

The Feast of Lăzărel - an Example of Preservation through Adaptation of the Ethnocultural identity of the Greeks of Izvoarele Village in Tulcea County

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Abstract: *Izvoarele village is the only compact rural settlement in Romania whose members identify as Greeks. Oral history pinpoints the genesis of this community in 1830, when a few Greek and Bulgarian families, having crossed Dobruja, settled at the foot of Consul hill. Even though these ethnic groups went through a process of ethnic synthesis along history, it is visible that the Greek community of Izvoarele has preserved certain valuable heritage elements serving as an identity trademark to be found in the architecture of dwellings, in garments, traditions, and in their main occupation, namely agriculture and sheep rearing. The present work deals with the musical repertoire performed on the occasion of Buianciu, a custom usually practiced on Lazarus Saturday (before Christ's Entry into Jerusalem). The protagonists of Buianciu, or Lăzăriţa by its Romanian name, are girls aged 10 to 14, who sing ritual songs in Romanian, Bulgarian, and Greek. The enacting of this custom contributes to the consolidation of group relations to this day, as the entire community acknowledges the framework pattern of the celebration.*

Key-words: *Greeks, agrarian musical repertoire, Lazăr, folklore, ethnic group*

1. Introduction

Izvoarele, in Tulcea county, is the main village of the commune by the same name and it is inhabited by people of Greek origin. Along the decades, it has borne several names: Alibeichioi, Regele Ferdinand, Filimon Sîrbu, being currently called Izvoarele. It is the largest and most compact community of Greeks in rural Romania. Other communities are known to exist in Dobruja, but those are in urban areas. The Greek population on Dobrujan territory came to the attention of Romanian researchers as early as the late 19th century and continues to be studied to this day.

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The origin myth of Izvoarele village speaks of the year 1830, when 13 Greek families from Aspros (Akdere) and 7 Bulgarian families from Koruköy, from the kaza² of Varna, they chose to settle in these lands (Știucă 2004, 74).

Having left their places of origin in 1829, they settled briefly in southern Bessarabia, but their longing for their native lands eventually determined them to head back home. On their way back, twins Tudorița and Chiriac were born to one Vașili Lefter, which forced them to stay put for 40 days to allow the new mother to recover. They alighted at the foot of Consul hill, where the vast surrounding forests and the readily available construction timber provided them with the wood required for the caique factories of Isaccea and Tulcea, two ports about 30 km away. Due to the abundant game consisting of boar and deer, the fertile lands with numerous springs, and the rich and cool Taița valley, they became attached to the area, so they took up agriculture. Such easily attainable gains contributed to these ethnics' settling definitively in Alibeichioi village (Știucă 2004, 73).

The choice of this ethnic group that resulted from a process of ethnic synthesis (Greeks and Bulgarians) as a research topic is motivated by the fact that it can be construed as a model in terms of numbers, group relations, and the conservation and revitalisation of ethnic identity.

The aim of the present paper is to study the musical repertoire integrated into the spring calendar traditions of the Greeks of Izvoarele village, as well as elements related to their preservation and revitalisation.

The underlying hypothesis of this case study is the following: when an ethnic group is exposed to multiculturalism, acculturation, and globalisation, it needs to develop identity-centred strategies in order to endure.

The following methods were employed during field research: bibliographic documentation and analysis, direct observation, interview, and analysis. The instruments used were audio and video recordings made with the aid of a recorder and a video camera, respectively.

Capturing or reconstituting active or latent elements of intangible heritage is something that any researcher aspires to do. In the past, the patriarchal village, the true repository of ancestral customs and traditions, was a generous source of population for nearby urban centres, thus constantly influencing and enriching urban culture.

At present, both rural and urban culture are being reconfigured, while modernity and migration to other countries are factors that contribute to the emergence of new mentalities, traditions, institutions, and social-cultural relations.

² A *kaza* is an administrative division historically used in the Ottoman Empire and is currently used in several of its successor states. The term is from Ottoman Turkish and means 'jurisdiction'; it is often translated 'district', 'sub-district', or 'juridical district'.

In short, we could say that the natural environment generates, the historical context shapes, the social-economic framework refines, and the cultural context perpetuates and reinvents the components of tangible and intangible heritage (Chiselev 2018, 96).

The preservation of the Hellenism of the Greek community of Izvoarele village is encouraged by the Greek state; thus, cultural institutions have been rehabilitated (the community centre and the public library), a Greek-dance ensemble (Demetra) has been created and Greek language courses are held by teachers from Greece (Chiselev 2019, 189).

In time, a hierarchy of feast days was outlined within the Greek community of Izvoarele, either by attributing new connotations and significations that reinforce the aboriginal ones of a religious nature, or by reinterpreting or adding new ones to highlight identity features, while at the same time capitalising on a specific repertoire. The possibility of expressing oneself in one's mother tongue, the organization of events centred around folklore are ways of periodically revitalising ethnic identity (Chiselev 2019, 86).

It is well known that, through culture, minorities manage to put identity-related strategies into practice. The preservation of language, religion, cuisine, clothing, and folk art helps maintain relations between group members. This begins with private manifestations, within the family, then continues out in the community.

2. Lăzărel³ or Buianciu - Ways of Affirming Ethnic Identity

The enactment of celebrations, the amplitude of manifestations related to yearly traditions or rites of passage, the preservation of customs as a reflection of the archaic mindset make the Greeks of Izvoarele commune stand out through the conservation of heritage values with a certain degree of local specificity, translated into architecture, costumes, food (the preparation and distribution of kurban/korban on Saint George's day as per the Old Style calendar), traditions (Ziua Babei (Old Woman's Day), Lăzărel/Buianciu, Hurhumbălu), or occupational profiles (Chiselev 2019, 94).

In Romania, spring and summer customs preserve certain musical pieces of ritual value, which are performed in the most significant moments. Some of these customs are often turned into folk performances and parties fraught with music and dancing (Oprea 2002, 373).

³ TN: Diminutive form of the name Lazăr (Lazarus).

The practice of folk customs outlines a *modus vivendi* perceivable both in real social relations (within or among families and further among social groups) and in the relationship between man and the cosmos, between microcosm and macrocosm (Rucsanda 2010, 11).

The feast of Lazăr does not occur on the same date, either for the majority Dacoromanian group or for the ethnic groups on Romanian territory. The practice of this custom has undergone changes in time within all the communities, the initial scenario has evolved and its text has become part of the broad category of well-wishing songs and carols.

The difference between this agrarian ritual and carols consists in the composition of the group - in Dacoromanian communities, it is made up exclusively of girls, of whom one is chosen to be the bride, hence the expression 'a umbla cu Lăzărița/mireasa' (to go around with the Lăzăriță⁴/bride' (Pop-Miculi 2004, 58).

The custom of Lăzărel stands out in the Greek community of Izvoarele village as well, as it exhibits certain similarities to carolling and it is performed by pubescent girls, as opposed to young men. However, it follows the same pattern: the gathering of girls, the group hierarchy, going from door to door, the performance of consecrated songs, the reward from the host (Chiselev 2019, 160).

On the occasion of this celebration, called Buianciu⁵ (a Bulgarian name) by community members, music becomes the organising element. Nowadays there are ritual songs in Greek, Bulgarian, and Romanian.

The Romanian version is in fact a translation of the Bulgarian text. The manner in which these custom highlights the Bulgarian-Greek ethnic synthesis undergone by the community under analysis is noteworthy, the appearance of the Romanian version being a telling example of adaptation in view of making it accessible to Romanians as well. It is still alive, as the town-dwelling grandchildren of the inhabitants of Izvoarele come 'home' for the specific purpose of performing it (Știucă 2004, 111).

A week prior to Palm Saturday, the girls in the community begin rehearsing the songs, thus preparing for the incoming celebration. The group is made up of 10-15 girls aged 6 to 15 and it is customary in the village that several such groups should be formed. Every group chooses one of its own members, one with more initiative, to play the role of 'first girl', i.e. the coordinator of the entire group. Throughout the celebration, that girl will bear the name of 'buianciu'.

⁴ TN: Lăzăriță is the feminine form of Lazăr (Lazarus).

⁵ Cf. N. Știucă: there is a similar custom, called Buienițul, which has been preserved to this day in places with a mixed Romanian-Bulgarian population around the Capital (Herești, Valea Dragului, Vărăști), which exhibit a much richer repertoire.

It is worth noting that the traditional community requires a model of systemic connections of ritual customs and practices involving a relationship between actors, who may have different customarily established rights and duties and may use languages that serve functions determined by consensus on a global level (Rucsanda, 2010, 6).

Whereas, in the past, on the feast of Buianciu, the group used to perform five or six songs⁶, today, the girls, dressed in traditional holiday folk costumes, get together at the 'first girl's' home and perform three songs: 'Mă sculai de dimineață'(I woke up in the morning) or 'Călıno geană' - in Romanian (sung around 9-10 a.m.) and, until the evening, the Greek-language song 'Marlu lianis' and the Bulgarian song 'I mălai mamó'.

The songs speak of the death of the hero and his ritual mourning is meant to ensure his resurrection through vegetation in the fields. The Lăzărel/Buianciu girls are given eggs, flour, and money. At the end, they gather 'at the first girl's' home and divide their winnings evenly. The annual death and rebirth of the vegetation hero preserves the memory of ancient ceremonies dedicated to the gods of vegetation (Dionysus, Adonis, Aphrodite, Attis, Osiris).

The dynamics of feasts in today's rural society has triggered no major changes in the cultural memory and oral history of the Greek community in Izvoarele village, as they were shaped along the decades by ecological, historical, social and cultural factors specific to a minority group.

⁶ Cf. A. Chiselev: in the past, the repertoire was broader, including songs in Turkish or songs with a direct beneficiary (performed in homes with young men)

3. Musical Analysis of the Ritual Song Lăzărel or Buianciu

Mă sculai de dimineață

Adagio ♩ = 60

M-am scu - lat de di - mi - nea - țã

M-am spã - lat pe ochi pe fa - țã

Cã - li - no gea - nã - mi, Cã - li - no,

Cã - li - no, del - beri ma - li - no,

Cã - li - no, del - beri ma - li - no.

From the very onset, one can recognise similarities between this ritual song and carols. From the size of the melodic row, which coincides with that of the text line isometrically fitted onto an octosyllabic pattern, to the feminine rhyme highlighted in the acatalectic lines and the masculine rhyme in the catalectic ones.

The rhyme is successive and connects the lines through the consonance of the final metric feet. The refrain, which is independent, appears after the first two lines of each stanza, following an anapaest-based rhythmic formula.

The melody, devoid of appoggiaturas, evolves along the lines of a major-third hexachord (D1, E1, F#1, G1, A1, B1,), while the rhythm is giusto-syllabic. The profile of the melody is crenelated and the climax, placed on B1, reveals the evolution of the mode from a major pentachord.

The ambitus is of a major sixth and defines the sound structure of the ritual song. The architectural form is simple, of a primary type (A+refrain), with even motifs, characteristic of ritual songs performed by a group.

The melodic stanza becomes ampler through the rhythmic repetition, yet with melodic variation, of the second half of the second phrase.

The cadences, for both phrases and refrain, are realised on the first step of the mode. The inner cadence is realised through descending melodic movement and the final one through repetition.

4. Conclusions

The Lazăr/Buianciu ritual song, performed by the members of the Greek community of Izvoarele village on Palm Saturday, can be viewed as a way of revitalising ethnic identity.

The present scientific enterprise set out to highlight the functionality, structure, and semantics of the practiced rite, as well as the methods of preserving and revitalising the celebration.

The existence of a Romanian-language version, which is performed first on the day of Lăzărel/Buianciu, underscores the profound changes that occurred within the community in terms of both mentality and festive sentiment.

The presence of this version of the ritual song sung in Romanian demonstrates the capacity of the (Bulgarian-Greek) traditional musical repertoire performed in an aboriginal social context and mentality framework to adapt to the language of the majority ethnic group in view of ensuring the 'cultural survival' of the minority group.

The vulnerabilities of Dobrujan ethnic groups, one of which is the Greek community of Izvoarele village, stem from demographic decline, migration, mother-tongue abandonment, the confinement of customs to passive memory, mixed marriages, etc.

In spite of all these threats, Dobrujan ethnic groups currently resort to their own ethno-culture, promoting an attitude of openness, communication, and imitation of native-country culture.

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