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**MIGRATION OF THE ALBANIANS TO THE EAST
BALKANS AS A RESULT OF SKANDERBEG'S STRUGGLE
AGAINST THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: ALBANIAN
SETTLEMENTS IN BUJAK AND AZOV SEA REGION¹**

The present paper aims at investigating the demographic dynamics of Albanians in Ukraine, their ethnic and local identity, traditional culture, to analyze the social processes in the community of Albanians who live on the territory of the former Soviet Union Republics (Ukraine, Moldavia, and Russia) and the degree of ethnocultural and language interference happened due to long co-existence with neighbouring ethnic groups.

The history of question

Four villages with Albanian population are located in Ukraine: Karakurt (former name Zhovtnevoe (1944–2016)) set up in 1811 (Odessa oblast), Georgievka (former Tyushki), Gammovka (former Dzhandran) and Devninskoe (former Taz) set up in 1862 (Zaporizhia oblast). Before migrating to the territory of the Russian empire Albanians had moved from the present-day South-Eastern Albania into Bulgaria (Varna region) because of the Ottoman invasion (Zhugra, Sharapova, 1998, 117-151). Three hundred years later they had moved from Bulgaria to the Russian empire by reason of Turkish-Russian cleansing opposition in the Balkan Peninsula (Derzhavin, 1926, 171-192; Derzhavin, 1933, 504-512; Derzhavin, 1948, 156-169). Ethnic Albanians also live in some villages in Moldavia and the cities of Odessa and St.-Petersburg.

Current situation

Today, in Russia and Ukraine there are estimated approximately 5000 ethnic Albanians (Novik *et. al.* 2016a). They live mainly in the villages situated in Odessa and Zaporizhia oblasts. The language and

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many elements of traditional culture are still preserved and maintained in all Albanian villages (Novik *et al.* 2019). These Albanian villages are of particular interest and value from the ethnolinguistic and linguistic point of view since they provide and demonstrate us the excellent example of “a melting pot”: Bulgarians and Gagauzes live side by side with Albanians in Karakurt; Russians and Ukrainians share the same space and land with Albanians in Azov district. It is worth mentioning that in multi-lingual environment the Albanian patois retains original Balkan features (Novik 2013).

Questions of methodology

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century are marked by growth of ethnic self-awareness all over the world, which is particularly interesting set against process of globalization and unification of culture. In 1998, 2002 and 2005–2013 the author carried out a fieldwork among Albanians settled in Azov district and Odessa oblast. Analyses of the language and traditional culture of the Albanians settled in Ukraine requires specific methods that should be developed for this particular type of research. The following algorithm is suggested – to find out what ethnic groups co-exist with Albanians in the Albanian settlements.

All Albanian-populated villages (in the territory of Ukraine) have been thoroughly investigated. The fieldwork research aimed at studying the changes, recently happening in the studied villages, mainly in the domain of traditional language and culture preservation (Novik 1998; 2002; 2005; 2010a).

Milestones of history and traits of ethnicity

The mentioned settlements in Zaporizhia oblast were founded in 1861–1862. Their founders were originally from Karakurt (nowadays village Karakurt, Bolgrad district, Odessa oblast, Ukraine). Albanians had come to Karakurt from the Balkan Peninsula in 1811. Firstly, the population in Georgievka and Devninskoe was almost purely Albanian. In Gammovka Albanians lived together with Gagauzes. Later on, in the nearest area there appeared Bulgarian, Ukrainian, and Russian as well as mixed settlements. For the long time the population of Albanian villages retained monoethnic (except for Gammovka). Until the 1920s

the Albanians hadn't admitted and hadn't welcomed the interethnic marriages. The elders thought that their sons could only marry Albanian girls. Daughters as well were given in marriage only to Albanian youngsters (Novik *et. al.*, 2016a).

After the evil years of two Revolutions and the Civil war, the choice of marriage partners became noticeably narrow. Thus, interethnic marriages got "green light". However, this freedom in choice was restricted by the moderate list of peoples allowed to marry Albanians. From this point, Albanians could marry Bulgarians and Gagauzes. All other peoples were thought "strangers". That's reasonable. The ancestors of Azov Albanians had lived some centuries among Bulgarians and Gagauzes. They left Albania approximately in the 16th (or in the early 17th) century and initially settled down in Eastern Bulgaria (Varna region), where they neighbored with Bulgarians and Gagauzes. Then in the beginning of the 19th century Albanians moved to the territory of the Russian empire, escaping from the growing Ottoman oppression. Bulgarians, Gagauzes, Greeks and minor groups of other peoples moved together with Albanians (Ivanova 2006, 302).

In the newly explored and lived-in territories Albanians met Russians, Ukrainians, Moldavians, and Noghays. The way and conditions of life, customs and traditions closely bound Albanians with other refugees from the Balkan Peninsula. Albanians spoke not only their native language – Albanian, but also the Gagauze and Bulgarian languages. They couldn't communicate and keep economic and social links without the command of their neighbours' languages. Albanians first met Russians in Budjak (the cultural and geographic area between the rivers Dneestr and Prut). The communication with Russians was limited to the interaction with the Russian officials. There was practically no everyday communication with Russians and Ukrainians in the first years after their exodus. When Albanians moved to Azov region, the interaction with Russians strengthened, however, some vigilance and detachment remained. According to some native consultants, until WWII Albanian women scared their children with Russians: "There will come a Rus[sian] and seize you". When some carriage with the officials appeared unexpectedly in the village, women

urged children to their houses: “There Russians go!” (Novik *et. al.* 2016a).

The famine, which stroke Ukraine in 1932, passed through the Albanian villages as well. Loads of people starved to death in Azov region. Sinister scenes of that time remained indelible in the people’s memory. Elder informants shudder to think of those days. In Albanian villages people recollect the famine more often than WWII. Many villages and homesteads in Azov region ceased to exist due to the death of their inhabitants. The Soviet officials decided to resettle there Ukrainians and Russians from the Northern parts of Ukraine. After WWII there was a sharp lack of man power in this agricultural region. At the same time the great level of unemployment was observed in the Western Ukraine – a region recently annexed to the Soviet Union. The officials in Kiev started to resettle western Ukrainians to the Eastern part of the country. Unmarried young girls were transported by lorries, then they were distributed to agricultural units: farms, field-crop growers’ brigades and etc. Thus, there appeared new families – local eligible bachelors were looking forward to marrying those young girls. Moreover, the elders could no longer stand up to interethnic marriages. The population of Azov region became more and more mixed.

Starting from the mid-1940s – beginning of the 1950s Albanian young men were recruited to the regular army. Before that they hadn’t had to serve. In the beginning of WWII Albanians were recruited to the front, but later the Soviet officials decided to eliminate the representatives of peoples, whose countries of origin were either under the German occupation or fought on its side, from the army. Although Albanians resisted the Fascist aggression, they were equaled to Bulgarians (Bulgaria was known to be included in the German coalition). To be on the safe side, the Soviet officials numbered Albanians among the so-called “suspect citizens” and refused them to the honorable duty of serving the Motherland.

During the army service period Albanian young men met young girls of different nationalities in different parts of the Soviet Union. After having been demobilized they came back to their villages with those young girls and married them. So mixed families appeared: Albanian-Byelorussian, Albanian-Tatar, Albanian-Mordvinian and so on. From that moment on the radical turn in the traditional mode of life

happened (Narodi 1997, 27-29). The foreign cultural element flowed into Albanian families. Russian became a spoken language in the daughter-in-law's presence in order she could understand what everyone was talking about. Children born in such families became bilingual from the very childhood. Moreover, very often in such cases Russian played the role of the first language. Russian social models and views on the economy management, new judgments and assessments penetrated in the Albanian way of life (Budina, 2000, 239-255; Ivanova, 1995; Ivanova 1999, 217-218; Ivanova, 2000, 40-53).

There are no any more purely Albanian families, - this is what they say themselves. Nearly in every family we may find a Bulgarian or Gagauze grandfather, a Russian or Ukrainian grandmother. Thus, innumerable pure Albanian families emphasize with pride their origin. But even in these families they don't speak only Albanian, as it was several decades ago. This is because of the school. In Albanian villages in the territory of Ukraine teaching at schools was in Russian. Albanian children faced huge language trouble when they entered the first form. They couldn't simply understand Russian-speaking teachers. And this language obstacle was hardly overcome. Many Albanian parents spoke Russian in their children's presence in order that the latter didn't have problems at school. Thus, such children, when they came to school, had the command of Russian. But they continued to speak Albanian in families, especially to the elders and to their Albanian peers. According to teachers, pupils communicated in Albanian during the breaks even 25-30 years ago. Nowadays in Azov region they use the Russian language. They can only speak Albanian to their grandparents, because it is in a way customary. The Ukrainian language that is actively engrafted by the officials nowadays can be hardly learned by Albanian children (Novik *et. al.* 2016a).

The language question is related to the ethnical self-identity problem. The last general census in the Soviet Union gives us the following information: approximately 5000 Albanians has lived in Ukraine. In 1996 the passports of a new type appeared in Ukraine. The column "ethnicity" has been absent since then, so people have been counted without taking into account their ethnical affiliation. The only possible way to count the number of people of a certain ethnicity has been the Household books that are kept in each village administration

(Novik 1998). The column “ethnicity” has been remained in such books. Analyzing this information allowed not only to number the Albanian population, but also to trace the level of “prestige” of this ethnical identity. For example, during the Soviet period many Albanians registered their children as Russians or Ukrainians. This was because of the parents’ anxiety for their children’s prospective career – to avoid the problems connected with unusual ethnicity as it happened in different Soviet periods. Since the independence of Ukraine the tendency of “being Ukrainian” has been growing. Most people concerned it favourable to belong to the title nation of a newly formed state. However, the absence of economic development, the ideological crisis and disappointment in the national policy have led to Albanians’ desire to underline their ethnical affiliation. People ceased to feel embarrassed to be Albanians; moreover, they became proud of their origin. Nowadays we may see the examples of situations when grandchildren feel themselves Albanians though in their families only one grandparent is Albanian. This situation cannot be compared to German, Greek or Jewish self-identification. It is not profitable to be Albanians unlike it is in the mentioned cases. Albania doesn’t render assistance and there are no economic programmes to help the Azov and Bujak diaspora. At the same time people declare their ethnicity, and it is a stable situation (Novik *et al.*, 2019).

During the fieldwork research carried out in the Albanian villages in 1998, the Household books were used as the source of important information. But in 2000 the Ukrainian officials introduced a new type of books for village administration. There is no column “ethnicity” as it is in the national passport. As a result, we can number the Albanians by fieldwork only. So 472 people live in Georgievka, 698 – in Devninskoe, 496 – in Gammovka. The majority of them are Albanians (Novik 2005; 2010a). Approximately 2500 people live in Karakurt (Novik *et al.*, 2016a).

Ethnonym as a problem

Together with the question of ethnical affiliation arises the problem of ethnonym that in the case of Albanians in Ukraine is something far from being trivial. There exist some variants of ethnonyms that may be

traced back to the different historical periods by theoretical and factual analysis.

First, the most widespread and widely used variant is *ga tantë* (alb. lit. 'nga tanët [from ours]'). This ethnonym was used among Albanians even during the resettlement campaign to Russia – the first scientific investigation of the Albanian community enlightens this fact. *Ga tantë* variant falls in deep connection with the linguonym – Albanians call their language *si neve*, i.e. 'as we [do it]'. Consequently, the phrase "to speak Albanian" will sound in a following way *zallahit si neve* (alb. lit. 'flas / flet / flet si ne [I / you / he, she speak(s) as we]') (Novik 2013).

We suppose that Albanians have kept the *ga tantë* ethnonym since the Balkan period of their history, moreover, when they had been living in the Albanian lands. The majority of scholars believe that Albanians moved to Eastern Bulgaria in the 16th century, and thus the ethnonym may have been preserved since that. The present-day ethnonym *shqiptar* that is used by the Albanians within the Peninsula appeared not before the 17th century (Desnitskaja 1987, 204-252) and was mentioned by English traveller W. Leake. Nowadays the word *shqiptar* means "the one who speaks clearly and comprehensibly", it is a derivate of an Albanian verb *shqiptoj* – 'to speak clearly, to spell'. At that time, in the 17-18th centuries, when the consolidation of Albanian lands was waited for, the necessity in the one and unique name of the whole Albanian ethnos instead of the numerous regional terms was obvious (Tirta 2003). Arbers, arbans, albans, arbereshes, arvanits, arnauts – this list refers the names of the Albanian ethnos and its subgroups in the usage of neighbours in Europe and Asia. However, there was no common term of self-nominating. This fact could be explained by the historical circumstances – for quite a long period of time the Albanian lands were disintegrated and were the parts of different medieval states, as a result till the 18th century ethnical affiliation of Albanians was to a great extend regionally specified. Changing in the geopolitical situation and, thus, forming of the national interests led to the creating of the Albanian national idea. Since that, Albanians more willingly felt the affiliation to the nation sharing the language, history and traditions than a region they came from (*krahina* – a territorial unit with certain specificity in economical, political and geographical features). The descriptive linguonym *si neve* also proves

the idea that Albanians had left their motherland before the present-day terms for the Albanian nation (*shqiptarët*) and the Albanian language (*shqip, gjuha shqipe*) appeared (Islami, 1955; Novik, 2007; Kaminskaja and Novik 2008).

Because of such terms for self-nominating and self-presenting, until the 20th century the ethnical affiliation of Albanians was uncertain not only to their neighbours, but to themselves. In Eastern Bulgaria the Ottoman administration included *Si neve* Albanians in the Christian part of the population, without any ethnical demarcation: all Muslims considered being Turks, Orthodox peoples thought to be Greeks. However, the Ottoman rulers tended to differentiate Albanians from Slavs, calling the first Arnauts (Novik 2013).

Until the beginning of the 20th century Albanians in Ukraine appealed themselves as *ga tantë* (“of ours”). Russian officials treated them, first of all, as Orthodox refugees from the Balkans. It goes without saying, that Bulgarians, Gagauzes and Albanians, having come all together from Bulgaria, were thought to be Bulgarians by the new Tsarist administration (Novik *et al.*, 2016a).

The second ethnonym of Albanians in Ukraine appeared in the 1910-20s as a result of fieldwork activity of acad. Nikolay S. Derzhavin who found Albanian villages while collecting language, folklore and ethnographic data in Bulgarian settlements of the Azov area (Derzhavin 1933, 1948). It was he who informed the locals that the patois they spoke was the Albanian, or Arnaut language. Thus, the ethnonym *arnaut* was born, and the language the local people spoke was attributed as *arnautçe*.

Nevertheless, the term *arnaut* hasn't substituted the previous type of self-nominating, but widened the imagological palette of self-consciousness among the Albanians in Budjak and Azov region, letting them not only find a definite position in the range of groups which form this multi-ethnical community, but also obtain their “once-obliterated motherland”.

Finally, in the last decades the Russian terms *albanets* (Albanian) and *albanskij jazik* (the Albanian language) have been engrained among the Albanians in Ukraine. This draft in self-consciousness and self-nominating may be regarded as a result of knowledge gained from the scholars who have come regularly to lead the ethnologic, linguistic

and anthropologic research. Nowadays, all Albanians living in Ukraine include themselves in the thoroughness of Albanian nation, but the mental connection with the Albanian state keeps quite unconscious (comp.: Novik *et al.*, 2019).

Tradition in transition

During the fieldwork trips the author also collected a large amount of linguistic and ethnographical data that are to be thoroughly studied. The first thing to be mentioned is the fact that Albanians in Ukraine in all their settlements continue to speak Albanian, celebrate their traditional holidays, sing songs in Bulgarian, however, they regard them as the element of their culture, and cook traditional dishes (Musliu and Dauti 1996).

The preservation of traditional culture in multi-ethnic context arouses particular interest. First, the cultural element that keeps preserved in its full extent is the traditional cuisine. In some families Albanian may not be spoken and Albanian songs are obliterated, the grandmother's clothes may not have kept safe, but housewives will always cook traditional dishes. No traditional feast or wedding ceremony can manage without them. Second, Albanians keep their musical and dance culture, inherited from their grandparents. The Albanian traditional dance – *valle* – is performed with pleasure on feasts and holidays. Third, members of the folk group have attempted to reconstruct, with crumbs of information, Albanian traditional costume. This costume is thought to be Bulgarian, but Azov and Bujak Albanians regard them as the piece of their tradition. And this fact plays the supreme part in studying the traditional culture preservation (Novik *et al.*, 2016b).

Enumerating the whole range of elements of traditional culture and markers of identity may take a long way, but the main thing that should be declared is that the Albanians give us the brilliant example of successful integration of a Balkan ethnos into the foreign ethnical environment and adaptation to the alien and unknown conditions of living (See: Tirta, 2004; Stublla, 2007; Novik, 2010b; 2010c). Albanians have managed not only to integrate into the local multiethnic society, but also to bring in their experience, cultural skills and achievements in the bright cultural and social palette of its region.

To wrap up with, the author would like to say that nowadays (2011, 2012 and on) he together with the colleagues from Saint-Petersburg (Russia) and Marburg (Germany) – Andrey Sobolev, Denis Ermolin, Maria Morozova and Alexandra Dugushina – lead the fieldwork research in South-Eastern Albania that is aimed at defining the starting point of migration. The ultimate scientific interest and attention is being paid to the regions of Korça, Devoll and Kolonja, because, according to the ethnogenetic mythology of Albanians in Ukraine, this area is the mysterious land of their ancestors. The already collected ethnolinguistic data prove the fact that the *Ga tante* Albanians may have been originated from this zone of South-Eastern Albania. Still, the fieldwork material is to be analyzed and systematized.

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