



HyperCultura

Biannual Journal of the Department of Letters and Foreign Languages, Hyperion University, Romania

Electronic ISSN: 2559 - 2025, ISSN-L 2285 - 2115

Vol 3, no 1/2014

Identity and Conflict in Cultural and Geo-Political Contexts (Part II)

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Recommended Citation:

Bara, Mariana. "Constructing Armân/Vlach Ethnic Identity". *HyperCultura* 3.1 (2014)

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Abstract

Constructing identity (ethnicity, in this case) is subject to the action of several elements shaping the complex relationships between the individual and the communities of which he/she is a member, with direct and indirect effects: the SELF (beliefs, awareness) about himself; others about the SELF; institutional (official) statements about the SELF; (statements of) the SELF about himself to others. Linguistics and cultural and social anthropology are sometimes in contradiction in defining identity, as loyalty towards ethnicity does not exclude differences in national affiliation.

I will analyze the identity as a complex of perspectives and assertions, starting from a corpus of data (gathered from my previous research) and from the related bibliography, trying to sort out my hypothesis of the four perspectives on identity.

The present study tries to answer, from a linguistic perspective, the questions whether the geolinguistic approach is sufficient in order to define ethnic identity, and if its limitations, as shown in the bibliography (from Gustav Weigand's field research in late 19th century to Thede Kahl's in the early 21st century) can be surpassed.

Keywords: ethnic identity, self-identity, external perception, national affiliation, Armân/Vlach cultural and ethnic identity.

1. Introduction: Useful Short Definitions

To start with a general assertion, ethnic identity or ethnicity is one of the individual social identities (Appiah "Stereotypes" 43), along with race, gender, class, sexuality and religious affiliation. Ethnic identity is a result of several variables, and the central one is the family, its ancestral origins, its cultural behavior. If ethnic identity is a given dimension, generated by birth and family, national identity is an historical and ideological construct, or an *artifact* (Bara "Criza") and the object of the affiliation.

2. The Four Layers of Ethnic Identity

This approach to the question of ethnic and cultural identity is relatively new and still in need of theoretical research. Most of the contributions in this field take for granted the ethnic identity as a given block of markers and discuss further aspects, such as kinship, community memory, traditions, minority issues, cultural markers, et cetera.

In his lecture given at Cambridge University, Appiah ("The State" 241 sq.) distinguishes, under the title "Individuality and Identity", between "three core elements" of the existence of social identities that are raising "questions for ethics and politics":

- "the **typical label** for a group", a consensus usually organized around a set of stereotypes, regarding what the typical members of a group "are like, how they behave, how they may be detected";
- "the **internalization** of those labels", as parts of individual identity;
- "the **treatment**" of an individual as part of the group, that leads to discrimination.

In a prospective text, Caragiu Marioțeanu ("Aromânii" 2001) tried to explain the difference between identity, identification, and legitimation, as follows: "Este limpede însă că identitatea, conștiința de sine, și identificarea, recunoașterea de către alții a identității nu sunt, totuși, suficiente: este nevoie de o legitimare a acestora. [It is obvious, however, that identity, self-awareness, and

identification, the recognition of one's identity by others, are not sufficient: they are in need of legitimization.] (translation mine)".

From this text, we can understand that legitimization is the institutional step, the state authority voice and power position regarding a given ethnic group (and his language). In her previous text (Caragiu Marioțeanu "Identitate" 1998), the author detailed the opposition *identity / identification*.

From the corpus of data and my previous research on the ethnic identity, I may advance the hypothesis that there are at least four embodiments or four layers of ethnic identity. As they are intricate and many times entangled, it is really difficult to choose the order of their presentation. It could start from the individual perspective or from the institutional perspective. It could start from the empirical experience or from the scientific or political one. The fact is that ethnic identity is a complex and multi-faceted psychosocial phenomenon.

The "actors" of this phenomenon are, from the concrete to the abstract: the individual, the ethnic group, the society (the nation), and the science as a repertoire of codified knowledge. The relationships between the four actors are complex as well.

The individual is raised and socialized in a family, in a small group of relatives and gradually in his/her life he/she is exposed to larger groups and communities. The family, considering the most traditional pattern of parents and grandparents, expresses ethnic features (beginning with the language of everyday communication, the process of language acquisition by the child) in a tacit way and transmits (implicitly) cultural markers, ways of acting, behaviors, attitudes, through assertions and evaluations. The family explains to the child and establishes for his benefit the border between "us" and "the others", between the internal world of the house and the outside.

At this level, the ethnic identification is acquired by the child in a comprehensive and implicit manner, not through a discourse about social, cultural or ethnic divisions and borders.

Nevertheless, at the same time, the behavior of individuals and groups is the vehicle of observable and quantifiable markers. Their world is subject to comparison, analysis, classification and codification from a point of view, be it empirical or scientific. Their world, their everyday life is therefore the object of reflection.

Combining those two perspectives, the levels of the existence *in se* and the level of observation and reflection, I prefer to list the four embodiments of the ethnic identity as follows:

- (a) the codified **assertion** of the existence of an ethnic group among other ethnic groups;
- (b) the **perception** (direct and indirect; empirical and official, scientific, political et cetera) of others about a specific ethnic group and about an individual as member of that group;
- (c) the **self-identity**, through socialization (i.e. beliefs, awareness about himself) as being a member of a specific ethnic group
- (d) the **statement** of an individual about himself as a member of an ethnic and/or national group, his **declared affiliation** to a group.

In other words, there is (a) a specific **X** ethnic identity **given** by various factors and markers and **asserted** by insiders and outsiders as well. We can refer to this X as to an objective entity, described and defined, that is real and existing, confirmed by empirical experience and known and recognizable in a spread area. This identity is known by those who are sharing it in an innate manner, and also by those who are not sharing it, but have in different ways the possibility to assist to it, to see it or to learn, hear, be informed about it.

This **X** identity existed prior to its codification and could be (b) experienced, perceived first by people living or traveling in some geographical areas, and, then, by researchers interested to analyze and describe it. All these people contribute to **elaborate the knowledge about X**. They are outsiders (even if some researchers might be insiders). This knowledge is a descriptive one, most of the time a list of markers, a repertoire of facts about X as a group, with statistical information about the number

of individuals pertaining to X. This knowledge is deposited in bibliographies and sometimes it is the unique tool for further studies.

But the **X** identity is a living reality (**c**) and individuals belonging to this group are aware of their differences, as they, too, are constantly experiencing different encounters with other groups and individuals. From the differences they notice, they are, too, building knowledge about themselves and about the others.

For different reasons, in specific social, historical conditions, this X identity (**d**) might be asserted or concealed. This action is known also as identification, or affiliation. The real clash between ethnic identities occurs where local/ethnic identity is included in the broad/national identity.

3. A Description of the Four Layers

a. The Codified Assertion or the Relationship between the (Ethnic) Name and the (Ethnic) Identity

The codified assertion is a LABEL (Appiah "The State" 241). The world population is described and known as being divided in ethnic groups, be them in present days nations organized in states, or simply people or nations without a state. It is obvious that this political category - the state - influences the view about ethnic groups. Meanwhile, ethnic groups are attested earlier than the age of states.

Each identity assertion or distinction begins with its name. In the present case, we encounter a double-faced situation and a profusion of names:

(a) Insiders designate themselves with one and the same name, despite the large geographical area they live in, or the elapsed period of time.

Armân/Râmân is the name given by insiders, by Armâns themselves, and it is considered the ethnonym or ethnic name in their language. The word comes from the Latin *romanus*, meaning *citizen of Rome*. Despite the large area where they have lived in the Balkans for over two thousand years, they have always designated themselves as Armân^ũ (sg.) Armânj (pl.), and their language as *armânească*, *armâneashti*.

(b) This ethnic group is known and designated by outsiders in different ways: **Aromunen**, **Arumanian**, **Arvanitovlah**, **Choban**, **Karagun**, **Kutsovlah**, **Macedo-Romanian**, **Megalovlah**, **Tsintsar**, **Vlah**, **Vlasi**.

What is changing from name to name is the perspective or the ideological charge: **Aromunen**, **Arumanian**, **Macedo-Romanian** are created terms, translated from Romanian, to stress the point that this ethnic group is a part, a branch of the larger group or the Northern-Danube Romanians. Those theories can be traced back to mid-19th century.

Arvanitovlah, **Kutsovlah**, **Megalovlah**, **Vlah** are current terms in Greek, which underline the fact that this ethnic group is of a Latin origin, living in current Albania, in medieval Megalovlahia (Epirus, Pindus Mountains, Thessaly), or having a surname not yet explained in a satisfactory way.

Vlasi is the correspondent of the Greek **Vlah** in southern Slavic languages.

Choban, **Karagun**, **Tsintsar** are not focused on the ethnic description, but rather on the traditional occupation (*shepherd*), on the main piece of traditional ware (*black gown/gouna*), or to an unexplained feature (maybe the frequency of "ts" in their language, or maybe a remainder of their Latin origin: *Caesar's sons*).

It is very curious that Weigand's terminology was not used in Romanian studies and, moreover, it is almost hidden, since his book from 1894 is not yet translated into Romanian. In his introduction to this book, Weigand explains the term **Aromunen** in the very title of his monograph as the people (germ. *Volk*) known also as *Makedo-Romanen*, so as *Romans* from Macedonia, and not at all as *Rumänen* from Macedonia, as the other Romanian scholars do. In 1907, Weigand makes the distinction between *rumänen* and *aromunen* from the title. This last work, too, is almost unknown and unregistered in Armân studies in Romania.

A Romanian traveler and writer, Nenițescu, published in 1885 his *De la Românii din Turcia*

europenă: studiu etnic și statistic asupra Armânilor. Although the original title (and the entire text) used the term **Armâni**, his book is always given in bibliographies with the term **Aromâni** (as if Nenițescu was wrong and must be corrected...).

The only study ever using **Armân** as an ethnic name is Fatse in 1984, due to her position, as an outsider of the Romanian scientific environment and the national ideology. Consequently, she was free of old theories and constraints to use the proper name of this Latin speaking people.

In conclusion, it is obvious that no matter what name is used, it is typically the one and the same group that all those terms refer to.

b. The External Perception

Daily experiences of people living in the Balkans have led to the global characteristics attributed to each ethnic group. Prior to ethnological or anthropological studies, rooted in the 19th century, written testimonies about ethnic groups had registered the Vlachs, as Byzantines chronicles and other documents, since the 10th century.

From these early sources, the identity of Vlachs/Armâni is already established as sheep breeders and consequently as an ethnic group living upon a milk and wool industry economy, upon goods transportation by caravans. This image tends to prevail and to become a stereotype, despite the fact that in urban centers Armân traders, golden and silver smiths or tailors were active.

There is a question often expressed in simple (and naïve) terms as: define in two words a given ethnic group. The certainty and the predictability of a short answer are neither proved nor reliable. The reason is that values and identity markers could not be regarded as shared equally by all members of a community or at different moments of history. Identity, even in the external perception, is flexible and changing.

In a relatively recent text, published online, Irina Nicolau escapes the rigors of a scientific text and builds an essay, where for her, asked many times to define in two words this ethnic group, the external perception about Armâni is condensed in two words: "durere și splendoare", "un necuprins paradox". In English: "suffering and splendor", "an extended / incomprehensible paradox". After this poignant statement, she tries to enumerate the repeated classical traits about this group and reformulates the glorifying stereotype, current in the Romanian studies: courage, solidarity, friendship, family.

Nevertheless, referring to the contemporary Armâni, Irina Nicolau identifies them through two features: the names and the language. This is, in fact, the new frame of life, where the traditional outfit and the specific appearance are already replaced by a modern and relatively uniform, globalized fashion.

The anthropologist Vassilis Nitsiakos, a Vlach himself, approaches the subject with more subtlety and identifies, during his scientific journey through Southern Albania, old Vlach people through their appearance and posture. He is aware of these features given his own memory and knowledge about Vlach people.

Other external perceptions given by travelers were registered (see Tega 1998).

c. The (Inner) Self Identity

This facet regards the ethnic element composing the self-identity (at the individual level). Through early socialization in family, the individual will receive diffuse information about himself as member of a specific ethnic group. He/she will participate in family events, will acquire a specific language, will assist at conversations and will be subjected to specific norms of conduct.

Depending on the type of the larger community, he/she will discover the differences or similarities between his/her family and other families. The children will become aware of those cultural markers and of the relating attitudes. It is also possible that the child will not receive the specific information directly, in cases where the family is hoping to assimilate to the broad community (i.e. the immigrants).

As Schwandner-Sievers ("The Albanian") demonstrates, and at the time of her research – the year

2000 –: "Aromanians or Vlachs define themselves as a people, basing ideas of ethnic or cultural cohesion on criteria of language, religion, descent, common history and former socio-professional specialization".

Although this definition includes five criteria, the last one is more or less obsolete, given the dynamics of economic life, but it is still operating if related to family history or the community memory of ethnic identity.

And here it is the main point of the Armân question: if language is the first sign of identity, how could one be Armân without knowing the language? The study of the Armân language and culture are under debate, mostly because of its so-called lack of utility. But there is also another point of view, expressed by the cultural associations: studying a language and a culture is enabling the human being with new tools and new horizons.

The question of language (mother tongue) preservation and shift is connected with self-identity. The complexity of shaping self-identity upon the language acquisition is reflected by a modern diversity of cases, including the mixed marriages, which are more frequent nowadays than in the first half of the 20th century. For this reason, language remains a strong identity marker, but not the only one.

The last 20 years have permitted, due to political events and freedom of expression and circulation in most Balkan countries, the Armân culture a great revival, illustrated mainly in literature. Written sources (books, journals, reports) and my numerous journeys in areas where Armân people live, my conversations with many of them helped me realize that, despite the lack of formal education in Armân mother tongue, the nucleus of Armân language, its basic vocabulary is still homogenous and we can communicate using this language. I became aware, even if today the traditional socio-economic life has been replaced with modern ways of life, of a real Armân cultural and ethnic identity.

We meet at scientific events, at folklore festivals, at poetry contests taking place in the Balkan countries, and we discover that our cultural and ethnic identity is still strong.

d. The Personal Statement about the National Affiliation and the National Identity Policies

Nonetheless, despite this given ethnic identity, we have to distinguish further between two or more trends in Armân self-identification or national affiliation.

In various occasions, conditions and external pressures, an individual, member of a small or powerless ethnic group could express about himself, about his ethnic identity, two types of statements:

- (a) faithful to his self-ethnic identity, builds as a member of a given ethnic group
- (b) wishes to affiliate to a larger or powerful group.

This is the problem of self-identification. As Lazarou notices, most Vlachs have considered themselves Hellenes, at the national level of their identity – and this since at least 1820 – but at the same time they have also known they were Vlachs, at the ethnic level. Fewer have considered themselves Romanians, especially after the opening of Romanian supported schools (Tanașoca). It is still unclear if those, and only those, declaring themselves Romanians, have migrated to Romania after 1925, because the historical and economic conditions were complex. More than half of the migrant families came from Bulgaria (Bara, Cușa, Saramandu, Tușa), and less than half from Northern Greece, the remaining from Serbia and Albania. In the Cadrilater region of Romania, where they had been colonized, the Vlachs/Armâni continued to sing in their traditional way, half their songs being in Greek and half in *armâneashti* (Paul H. Stahl, personal communication). The Vlachs colonized in Cadrilater received the naturalization and the Romanian citizenship only ten years after their arrival.

In earlier centuries, since the 16th century, the Armân merchants traveling and trading in the North of the Danube Principalities had had continuous contacts with Romanian people (known as Wallachians and Moldavians at that time) and their language. In spite of the long periods of time

they had spent here, they never expressed the idea of similarity or identity, language or customs with the Armân people. These merchants simply declared themselves, and were known, as Greeks (they were speaking and writing in Greek).

In other countries, as well, we can find similar examples. It is known that in Vienna and in Buda and Pest, the Greek communities and churches included also Vlachs, among them Michael Bojadschi, the author of the first Armân Grammar (Vienna, 1813). About 1825, when Vlachs/Armâns came in the modern cities of South Bulgaria, as Peshtera, for instance, they were registered in official documents with their Greek ethnic name: Koutsovlachs. They built a church and opened a Greek school. These facts are registered in the archives of the church they built and were reported in September 2003, by the Bulgarian priest of Peshtera, to a group of Armân visitors.

The distinction between the so-called inner identity and the option, the affiliation to another identity, is implicated in Ornea's comments: they are now Romanians *by option*. Nitsiakos is more clear about this distinction, as he is following the development of a supra ordinate entity, the *national* identity, which includes several *ethnic* identities, in the forging of the Greek national state.

In the Balkans, peoples were confronted in the 20th century with a demographic policy that generated movements and shifts along the new borders, designed by the new nation states in order to secure their ethnic homogeneity. For the purpose of this study, it must be said that since 1926, some 30,000 Armâns from Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia have decided to expatriate themselves and migrate to Romania. Scholars begin to claim that in the actual condition of the Armâni, their identity is no longer the same in all countries, that time and local context have irreversibly changed the old cultural and ethnic unity and solidarity. Although it is true, we still notice many features still resist, they are common as identity markers.

Without using the term of *affiliation*, Kahl ("The Ethnicity" 2002) explores the phenomenon of Armân/Vlach *ethnicity* (Ethnizität) after 1990. He finds seven types of identification: pure Armân, Greek, Romanian, other Balkan identity, local one, indifference, double identity. The analysis of every situation (national, political, historical, personal) will be used to account for this variety of assessments.

In fact, a split in the traditional national (Hellene) affiliation has occurred since mid- 19th century, when Romania opened and supported elementary and high schools in the Ottoman provinces of Macedonia and the Epirus area, high schools that were later closed in mid - 20th century. The cleavage between two main national affiliations (Hellene and Romanian) has strongly affected the unity of the communities and the identification of the Armân people: only a thin segment was gained for the pro-Romanian identity, and the rest felt Hellene and sent their children to Greek language schools (see also Hâciu "Aromânii" 600-601). This cleavage has operated and is still noticeable in Albania, even in the opposite choices asserted by members of the same family: one child to the Greek school, another to the Romanian school (see Schwandner-Sievers "The Albanian" - 2000).

Quoted by Gica ("The Recent History" 2011): "Aromanians who wanted to progress in professional careers would deny their Aromanian minority identity and identify as Macedonians so that their careers would not suffer", this could be read as a general assertion about the condition of Armâns in different national states.

4. Is the Geolinguistic Approach Able to Define Ethnic Identity?

Vlach individuals are affiliated as persons with one of the national identities given by the state they live in. About the Hellene (not simply Greek) national identity and self-identification, see Nitsiakos (*On the Border* 144-145). The anthropological approach is far more complex and takes into consideration various variables of the ethnic identity.

There is, for the observer on the field, a frame in which this identity manifests itself and can be perceived. Language is one of the elements, but as individuals are differently socialized and educated, the linguistic dimension is differently relevant for different generations. As Nitsiakos testimonies for a three generation family in Albania, the oldest person, the grandmother Quiratsë, is a Vlach with all the recognizable identity features (appearance, face, black clothes and scarf), the

middle-aged person, her son Gjergj is "aware of his Vlach origin" [both parents], but "accepted" however "his assimilation into the Albanian society". "He is a typical Albanian", as his appearance, ways of behavior, expression, and consciousness show (Nitsiakos 142). Born and educated after the fall of the communist regime, Gjergj's son expresses a powerful affiliation with the Hellene national identity and wishes to study in Greek.

Such examples could be extracted from a variety of publications and informal conversations between members of the Vlach communities, and they were already present in the 19th century, as Weigand (*Die Aromunen* 1894) registered in Monastir (today called Bitolia): the lady of the house where the author was invited spoke an elegant Greek language, one of his sons German (he was studying in Germany), the other in English (he was studying in Constantinople), but her daughters spoke in Vlach, and the servants in Bulgarian. In other circumstances, Weigand recognizes the Vlach people by their appearance, their behavior, the shape and the brightness of their eyes. Weigand underlines that neither the language, nor the dress, are always identity markers.

The fact that the fourth layer of the identity is the result of the option, of the affiliation with a national identity, is illustrated also by Trifon (*Les Aroumains* 2005): the sons of a Vlach mother may choose different affiliations.

From my own experience (as a member of the Vlach community) and from the related bibliography, I identified (Bara "On the Armân" 2004) some markers that are stronger than the language, nowadays in a process of abandonment.

In my view, Armân/Vlach cultural identity is based upon a series of distinctive elements, material (culinary products, wool artefacts, family photos) and immaterial (songs, dances, Christian names and kin names, kinship and family memories, matrimonial rules, wedding ceremony, other feast-related traditions).

From the list I have previously given (Bara "On the Armân" 2004), I will retain here a few specialties. *Tărhănă* [home-made pasta in the form of small round crumbs, boiled in milk], still manufactured by old Vlach women, but also prepared by specialized undertakings in Greece. *Peturi* [thin, home-made flat noodles boiled in milk]. *Plătsintă* [wedding ritual sweet pastry from wheat and corn flour, sugar and boiled oil]. *Păstrămă* [sheep or goat pastrami]. *Căvărma* [boiled sheep meat conserved in solid fat]. *Piperki cu cashu* [fried peppers with cheese]. *Pita* [salted pastry filled with cheese or leek]. Cooking traditional specialties is still an important part of family and community tradition.

Onomastics is also a relevant element for the Armân identity: *male Christian names* (Cola, Coli, Costa, Dima, Dina, Yioryi, Hrista, Iani/Yeani, Iota, Lifteri, Miha, Mina, Mita, Nicea, Santa, Steryiu, Stila, Tegha, Zica, Zisa) and *female Christian names* (Aghora, Athina, Ciona, Dhafa, Despa, Evanthia, Hrisa, Hrisula, Iana/Yeana, Ianula/Yeanula, Kiratsa, Lena, Limbeada, Mara, Marusha, Mica, Musha, Pepa, Roidha, Shana, Sirma, Sultana, Stiryeana, Tana, Vanghea, Vanghilitsa, Zoi, Zora, Zuitsa).

Family names are also characteristic (see also Nitsiakos 398). There are specific prefixes for names: *cara-* (Caraiani, Caramaci, Caragiu, Carafoli), *hagi-* (Hagi, Hagi-Duli, Hagivreta), *papa-* (Papacostea, Papahagi, Papanace, Papasteryiu). Frequently family names are ending in *-a*: Bara, Barba, Bashtavela, Beca, Beza, Bletsa, Caracota, Chihaia, Cucona, Cunia, Cuturela, Cuvata, Dima, Gica, Gioga, Goga, Guda, Mataranga, Pala, Paligora, Pasha, Piceava, Poala, Popnicola, Samara, Sima, Vrana, Zeana, Tega, Topa, Tsadila, Zapara, Zuca; names ending in *-i*: Balamaci, Becali, Dauti, Farmachi, Fuchi, Ghizari, Gioni, Godi, Koukoudi, Mandili, Padioti, Papari, Papazisi, Papuli, Perifani, Piti, Prefti, Samargi, Shoki, Stambuli, Vangheli, Vlahbei; and names ending in *-u*: Babu, Ciamitru, Docu, Iorgoveanu, Lazarou, Mantsu, Murnu, Pushuticu, Saramandu, Stavrositu, Tugearu, Veru.

As an effect of the assimilation policy, mainly in Bulgaria since the beginning of the 20th century, Armân first names have compulsory been turned into Bulgarian forms, such as: Shteryiu became Shterev, Damu became Damov, Kiurci became Kiurciev. During the Bulgarian occupation of the today's Republic of Macedonia, during the Second World War, the Armân last names were also turned into Bulgarian forms, such as: Costa became Kostov, Dima became Dimcev, Naum became Naumov, Mihali became Mihailov, Shteryiu became Shteriov. The second effect of this policy and of

the complexity of modern life including exogamy, the Armân Christian names were abandoned in favor of the Slavic ones, such as: Branislav, Desislava, Goran, Gordana, Krasimira, Pero, Stoiance.

In Romania, for the official identity documents delivered at the moment of their immigration (from 1926 until 1937), they were in many cases registered with Romanian *family names*, such as: Apostol, Costea, Gheorghe, Dumitru, Enache, Ionescu, Mihai, Nicolae, Tănase. For the *Christian names*, the first step in the 1930's was to switch from old Armân to modern Romanian ones: Aghora became Tudora, Stiryeana became Ștefania, Santa became Alexandru, Pepa became Petra, Iani became Ion, Ioan. The second step, in the 1970s, was to modernize the traditionally-given names conserving only the first letter: from grandfather Dima, Vasili to grandson Daniel, Valentin; from grandmother Aghora, Dhafa, Kiratsa, Sirma, Vanghea to grand-daughter Aurelia, Daniela, Ketty, Silvia, Valentina. In the stream of modernization, new names are also given, without any traditional motivation, such as: Cristina, Florentina, Mariana, Mihaela.

I must mention at this point a new trend in the 1990s, that of giving old Armân names, such as: Iani, Kira, Mara, Nicolas (Cola). Giving to their children those names, the young parents expressed their will to bond with their cultural identity, to praise their roots and to reflect their Vlach identity. It is also a way to create a familiar and recognizable reference for their families and for themselves.

However, despite the name occultation under Slavic or Romanian forms, the members of the Armân communities have the ability, reinforced and transmitted by group, to recognize and discover the Armân name behind the official one. You will hear often: *that is the official name, but this other is the Armân name*.

Conclusion

The play between the national, official identity and the inner, ethnic one, known by the members of the communities due to group memory, underlines the complexity of the identity question. This aspect is better understood by researchers who are insiders, able to establish a better communication and empathy with the members of the studied ethnic group.

Collective memory is a strong link between generations and between kinship members and it is cultivated in different ways: old stories told in formal (festive days, marriages, funerals or remembrance ceremonies, when the whole family is gathered) or informal contexts (any time home or where guests are invited), memory books (historical, autobiographical), genealogical explanations for the benefit of the younger people.

Coming from specific places in the Balkans, Armâns have migrated to Romania and still have there their relatives whom they can meet today in festivals or particular visits. They were colonized in the same localities in South Dobrogea. They were moved together in Northern Dobrogea in September 1940 when the frontier between Bulgaria and Romania was redrawn. They were settled in the same area. They have passed through the same experiences under the communist rule, some of them being once again forced to move as politic detainees, with all the family, in specific areas with obligatory domicile for almost five years.

Consequently, I consider that those markers and the complexity of the identity issue escape the too narrow linguistically approach and that cultural and ethnic identity, in its flexibility and continuous negotiation, is rather the theme of anthropology.

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