

Manners of maintaining the cultural identity of the Greeks, Aromanians, Lipovans and Dobrogean Tatars and their effects in musical practice

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Abstract: *This study presents the mutual conditioning between the social dynamics and the traditions of the ethnic communities of Dobrogea, as well as the ways of maintaining the cultural identity of the Greeks, Aromanians, Lipovans and Tatars in the full era of globalization. For a clearer understanding, we will highlight how the evolution of Romanian society deeply and irreversibly affected the musical and choreographic repertoire of the four ethnic groups.*

Our perception of collective human identity is also shaped by the way traditional music is perceived, knowing that it has a very strong connection with ethnicity and origin, and that is why traditional musical creation constitutes a true identity brand.

Key-words: *traditional musical repertoire, cultural identity, Greeks, Aromanians, Lipovans, Tatars*

1. Introduction

This study focuses on four ethnic communities from Dobroudja, whose ethnocultural identity has been perpetuated for centuries in the allogeneic space of this region. We started from the hypothesis that this identity can be achieved, negotiated and developed also by adapting the traditional musical repertoire to the current transformations in society and the mentality of the ethnic Dobrogean Greeks, Aromanians, Lipovans and Tatars.

Maintaining and perpetuating the musical repertoire, both in the family and at the celebrations of the Dobrogean communities should be considered ways of remembering the origin. In order to highlight the evolutions and changes produced in the musical repertoire in the practice of the four communities, I applied analytical and descriptive methods. I used information obtained in my own field research, because I found in recent years that in the traditional musical repertoire

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belonging to the ethnic groups in the Dobrogean territory, important and irreversible transformations have taken place.

Currently, the music of the four groups is adapted to the new, receiving influences either from the territories of origin, or from cultures from the Balkan or universal space. These influences penetrated the proper song and dance music genres, considered the most resistant and able to adapt any influence or contamination to the local conditions and style, giving rise to new creations that will belong to transnational pseudo-local musical genres.

For a better understanding of the phenomenon we must turn our attention to social dynamics, cultural exchanges and how they are expressed in music and in musical and choreographic practices. Currently, social and cultural diversity is built and organized in what we call globalization, or the phenomenon of transforming the world into a unitary whole, in which existence takes on a universal character. In this process of globalization, it is increasingly difficult for Dobrogean ethnic groups to identify themselves as distinct and immutable. They have to take into account new phenomena and practices, and the results are visible both in the meaning of identities, practices and cultural belonging as well as in traditional music and community practices.

I proposed a useful approach for understanding the aspects of traditional music and hybridized community practices, as a result of influences from countries of origin, borrowing and contamination due to proximity, mixed marriages, emigration, the disappearance of the popular creator from the village hearth and replacing him with professional creators who have skills in most musical fields.

Therefore, also in the Dobrogean space we can consider that the diversity in the field of traditional music has grown significantly, this aspect having a decisive importance for the growth of new "multicultural" spaces with their special forms of expression and styles.²

Since the cultural origin is less and less perceived by the young people of the four ethnic groups, they represent at least the fourth generation of ethnics born and raised in Dobrogea, in order to maintain their identity, it is necessary to facilitate access to their original/authentic culture, both through contact with older community members as well as connections with countries of origin.

In all the groups subject to research, we currently observe the combination of traditional elements, with a mandatory character, with modern elements of foreign origin. We can observe how the reconstitution of community practices is carried out in the communities subject to research within the limits imposed by modernity and in accordance with the trends of uniformity manifested in the current Dobrogean society.

²https://carkiv.musikverk.se/www/epublikationer/Lundberg_Malm_Ronstrom_Music_Media_Multiculture.pdf Accessed Sept. 19, 2023.

This attraction to modernism, present in the four ethnic groups whose repertoires of songs and dances I studied, started mainly during the period of the communist regime that the Romanian people went through. The decrease in identity practices and the sense of belonging to the group was due to the interference of the unique party in all forms of ethnic and cultural legitimation of the communities. The emergence of cultural instructors from villages and communes, who guided the affirmation of community identities by altering the musical-choreographic repertoires, led to forced changes and irreversible losses of ethnic specificity. These beautification actions, which contributed to the flattening of ethnic differences, had as their main purpose the participation in the “Cântarea României”/“Glorifying Romania” festival-competition. In that period, for Dobrogean ethnics, the stage became the only place where the split produced between community social practice and the construction of tradition as an object of political ideology was restored (Iosif 2014, 19-20).

After the end of the communist period, with the revival of the feeling of belonging to their own cultures, all the ethnic groups restored their community practices also through the stage, but this time with the support of the countries of origin, an aspect that demonstrated that connections with the countries of origin favor cohesion in communities outside the original territory.

2. Ethnic and cultural diversity

Having a geostrategic position favored by the opening to the sea, but also by the road network built since the Roman period, Dobroudja has functioned since ancient times as a space with multiple roles, such as passage, colonization, maintaining an influence or cultural corridor (Chiselev, 2019, 9).

Ethnic groups from Dobroudja are nothing but human communities with common interests, beliefs or norms of life. By community, from a scientific point of view, we mean a restricted society characterized by a partially closed economy in a territory from which it procures a good part of the products necessary for subsistence. Members of rural communities submit to collective discipline, a decisive factor in maintaining cohesion (Bonte, Izard 1999, 675).

Dobroudja, a cultural mosaic of identities and belongings, which supports social and cultural cohesion, includes in its territory ethnic groups with bicultural identity, due to cultural heritage and social interaction with those in proximity. The construction and affirmation of ethnic identity are main objectives at the local level knowing that a multicultural society can only prosper if its members have access to their cultural heritage.

The promotion of social cohesion in the contemporary Dobrogean society is based on the relationship between ethnic identities and the society that is in full

process of globalization (Săgeată 2009, 16). For the construction and continuous renegotiation of ethnic identities, the most important cultural resources are artifacts, musical-choreographic repertoire and knowledge.

Of all the arts, music generates the deepest social experiences of cultures, drawing upon itself a multitude of social meanings. It acts in all layers of society, identifying with tradition and cultural continuity. Emotional, social and cognitive connections can be developed through music, which involves the construction and enactment of a social memory and identity in which the individual and the social are linked³.

2.1. Greeks

The existence of Greeks on the territory of Dobroudja has been mentioned in historical documents, writings, travel diaries since antiquity. The permanent presence of these ethnic groups in this territory has determined that the traditional cultural heritage of the Greeks of Dobroudja joins the existing traditions and ethnocultures in this multi-ethnic space, providing an overview of how, over time, traditions have been influenced and they potentiated each other.

The Dobrogean territory, characterized by social heterogeneity and “modernized” inhabitants from an educational and professional point of view, led the Greeks to adapt to the two defining coordinates of urban life - multiethnicity and interculturality. Research undertaken in recent years has revealed to me that over time this adaptation has led to ethno-traditional abandonment, inter-ethnic cultural alterity, acculturation, bilingualism and cultural reciprocity.

2.2. Aromanians

The Aromanians, or South-Danube Romanians, represent Latin-speaking ethnic groups from the Balkans, which were characterized until the 17th century by a predominantly oral society, whose main occupation was shepherding (Brezeanu, Zbucea 1997, 7).

In 1913, at the end of the first Balkan war, they immigrated to Romania, settling mainly in Dobroudja, continuing to preserve their language, customs and consciousness of their own identity, even when the conditions affirmatively they were hostile (Brezeanu, Zbucea 1997, 48).

The herder collectives, isolated and relatively closed, of the Aromanians preserved ancient practices that were embodied in customs related to the cycle of life and herding. Unlike other Dobrogean communities, they have lost less of their

³ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17411910600634221>
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musical repertoire and community practices. However, the evolution of society also determined in their case the passage into the passive memory of the community of those musical creations and community practices considered obsolete, and their replacement with others, either borrowed from the majority or nearby ethnic groups, or due to certain models of foreign/exotic origin.

2.3. The Lipovian Russians

The settlement on the banks of the waters of the Danube Delta came as a natural continuation for the Lipovian Russians who originated from the area of the Dnieper, Volga and Don rivers. In this way they could continue to practice their favorite profession, that of fishermen (Tiuliumeanu 2015, 121).

The Lipovian Russians settled in Dobroudja chose the path of exile due to the persecution of Tsar Alexei Mihailovici and Patriarch Nikon who reformed the Slavonic services and texts according to the model of the Greek religious ritual. Once settled in the Dobrogean territories, they obtained in 1851 the right to practice their old rite worship freely and without anyone's interference through a firman from the Ottoman Gate (Jora 2014, 63). Persecuted and forced to choose exile, these Old Rite Orthodox believers have carefully preserved their language, traditions and customs for more than three and a half centuries (Tudose, 2015, 15).

Among the priceless treasures of the Russian national culture that we find today, we mention old manuscripts and prints, ancient icons in the Byzantine style, fabric samples, applied art, housing architecture, folk costumes, folk traditions and customs, folklore, etc. (Jora 2014, 71).

For these ethnic groups, the modernization of contemporary society has produced changes in the community mentality, contaminations and cultural abandonment penetrating both the musical and choreographic repertoire as well as regarding mixed marriages.

2.4. Tatars

The first members of the future Turkish-Tatar community in Dobroudja were merchants from the Balkan Peninsula and are mentioned in historical sources at the beginning of the 7th century (Stancu 2008, 356). The Dobrogean Tatars, the majority in the Dobrogean space, were attested in historical documents with settlements in the central area, in the southern part, as well as in the area of the Dobrogean steppe (Ibram 2017, 20).

And the Tatars, like other cohabiting ethnic groups in Dobroudja, are exposed to the phenomenon of acculturation. They tacitly assimilate the cultural characteristics of the dominant Daco-Romanian majority group or the ethnic groups in proximity, through the deterioration or loss of linguistic identity, through

the loss of “purity”, the authenticity of ethno-folkloric and religious practices, through the pressure of contemporary civilization and history, through the servitudes of globalization, through the need for balance between customs, traditions and modernity, by changing the way of thinking of the collective mind. (Ibram 2017, 223)

3. Manners of maintaining the cultural identity

The reduction of technological differences between town and village, cultural overlap and mobility are the main factors underlying the loss of cultural identity. Nowadays people are not bound by their geographical origin and thanks to the Internet and satellite communications they have access to a wealth of information that was previously unavailable to them.

Traditional music has been drawn into the phenomenon of globalization especially recently, when the Internet appeared which facilitated the access of people all over the globe to music from all over the world (Suiogan 2011, 83).

The musical and choreographic repertoires currently in the practice of the four ethnic communities under research have undergone changes in accordance with the collective mentality and the current level of society, an aspect that will contribute to the acceleration of the phenomena of acculturation, bilingualism, ethno-traditional abandonment, intercultural alterity ethnic and cultural reciprocity.

3.1. The Greeks

The Greeks of Dobroudja gave up certain traditional musical genres (the lullaby) and ritual repertoires (songs from the agrarian, wedding and funeral repertoire). Currently, the lullaby has been replaced by creations originating from the country of origin, and the songs from the agrarian, wedding and funeral repertoire have disappeared, their recovery being impossible.

The musical and choreographic repertoire was reinvigorated by bringing it to the same common denominator as that of the country of origin. The dance style has not undergone any changes, but the same cannot be said about the organology and the dancers. If the bouzuki, considered an emblematic instrument for Greek culture, especially in the diaspora, continues to be present in instrumental music, the other traditional instruments - bagpipes, drums, baglama, zurna, daouli (david) and toubeleki (percussion instrument made of metal, open on the lower side and with a leather membrane fixed on the upper side) (Bărbuceanu 1999, 403) - were replaced by modern instruments - organ, guitar, violin, clarinet, electronic drums.

As for the participants in the dance, the changes are also notable. Zeibekiko is originally a Turkish dance that takes its name from the Zeybeks, former Turkish irregular militia and guerrilla fighters who lived in the Aegean region of the Ottoman Empire from the late 17th century to the early 20th century⁴.

The dance penetrated the Greek culture brought by the displaced Greeks to Izmir, and represents the form of expression of the hopeless, who lost their homeland, nation and fortunes. Initially it was like an allegorical dance reminiscent of war: two armed men facing each other. Later it turned into a dance performed by a single dancer, which unfolds on an improvised choreography. The dancer has the freedom to perform dance steps that require some virtuosity in their realization and body movements independent of the steps, loaded with expressiveness. Currently, this dance has retained its character as a solo dance, but, following the model provided by the Greeks of the country of origin, it can be danced in the community of the Dobrogean Greeks by both men and women.

Tsamikos is another dance that was originally meant for men but nowadays can be danced by women as well. It originates from the areas of Peloponnese, Thessaly, Central Greece and Epirus. This traditional dance, with rural origins, was an icon of Greek masculinity. It is performed in an open circle, the leader demonstrating his choreographic skills through virtuoso acrobatic movements, which require a good physical condition. Then he cedes precedence to the other participants in the dance, all participants being at a given moment the leaders of the troupe of dancers.

It is a dance that has its origins in a legend which says that the guerrilla warriors who freed the Greeks from Turkish oppression (Klephts) danced it as a form of training, to keep fit and prepare for battle. The costume worn during the dance is called Foustanella and is worn by both women and men. The song has a strict tempo and the dance is performed in a circle, with the participants holding hands⁵.

3.2. Aromanians

In the Dobrogean multicultural space, the traditional, eminently oral culture of the Aromanians could be considered impenetrable and conservative for many decades in relation to the other Dobrogean cultures. With the establishment of the communist regime, the Aromanians tried to preserve their cultural heritage as long

⁴ <https://greekreporter.com/2021/12/03/history-tradition-greek-zeibekiko-dance/>
Accessed Sept. 20, 2023.

⁵ <https://folkdancefootnotes.org/dance/a-real-folk-dance-what-is-it/about/tsamikos-transformed/>
Accessed Sept. 27, 2023.

as possible, but the transformations produced in modern society managed to penetrate in gradually causing irreparable effects.

Today we can talk about the richness of traditional musical and choreographic creations, and this aspect is due to the music that unites the members of the community in order to outline individual and group identities.

If we were to recall the musical genres exposed to transformations, I would mention the carol, which was enriched by taking over the carols from the Daco-Romanian majority culture. Their characteristics have been preserved, the only adaptation to the ethnic specifics being the translation into dialect. They are sung during the winter holidays alongside the community carols, being accepted by the entire community today as their own cultural assets.

Another genre that has adapted to the dynamics of contemporary society is dance music. At community events, in addition to their own creations, they also dance to dance songs of Daco-Romanian or international origin. And in the case of the Aromanians, we find two exclusively male dances, which also allowed access to women. The two dances are “Ceamcu” and “Treambură Pamporea” (“The ship sways”) which are danced in an open circle. In both dances the participants hold each other's shoulders, and the leader of the group, called “caplu” (head/leader), spins a handkerchief or string of string of beads made of amber or other semi-precious stones. This accessory, indispensable in the hands of old men, is kept from generation to generation, being highly valued. Currently, at “Ceamcu” the women participate in the dance sitting in a semicircle, behind the men, with their hands on their waists, making gentle body movements, without standing out.

If “Ceamcu” is an old dance, “Treambure Pamporea” is actually a [proper song, whose melody serves](#) as a dance tune. It recently appeared in the Aromanians cultural landscape (for several decades). The poetic text tells about the fear of death of the passengers on a ship in the middle of the sea at the time of a strong storm.

During the chorus they dance in an open circle, the men holding each other's shoulders, and during the stanza proper they clap their hands while the leader can be changed.

As we have seen, both are virtuoso dances, which aim to show off the qualities of the dancers – physical endurance, virtuosity in performing acrobatic figures and suppleness of leaping steps.

3.3. The Lipovian Russians

In the current context, when the Dobrogean ethnic communities face ethno-traditional abandonment, inter-ethnic cultural alterity, acculturation, bilingualism and cultural reciprocity, it was natural that in the case of the Russian-Lipovian ethnics, the musical and choreographic repertoire would undergo important

changes. The first mentioned will be the lullaby, a vocal genre threatened with extinction.

Being sung in privacy, this creation, indispensable to human existence, contributes to emotional communication and to the realization of the most important function performed by the lullaby - that of falling asleep. It has been observed that during the performance of lullabies, almost instantaneous energy transformations occur in the infant's brain in some areas of the hypothalamus and parietal areas of the cerebral cortex (involved in the reactions of consciousness and subconsciousness), (Rucsanda 2010, 10).

As a reaction to the lack of popular creators of this genre, where the mother still lulls her baby to sleep by rocking him, songs from the pastoral repertoire were included in the lullaby genre. For the most part, mothers have abandoned the ancestral practice of rocking, lulling their babies to sleep with the help of gadgets (electronic cradles) that provide through the speaker and foreign lullabies.

The two fishing songs that present similarities in terms of rhythmic-musical structures, particularities of interpretation (tempo and nuances) and repetitive melodic-rhythmic formulas that allow performing similar kinetic movements (swinging), made it possible to take over and fix them in this genre, currently being accepted by the community. The two songs I am referring to are: "Litaet smei" ("The dragon is flying") and "Vdoli pa moriu" ("Along the sea").

Regarding the traditional organology, we can say that the Lipovian Russians knew only the harmonica (harmonișca in the dialect), this being the only accompanying instrument of the musical repertoire. It is an accordion-like instrument, and belongs to the category of wind instruments, with an air tank and a keyboard. On the right hand, the keyboard consists of keys, and on the left hand, buttons called basses. (BĂRBUCEANU, 1999, 9). Currently, in addition to the harmonica, other instruments, much more powerful, have entered the accompaniment, such as: the piano, the guitar, the drums.

3.4. Tatars

The ethnic group of the Dobrogean Tatars has a rich musical and choreographic repertoire, in which creations belonging to the old layer coexist with those of more recent date. The transformations produced in the lifestyle, the dynamics of the Dobrogean society and the changes in the mentality of the community have also allowed, in the case of the Tatars, certain musical genres to disappear and others to be replaced by newer creations of foreign origin.

From the practice of these ethnic groups, once considered the majority in Dobroudja from a numerical point of view, the lullaby, a unique species in the folklore of all peoples, has disappeared. The disappearance of the popular creator, the one with origins in the hearth of the village, and the patriarchal lifestyle, in

which women had the role of taking care of the household and raising children, are perhaps the most important factors that determined the loss of these creations from their heritage cultural. Today, mothers are lulling their babies to sleep with Turkish lullabies by accessing free sites that also make it easy for them to watch lullaby videos online.

Another category from the musical repertoire that has adapted to the new Dobrogean society, characterized by globalization, is represented by traditional dances. These are more and more imbued with elements of Turkish origin, both in melody and in terms of traditional organology. No traditional band anymore uses the traditional instruments - zurna and davul - these being replaced by modern instruments, outside the community cultural space, and I would list as an example the clarinet, organ and electronic drums.

And the Tatars brought innovations in terms of dance participants, and in this sense I would mention the traditional dance "Beş parmaq" ("Five fingers"). If in the past it was performed exclusively by men, nowadays it is a pair dance, the participation of older women (the wives of those participating in the dance) being also allowed. It belongs to the category of dances that are difficult to perform, having an improvisational character, almost motionless, without a lively rhythm.

This dance, which takes place in a rare and solemn tempo, is performed at the wedding, only at the request of the participants. Men are older as they must be well versed in dance steps and body posture. The women dance around the men, imitating their dance steps and arm movements.

The movements of the dancers simulate combat positions, being fragmented, inflexible, slightly theatrical, the dancers remaining in the pose with raised arms and open palms, so that the fingers are ostentatiously exposed in front of the other dancers. The torso is almost motionless, the chest is thrust forward, giving the impression of a warrior attitude. The dancers, with slightly bent knees and moderate trunk bends, execute movements from one leg to the other. From time to time, keeping the rhythm of the song, they change places with each other, performing big and firm steps.

4. Conclusions

Generations change, and the feeling of belonging to a group can only be maintained by memorizing and recalling the events experienced in the community, by accessing historical sources, customs and various practices of daily existence (Iosif 2014, 16)

In the midst of the era of globalization, the phenomenon of orientation of Greeks, Aromanians, Russian-Lipovians and Dobrogean Tatars towards finding ways to maintain their cultural identity and consequently accepting the resulting

creations in community musical practice, currently has major implications for the conditions of identity formation and for understanding it. We can observe how in vigorous creations, belonging to repertoires once considered impenetrable, the symbiosis between own and foreign elements that have merged, currently ensures the particularity so necessary in today's society.

The proposed approach highlighted the following ways of maintaining the cultural identity of the Greeks, Aromanians, Lipovans and Dobrogean Tatars and their effects in musical practice:

- the adaptation of folk dances, a genre governed by immutable organization, to changing social customs, either according to the model practiced in the original territories, or due to the dynamics of the Dobrogean society, had the effect of the participation of women in the dance;

- the disappearance from the community practice of the lullaby, this time a vocal genre, and its replacement with proper songs that show structural, formal and stylistic similarities with the lullaby genre;

- the abandonment of the traditional organology, and the adoption of technically advanced instruments, an aspect that has the effect of taking over some songs from the repertoire of the countries of origin or from the groups located in the vicinity.

Despite these inconveniences, the cultural heritage of the Greeks, Aromanians, Lipovian Russians and Dobrogean Tatars has withstood all the difficulties imposed by denationalization and globalization, demonstrating its power of adaptation to the transformations produced in the village world.

The freezing of musical and choreographic repertoires of ethnic expression is due both to the lack of creators and performers of instruments considered traditional. However, the retrospective attitude towards cultural origins need not necessarily produce stagnation due to immutable traditions.

The ethnic groups of Greeks, Aromanians, Lipovian Russians and Tatars constantly demonstrate that they have oriented themselves in today's society, their cultural products, viewed as a whole, giving rise to a cultural mosaic of identities and Dobrogean belongings characterized by uniqueness.

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