - with Armenians in previous census. It was not earlier than 1989-1990, at the beginning of the post-communist period of transition, that Aromanians got a further chance to express independently their identity and to be recognized in Bulgarian

society exactly as an ethnic community under their common proper name Arma\*ni. One of my informants – a middle-aged man, activist of Sutsata in Velingrad, was eager to stress that he was proud to be Arma\*nu and in next census in Bulgaria he would definitely claim officially his proper identity exactly as „Arma\*nu” if only there would be such item provided. He assured me he was ready and willing to agitate others, especially from the younger generation, to do the same in order finally to render some account of the numbers of Aromanians in Bulgaria.

However, even the representatives of the younger generation, born and educated in Bulgaria, the descendants of numerous mixed marriages who claim to feel Bulgarians and tend to change their identity, they are also conscious about their affiliation and still retain (albeit not actively) the proper name Arma\*ni (cf Kahl 2001 : 13; Atanasova 1998: 166).

Accordingly, as suggested by the evidence, despite the various connotations of the self-denomination Arma\*nu/ Arma\*ni it proves to be still comprehensive about the entire Aromanian community, integral for its inner cohesion and distinctive in reference to other cognatic groups, i. e. it is still active as the common proper name of this ethnic (ethnonyme). It is still current as a basic ethnicity-marker and has a great importance in the construction of Aromanians identity patterns in Bulgaria at present, especially during the last decade.

Another basic ethnicity-marker, recognized by all authors as one playing a key role, is language, the most important resource for boundary maintenance.

We agree with T. Winnifrith that „the turbulent history of the Balkans is such, that claims for racial identity as opposed to linguistic identity are largely mythical. The distinguishing feature of the Vlachs, the feature that makes them interesting for the historian, is not their race, nor their religion, nor their culture, nor their consciousness of a separate identity, but their language.” (Winnifrith 1987: 7).

Indeed, the variety of ethnic proper names and derogatives is puzzling in distinguishing who IS and who IS NOT „Vlach” on the Balkans. The crucial importance of language as an overt sign of diversification (Barth 1996: 78) has been recognized by many authors. This is especially explicit when attempting to render an account of the numbers of Vlachs in any of Balkan countries, i. e. to draw the boundaries of the community. Following again Winnifrith, it is of course „hard to fix upon any criterion about what determines a Vlach-speaker. Official census figures are hardly a good guide and we have to make due allowances to bilingualism, nomadism, the unpopularity of Vlach and possible confusion with Romanians.” He finally takes as such a criterion the regular use of Vlach at home (Winnifrith 1987: 3-7). Twenty years later trying to estimate the numbers of Aromanian community in Bulgaria, Thede Kahl distinguishes as greatest the colonies in Peshtera and Sofia referring again to the „active Vlach-speakers” (Kahl 2001: 6, 13).

In the case in point one should fairly well distinguish between „mother tongue” and „language spoken” since considerable parts of the community spoke Greek or Romanian in different periods. In those parts of the community (prevalently merchants and craftsmen) who settled in urbanized centres where Greek was dominant, it rapidly took advantage to Vlach, while at the same time nomadic groups (such as Grammosteani) kept for a long time speaking only one language - their native vernacular (Kahl 2001: 2 ff.; Kahl 1999: 8).

Aromanians speak a dialect derived from Latin. In many oral popular versions of origin this

dialect is said to be „Roman” or „Italian,” its resemblance to French is pointed out, obviously due to the consciousness of its adherence to Romance languages. In some cases a special stress is laid over its worth as one of the most ancient, archaic languages on the Balkans, respectively - virtues and dignity of its bearers have been focused upon. „Vlachs are the oldest people in the Balkans. We have come to this area since 4000 years ago. Vlach is the language of Thraco-Dacians and the base of languages!”(cf. Cyrilova 1998: 25- 28; Todorova-Pirgova 1999: 49). Aromanians are aware of their vernacular being cognate to Romanian although distinguish them. They appreciate the advantages of Romanian as literary and an official national language.

Recently Aroumanian speech everywhere in the Bulgarian diaspora is the basic marker of self-identification. It is crucial for tracing the boundaries of the community both in ethnic and regional aspects. Aroumanians call their language Arma\*neas\*ti as derived from the proper name of the community. They worship it as their own native mother tongue. Limba# Arma\*neaska# is considered as a precious value, the heritage of fathers and forefathers (Belemace 1990). Aromanians are aware about its role of crucial importance for keeping the coherence of their community. After the transition to modernity and the decline of traditions and folklore, the language is often referred to as the principle and sole sign of diversity by Aromanians in Bulgaria. This could not be neglected even by those fellows who tend to change their identity: „We are Vlachs... But it makes not difference that we are also Bulgarians. Well, indeed we do speak one more language.”(Peshtera)

At the same time Aromanians are aware of some specific characteristics of their speech - particularly that it remains vernacular, just a dialect spoken in the limited space of family and kin because of the lack of alphabet (due to a lot of problems) and respectively - of a literature. Arma\*neas\*ti was not allowed and taught at schools, sung in churches or used in official business (Winnifrith 1987: 4). It never grew up to the status of an official language. It proved to be active solely in terms of inner communication of the group. Teaching and learning Arma\*neas\*ti took place exceedingly in family. According to Winnifrith this was one reason for its survival and the persistence of its purity. „Children learn language at their mother’s knee, and Vlach mothers have little opportunity or inclination to say much more than they had learnt at their own mother’s knee.”( Winnifrith 1987: 36).

In many languages the concepts of „language” and „people” are synonymous. One could hardly look for more profitable evidence for the illustration of the link between language and identity than that suggested by Aromanian case. Having allegiance to the community, bearing that identity, being a genuine fellow - „curat Arma\*nu,” meant necessarily to speak Arma\*neas\*ti. It is by this very sign that Aromanians currently recognize each other in Bulgaria, in different diasporas in the Balkans or beyond (Peshtera). On the other hand the process of „Bulgarization”(i. e. „turning into Bulgarian”/identity/) due to the progress of intermarriages and adaptation to modern standards of culture and mode of life, is definitely referred to the abandonment of their mother tongue and switching to Bulgarian. An elder man from Peshtera exclaimed: „You cannot even tell young that they are Arma\*ni. Neither persuade them, nor anyone of their children or of grand-children! You see this lady , my neighbour, she is a physician. How could I tell her whatsoever?! „No, we are not Vlachs!”- she replies. She remembers well, I m sure -



she is not that young. I still perfectly remember her parents and the whole kin - they all spoke Arma\*neas\*ti!"(Age 72. Cf. also Atanasova 1998 b: 166; Kahl 2001: 9- 12).

Bilingualism is still actual in Aromanian community. Almost all interviewees highly appreciated bilingualism and pointed out that learning and speaking of one more language brought for them at any rate a privileged position to Bulgarians. „I have heard many a time my grandfather saying to some Bulgarian : „Why should you curse us? How dare you, as we prove to be ten times more civilized than you ! There is no Vlach who could not fluently speak at least three languages! Our grandfathers were masters of Bulgarian, Turkish and Greek!"(S.P.,age 75, Peshtera) In the construction of their identity pattern they largely made use of bilingualism, polyglottic capacities and culture of their grandfathers as a compensation of their mother tongue „illiteracy.”

Recently in Bulgaria a clear differentiation between generations in the mastery and regular use of their native tongue could be observed. All Aromanians from the elder generation (predominantly Grammosteani) keep and speak their vernacular. Both elder and middle generations are bilingual. But young generation born in Bulgaria and the product of socialist educational system, practically lose their mother tongue. In most cases they can properly understand Arma\*neas\*ti spoken, but they are hardly able to speak which is painfully experienced both by themselves and their parents. „I can perfectly understand when the old speak and I can simultaneously translate in Bulgarian, but it is impossible for me to turn my tongue and say anything in Arma\*neas\*ti! I fumble for words and wonder for a long time... I don't know how properly to lay the stress. Yet I'm greatly willing to twist my tongue, to say anything - a single word to my mother, to be understood...But I'm just not able! And from my personal viewpoint all this is convicted. It will remain just so - you may have been of such identity, of such origin, but nothing more could ever happen!"(Age 36, Velingrad) Most dramatical for them proved their own incapacity to neither teach Arma\*neas\*ti to their children, nor urge them learn it from their grandparents. Finally, children were reluctant and not interested to listen, learn and speak „the tongue of grandfathers” and preferred English, German and French instead. They explicitly claim their unwillingness of communication in Vlach and confess they could not speak it. Notably, this behaviour is motivated with the lack of relevant milieu. Speaking Vlach proves not sensible for them in Bulgarian society for it does not provide any better chance or a higher social (economical, administrative, etc.) status, so the position of language is pushed to backwaters or is missing at all in the construction of their identity patterns. All this is symptomatic for the complex and contested course of integration in Bulgarian society.

Recently two opposite trends in respect of preservation and transmission of the language could be observed. Elder and middle generations are conscious they are the last Vlach-speakers, respectively - the last bearers of identity and ethnic continuity, since language proves to be the last stronghold of ethnicity. „Our children don't speak Vlach. We rest the last living Vlachs. After our death Aromanians will be almost completely assimilated...”(Peshtera) Aware about the situation, elder generation considers its substantial task and duty the persistence and perpetuation of language.

It deserves mentioning that in the poem of C. Belemace „Dima#ndarea pa#rinteasca#”(The



Will of Forefathers)- the hymn of educated Aromanians, attendants of Liceu Roman - the worst curse would reach those who forgot and abandoned their fathers language and name.

Obviously sedentarisation, particularly in towns, modernization, urbanization and getting education in the terms of socialism in Bulgaria were powerful factors for the break-down of Aromanian traditions and folklore and a serious threat to the survival of their language.

Communist authorities invented various obstacles to prevent teaching Arma\*neas\*ti even at the primary schools in the towns with Aromanian population. Neither was allowed the restoration of the former Liceu Roman in Sofia, closed in 1948. Aromanians felt deprived and oppressed by the authorities during the period of socialism, fairly conscious that they were worse treated than Turkish minority in Bulgaria.

In this respect very impressive are the thoroughful efforts of the present Sutsata Arma\*nilor and especially of the Centre of Aromanian Language and Culture (found in Sofia in 1995) for saving the language. Their activists carried out successfully the initiative for restoration of the Romanian college (in 1999) and teaching Arma\*neas\*ti compulsory for all „ethnic Aromanians”(Arma\*nlul 1999). A short vocabulary and an Aromanian grammar have been already published by Toma and Nicolas Cuerkci, as well as the first volume of „The history of Aromanians and their relationship with Bulgarians” by the historian G.Barbolov from the Institute of Balkan Studies.

### Popular versions of origin

Recent studies of ethnicity point out as one of the distinctive features of ethnic groups the myth of common ancestry - „a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnic the sense of fictive kinship”( Horowitz 1985: ch.2).

What is being extracted from this ethnicity resource for the construction of recent identity patterns?

My Aromanian interviewees made different sense of the concept of roots. It could refer to kinship and a particular kin: „Our root, our kin is rooted in Mount Grammos.”(age 36, Velingrad) It could be related to some site or locality, where a certain part of the community settled and gave birth to their children: „Our Vlachs, from our root from Dorkovo.”(age 70, Peshtera) Yet in general the idea of roots embraces the entire community and its common origin: „Our Vlachs, our roots, come from Greece.”(age 82, Peshtera)

However, our subject under consideration here are the variants of Aromanians’most popular oral versions about their origin (of where their roots come from) as suggestive about their part in the construction of Aromanians identity in Bulgaria today. Therefore, I am not going to discuss the scientific discourses of historians or anthropologists on the subject.

1.First of all come the popular versions of Aromanians mythical or ancient common ancestral homeland, situated generally in the south of the Balkan peninsula(over the territories of today’s Greece, Macedonia and Albania). In the narratives Aromanians themselves claimed to be the descendants of the most ancient autochthonic pastoral tribes on the Balkans - anonymous or called Thracians, Illyrians, Thraco-Illyrians. The community inhabited its mythical common homeland since times immemorial or „in the time of the ancient Thracians (Illyrians).” After the

Roman invasion and conquest of the Balkans these tribes were „Latinized” or „Romanized” which affected mainly their speech - they adopted some dialect, derived from Latin - a „Roman”(but not Romanian) speech. The explanation of the dialect has some reflections over the origin: „we are romanized Thracians;” „autochthonous romanized population” or „Thraco- Romans”(Peshtera, Velingrad, Sofia; cf. Cyrilova 1998: 26; Athanasova 1998: 18). During the period of Roman domination the „Romanized Thracians and Illyrians” dispersed all over the peninsula, they mainly fled to the mountains and (in some variants) then became itinerant shepherds. Curiously enough many aspects, particularly those about the origin and identity of the ancestral tribes, are familiar to the eldest informants - mostly Grammosteani (herdsmen or shepherds) and often almost illiterate (especially in Romanian) and poorly educated. This suggests that oral versions were probably influenced by the knowledge of the more educated middle generation, gained at Romanian schools or from Bulgarian and foreign (chiefly Romanian) historiography. This could be supported by the narratives of two former attendants of Liceu Roman in Sofia. „I’ve got some evidence and I’ve read in books that since the 50-th century B.C. the Vlachs existed here - on the Balkan peninsula. But these are...Thraco-Romans and Thraco-Illyrians. We come from the Thraco-Romans - the most ancient tribes in the Balkans.”(age 78, Peshtera) The second one is of special interest because he wrote his own alternative text - a history of the Vlachs in Peshtera where he claimed that their origin was from the ancient Thracians („the last descendants of the former Thracians assimilated in Peshtera and even in Bulgaria”) and they were „indeed the last Thracians living” as it was „well-known from history.”(72 years old, Peshtera) It seems interesting that the idea of claiming a direct descent from the ancient Thracians, obviously borrowed from historiography, is very suitable to make Aromanians closer to Bulgarians.

Accordingly, other versions derive a direct descent from the ancient Romans, claiming that old Vlachs were „in fact Romans/Italians” who „came from Rome” and logically their ancestral homeland was situated in Rome or in Italy. This implicated both their identity and the nature of their mother tongue as „Roman” or „Italian” but yet not Romanian (Peshtera, Velingrad). In „Roman/Italian” versions a clear distinction between Aromanians and Romanians (today) can be observed. Besides, they bring about some sense of pride because they suggest the link between Aromanian ethnics and the glorious Roman Empire and *Populus Romanus* as well.

Very popular is another version that claims ancient Macedonia to be the native homeland of Aromanians. It gives an explanation to the denomination Macedonian Vlachs or Macedo-Roma\*ni. „They lived here (in Macedonia), and that’s why we’re called Macedoneni.(...)Because so is presented the history of the past, since before - whence Alexander Macedonian(Alexander the Great) lived. As a matter of fact he has been our king! They descended him - this population... But when he lost the war, when he died so young, yet since then the Vlachs dispersed! And there is a song about that - the song of Alexander Macedonian.”(age 75, Velingrad) The lyrics represented the legend about Aromanians life in their mythical homeland. It was „a glorious time,” „a splendid life.” „The Vlachs had houses, their own state, etc.- when Alexander was king. But when he got ill and died, then all the Vlachs, the Macedonian Vlachs, they spread all over the world! And it is for that reason now we have no state. If Alexander hadn’t died we should also have our state and we shouldn’t live today in alien states!” The motif about

having their own proper state at some time in the past (most of all in Antiquity) often recurs in the narratives providing „evidence” and background for Aromanians stands to be of no less virtue and dignity than the other Balkan peoples with their own national states. The motif of Aromanians dispersal in the narratives and folklore is also a recursive metaphor which reflects consequent stages of their spread „all over the Balkans/world” and contains an explanation of the specific type ethnic dispersion they represent.

2. Other versions exhibit the idea that closer in time (during the period of Ottoman rule) the common ancestral homeland is definitely related to the area of Pindus and Grammos. This is the Great time, the Golden age of Aromanian ethnic in their „state” in the highlands with the famous Moschopolis as their „capital”(Boga 2000). In the variants presented by Grammosteani the prominent kehaya Hagi Stere as a personification of their leader and ruler. These versions also reproduce the motif of Aromanians dispersal and the loss of their „state” and „capital/centre” (Rakshieva 1996: 36; cf. Cyrilova 1998:27; Atanasova 1998 b:15).

Consequently Macedonia becomes a refuge for the fleeing Aromanian waves from Pindus and Grammos. Some versions consider it as a core of their ethnic territory and secondary centre of migrations in a later period. Collective memory of many clans emigrated to Bulgaria has kept the recollection of the „clan’s roots” which come from a particular place (region, settlement) of Macedonia or Greece (randomly): from Ioannina, Ghevghely, Neveska, Bitola, Krushevo, Gopesh, etc (Rakshieva 1997: 198; Kahl 2001:6). This recollection is concrete and live.

3. Another group of oral versions of descent are particularly related to Bulgaria as new settlement area and „homeland.”

The first stage of their settlement in Bulgaria implies their adjustment to a new environment. The group of merchants and craftsmen settled in towns and cities and adapted their toponymes as their own denominations of origin: Pes\*tiriani, Ba#ta#ceani, Giuma\*iot\*i,etc (cf. Kahl 2001: 6). The group of shepherds became also adjusted to the new areas which got a reflection in folklore: I ciudii, laie, I ciudii/ Bakica tu Vi\*rgi\*rii/Doua sute di ca#livi/... s\* gli aspri\*ndea\*s\*ti/ Alti ’n Banje, alti -’n La#jeani/ s\* mai mult\*’i-’n Vrat\*a’n hoara#[Miracle,oh miracle/Bakitsa in Bulgaria/200 huts/...they scattered/ some in Chepino Bath/some in Ladjene/ most part in town Vratsa] (cf.Rakshieva 1997). Collective memory has kept the recollection of the root and the route of migrations and history of each clan. „Our root comes from Grammos - in Greece.

My grandfather is born in Bulgaria, Macedonia here - in Rila monastery. From there they move to Lukovit- Ladjene(Anton)- Koprivshitsa- Dorkovo- Velingrad.”(age 56, Velingrad) The memories of pastoral life perpetuated among elder generation, a considerable part of which born in Bulgaria, suggest their affection to the country as their homeland. „I’ve been born at Belmekean - Curtovo. About Bulgaria we think that it is our country, our homeland, because we live here. Our Vlachs were passionately attached to Bakica. And when they emigrated to Romania they composed a new song about it ...They felt very unfortunate, they were very sorry. They were eagerly bound to here, because here they were born... They belong here.”(Age 78, Velingrad)

The memory of pastoral life in the mountains has been transmitted to young generation but it sounds some strange and abstract to them. „A part of Vlachs emigrated to Romania. I remember our relative- an aged man, Lali Teja. My father especially carried him to Curtovo. We ate a roasted lamb. He sung and cried, and burst laughing, and rolled in the grass as a little donkey!

He pointed to the places of calivi and the sheepfolds. That was the place of his childhood and he remembered that. Well, what memories could I personally have? Except what I could hear from here and there. Because My childhood passed here - in this quarter, in Velingrad.”(Age 36)

For the young generation born and grown in Bulgaria, adjusted to modern social and cultural standards, the consciousness of the ancient common ancestry or the origin of forefathers becomes more and more abstract. They feel integrated to Bulgarian society while retaining the awareness of ethnic identity. „Bulgaria for us is comprehended as a ... homeland. We don't know anything else. We have been born here and we are patriotic for Bulgaria and for Velingrad. I've been born here. I am a citizen of Bulgaria. By national identity- positive Vlach and I will proudly declare anywhere I am Arma\*n!...Well, my descent is from Grammos indeed, but I couldn't feel so strong an affection as for my native place, could I?”(Age 56) Or even more pragmatically expressed: „The native land, the homeland for a person of our age is where his business takes place, where is his milieu.”(Age 36, Velingrad) This is the way combined definitions of ethnic identity - such as „Bulgaro-Vlachs” have been born. They are given from elder to younger generation as reflecting not just (and not so much) the combination of ethnic identity and citizenship, but the changes in the basic orientations which in turn brought changes in the set of signs of diversification.

In the construction of identity patterns of young generation the part of collective memory and consciousness of origin is pushed back on behalf of a set of value standards ascribed as distinctive characteristics (identity marker) of the group. „I am a native Vlach, so I've grown. But that you may be Vlach makes no difference that you are Bulgarian. Yet I think we are the more Bulgarians than Bulgarian themselves!”(Age 36, Velingrad) And he approved his claim with a long list of essentials of virtues, worths, morality standards, spirits, etc., concluding that Aromanians were indeed „a very tough people” - perhaps tough also in respect of interaction and interethnic relations?

Accordingly, as is suggested by the evidence, the boundary as a specific set of signs is different in content for generations. Identity patterns are variously constructed, from various elements in different constellations and is being maintained in different ways. The behaviour of actors being determined by their basic orientations and strategies - of segregation, of getting a recognition in a complex society or of integration. Some answer for the striving of elder generations is suggested by the names of their legal organisations. But younger Aromanians accentuate the process of interaction, of making diversities more discrete, subtle and submerged on account of common aspects and features.

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## **COLOFON**

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