

MARTOR



Title: "Local Institutions and Multicultural Identities. Aromanians in Mihail Kogălniceanu Commune, Constanța"

Author: Stelu Șerban

How to cite this article: Șerban, Stelu. 2009. "Local Institutions and Multicultural Identities. Aromanians in Mihail Kogălniceanu Commune, Constanța". *Martor* 14: 49-63.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-14-2009/>

Martor (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review) is a peer-reviewed academic journal established in 1996, with a focus on cultural and visual anthropology, ethnology, museum studies and the dialogue among these disciplines. *Martor* review is published by the Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Its aim is to provide, as widely as possible, a rich content at the highest academic and editorial standards for scientific, educational and (in)formational goals. Any use aside from these purposes and without mentioning the source of the article(s) is prohibited and will be considered an infringement of copyright.

Martor (Revue d'Anthropologie du Musée du Paysan Roumain) est un journal académique en système *peer-review* fondé en 1996, qui se concentre sur l'anthropologie visuelle et culturelle, l'ethnologie, la muséologie et sur le dialogue entre ces disciplines. La revue *Martor* est publiée par le Musée du Paysan Roumain. Son aspiration est de généraliser l'accès vers un riche contenu au plus haut niveau du point de vue académique et éditorial pour des objectifs scientifiques, éducatifs et informationnels. Toute utilisation au-delà de ces buts et sans mentionner la source des articles est interdite et sera considérée une violation des droits de l'auteur.

Local Institutions and Multicultural Identities Aromanians in Mihail Kogălniceanu Commune, Constanța

Stelu Șerban

Institute for South-East European Studies, Bucharest

The aim of this article is to approach the change process related to some characteristic aspects of Aromanian identity in Mihail Kogălniceanu, a fairly large commune lying 30 km from Constanța Municipality. Shortly after 1878, the commune was mainly inhabited by the descendants of the colonised Transylvanian shepherds of Orthodox religion. Orthodox Aromanians, Muslim Tartars as well as small groups of Roma and Germans live together with the majority group. There is also a Roman-Catholic community here made up of Germans and Romanians.

The context of the present research is set by the local political and civic institutions. I will show how the group of Aromanians in Mihail Kogălniceanu redefines its identity by means of such institutions¹. The traditional values codified for many generations in the geographical area where Aromanians originated are being eroded, making room for attitudes and values which are not generated by the pressure of national society but by the Aromanians' self-perception within it.

It is important to bear in mind that, unlike other groups with a weaker sense of collective identity that have recently settled in different localities of Dobruđa², Aromanians arrived in Romania with a strong attachment and conscience of the group to which they belong. Their identity was different and is still different from local identities

and from most Romanians' identity. The awareness of these differences is the engine of the change process of the collective identity of the Aromanians from Romania.

The study of Aromanian populations and culture has grown and developed, ranging from historiographic approaches or simple travel journals to linguistic analyses and, more recently, anthropological field research. Therefore, when referring to Aromanians, we ought to distinguish the way in which different authors have gathered, analysed and interpreted data about them and also the premises which underlie some general conclusions. As a matter of fact, there is a substantial bibliography about Aromanians which includes many fields, as shown by a brief overview (Kahl 2006: 227-318). Thus, I agree with pertinent opinions according to which the current research of Aromanian culture and populations and, particularly, of their ethnic identity can only be done by conflating field and anthropological research and the study of the national histories on whose territories Aromanians lived or still live (Trifon 2005: 22).

Another basic premise of the article is that of differentiating the Aromanian communities, function of the social and cultural milieus in which the last generations of Aromanians lived. Starting from social and economic adaptability, a seemingly general feature of Aromanians (Fatse 1984, Trifon

2005: 25), the last Aromanian communities formed either by immigration (USA, Western Europe, Romania) or by natural migration from the rural to the urban environment in the original society, acquire even more striking features meant to differentiate them. For instance, we can compare the conclusions drawn by anthropological researchers about the Aromanians in the USA (Fatsé 1984)³ to those about the Aromanians in Albania (Schwander-Sievers 1998). The blatant differences stem from the way in which the Aromanians' traditional identity founded on a common language and on their belonging to a more or less specified Balkan space has changed when in touch with the institutions and values of the societies inhabited by the last generations of Aromanians. In this article I am referring straightforwardly to this differentiation, though it be based on one single case whose representativeness can be a subject for debate.

The third premise I start from is theoretical by excellence. The identity of a human group derives from the collective choices made by the members of this group. This is why the immediate cultural and institutional context is of paramount importance. The values and institutions that distinguish the group are either preserved or reshuffled by a clash with the values and institutions of the society in which the group lives. Tradition provides the cultural material needed for forging the identity of the group to the extent to which the members of the group assimilate it, become aware of it and put

it to use whenever they make choices that affect the group's identity. In the case of the Aromanians in Mihail Kogălniceanu the options that underlie the foundation of the family, an aspect of tradition that is most difficult to change, are based on different rules when it comes to the last generations of Aromanians. The sources of these changes range from individual biographies and recent history (deportation, for example) to the economic and social success hailed by Aromanians within Romanian society.

I will also consider the manner in which the Aromanians' local involvement in political and civic institutions and organisations influence their identity-forging model. The two dimensions are important and interconnected. Finally, I will insist on the connection between them.

Some data on Mihail Kogălniceanu locality are necessary. The number of the inhabitants has permanently changed due to both natural migration and especially the successive settlement on its territory of different populations belonging to different ethnic groups (see Table 1).

The Nogay Tartars were the first inhabitants of Caramurat, the original name of the commune. After the Czarist occupation of the Crimean Peninsula (1783), many Tartars took refuge in Dobrudja. This is why most Tartar ethnics have chosen this place of residence since the eighteenth century.

A significant number of ethnic Germans coming from the southern part of Bessarabia have set

Table 1. The ethnic structure

Year	Bulgarians	Csángós	Czechs	Gagauzy	Germans	Greeks	Magyars	Poles	Romanians	Aromanians	Russians	Turks	Tartars	Gypsies/Roma	Ukrainians	Others	Total
1916					875				1265				400				2540
1936	12			11	1199	4			1084				346				2660
1940	16	84		18	1527	6	4	4	1445		4		230				3338
1991	3		1		29	1	6		8868		6	74	311	128	3	8	9438
2002					18				8155	1214		107	337	283			10114

(The National Institute of Statistics and the City Hall of M. Kogălniceanu commune – 2002).

tled here since 1850, but after 1940, following the treaties signed by Romania and Germany, the German ethnics came back to their native country. There were only 10-15 families left in the commune and the households left by those who were dislocated were occupied by Aromanians and Romanians. Only 18 Germans are currently living in Kogălniceanu compared to 1940, when their number reached 1527.

Attracted by the propitious climate of Dobrudja and by its fertile agricultural lands, the number of inhabitants increased in the commune after 1878 due to the settlement of Romanians coming from villages of southern Transylvania (Săcele, Săliște, Valea Tilișca, Galiște, Rășinari, Poenari, Rădeni). The Roma coming from Medgidia between 1951 and 1952 were the last settlers in the commune. Initially, their move to Kogălniceanu brought only 3 families, yet their number has substantially increased at present (43 families in 1992)⁴.

The Aromanian group in Mihail Kogălniceanu is part of the branch of Farsherots. The inhabitants of this locality originate from the region of Veria, Greece. Most of them had already been colonised in southern Dobrudja during the inter-war period. According to field research statistics made over three decades ago, the Farsherots represent only a third of the Aromanians in Dobrudja (Saramandu 1972). The Cipani or Gramostian/Gramustian Aromanians in the villages of Tulcea County formed the great majority. I will not elaborate here on the major differences between the two groups. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the Farsherots, including those in Mihail Kogălniceanu, have also identified themselves with the ethonym 'Aromanian' at the 2002 census. Apart from Farsherots and Cipani, Dobrudja also hosts Pindean and Moscopolean Aromanians as well as Megleno-Romanians only in the village of Cerna, Tulcea County.

In this context we must say that Mihail Kogălniceanu commune is an illustrative case seen from the perspective of multicultural models of accommodating different minority groups. There is a different situation in localities mainly inhabited by

Aromanians, be they Farsherots or Cipani, and the premises of field research must be changed.

Traditional values and institutions.

Family and marriage

A set of factors with a decisive influence on the moulding of the Aromanians' identity is linked with the increase in the number of *mixed marriages*, with the models and rules that intervene in the cohabitation of the families resulted from these marriages (Plecadite 2002). As I said, the Aromanian group preserves traditional rules for establishing kindred and matrimonial relationships. The genealogical surveys conducted as part of the interviews allowed me to determine the change of matrimonial rules over time.

We must say that the genealogical memory of the Aromanians goes back four generations. Nevertheless, elderly subjects (over 70 years of age) preserve the same kinship memory prevailing in the Greek villages of their origin. As a rule, the social control related to the making of a family was said to be very strict at the time (Idem: 51). The would-be spouses were 'promised' to each other by their parents from a very tender age (around 15 years of age). The major purpose of contractual marriage was to acquire as many goods as possible. The 'acățătura', the general name for wealth, consisted of herds of animals (sheep, cattle, horses), real property (household land or/and mountain pastures), household goods (particularly those offered by the wife). Nevertheless, the 'engagement'/logodna period during which the future spouses got used to each other was prior to their official marriage. The 'engagement' rule has been preserved and expanded to the new generations.

Education capital was more and more taken into consideration. Many wealthy families (with 'acățătura') preferred contractual marriages with families whose members were educated and unfolded intellectual activities. I.S., one of the interviewed subjects, remembers that each of his grandparents had descended from these two categories. He remembers that one of them had told him about the frequent family discussions on such dif-

ferences. They were also preserved during the interwar period among the colonists in Cadrilater (the South Dobrudja, now belonging to Bulgaria). In fact, the tradition initiated by the late 18th-century projects of forging an Aromanian identity (Moscopolis and Gramostea) underlined the importance of intellectual capital. It has been preserved up to the present generations. The Aromanian youth and their families invest in education (higher education) more than the other population groups in the commune. Initially they left the commune in order to complete their studies, which caused many mixed and/or exogamic marriages specific to the last generation of Aromanians.

Socially controlled marriages contracted either on the basis of wealth or of the kinship tradition within the same lineage (there is still a ban on the marriage between cousins once, twice and thrice removed; beyond this limit many marriages were contracted between relatives) were also preserved during their migration in Cadrilater and subsequently in northern Dobrudja until the 1970s. Social control took on a new form, then weakened and finally disappeared. In the 1940s, shortly after the Aromanians' settlement in the commune, this form of control could already be avoided. For instance, W.W.'s parents were among the first to make a mixed family made up of a German father and an Aromanian mother. His mother's family strongly opposed this marriage, breaking off his relationship with the girl. They did not give up, the future wife was 'stolen' and they made a separate family. Current opinions like the so-called 'gura satului' (village gossip) adds to the Aromanian family's reaction. 'Curses', oral texts which condemn that event, are still preserved today.

The family lineage of C. is also an interesting case (see his genealogy at the end of the article). Its members are a more striking illustration of the way in which individual biography and existential circumstances change the structure of the expanded family and the orientation of kinship alliances. Either parent of N.C., currently 75 years of age, married to a 'Moldavian woman from Galați', was married twice. His mother was initially married in

Greece to a French citizen. After they got married they had a son who was looked after by his mother and took her name after they had separated. Their separation was caused by the spouses' disagreement on their migration to Cadrilater. N.C.'s mother reached the region together with her child and relatives. Her husband remained in Greece. N.C.'s father, also settled in Cadrilater, had been married before. His wife had died. After they got married she gave birth to two sons. N.C.'s mother and father got married in Cadrilater. N.C. is the only child born into this marriage. Thus, the stepbrothers on both mother's and father's side came to live under the same roof in N. C.'s family. This has not affected their solidary relationship, at least in N.C.'s view. The notable difference is that the mixed marriages with Romanian men and women among the members of this family are more frequent and emerged in an earlier generation compared to the other Aromanian families.

Mixed marriages are currently high in number. The Romanian majority is the cultural group preferred by Aromanians for mixed marriages. It is noticeable that there are hardly any marriages between the Farsherots from Mihail Kogălniceanu and Cipani, the majority group of Aromanians from Dobrudja. This suggests that the identity of Aromanians as a generic group is weak and affective by nature. As in the case of other Aromanians in Dobrudja, namely the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna (Belkis 2002), it does not imply institutions, be they traditional, like marriage.

The interviews I have conducted show that the future spouses are now responsible for contracting mixed marriages. Families intervene, but the key factors that once used to make these interventions efficient are now missing. The idea of wealth has changed, though the orientation towards practical, lucrative environments still prevails. Besides, a relatively explicit set of rules regarding cohabitation within these families has been elaborated over the past decades. They are based on mutual respect for the culture and specific customs of each family and on durable relations, despite occasional disputes. Responsibility is once more transferred to

the nuclear family. Families do not intervene when disputes emerge. However, this very reason is conducive to a relative advantage to Aromanians because, having more cohesive family ties ('soia' in Aromanian) they influence the family environment of the mixed couples to a greater extent. Thus, the spouse of Romanian origin will learn the Aromanian language spoken in the commune (actually not very different from Romanian) in order to get closer, or to talk, for instance, to his Aromanian relatives (the example of the interviewed families of E. and W. W or G. and M. G.). In order for children to learn Aromanian, its use by the mixed family is also accepted.

The changes in matrimonial rules have also affected the choice of the godparents, an important sequence in the course of making a new family. As in the case of the Romanian peasant communities, in the past (Stahl 1998: 125-138), and to a certain extent in the present, Greece (Şerban 2007), in Greece the Aromanians preserved the rule according to which the godparents' family should multiply over generations. Thus, the godparents' children (on the paternal line) acted as godparents to the godsons' children (on the paternal line too). The husband's family decided on the choice of wedding godparents. They were also called to the baptism of the children in the new family. The rule weakened once with their settlement in (southern, then northern) Dobrudja. The departure of a part of Aromanians from Greece put an end to these relations. The godparents'/godsons' family, or only a part of it, remained in Greece. The unpropitious social conditions specific to populations dislocated many times strengthened this aspect. The lack of money caused the absence of income surplus and prestige which usually underlie the choice of the godparents.

A good example is the manner in which the Aromanian group's itinerary in southern Dobrudja, Cadrilater, has changed the matrimonial and godparenthood alliance strategies. Thus, if village marriages were strictly endogamic before Aromanians left Greece, their settlement in Cadrilater allowed Aromanians in different villages to get into

contact with each other. Marriages were thus officiated within the regional group of Farsherots. The affiliation of the future spouses to different villages did not matter any more. The family's social control weakened in the same manner since not all members of a specific generation migrated to Bulgaria or, if they did, in some cases it happened at different times.

A visible effect of this situation was the break in continuity in so far as the choice of the wedding godparents is concerned. In many cases the wedding godparents of the parents of a future spouse either remained in Greece or settled down in different areas of Cadrilater. The rule according to which they or their sons must be godparents was no longer applied. More often than not, the new godparents were chosen from among the future spouse's relatives.

Similar situations occurred after the Aromanians' settlement in Mihail Kogălniceanu. This time the cause was the forced domicile that the communist authorities imposed on many of the Aromanian families in the commune. Their adherence to different political parties during the interwar period, particularly to the Legionary Movement, determined the incoming communist regime to choose localities from Bărăgan or Banat as forced domicile imposed on the Aromanians in Mihail Kogălniceanu. The quite long period of time during which this action was taken as well as the brutal displacement of the families and their frequent intentional separation resulted in the emergence of matrimonial alliances according to ad-hoc criteria. Interpersonal contacts and relations exerted a decisive influence on this matter. This new type of kinship was also preserved after Aromanians came back to Dobrudja, all the more so as not all Aromanians from Mihail Kogălniceanu came back here. A part of them settled down in neighbouring localities like Ovidiu, Palazu Mic or Mihai Viteazul⁵.

The rule of perpetuating godparenthood within the same lineage is still deep-seated in the Aromanians' conscience. However, it is no longer respected statistically but it is taken into account

function of various circumstances. For instance, one has to ask the permission of the ‘natural’ godparents in order to choose another godparent. Permission is granted most of the times and thus the nuclear family becomes more and more responsible for the choice of the godparents. Besides, the rule according to which the husband must choose the wedding godparents – observed in the case of mixed marriages too – is also preserved.

Biographies, institutions and political activism

Before I refer to the Aromanians’ activity carried out at the level of local politics, I would like to make some remarks at first sight about the ambiguous way in which the officials of the local institutions perceived the research team’s stay and activity in the commune⁶.

I began by trying to draw up statistics of mixed marriages officiated over the past six decades. In order to frame this period I considered the year 1940, when the last sudden structural change of the local population was caused by the Germans’ dislocation from the village and the colonisation of Aromanian Farsherots in their stead. Unfortunately, I failed to achieve this goal. The local authorities, who are in the possession of marriage certificate archives, and the clergy who hold married couple matrixes refused to cooperate on this project. They invoked different regulatory provisions, though the official letters sent by the institute clearly showed that the nature of our project was strictly academic.

Instead, the ‘Muşata Armână’ Cultural Foundation, whose leaders got involved in collecting the data, were extremely kind and supportive. Under these circumstances I had to adapt the research methodology. I opted for interviews on kinship divided into three categories: patrilinear, which is the basis of the traditional social structure of the great majority of people in the commune, matrimonial, marriages inside and outside the cultural group, inside and outside the commune, and wedding godparenthood.

The reasons for which I chose the Aromanian group in Kogălniceanu as a subject for a multicultural-oriented field-research are linked with the multiple relations of this group with the local institutions. The institutional support offered by the above-mentioned foundation was of utmost importance. This foundation puts together disparate initiatives taken within the community in order to elaborate a cohabitation formula for the cultural groups that live in the commune.

Secondly, the collective identity of the Aromanians from Romania, which is now multiplying its local and national dimensions, was another important factor. There are divergent alternative models based either on cultural or political data, which are initiated at local and national level or by representatives of the Aromanian Diaspora. Thus, we must consider the attempts to include the etonym ‘Aromanian’ in the nomenclature of Romanian national minorities. The initiative has a political tinge. If this happens, the organisations that represent the Aromanian group will have the right, just like the other national minorities from Romania, to appoint a deputy in Parliament and to fund their activities with money from the public budget. We must not ignore the success hailed by regional civic associations like ‘Fara Armânească’, which are highly appreciated by Aromanians for supporting these initiatives or the involvement of some intellectuals from or outside Romania⁷. The Aromanians from Mihail Kogălniceanu also participated in the actions organised in Constanţa by Fara Armânească.

The alternative to activism and political mobilisation is given by projects supported by local institutions and associations. The Muşata Armână Foundation is a telling example and also a role-model. They do not deny the specificity of the Aromanians’ identity, either. For example, the Aromanian dialect is taught in the school of Mihail Kogălniceanu commune on the initiative of this foundation. There are handbooks in Aromanian and people eager to teach various subjects in Aromanian. Other initiatives of the foundation to be considered below can be included in this category.

The traditional criteria that still underlie the structure of the social basis of the Aromanian group in Mihail Kogălniceanu are the third reason for our option. Kinship according to *soia*/family lineage is preserved even if the members of the family live in different countries and very far from home. A good example is the family lineage of Butcaru with relatives in the USA or Gârțu, whose families are scattered in villages from Constanța and Tulcea, but also in Canada, USA and Italy. The accounts of kinship branches are in most cases accompanied by detailed biographical data and by descriptions of some events that are part of a certain genealogical history. The Cușa family lineage is a telling example.⁸ A part of its members invigilated by the communist regime were forced to go into exile in France and the USA. Others, who remained in the country, were deported or imprisoned in Aiud. The post-1990 re-establishment of relationships with those who left as well as the remembrance of those who died turns their genealogical history into a real chronicle of local history. Thus, we must point out that genealogies and, in a broad sense, kinship relations are of utmost importance for the process of forging group identities.

The analysis of life histories and genealogies proves the existence or non-existence of a strong (or weak) memory of the community as well as the existence of different degrees of social memory. In the literature oral memory and history are known to be related particularly to property or to certain events happening within the community, such as 'family foundation' or another important fact. We must say that the biographical analysis is important only if seen from the perspective of the analysis of the community in which the individual lives and according to the way in which his biographical trajectory influenced the community.

Apart from the effects that forced domicile and the banishment imposed by the communist authorities in the 1950s had on the preservation of kinship, marriage and godparenthood relations between Aromanians, other events such as the accounts of their itinerary in Cadrilater are also il-

lustrative in this respect. The dislocation from their birthplaces in Greece meant to Aromanians a break-up with their old lifestyle. The traditional social organisation and its relevant institutions like *fălcarea* or *celnicatul* derived from the Aromanians' basic occupation, namely short-distance grazing. Still, neither Cadrilater nor northern Dobruja provided propitious conditions for continuing this activity. Aromanians had to deal mainly with agriculture, which caused a sudden change in both their economy and social organisation (Plecadite 2002: 38)⁹.

The nostalgia for their birthplace, doubled by their dissatisfaction with the way in which they had been welcomed to Romania, led to the idealisation of their place of origin. The oral histories and songs spread by word of mouth by the members of the elderly generation from Mihail Kogălniceanu stands proof of that¹⁰. We can draw a parallel between this imaginary dimension of Aromanian culture and the utopian accounts about Moscopole made by Aromanian intellectuals (Lambrou 2001). Utopian or not, the nostalgia for their birthplace had an important impact on the Aromanian population. For instance, the inhabitants of Mihail Kogălniceanu know that the Aromanians in the neighbouring village, Palazu Mic, chose to settle down there precisely because of the numerous pastures and forests that surround the village hidden at the end of a valley. Thus, traditional grazing could thus be resumed.

The identity of the Aromanian community in Kogălniceanu does not limit itself to the expression and perpetuation of some values we can generically call tradition. The local institutions as a whole shape these values and set the frame for joined-up individual options that create certain identity models. Taking this into account, I noticed that every year the public interest activities circumscribed to the local sphere are every year more radically detached from activities targeting the mobilisation of political options for one party or another. The values and attitudes that allow this to happen in Mihail Kogălniceanu are typical of any traditional community. Traditional solidarity

and notability are more important in dealing with the local administration than the affiliation to doctrines and local organisations. What matters is that, apart from tradition, there is a well-configured sphere of the local public space defined by the existence of certain problems related to the development of the locality and the well-being of its inhabitants.

The lack of appetite for political activity is not just a consequence of the significance of traditional solidarity. After 1990, activism reached a high level due to the inhabitants' involvement in political matters, most of the great Romanian parties setting up active branches here. However, the local organisations of political parties are now going through a crisis. On the one hand, the local leaders of the parties that form the current governing coalition (since 2006) are accused of corruption and collaboration with the repressive bodies of the communist regime. On the other hand, the mayor, who holds the most important and reputed position in local politics, adopts a politically neutral attitude, though he was elected in 2004 by Social-Democrats. Joining the Social-Democrats shortly before the 2004 local elections, he rather lays stress on his independent position. It is the representation of public interests that matters, not the affiliation to a specific ideology or organisation.

Former aviation officer, born in Transylvania yet married to an Aromanian woman from Mihail Kogălniceanu, the image of this mayor seems to come up to the inhabitants' expectations of depoliticisation of public action. The local council is facing a critical political situation. Following the migration of some PSD (Social Democrat Party) local deputies to the parties in the present governing coalition, the great majority of the council's members have changed their belonging after local elections. Thus, we deal with a cohabitation between a Social-Democrat mayor and a majority made up of Liberals and Democrats. Nevertheless, the relative lack of scope in local politics contributes to a balanced approach of the interethnic/multicultural issue and of the neutral perception of relations between cultural groups.

The NGOs with a multicultural profile are the first to strengthen their position against the background of local political crisis. Their projects are even more carefully considered either by public or by private funders. The activity of the Muşata Armână Foundation is a very good example. Unlike the previous years, when its activity was carried out in a private space, the present premises of the foundation host a museum with objects donated by the Aromanians who live in the commune. Yet, the leaders of the foundation aim at achieving much more than that. They intend to gear up a network of local households to deal with agritourism circuits. Thus, in association with the City Hall and other county institutions (including the ecclesiastic ones) the foundation will sign partnerships meant to provide European funds for development. The new actions taken by the local civil society shows that the multicultural objectives do not exclude local community development projects. Conversely, the affirmation of group identity, as is the case of the Aromanian group in Mihail Kogălniceanu, entails initiatives and local leaders able to ensure the development of the local community as a whole.

There is an obvious connection between family or, in a broader sense, kinship, both acting as traditional institutions, and political parties, local administration structures or NGOs. For instance, the Muşata Armână Foundation was set up on the praiseworthy initiative of a family of intellectuals that lives in the commune. Initially circumscribed to a rather private space and interest, its activities have gradually expanded. There are tight kinship relations between the collaborators and the persons who get involved in promoting its activities. Also, the foundation's good relationship with the City Hall after 2004 was due to the kinship between the foundation's leaders and those who held the position of mayor and vice-mayor.

On the one hand, these ties are important because of a rise in the efficient activity of this organisation and of the other organisations and local institutions. Solidarity and sociability implied by kinship are used to achieve the targeted goals. On

the other hand, restricted groups tend to control the agenda of these organisations. In other words, the danger of institutional corruption is imminent. This is yet another facet of our topic which is hardly connected with the current moulding of Aromanian identity. What matters is that values and traditional institutions like those related to kinship are shaped and become part of the pattern of some structures that define modern societies. This influences the creation of certain identity models within Aromanian population groups.

Ambiguity and (self-)identification

Like all identities, Aromanian identity models are more or less generic cultural constructions. Be they created by restricted groups that have been diligently promoted or the result of certain vague creation processes characteristic of traditional communities (Stahl 1983: 250-274), their approach and analysis must take this premise into account. The high degree of ambiguity, uncommon in the south-east European area as well, is the prominent feature of Aromanians' identities. Thus, the authors fond of Aromanians' life and culture identified a large number of ethnonyms among the Aromanian population. For instance, Irina Nicolau found as many as 64 such terms (Trifon 2005: 19). On the other hand, the term 'Aromanian/a'rmanian', which finally imposed itself as an etonym, is, to a great extent, an academic coinage. It was used and proposed by the linguist Gustav Weigand in the second half of the 19th century (Peyfuss 1994: 11, Trifon 2005: 18). Even if Weigand had found and borrowed it from the Albanian Farsherots, there is no telling whether it defined, at least at that time, the whole Aromanian population. As a matter of fact, there are no ethnonyms referring to Aromanians in *Liturghierul (The Missal)* published in the latter half of the 18th century and *The Dictionary* made by Theodor Cavaliotti in 1770, the first texts written in the Aromanian dialect, and the generic terms that refer to the Aromanians' neighbouring populations are also missing. Even if these writings came out during the flourishing period of the town of Mo-

scopole, the core of Aromanian climactic development, it seems that there was absolutely no interest in differentiating and separating Aromanians as a separate group¹¹.

Generally, the Aromanian elite filters and rewrites the historical past of their own community from the perspective of collective identity forged according to the nation model¹². For instance, the scholarly references to the building of the town of Moscopole in the second half of the 18th century, a period of ultimate consolidation and development of Aromanians' collective conscience, are made from the perspective of an animating utopia of national identity (Lambriu 2001).

On the one hand, ambiguous self-identification is also characteristic of the Aromanians from Mihail Kogălniceanu. On the other hand, the system of self-identification as a group is a clue to the latent change of their identity understood as a consolidation of landmarks that should mean more than just self-labelling. We include here generic terms, the series of Aromanian terms related to kinship and the onomastic wordstock. The Aromanians in Mihail Kogălniceanu generically use the terms 'ar'mân' and 'Macedo-Romanian to identify themselves'.¹³

As shown, the terms are differently used function of circumstances and the speakers engaged in the act of communication. 'Macedo-Romanian' is the term used to describe Aromanians by the Romanians or other local cultural groups. It is worth mentioning that this term is somehow imprinted on the Aromanians' mind. Far from having a pejorative connotation, it appeared once with the settlement of Aromanians in Romania. It was Romanians who use the term as a result of the population's identification according to the territory of 'Macedonia' they came from. The term was naturalized and assimilated by Aromanians too against the background of the considerably different destiny of Aromanians from Romania (colonisation in Cadrilater, the dislocation to northern Dobruđja in miserable conditions, the deportation of Aromanians in Banat and Bărăgan for political reasons). Aromanians call Romanians 'mucani', a term which refers only to

the Romanians on the current Romanian territory. The members of the small groups of Romanians colonised in Cadrilater together with Aromanians are identified as 'Romanians'.

The identification of the 'language' spoken by Aromanians in the family causes a certain ambiguity. 'Language', not dialect, is the term used by the members of the community. Its determinatives are 'ar'mâneasca' (Aromanian) and sometimes 'machedoneasca' (Macedo-Romanian). The phrase 'limba de la dada' ('mother tongue' in Romanian) is also used to avoid any connotation.

It is worth mentioning that the fondness of the idea of 'language' as spoken language is only apparently vague. In fact, 'the Aromanian language' plays a decisive role in determining Aromanian identity. 'Language' is the only cultural feature that exerts an influence on the forging of Aromanian identity. This situation is not different from that of the Romanian-speaking population in the Bulgarian Timok or from that of the Rudari in Varna. This is why the use of this term must be accepted, no matter how 'unscientific' it may be. As a matter of fact, the preservation of the 'Aromanian language' is the main purpose of both cultural and ethnocentric organisations like Fara Armânească. For example, the Muşata Armână Foundation managed to introduce the Aromanian language in the curriculum of the school based in Mihail Kogălniceanu commune. In the Aromanian museum of the commune it also organises workshops on learning traditional crafts where people can acquire the art of craftsmanship and also socialise in Aromanian.

The ambiguities of Aromanians' self-identification, at least of those from Romania, are related to the processes of institutionalisation of their identity. If this is done by means of traditional institutions, by their preservation or adaptation, or if political and/or civic organisations pursue this goal, ambiguities are gradually resolved and replaced by identity models.¹⁴ Aromanian as a normative 'language' is living proof of that (Trifon 2005: 30-52). It should consider the rather social fact that the Aromanian spoken in Romania has evolved in its concurrence with the Romanian language (Sara-

mandu 2004: 221), which has lasted for about a century. Besides, in order to support and preserve the Aromanian language, one has to distinguish the political and ethnocentric premises from the strictly pragmatic ones related to the learning of Aromanian in a specific locality. A dodecalogue like the one supported by Matilda Caragiu-Carioţeanu (Caragiu-Carioţeanu: 1996), author of an Aromanian language handbook, is imperative.

Similar remarks can also be made about the ethnonym meant to designate the Aromanian population. The ethnonym 'Aromanian' is likely to impose itself in the long run. What matters is that this imposed term should go beyond self-identification ambiguities and be a result of the institutionalisation of some identity models.

* * *

More or less grounded claims say that the debate on the identity of Aromanians, inhabitants of Romania or elsewhere, is ill-intended and puts the Aromanian population in danger. I do not want to go into this polemical topic. However, it is worth mentioning that Aromanians' identity is different from the one of Romanians, their closest relatives. Moreover, they are aware of these differences and willing to encompass them in the form of viable identity models. Therefore, the debate on Aromanian identity lives up to the Aromanian's expectations. That these models are ethnic, cultural or based on local history and on the cohabitation with other population groups, in other words a multicultural model, is a question of term definition and institutional circumstances. In my opinion, wandering off these premises would distort the dialogue on this issue and would turn it into an ideological competition, which means that the use of terms related to the Aromanian population's expectations are misused and the context in which different associations, organizations or opinion leaders are engaged in this dialogue is ignored. I think that institutional corruption, the transformation of these organisations into informally controlled cliques and the misappropriation of their resources is the real danger which threatens the dialogue on Aromanian identity.

Genealogy of the family lineage of C. from Mihail Kogălniceanu

Gen. I		Gen. II		Gen. III		Gen. IV	
Family	Godparents/Remarks	Family	Godparents/Remarks	Family	Godparents/Remarks	Family	Godparents/Remarks
Ioan and Aspasia from Căndrova	?????	Dtru. and: 1. the first marriage with Minca who died in Greece 2. the second marriage with Ecaterina Roșu (the second marriage with Dtru., the first marriage with a French citizen) lived in the house of Ioan Nicolae	Filiu din MK	2 single dead brothers (Ion and Hristu) born into Ecaterina's first marriage.			
				Tănase Roșu (by his mother's name), born into the first marriage of Ecaterina, got married to Elena, settled in MK	Aromanians from MK	No descendants	
				Gheorghe, got married to Caramiciu Elena, settled in MK, was born into the first marriage of Dtru.	Aromanians from MK	Dan and Gina, she is from Cogealac	Aromanians from Constanța
						Victorița and Vlad. He was a Romanian from Maramureș, settled in Constanța.	Actor Ștefan Bănică Sr., a friend of Vlad
				Tănase was born into the first marriage of Dtru. and got married twice,: 1. to Ștefu Ștefania 2. to Vasilica, a Romanian from Galați, settled in MK	Aromanians from MK	Dtru. Ștefu, single, born into the first marriage of Tănase	
						Elena Ștefu, single, born into the first marriage of Tănase	

						Marioara and Gândac, a Romanian from Galați, born into the second marriage of Tănase, live in their parents' house	Romanian from, first-degree cousin of her mother
				Nic. Ioan was born into their second marriage (due to an error, the City Hall, transcribed the name after the grandfather's name), the same like Ileana, a Romanian from Piatra Neamț. Both live in MK.	Enache Ghe. from MK	Mihaela and Dobre, a Romanian from Ion Corvin, live in Constanța.	Their cousins, Gândac, Romanian, and Marioara, Aromanian/Romanian, daughter to Tănase and Vasilica
		Mihai and Ianula, married in Greece, settled in MK	?????	Hristu and Nastasia, settled in MK	?????	Costică and Belu Veronica, married in Banat, Settled in Ovidiu	?????
		Costică and Haida, married in Greece, settled in MK	?????	Marica got married to Zdru Tănase, he is from Ovidiu, settled in Ovidiu	Pariza from Ovidiu		
				Ioana got married to Libu Ghe., he is from Ovidiu, settled in Ovidiu	Libu Ctin. from Ovidiu		
				Tănase got married to Lenu Florica, settled in MK	Muși Dtru. from MK	Costică and Mihaela Ștefu, she lives with her parents	Muși Dtru.
						Mihaela and Tega, he is from Palazu, settled in Palazu	Aromanians from Palazu
		Brothers who remained in Greece					

Notes:

¹ The field research has been funded by the Romanian Academy Grants Scheme between 2005-2006. In 2005 the field research also included Elena Herda to whom I am indebted for culling a part of the data on the history of Mihail Kogălniceanu locality and for transcribing the interviews conducted here.

² The case of the neighbouring commune, Nicolae Bălcescu, is telling from this perspective. (Șerban, Doron-del 2004).

³ See also the Society Fârșerotul Newsletter on www.farserotul.org.

⁴ In 1991 the locality was the theatre of some conflicts between the Roma and the rest of the population (Zamfir 1993). Many Roma houses were randomly set on fire and their inhabitants driven away. The conflict was not alleviated in 2005, either. It was mediated by the authorities and the officials of Roma civic organisations. The mediation took place within a general assembly of the inhabitants in the commune's house of culture. The meeting was extremely violent, the Roma were accused of robbery and threatened with a repetition of the 1991 episode (personal fieldwork observations).

⁵ The statement can be applied to other groups of Aromanians such as the Gramustians from the town of Călărași (Plecadite 2002)

⁶ Long-term social research made in a multicultural community is regarded with suspicion. I faced the same hostile attitude in Moldavian villages with Roman-Catholic population (Șerban 2004). The intention, at least during the communist period, to manipulate the ethnologist or the anthropologist in the south-east European communities gave birth to subtle practices (Roth 2005).

⁷ Following the pressure put by the Aromanian Diaspora on the Council of Europe, the latter recommended the etonym 'Aromanian' in 1988. On the other hand, *Zborlu a nostru*, the most important ethnocentric magazine of the Aromanian community, was financed by the controversial figure of Ioan C. Drăgan (Carageani 1999: 43 n.14). We must also mention the actions undertaken by Constantin Papanace, former leader of the Legionary Movement, who had required the UNO to recognize the etonym 'Aromanian' ever since the 1950s.

⁸ The descendants of the Cușa family is one of the few who officiated marriages with Cipani.

⁹ Aware of the trauma caused by the change in main occupations and lifestyle following colonisation, Nicolae Iorga proposed Maramureș as the place of Aromanians' settlement. The geographical position, economic structure and social history made it look like the places that Aromanians left in Greece. It is true that apart from these reasons, Iorga also added that the consolidation of the Romanian majority from Maramureș was threatened by the settlement of the Jews in that region.

Finally, this was the only reason taken into account when the Romanian state offered Aromanians the region of Cadrilater. The Romanian authorities' decision is undoubtedly questionable from the point of view of the Aromanian population. It seems that it prevailed at the time over the syntagm 'State interest'.

¹⁰ A good example is 'the old Bardu' who was very virulent in defending this image (a personal statement made by my colleague Viorel Stănilă).

¹¹ There are arguments according to which the authenticity of some of these sources is questionable (paper delivered at the workshops organised by the Institute for South-East European Studies, Mihai Țipău, 2008).

¹² It has been acknowledged that Mihai Boiagi and Gheorghe Roja's grammar books, the first texts in the Aromanian dialect which foreground the problem of Aromanian ethnic identity, were written and published in the Aromanian Diaspora from the Habsburg Empire at the dawn of the 19th century, given the spread of the political model of the nation (Peyfuss 1994: 26-28). Nevertheless, the term 'Aromanian nation' was not introduced in the language spoken by Aromanians. The terms *fara armânească*, *populu armânescu*, *miletea armânească*, *laolu armânescu*, *gînsa armânească*, *ghimta armânească* are very similar in meaning with the former (Kahl 2006: 118).

¹³ Cristina Plecadite elaborated on the topic related to the Gramustians from the town of Călărași (Plecadite 2002).

¹⁴ Gheorghe Carageani has recently suggested more variants. Apart from nation-type identity, he also mentions the possibility of political identity to be a first or second-rank minority (Carageani 1999: 49-85).

References:

- BELKIS Dominique (2002), 'Vers une définition de la „méglénité“' in *Martor*, vol. 6.
- CARAGEANI Gheorghe (1999), *Studii aromâne (Aromanian Studies)*, Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române.
- CARAGIU-CARIOȚEANU Matilda (1962), *Liturghier aromânesc. Un manuscris aromânesc Inedit (Aromanian Missal. An Unprecedented Aromanian Manuscript)*, Bucharest: Editura Academiei.
- (1996), *Un dodecalog al aromânilor sau 12 adevăruri incontestabile, istorice și actuale asupra aromânilor și asupra limbii lor (A Dodecalogue of Aromanians or Twelve Indisputable, Historical and Present-Day Truths of Aromanians and Their Language) in Neagu Djuvara (coord.), Aromânii. Istorie, limbă. Destin (Aromanians. History, Language, Destiny)*, Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, pp.168-183.
- FATSE Beverly (1984), 'Ethnic Solidarity and Identity Maintenance. Armân Ethnicity' in Paul Stahl (ed.), *Etudes and documents balcaniques et méditerranéens*, Paris.
- Kahl Thede (2006), *Istoria aromânilor (The History of Aromanians)*, Bucharest: Tritonic.
- Lambru Steliu (2001), 'Narrating National Utopia. The Case Moschopolis in the Aromanian National Discourse' in *Xenopoliana*, 9, nr. 1-4, pp. 54-81.
- PAPAHAGI Pericle (1909), *Scriitori aromâni în secolul al 18-lea (Cavaliotti, Ucuta, Daniil) (Aromanian Writers in the Eighteenth Century – Cavaliotti, Ucuta, Daniil)*, Bucharest.
- Peyfuss Max Demeter (1994), *Chestiunea aromânească (The Aromanian Question)* Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică.
- PLECADITE Cristina (2002), *Aromânii grămușteni din Călărași. Strategii matrimoniale, Identitate (The Gramustian Aromanians from Călărași. Identity and Matrimonial Strategies) in Paul Stahl (ed.), Etudes Roumaines et Aroumaines*, vol.22, Paris.
- ROTH Klaus (2005), 'Observing Socialist and Post-socialist Everyday Culture: Inside and Outside Perspectives' in Ștefan Dorondel, Stelu Șerban, *Between East and West. Studies in Anthropology and Social History*, Bucharest: Editura Institutului Cultural Român, pp. 107-130.
- SARAMANDU Nicolae (1972), *Cercetări asupra aromânei vorbite în Dobrogea (Studies on the Aromanian Spoken in Dobruja)*, Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR.
- (2004), *Romanitatea orientală (Eastern Romanity)*, Editura Academiei, București.
- SCHWANDER-SIEVERS Stephanie (1998), 'Ethnicity in Transition: The Aromanians' Identity Politics' in *Ethnologia Balkanica*, vol. 2, Sofia, Munich, pp. 167-185.
- STAHL Henri H. (1998, 1958), *Contribuții la studiul satelor devălmașe românești (Contributions to the Study of Romanian Joint Proprietor Villages)*, vol. 1, Bucharest: Cartea Românească.
- (1983), *Eseuri critice. Despre cultura populară românească (Critical Essays. Of Romanian Folk Culture)*, Bucharest: Editura Minerva.
- ȘERBAN Stelu (2004), 'Catolici și ortodocși în Moldova, aspecte ideologice și sociale în sate mixte confesionale' (Catholic and Orthodox People in Moldavia: Social and Ideological Aspects in Mixed-Religion Villages) in *Sociologie Românească (Romanian Sociology)*, 2004, vol. II, nr. 1, pp.117-140, (web site:www.sociologieromaneasca.ro)
- (2007), *Rudenie și structuri alternative într-un sat din nordul Transilvaniei (Kinship and Alternative Structures in a Northern Transylvanian Village) in Buletinul Institutului de Studii Sud Est Europene (Bulletin of the Institution for South-East European Studies)*, vol. XII, 2003-2007, pp. 9-26.
- ȘERBAN Stelu, Ștefan Dorondel (2004), 'L'histoire orale entre document et récit. Continuité et changement dans la société rurale de Roumanie' in Elena Siupiur (coord.), *Peuples, Etats et Nations dans le Sud Est de l'Europe*, Bucharest: Anima, pp. 45-82.
- TRIFON Nicolas (2005), *Les Aroumains: un peuple qui s'en va*, Acratie.
- ZAMFIR Cătălin, Elena Zamfir (coord.) (1993), *Țiganii între ignorare și îngrijorare (The Roma between Ignorance and Anxiety)*, Bucharest: Alternative.

