

ROMANIANS AND COSMOPOLITANISM

Diana MĂRGĂRIT *
Emilian MĂRGĂRIT **

Abstract

The Aromanian problem consists in identifying what Balkans lost when nation-states rose. This article is divided in two main parts: the one regarding the elements which describe Aromanians through the historical doxa and shape their identity; the other one concerning the solutions brought by the cosmopolitan theses and discourses in order to assure their recognition and preservation. Thus, our goal is not to stigmatize the nation-state paradigm, but to highlight its limits in respect to itself and to cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: Aromanians, cosmopolitanism, identity, minority, recognition.

Résumé

Le dilemme des Aroumains consiste à trouver ce que les Balkans ont perdus lorsque l'Etat-nation est apparu. L'article est divisé en deux parties : une qui vise les éléments qui décrivent les Aroumains par un doxa historique et qui tracent leur identité ; l'autre qui suppose les solutions envisagées par les thèses et les discours cosmopolites afin d'assurer leur reconnaissance et préservation. Ainsi, notre objectif n'engendre pas la stigmatisation du paradigme de l'Etat-nation, mais de mettre en évidence ses limites par rapport à celle-ci et au cosmopolitisme.

Mots-clés: Les Aroumains, cosmopolitisme, identité, minorité, reconnaissance

Rezumat

Problema aromână constă în identificarea a ceea ce au pierdut Balcanii atunci când statul-națiune a apărut. Articolul este divizat în două părți: una referitoare la elementele ce descriu aromânii prin intermediul unui doxa istoric și care conturează identitatea lor; cealaltă vizând soluțiile aduse de tezele și discursurile cosmopolite pentru a le asigura recunoașterea și prezervarea. Scopul nostru nu constă în stigmatizarea paradigmei statului-națiune, ci în evidențierea limitelor sale cu privire la aceasta și la cosmopolitism.

Cuvinte cheie: Aromâni, cosmopolitism, identitate, minoritate, recunoaștere

1. The Aromanian problem

Which should be the starting point of a discussion concerning the minority called Aromanians (vlachs, rumâni, armâni, macedo-români)? If we want to speak of a community we must pinpoint different communities through Balkans as they are living among Macedonians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, and Romanians.

* PhD, Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, International Relations and European Studies, "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iasi; email: margaritdiana@yahoo.fr

** PhD, email: emi_margarit@yahoo.co.uk

So the problem starts from their identity. Our goal is to prove that their identity is not gained by a synthesis of an analytic approach concerning their historical determination and differentiation or cultural importance in the rising of national-states in Balkans, but by a political framework that encourages self-awareness of different ‘Aromanians’ in respect to their heritage. The drums of this minority called Aromanians are their language and the sound of it can be heard and saved only in a political cosmopolitan requirement.

With all the good-will effort of the historians to portray Aromanians as a particular community in relation to any population of Balkan states, the finality of their inquiry does not lead to an acknowledgment of their liberty to maintain their proper specificity. As prosaic as it sounds, the image of history is produced by historians and all belong to specific state that encourages a saga of the natural creation of their state. A minimal epistemological affirmation can be made in respect to the history of this community of language, sometime between 8th and 13th century the Vulgar Latin spoken in the Balkan provinces, which is also known as Proto-Eastern Romance, has differentiated itself, for various historical reasons, into four languages: Daco-Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian. There are two major theses concerning the origin of the Aromanian: the hypothesis of a Balkan autochthony of Aromanian population even if they are only mentioned in documents at the end of 9th century; this supposition is supported by most historians. And, in relation to the ‘silence of the archives’ - an immigration theory that places the Aromanian origins in the North of the Daco-Romanians tribes (or even some researchers who think that they immigrated from south of Danube). With a few exceptions this proposition has the support of all Romanian linguists (Poghirc 2012, pp. 20-21, 41-42).

The Balkan autochthony of Aromanian population has supporters among Greek or Albanian historians because the particularity of Aromanians could be suppressed under the consideration of a common origin. The Greek history considers Aromanians a Greek Latinized population so the problem of any recognition as minority is naive since they are only Greek with a fuzzy Latin infusion. The Albanian historical version considers Aromanians descendants of Illyrians Latinized so they are proto-Albanians (Friedman 2001, pp. 31-32). The Romanian history considers Aromanians as a Romanian ‘minority’ since they consider Aromanian language only a dialect of Romanian language. The premises of this absorption is given by the historical consideration of Daco-Romanian as Proto-Romanian spoken by all the population that had been on or in the vicinity of the territory of what is now Romania and has split and spread into the Balkans. This linguistic hypothesis is trying to respond and explain the many features that Aromanian language shares with modern Romanian, having similar morphology and syntax, as well as a large common vocabulary inherited from Latin. If the Romanian linguistics and historians consider that Aromanian is a dialect of the Romanian language, they suppose that by encapsulating it in the limits of a dialect,

their differences produced by different historical *adstratum* could be eluded (Du Nay 1996, pp. 32-33). Aromanian has Greek influences, while Romanian has Slavic ones.

The incertitude of an honest reader in respect to these dissimilar variants of historical approaches on Aromanians could be set aside not by a true and disinterested point a view, but by an inquiry of the criteria through which the fabric of the historical perspective is determined. What can one observe in these various hypothetical illuminations? That the historical fact of 'Aromanian' is sought as essence of some sort and the purpose of this is clearly to set-aside all the requirements of a right to differ. They all murmur that apart all and in the end Aromanians are just Greeks, Albanians, and Romanians with an accidental historical polish – their language. And what malevolence and stupidity to consider on one hand, a *removable accident* what should be reflected as an intimate and valuable expression of a community of people, and on the other hand, to consider the contingent advancement of history, in respect to the rising of the national-states in Balkans, a necessary evolution .

The next step is by consequence the demise of any element of difference that could hinder the presupposed objective identity of the nation-state: an official language, a homogenous nation. We have thus the dialectical usage of historiography: to start the inquiry with the fact of their particularity of language and traditions and to end by dismissing it in the name of an objective and necessary evolution of the official mother tongue of the state and the normativity of a statistical majority. We consider this an ideological perspective and the 'clorophomic' rhapsodic folklore of any nation-state in Balkans. Furthermore, the premise of the historical discourse of nation-state does a prejudice to any positive form of linguistic heteronomy. And this is the 'Aromanian problem' what positivity can you demand to a proper definition if the 'historical fact' mandate that they are just Latinized Greeks, Thracians, Illyrians, Daco-Romanians with Greek lexicon variations, old Romanian, that is a 'simulacrum' of a language. So we face another strategy of nulling their difference - the string or belonging to a territory. They are nowhere to be put since they don't belong to a constituted majority with a territory or nation-state so they must be absorbed by remitting them to a common *illo tempore* origin. Why? For the simple fact that they are living differences and they must fill somehow the official right story of that state and the identity card of citizenship. Thus, every nation state has its own territorial and population agenda. More precisely states border a territory legitimized by a right-history ordeal of a population living there from the beginnings, population which is considered homogenous and speaking the same language (the romantic framework of the concept of nation). The Balkan wars were a confrontation created by such strategies of legitimation on the former territories of the Ottoman Empire (especially the second Balkan war). So the question what is an 'Aromanian' started after 1913 when populations had to be remitted to a historical convenient reference

to a territory and started to play the cunning strategies of the state (Motta 2011, pp. 255-257). So, in response to such essentialist claims regarding the Aromanian identity we say that it is not a matter of what is, but a question of how can one live in the paradigm of nation-state as Aromanian? That is as an individual who embodies as personal response a tradition of language and spirituality.

2. The cosmopolitan answer

Being aware of the enormous quantity of writings on the cosmopolitanism, we will not refer to it in an exhaustive manner, but rather as an operative concept. By this, we are interested in understanding cosmopolitanism as a correlative concept to the one of nationalism and, as a consequence, the place of Aromanians as a group between nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

From a nationalist perspective, Aromanians find themselves in two different perspectives: as a minority group whose language is politically recognized by the government (as in FYROM) or a group of archaic people, different from the majority of the population with no official recognition (as in Romania, Greece, Albania, Serbia, and Bulgaria). Be they or not recognized politically, Aromanians are put face to face with a statehood and nationalist paradigm because in both cases, the state is the only agent able to recognize them. Or, in the case of a group such as Aromanians, which is not an ethnic minority *sensu stricto* because they did not have a determined home land gathering them in primordial times, how can we understand the governmental reactions of recognition or neglect towards them? When defining an ethnic minority, Wolff refers to four subcategories: national minorities, transnational minorities, indigenous minorities, and immigrant minorities (Wolff 2009). These criteria are the results of two elements which originate the taxonomies related to nation-states: the territory and the official homogenous language. In the same way as Wolff, Kymlicka points out a historical territory as origin of a national minority (Kymlicka 2001, p. 20). All the definitions of minorities concern a historical and political homeland. Aromanians have a geographic and even historical homeland – the Balkans, but not a political one.

Nowadays, Aromanians are citizens of the states where they live or where they were born, therefore they are embodied in the nation. From a formal point of view they are Greek, Bulgarian or Romanian, but their official status does not coincide with their informal identity. Moreover, in the eyes of a state, only what is derived from a state paradigm and expression can be recognized. What is to be done with Aromanians? For centuries, Aromanians borrowed the traditions, habits and other cultural values from/to the populations with whom they got into contact due to their economic and political practices. The only element of specificity remained and remains their language. By this, in the case of Aromanians it seems hazardous to consider them as an ethnic group since their only peculiar characteristic is the language; therefore, they can only be considered a language minority.

“Nationalism denies difference internally, while affirming, producing and stabilizing it externally” (Beck 2006, p. 56). Someone could say that all groups act similarly and, at a general level, every group is more or less nationalist. We would say that state nationalism should not be confused with group solidarity or the willingness to preserve the specificity of the group. The self-pride and the self-preservation are values disposed on a horizontal level, while nationalist politics as the exclusive emanation of the power of the state is hierarchical.

For the recent twenty years, cosmopolitanism next to globalization has been on everyone’s lips, even though its history as a concept *per se* is far too long. The fluidization and the openness of national boundaries toward the outside, the intensification of economic, cultural and political exchanges between state and non-state actors (Scholte 2000, pp. 62-65), along with the proclamation of liberal principles and values as supreme moral standards, brought to light a special concern for individuals instead of states. Cosmopolitanism has bestowed the individual in the middle of the political concerns and deprived the state of its role as unique and autonomous agent in the international arena.

As Calhoun suggested, “cosmopolitanism seems to signal *both* the identity (and therefore unity) of all human beings despite their differences, *and* appreciation for and ability to feel at home among the actual differences among people and peoples” (Calhoun 2008, p. 444). Being a cosmopolitan supposes each one’s self-awareness of being a man of the world, the recognition of the other also as a man of the world and simultaneously “an understanding of the alien Other, *cosmopolitan understanding*” (Beck 2009, p. 4). In this respect, cosmopolitanism becomes impossible in the lack of reciprocity. In sum, theories about cosmopolitanism refer to three types of arguments: a) under the impact of the globalization, solidarity is not bordered to the nation-state, but surpasses it; b) the globalized world is institutionally governed so that it generates worldwide political consciousness and the shared feeling that world belongs to everyone; c) solidarity, the core of cosmopolitan consciousness, in the name of democracy and human rights reached global dimensions (Cheah 2006, p. 491).

From a cultural point of view, cosmopolitanism reveals its attitude toward identity, “where ‘identity’ has something to do with the way we sometimes think we are entitled to present ourselves to others, the sort of non-negotiable side of our cultural preferences” (Waldron 2000, p. 230). From the perspective of their self-awareness, Aromanians’ identity is cosmopolitan. The fact that they were wealthy merchants, shepherds or intellectuals, crossing the Balkans and speaking fluently the languages of different populations stands as proof of their openness and spirit of dialogue.

Still, our intention consists not in treating cosmopolitanism, but the relation between Aromanians and cosmopolitanism through a bi-dimensional key of interpretation: cultural and political. From the intersection of two dimensions result three keys of interpreting the Aromanians dilemma: a cultural one (identity), a political

one (Aromanians-state), a cultural one because of its political implications. The third key of interpretation, a hybrid of the first two, is suggested by Robertson who asserts the inevitable implication of cultural elements into the international affairs to such a point that some internal affairs become cultural. “It might be said that, again to varying degrees, all of international politics is cultural – that we are (but one must not certainly exaggerate the novelty of this) in a period of globewide *cultural* politics (and also, of course in a period when culture has become more explicitly politicized, which has to do with the politics of culture.)” (Robertson 2000, p. 5).

The Aromanians’ ethos should be probably understood as a tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Their freedom to move and to practice their traditional rituals, language and traditions has been permitted by the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, their freedom was limited to the frontiers of the Empire. When the Ottoman Empire fell and the nationalist movements became effervescent, Aromanians tried to negotiate their status-quo. At the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th one, there were only two possible solutions: a) depending on their geographical position, that Aromanian cities and villages be entrapped in the newly configured Balkan states; b) that they create their own state. No matter which decision they could have made, the confrontation with the nation-state seemed inevitable. The recent history proved that the political conjectures determined Aromanians to follow up the first type of solutions. Yet, despite this general evolution of Aromanians communities, there was an exception, the Principality of Pindus or the Vlach Principality. Proclaimed as autonomous state in 1941, it covered Epirus, Thessaly and a part of Macedonia and lasted only four years (Poulton 2000, pp. 111-112).

Certainly we do not believe that cosmopolitanism should completely replace nationalism or that state should give up its sovereignty. In this respect, we consider that cosmopolitan realism as proposed by Beck represents a leverage of recognition and valorization of those groups – like Aromanians – who are threatened with dissolution in the vast mass of the majority. “Cosmopolitan realism does not negate nationalism but presupposes it and transforms it into a cosmopolitan nationalism. Without the stabilizing factors that nationalism provides in dealing with difference, cosmopolitanism is in danger of losing itself in a philosophical never-never land” (Beck 2006, p. 49). Situated between universalism and nationalism, cosmopolitan realism struggles against the absolutism of the equality or of the difference. The story of Aromanians perfectly fits in the context of cosmopolitan realism. “Marginalized groups have discovered their hidden and suppressed histories. Difference is no longer universalized out of existence or viewed as an ontological given, but *historicized*. Thus cosmopolitan realism rests on a twofold negation: it negates both the universalist negation of and the essentialist insistence on ethnic difference” (Beck 2006, p. 61).

As a consequence, neither the absorption of the Aromanians in the majority population, nor their governmental “recognition” as an ethnic minority seems to

please them. For both situations, Romania gives eloquent examples. On the one hand, the Romanian government offers study fellowships to young Aromanian Albanians, based on the assumption that they are Romanians, even though there are insignificant similarities between Romanian and Aromanian (which can be found in all the Balkan languages). At the same time, these young students do not feel as Aromanians and they usually avoid presenting themselves as Aromanians (Schwandner-Sievers 2002, pp. 152-157). This ‘ethnic support’ for Aromanians has an historical filiation. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Romanian government financed the construction of institutions of education in those Balkan areas where Aromanians lived (Greece, Albany, Macedonia). On the other hand, in 2011, the Romanian president proposed that Aromanians be officially recognized as ethnic minority. His arguments were mostly financial, based on the fact that they could have access to funds for minorities. This proposition had been firmly rejected by international organization called The Council of Aromanians because they do not belong to any state.

3. Conclusion

For more than two centuries, Aromanians have struggled between the nationalism and cosmopolitanism. By being caught in the middle between the political effervescence of the 19th century creation of nation-states and a quasi-nomadism (traditional social-economic behavior), Aromanians represent, in our opinion, a clear case of liminal group. How can we understand the Aromanians identity? Through an historical approach and especially through their way of understanding themselves (multi-layered discourses: a collective memory, social orientation, political affiliations). Still, we were not interested in simply describing Aromanians, but in understanding the influences that the filter of the nation-state paradigm had mediated their understanding of themselves. If Aromanians struggle to maintain their specificity, than their solution consists in renouncing to the nation-state reference. By this, we sustain the fact that Aromanians should be left to live (in an ontic way) with no pressure from the state labeling, as an adventure of difference assumed through understanding and common heritage.

Cosmopolitanism seems the right solution for those whose rights are intentionally violated by governments or for those who suffer because their states are unable to protect them. Cosmopolitanism is invoked whenever distress, misery, immigrants, stateless people or refugees manifested (see Hassner 1998, pp. 252-272). What happens to those who are on the edge of their disappearance without being explicitly or deliberately threatened (Gauss 2002)? Aromanians deserve a special attention because their distinctiveness originates in the spirit of Balkans, lost once nation-states appeared in the 19th century. “If cosmopolitanism is here to stay” (Fine and Boon 2007, p. 7) and if Europe and its political expression, the European Union, should make more efforts to touch a certain cosmopolitan ideal (Delanty 2009, pp. 200-224), then the case of Aromanian should be a starting point.

References

1. Beck, U. (2006). *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
2. Beck, U. (2009). Critical Theory of World Risk Society: A Cosmopolitan Vision. *Constellations* **16**(1), 3-22.
3. Calhoun, C. (2008). Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism. *Nations and Nationalism* **14**(3), 427-448.
4. Cheah, P. (2006). Cosmopolitanism. *Theory, Culture & Society* **23**(2-3), 486-496.
5. Delanty, G. (2009). *The Cosmopolitan Imagination. The Renewal of Critical Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Du Nay, A. (1996). *The Origins of the Rumanians*. Toronto: Matthias Corvinus Publishing.
7. Fine, R. and Boon, V. (2007). Cosmopolitanism: Between Past and Future. *European Journal of Social Theory* **10**(1), 5-16.
8. Friedman, A. (2001). The Vlah Minority in Macedonia: Language, Identity, Dialectology, and Standardization. In Juhani Nuoluoto, Martii Leiwo and Jussi Halla-aho (eds.). *Selected Papers in Slavic, Balkan, and Balkan Studies*. University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 26-50.
9. Gauss, K.-M. (2002). *Sterbenden Europäer: Unterwegs zu den Sepharden von Sarajevo, Gottscheer Deutschen, Arbereshe, Sorben und Aromunen*. Otto Müller Verlag, Salzburg.
10. Goodman, J. (2002). Nationalism and Globalism: Social Movement Responses. *The International Scope* **4**(8), 1-17.
11. Hassner, P. (1998). Refugees: a Special Case for Cosmopolitan Citizenship. In Archibugi, D., Held D. and Köhler M. (eds.). *Re-imagining Political Community*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 252-272.
12. Kymlicka, W. (2001). *Politics in the Vernacular. Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship*. Oxford University Press, New York.
13. Motta, G. (2011). The Fight for Balkan Latinity. The Aromanians until World War I. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* **2**(3), 252-260.
14. Poghir, C. (2012). Romanizarea lingvistică și culturală în Balcani. Supraviețuiri și evoluție. In Djuvara N. (ed.). *Aromânii. Istorie, limbă, destin*. Humanitas, București, 15-58.
15. Poulton, H. (2000). *Who Are the Macedonians?* Indiana University Press, London.
16. Robertson, R. (2000). *Globalization. Social Theory and Global Culture*. Sage, London.
17. Scholte, J. A. (2000). *Globalization. A Critical Introduction*. St. Martin's Press, New York.
18. Schwandner-Sievers, S. (2002). Dawn for a 'Sleeping Beauty Nations'. Aromanians Identity Politics and Conflicts in Post-Communist Albania. In Kaser, K. and Kressing, F. (eds.). *Albania – A country in transition. Aspects of changing identities in a south-east European country*. Nomos, Baden-Baden, 147-163.
19. Waldron, J. (2000). What is Cosmopolitan?. *The Journal of Political Philosophy* **8**(2), 227-243.
20. Wolff, S. (2009). *Ethnic Minorities in Europe: The Basic Facts*. Accessed January 15, 2013. <http://www.stefanwolff.com/files/min-eu.pdf>.