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Cuvinte cheie: megleno-români, macedo-români, aromâni, Banat, identitate etnică, etnonime

A fi sau a nu fi meglenoromân

Rezumat

Revenind asupra unei anchete de teren realizată la începutul anilor 1990 la meglenoromânii din România, autoarele adaugă la rezultatele acesteia informații obținute în urma unor incursiuni ulterioare în teren, atât în Banat, cât și în regiunea Meglen, încercând să redea jocul complex al etnonimelor pe care le-au întâlnit pe teren și să analizeze performativitatea categoriilor etnice. Astfel, ele evidențiază modul și capacitatea de adaptare a grupurilor de meglenoromâni din aceste regiuni la diferite situații.

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To Be or Not to Be Megleno-Romanian

Summary

Recalling field research from the beginning of the 1990s among the Megleno-Romanians from Romania, the authors add research and data from two subsequent field trips, in the Banat and in the Meglen region. They reflect on the complex game of ethnonyms encountered on the field, and analyze the performance of ethnic categories. Thus, they highlight the capacity and ways of the Megleno-Romanian groups from these regions to adapt to different situations.

To Be or Not to Be Megleno-Romanian

July 1991: Bucharest

We met on the occasion of the first international congress of ethnologists, which the then-new Museum of Romanian Peasant of Bucharest had organized. One of us, student of anthropology at the University of Lyon 2, was in Romania for the first time; the other, musician and ethnomusicologist, was a member of the museum's young scientific team. We were called by Irina Nicolau, who then led the museum's researchers, and who asked us to unite for research on the Megleno-Romanians "so that they do not vanish", as this "would be a loss not only for Romania, but for Europe!"[2]

"Researching whom?", we asked in one voice… and then retired to the Library of the Academy of Bucharest, to spend long hours reading about the Megleno-Romanians in the scientific works of the beginning of the 20th century: the works of Capidan[3], Papahagi[4], Nenițescu[5] and Noe[6], and, naturally, those of Weigand[7] and Peyfuss[8]. It was old works we looked up, as nothing had been published in Romania since the 1930s. Therefore, the old studies were indispensable for those who wanted to prepare themselves on this topic, before they set out on the field to find out what had remained of Megleno-Romanians after 50 years of socialist assimilation policy in Romania.

Here, we have to repeat the litany of explanation of the four linguistic groups which make up the Latin language group of Western Europe[9], and add that those groups which live South of the Danube (Megleno-Romanians and Aromanians) belong to the generic category of "Macedo-Romanians". We add that, traditionally, the former were farmers, and the latter shepherds. These categorisations were the work of philologists and historians of the 19th century, and became part of the scientific discourse. On the Balkan Peninsula, however, the term Vlachs is in use, a term which

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[2] When the Berlin Wall came down, the part of Europe called "Eastern Europe" became a clear focus of ethnologists.

[3] Theodor Capidan, Romanian linguist of Aromanian origin, born in 1879 in Prilep, Macedonia, finished his doctoral thesis in Leipzig under Gustav Weigand, where he also became professor, before leaving to teach - and lead - the Higher School of Commerce (in Romanian language) of Thessaloniki. He then taught Transdanubian dialects at the Universitry of Cluj (Romania) and finally became professor at the University of Bucharest. (see Capidan 1925, 1928, 1935)

[4] Pericle, Nicolae, Tache, Valeriu and Marian Papahagi belonged to an Aromanian family of important scientists, researching culture, language and history of the Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians. Pericle Papahagi, who in 1900 published *Românii din Meglenia (Texte şi glosar)*, was member of the Romanian Academy, studied in Leipzig with Gustav Weigand, and in Bucharest with Ovid Densusianu. He is considered to be one of the greatest Romanian folklore researchers of the beginning of the 20th century. (see Papahagi 1900) Tache Papahagi, also a famous scientist of the University of Bucharest, published the *General and Ethymological Dictionary of Aromanian (Macedo-Romanian)* in 1963, which is still the reference work for the Aromanian dialect and for those who want to study it. (see Papahagi 1963)

[5] Ioan Nenițescu, Romanian poet at the end of the 19th century, took part in the Romanian War of Independence (1877-78). Like many other Romanian intellectuals of the time, he studied in Germany, namely in Berlin and Leipzig, where he defended his doctoral thesis. (see Nenițescu 1895)

[6] Professor Constantin Noe was Megleno-Romanian and very much involved in the resettlement of Megleno-Romanians from their villages of origin (in Meglen) to Romania. (see Noe 1938)

[7] Gustav Weigand, famous German linguist and specialist for Balkan languages. He was particularly interested in the Aromanian language and researched the Megleno-Romanian dialect. During World War I, he undertook research in Macedonia, which was then under German domination. (see Weigand 1892)

[8] Max Demeter Peyfuss, Austrian historian, born in 1944 and possibly of Aromanian origin. His work *Chestiunea aromânească* became a classic. (see Peyfuss 1994)

[9] The Daco-Romanians, the Istro-Romanians, the Aromanians, and the Megleno-Romanians.

originally designated only people who spoke a Roman language, but which has become a synonym for shepherds.

October 1991: First trip to Cerna[10]

A village of about 5,000 people, South of the town of Tulcea, in Dobruja, Cerna was known as "The" Megleno-Romanian village of Romania, the one in which a community of Megleno-Romanians still existed, more than 70 years after their departure from the Meglen region. We do not have here the space to elaborate on our trip and encounter with the locals, but we must say that we had a huge surprise[11] when we learned that most villagers, both those who had taken part in the migration, and their descendants, had never heard the term *Megleno-Romanians*. "We are Macedonians!", they told us almost indignantly.

We then realized they employed the term used by the Romanians to refer to them (*Machedoni*), thus underlining their situation of being immigrants. This term, sometimes used in a negative sense, would hold them in a state of being eternal strangers. This term is also used for the Aromanians of Romania, who went through the same migration. Among themselves, however, in everyday usage, topical, ethnical references dominate (for example to the village of origin), thus distinguishing between Uşineţi (from the village Oşani), *Liumniceani* (from Liumniţa), *Cupineţi* (from Cupa) and *Lundzineti* (from Lundzini).[12] But even if Megleno-Romanians use the term imposed by the host society, and even share it with those with whom they had shared a community of destiny, the Aromanians, it is also important for them to keep up the distinctions between them. The villagers, when asked by an outsider, clearly distinguish between "us", Macedonians, and "them", Vlachs, meaning the Aromanians.[13] The ethnonyms are, therefore, adaptable to the circumstances.

September 1993: Trip to the Banat

When she learned of the sometimes tragic fate of the "Macedonians of Romania", one of us (Dominique) decided to meet those who had fled, at the end of the 1940s, the famine which had devastated the Dobruja and found refuge in the Banat, the frontier region between Romania and then-Yugoslavia, from where the hitherto German inhabitants had been expulsed with the end of World War II (Belkis 1998). Others who came to the Banat were the *Machedoni* which had been deported due to their supposed affiliation with the Iron Guard[14] during World War II. The survivors stated (and that also came as a surprise to us) that they were "*Armâni din Meglenia*" (Aromanians from the region of Meglen), that "everybody who came from that region were *Armâni*", and that one only had to differentiate between the "*Armâni fârşeroţi* and the *Armâni din Meglenia*". The

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[10] An entire scientific team from the Museum of Romanian Peasant took part in this field research and was tasked with researching religion, family, music, food. Mircea Gherboveţ, Sabine Hambarek, Gabriel Hanganu, and our missed friend, Petre Popovăţ, were part of this team.

[11] Which, in retrospective, can be qualified as naivety.

[12] These topological designations, which attach everybody to his village of origin, also designate a person to a given quarter of Cerna. The research showed that, since their arrival in Cerna in 1940, people grouped themselves together after their village of origin, before they occupied the houses left by the Bulgarians. The village's space thus keeps the traces of a topography which is not its own, and thus keeps traces of the immigrants' history.

[13] The Aromanians of Romania, on the other hand, call themselves Aromanians (*Armân*), distinguishing between themselves and the Megleno-Romanians, whom they call *Machedoni* or *Vlaşi*. And while the Megleno-Romanians usually use the village topography, the Aromanians stress their ancestral linage.

[14] The *Iron Guard* is the name given to a far-right movement which existed in Romania from 1927 to the early period of World War II. It was ultra-nationalist, fascist, anti-communist and promoted te Orthodox Christian faith.

forceful manner in which the older villagers insisted on this version, shows to which degree it was important for them not to be specifically designated, which had the effect of weakening any possible solidarity between the ones and the others. In a context where they are a very small minority, say, a few families in a Banat-village, the affirmation of a community of belonging ("We all come from the same region: Macedonia") takes on strong meaning. Even more forceful was the opinion of another elder, who asserted there was no difference between the Romance language groups of Eastern Europe: "One can say we are Megleno-Romanians, but we are all the same, in fact we are Romanians who live in Macedonia."

May 1994: Trip to Meglen

After that, we decided to go to the very core, to the region of Meglen, on the northern frontier of Greece, in the heart of the historical province of Macedonia, where everybody is Macedonian, and where that distinction cannot be mobilized to separate several groups.[15] Surprise added to the emotion of finally being in the place of origin of our interlocutors, when it came out that here, people called themselves "*Vlaşi din Meglen*". *Vlach* here was the equivalent of *Macedonian* in Romania: It corresponded to a term which the majority used in their (the minority's) regard. Consequently, they considered themselves to belong to the Vlach population[16] of the Balkan Peninsula. A distinction between Megleno-Romanians and Aromanians does not exist here, only the toponyms are significant, those which refer to a common dialect, or the lack thereof.[17] It seems important for the Megleno-Romanians here to distinguish themselves from other populations, who share the territory, but not a Romance language. The term *Meglen* is thus reserved for non-Romanian speakers (Roma, Bulgarians, Greeks, Slavic Macedonians); *Rumâni* (Romanians) are those who have left for the exile in Romania in the 1920s. They use this term with a dose of mistrust when they speak of those who "believed the Romanian propaganda", which then promoted the idea that all people who spoke a Romanian language were one nation, and were destined to be relocated to the one and only country, Romania.

Instead of conclusion

So, at the end of the day, what are we talking about? What can we talk about, if no single ethnonym can pay justice to the complexity and plurality of the situation in reality? Our research plunged us into an ocean of scientific insecurity and fluidity, whereas we set out with the belief that we were dealing with a community well described and identified. Irina Nicolau had asked us to do ethnological research of utmost urgency ("before they disappear"). But what we could state, at the end of this inaugural research of two then-young researchers, was a boomerang-effect of our research in Cerna: The more *Meglenity* as category of identity, and object of our research, eluded us, the more it seemed to install itself in the village and take roots among the villagers. But it is up to scientists which will have followed us on the field, to see what this will have developed into in reality.

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[15] And while Dominique Belkis prolonged her Balkan research, Corina Iosif continued to prowl the streets of Cerna, to finish collecting music, and dances, of the Megleno-Romanians for a monograph. (see Iosif 2014)

[16] Capidan stressed already in 1925 that these populations called themselves Vlachs. (Capidan 1925)

[17] People know, for example, that they share the same language with the inhabitants of Archangelos (Oşani), but not with those of Livadia.

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