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"Pesna ki ima? Will there be singing?"

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Summary

The paper examines the cultural and historical context in which Macedonian songs and singing practices are performed in contemporary Greek Macedonia, primarily from the 1980s onwards. The author draws from personal experiences and extensive research on musical recordings to investigate how Macedonian songs, while historically constituting the primary cultural expression of many communities, have been treated, particularly since the 1990s, as a stigmatised and rejectable cultural practice in public contexts. In some cases, Macedonian songs were translated into Greek to be considered purified elements worthy of being integrated into Greek national culture. The paper highlights the significant power of Greek national ideology and the roles of state institutions and local cultural associations in shaping the narrative around Macedonian songs.

It emphasises how, under the guise of protecting Greek national identity, these entities have contributed to portraying these songs as deviant practices despite their widespread acceptance.

Keywords: Macedonian songs, cultural events, hellenization, identity, politics of culture, Greek Macedonia

"Τραγούδι θα έχει;"

Χρήστος Άψης, Μεταπτυχιακός φοιτητής,
ΠΜΣ "Σπουδές στην Τοπική Ιστορία – Διεπιστημονικές Προσεγγίσεις", Τμήμα Ιστορίας και Εθνολογίας,
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Περίληψη

Το κείμενο εξετάζει την πολιτισμικό και ιστορικό πλαίσιο της επιτέλεσης των πρακτικών και των τραγουδιών στη μακεδονική γλώσσα στη σύγχρονη ελληνική Μακεδονία, κυρίως, από τη δεκαετία του 1980 και έπειτα,. Ο συγγραφέας αντλεί από προσωπικές εμπειρίες και μακρόχρονες μουσικές καταγραφές και διερευνά τους τρόπους με τους οποίους τα μακεδονικά τραγούδια, ενώ αποτέλεσαν, ιστορικά, την πρωταρχική δημόσια πολιτισμική έκφραση πολλών κοινοτήτων, αντιμετωπίστηκαν, ιδιαίτερα από τη δεκαετία του 1990, ως μία στιγματισμένη και απορριπτέα από δημόσιες περιστάσεις πολιτισμική πρακτική. Σε κάποιες περιπτώσεις μεταφράστηκαν στην ελληνική γλώσσα για να 'εξελληνιστούν' και να ενταχθούν αποκαθαρμένα στον ελληνικό εθνικό πολιτισμό. Το κείμενο τονίζει, ακόμα, την καθοριστική επίδραση της ελληνικής εθνικής ιδεολογίας, τον ρόλο κρατικών θεσμών και τοπικών πολιτιστικών φορέων και τις ατομικές πολιτικές επιδιώξεις με πρόφαση την προστασία της ελληνικής εθνικής ταυτότητας στη διαμόρφωση του αφηγήματος που συνεχίζει να χαρακτηρίζει την επιτέλεση των μακεδονικών τραγουδιών, παρά την καθολική, σχεδόν, αποδοχή τους, ως μία παραβατική πρακτική.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Μακεδονικό τραγούδι, πολιτιστικά γεγονότα, εξελληνισμός, ταυτότητα, πολιτικές του πολιτισμού, ελληνική Μακεδονία

Introduction

"Will there be singing?" I am starting this paper with a seemingly simple question, although, when posed in Greece it often elicits at least a look of wonder usually followed by a 'what do you mean?' Admittedly, this astonishment is reasonable as evidently, what private, family, religious, or any other festivity is singing not a part of? The answer is none, since singing is merely a part of all the above. And yet, at times, it is intentionally left out.

Actually, this query, though it sounds implausible to many, is one that Macedonian speakers in Northern Greece¹ ask at every social gathering. It is a profoundly familiar question for the Macedonian-speaking residents of Florina, Kastoria, Pella, Imathia, Kilkis, and Thessaloniki. It is the typical question they ask when seeking information about festivals, weddings, baptisms, or any other event featuring music and dance. The inclusion of singing in these affairs cannot be assumed as a given, even in contemporary times. Whether it will be counted in or not is rather unpredictable, since it's influenced by numerous factors which we shall examine further on.

What follows is based on observational insights, research involving the collection of music recordings, and experiential knowledge gained from diverse roles and activities. These include my being a postgraduate student, a traditional-dance teacher, a researcher, and a collector of local songs from Eordaia, Florina, and Pella. Additionally, my perspective has been enriched by my upbringing in the village of Emporio in Ptolemaida, where I was deeply immersed in, and shaped by, experiences related to these cultural phenomena.

Moreover, I will be tracing the trajectories of Macedonian songs in Greek Macedonia², primarily focusing on the period from the 1980s onward, an era when these songs emerged in public gatherings throughout the villages of Florina. I will also explore the contexts where Macedonian songs are performed, the oppression and phases they have gone through before becoming a feature of many public events not only in the areas mentioned above, but also in the urban centres of Athens and Thessaloniki.

Documenting where Macedonian songs are sung today

People commonly assert that 'Macedonian songs are heard at dance festivals in Western Macedonia' or 'people sing in Florina'. These statements prompt to a series of essential inquiries. For example, 'Do people sing, in every village? Are Macedonian songs performed at all village events?' To

¹ I refer to "Macedonian speakers" as Greek citizens who actively use the Macedonian language, as well as those who, despite not speaking it currently, still regard it as a vital element of their cultural expression and identity.

² I use the term "Macedonian song" for two primary reasons. Firstly, the songs commonly performed at festivals and celebrations today are predominantly sung in the Macedonian language. Secondly, the majority of Macedonian language speakers refer to these songs as "Macedonian." Additionally, it's common practice among Macedonian speakers to emphasize the prefix "Macedonian" in Greek, stressing the 'ο', that is "*makedónika*", to differentiate them from those considered Greek songs of Macedonia.

address these questions effectively, we must specify the exact temporal context even when concentrating on each village separately.

From 1990 onwards, it becomes evident that there are villages in Greek Macedonia where singing Macedonian songs is a fundamental feature in public gatherings. Conversely, there are villages where not even a single line of a Macedonian song is sung. Likewise, numerous villages exist where, on public occasions, singing Macedonian songs is the main form of cultural expressions. And yet, intriguingly enough, there are times when these songs are left out on purpose.

Nowadays, the village of Griva in the Kilkis region is a notable example. A decade ago, Macedonian songs were a common feature there, whereas today they are no longer heard. In contrast, in the villages of Eastern Macedonia, Macedonian songs have never been a part of public events, in the past or present. Their performance is restricted to private occasions and parties only.

Similarly, the trend in the regions of Central Macedonia and Thessaloniki is much the same, with a few rare exceptions. Even though in Imathia and Pella, Macedonian songs are heard in many Macedonian-speaking villages, there is no singing involved in Lefkadia, Episkopi and Garefi, among others.

In the regions of Imathia and Pella, Macedonian songs are a significant part of cultural events in many Macedonian-speaking communities. However, there are some exclusions. In some villages, such as Lefkadia, Episkopi, and Garefi, among others, Macedonian songs do not play a part in public gatherings. Likewise, in the Kilkis area, they are not a standard feature in public events, except for the community of Griva. On the other hand, in the Kozani area, villages such as Olympiada and Emporio stand out for actively including Macedonian songs in their public events.

In the Kastoria area, the practice of singing Macedonian songs is widespread among most villages. Nonetheless, there are distinct exceptions, such as the community of Vasiliada and some villages within the municipality of Orestida, such as Nostimo and Asproklisia. Conversely, in the Florina region, Macedonian songs are completely left out in the Skopiá community and the villages around the Prespes area. In all the examples mentioned, major towns in the region that stand out are those where Macedonian singing has not yet been practiced. The sole exception is Edessa, where the cultural association *Metskes* is the only private institution incorporating Macedonian songs into its events, rather than using the Macedonian language in public spaces instead.

Macedonian songs, unlike the Macedonian language, are still regarded as a cultural expression that should be banned. In fact, the effects of these repressive practices are still evident even nowadays. Singing in Macedonian is clearly left out from current events organized by municipal or regional authorities. At the same time, entire villages, cultural institutions, and even individuals consciously refrain from singing Macedonian songs publicly, fearing that they may be labeled as being promoters of anti-Greek propaganda.

Translating the songs so that they 'become Greek'

The Greek state implemented severe policies and practices aimed at suppressing the use of the Macedonian language during the 20th century, from the time it was incorporated in 1912 up to the junta era (1967-1974) in particular. Moreover, criminalization and outright prohibition of the Macedonian language were enforced, in addition to oaths of allegiance to Greece by entire villages solemnly pledging not to use Macedonian. Even more so, there was police brutality, punitive transfers of civil servants to undesirable posts, and even a ban on using Slavic baptismal names.

At a micro-society level, in some cases, local communities have complied with the objectives of these practices. In villages in Drama and Serres, Macedonian songs were translated into Greek so that they could be more gently and smoothly integrated into the national narrative. Translations were done mainly by women, often with the help of teachers committed to the national ideology. In other cases, they borrowed lyrics from songs of different regions incorporating them into the local repertoire, such as *Tzanem potame* (GELisavet 2014) or *Stis Mantzuranas ton Antho* (George Mavridis 2016).

Similar cases were also evident in villages around the Thessaloniki region, where Cultural institutions borrowed lyrics from other areas, instead of mainly focusing on translating songs. The goal was to emphasize the use and vitality of the Greek language, supporting the ideology of Greek origin among the inhabitants, and reaffirming the rich tapestry of Greek culture. In this context, there was collaboration between cultural associations and various community institutions in Kimina, Neochorouda, and Pentalofos in Thessaloniki, in order to release CDs featuring Greek-language songs. These albums were presented as integral components of the local oral traditions.

In 1998, the Kimina Cultural Association released an album titled "Kimina Songs and Dances" edited by I. D. Vrizas. In 2000, the Neochorouda Cultural Association 'Alexander the Great' released another album titled *Me tou dopiu ti lalia kai tou degki tin anasa* edited by Epirot dance teacher Giorgios Kapsalis. A third album, titled *Traditional Dances and Songs of Pentalofos*, edited by dance instructor Giorgos Karkaris, was released in 2023. This album features songs performed by female vocalists from the Pentalofos Open Centre for the Elderly dance group.

As well, there are similar examples in the areas of Goumenissa and Kilkis, where two of the most renowned Macedonian songs, *Belo Olympio* (Domna Megga 2021) and *Lissavo* (Domna Megga 2022) also considered representative dances of the region, were translated into Greek, and separately released on CD. The first album, titled *Macedonia – Thassos*, is part of the *Greek Akrites* series, released in 1998 (Dickogs) featuring the renowned singer Domna Megga, alongside the Brass Bands of Goumenissa ensemble. The second album titled *The Brass Bands of Goumenissa*, released in 1999 (Ta

halkina tis Goumenissas 1999), was a joint effort by local musicians, featuring well-known artists Vangelis Gevgelis and Domna Megga.

Remarkably, songs translated into Greek were wholeheartedly embraced in the regions of Eastern Macedonia, although this wide acceptance was not necessarily assumed in Central Macedonia. Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted as a reaction against translations or borrowed lyrics, even though there were some objections to that. This situation is also linked to the fact that there were no vocalists in orchestras originating from, and being active in, Macedonian-speaking villages. In actuality, without a singer no songs could be performed in any language. This phenomenon does not only exist in Macedonian-speaking villages; it can also be observed in Greek-speaking villages in the region, such as Drimos, Melissochori, and Chalastra, where some of the brass bands of Goumenissa -- not including vocalists in their ensemble -- have performed.

In Imathia, Pella, Florina, Kastoria, and Kozani, there were no translations of Macedonian songs, or an introduction of Greek lyrics from other songs. Whether the songs were in Macedonian or Greek, there were absolutely no vocal performances in these areas. Instead, the focus was entirely on instrumental versions. The song of Captain Naoum (Kapetan Naumis) was a single case in the Florina region, which did not receive acceptance from the local society as the rhythm had been altered.

It was performed to the beat of the local Poustseno dance despite the community's unwillingness to embrace this particular adaptation. The song was featured on CD, titled *Stin Florina efichos*, produced by the 1st General High School of Florina in 2013, under the auspices of the regional administration of Western Macedonia, and performed by the high school choir, conducted by philologist and musician Dimitris Papadopoulos, and music director Vassilis Kommatas. (Vass Komm 2013)

Stigmatizing even music without lyrics

Following Greece's political transition in 1974, an issue surfaced concerning bands that performed purely instrumental music, omitting traditional vocals. Police and other state authorities frequently gave recommendations to these bands, particularly those known for performing instrumental versions of songs whether with or without lyrics. Advisories were issued and dispatched not only by state officials, governmental bodies and agencies, but occasionally also initiated by ordinary citizens feeling disconcerted.

An intriguing incident from the Eordea region, described in a letter from my archive titled 'Expression of Slavic Propaganda in Macedonia', addressed "To the Honorable President of the Government" in 1979, sparked controversy. The letter refers to the 'Dance of the Flowers and Cherries' event taking place in Emporio, Kozani during the same year. After mentioning that state

officials and the representatives of the political parties were present, it continues: "*At the beginning of the dance, the Amyntaio Orchestra that had presumably received instructions from their people not to play songs with Macedonian lyrics, started playing Bulgarian songs ('Mama Ki Te Koupe Tsiarveni Tsourapi,' meaning 'Mother will buy you colourful socks'), among others. The officials applauded, and so did the residents who recognized the tune... Successively, the orchestra continued playing Serbian tunes like 'Zaiko Kokoraiko,' among others; again, the officials applauded. The atmosphere became Bulgarian-Serbian, giving the impression to the national-minded Greeks of the town that everything taking place was done so under the blessing of the higher official organs of the State...*"

The sender was a local resident, a former government employee, who noted that the events transpiring that night were "*unprecedented and directed by Slavic propaganda, given that they occurred in vulnerable premises*". He also requested "*that an investigation be ordered to confirm the above, about some of which the newspapers got notice*". That was a time when playing music with lyrics was subject to criticism, even when performed in instrumental version only. "Especially those [melodies] considered to be connected with the historical period of the early 20th century, like *Tsakalarof* (Stalevski 2009), or the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), such as *Zaiko Kokoraiko* (Stalevski 2009).

Musicians chose to incorporate melodies from other regions of Greece into their repertoire, either by performing them in the original version, or adapting them to the local musical style of the area. The aim was to ensure that local dances could be performed with melodies and rhythms that align with local dance movements, while at the same time creating the impression, for state services, that both songs and dances fall within the acceptable boundaries of Greekness. In a conversation I had with a musician from Florina he mentioned, "*Due to being persecuted for playing our music, we invented the Ghioumia³. Whenever the police apprehended us, we claimed to be playing Greek music. And so, we performed the Ghioumia to the Poustseno dance*".

Translating dance names to (also) 'make them Greek'

Folklorists, musicologists, academics, and dance instructors are all advocates of keeping music clear of 'non-Greek' elements. They will Hellenize terms of Slavic origin and introduce translated or Hellenized terms for the dances. A notable example creating public controversy, was an article published in the Florina newspaper "Allagi" in 1990, penned by K. D. I. (Κούφης 1996: 241-243). The article, titled 'Litos,' addresses the dance known in the Macedonian language as 'poustseno,' translated into Greek as 'litos.' The translation aimed to tone down the influence the Macedonian language had, while highlighting its Greek identity. Likewise, the article criticizes the practice of translation by certain local cultural organizations.

³Ghioumia is a song from Voio Kozani in 5/8 rhythm, adapted to the rhythm of the poustseno in 16/16. The older musicians of Florina still remember it (Greek_Culture 2012).

In addition, the article specifically points out that *“the name of the dance... is derived from the verb of our local language "POUSTSAM" with the "ts" pronounced emphatically, meaning to let something go free, something that was previously restrained...The verb is also used to convey the various meanings of willingly freeing someone, such as allowing a soldier to return home as a civilian, releasing someone from prison, letting an animal go to graze, or letting water, a river, a channel, a tap, or wine flow...while the dance symbolizes 'freedom;' some in our region have 'self-imposed bonds' around themselves, have built walls, and enclosed themselves within”*.

The author then poses a critical question: *“Is it right to change the traditional name of a folk dance? Why did you members of the Aristotelis Association, as non-natives in our land, alter the name of our own dance?... Why, gentlemen of the Papagiannis Association, being one of us, did you change the name of our dance?” Did you consult your grandfathers and grandmothers about this change?... Is this how your grandmothers referred to the dance, as 'LITOS'?” “What are you trying to prove, members of the Papagiannis and Aristotelis associations? That you are 'more Greek' than others?”* (Κούφης 1996:241-243).

In a letter to the newspaper during the same year, the Administrative Board of the 'Aristotelis'⁴ Association responded, emphasizing, *“We at 'ARISTOTELIS' have not changed the name of any dance... We learned this particular dance from our grandfathers and grandmothers as LITOS, and it is as LITOS that we dance and teach it”*. In concluding their response, the 'Aristotelis' Association didn't miss the opportunity to declare their national sentiments in administrating the Associations: *“To address the essence of the publication, we at 'ARISTOTELIS' are not non-natives, nor do we consider anyone else as such... We regard everyone living in our border region as GREEK, whether their roots are from Pontus, Asia Minor, Northern Epirus, or they are native Greek Macedonians... No one claims laurels of Greekness, least of all us at Aristotelis... In essence: we at Aristotelis think in Greek, act in Greek, speak Greek, and we don't look for words and names in dictionaries created after 1945 onwards”* (Κούφης 1996: 243).

The songs started to be heard

In the Florina region towards the end of the 1970s, the sounds of Macedonian songs started to resonate. Yiannis Kizas, a native of Polipotamos, Florina, was a pioneering voice. Accompanied by his orchestra, Kizas performed in a number of local taverns. Towards the latter half of the 1980s, the scene witnessed the emergence of the music group "Aidonia". This wave had also brought forth other musical groups by the end of the decade. The musical repertoire was predominantly local, though it also drew significant influence from the contemporary Yugoslavian music scene, with melodies travelling across borders via cassette tapes, vinyl records, and radio broadcasts. A musician from Florina recounts, *“Our repertoire was modest, comprising about twenty songs, largely those we learned from our parents”*. Throughout these cultural developments, state authorities maintained a vigilant presence. They consistently monitored and, when necessary, intervened in public events. Their concern lay in

⁴See the Aristotelis' website (ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΗΣ. Φιλεκαπαιδευτικός Σύλλογος Φλωρίνης)

preserving and safeguarding the Greek identity of the region, which they perceived as being potentially undermined by these musical expressions.

A musician's account from the Florina region is particularly telling. He shared with me, "*We had gone to Edessa to play. The next morning, my phone rings at home. It's the chief of the local police, and he says to me... you and your orchestra were singing. 'Please, we don't sing.' He insisted, saying Edessa had informed him that we went there and sang. I assured him, 'Please, Chief, there must be some mistake. We are law-abiding; we don't sing.' And guess what happened... some orchestra members, after the celebration in Edessa, went to a tavern in Likostomo, played, and sang. And when asked who they were, some said they belonged to my orchestra. Can you believe it?*"

The first organized event featuring Macedonian songs took place in 1988 at the festival of Prophet Elias in Meliti, Florina. The police intervened, forcibly removing the microphone from the singer and cutting off the power (Κωστόπουλος 2000: 365). This festival marked the first collective effort by Macedonian speakers to assert their right to openly sing in their own language.

Throughout the 1990s, more and more villages such as Lofi, Atrapos, and Polipotamos, started incorporating Macedonian songs into their festivals, in this way considerably changing the repertoire. Singing in Macedonian entered a new phase, embracing songs with political messages. These contemporary compositions, introduced from present-day North Macedonia or by Macedonian immigrant communities in Australia and Canada, became increasingly popular. Moreover, the repertoire was enriched with what they called "love songs," a mix of both new and older arrangements.

Singing in Macedonian ever more gained ground with participants supporting this choice as a form of resistance against the oppressive practices of the Greek state. In Meliti, singers and musicians from North Macedonia, such as Vaska Ilieva (Makedonier 2009), Steftse Stoikovski, Angel Dimovski, (Trtmrtfrt 2012) among others, started appearing. However, the authorities at the border sometimes reacted by denying entry, as in the case of Ferus Mustafov (Trtmrtfrt 2012), who was invited to the dance evening of the Meliti cultural association in 1995, but was denied entry to Greece.

The introduction of Macedonian songs into public events expanded to several significant areas in Western and Central Macedonia, such as Griva in Kilkis, Loutraki in Aridaia, Tichio in Kastoria, Ambelies in Giannitsa, Stavrodromi in Imathia, Olympiada, and Emporio in Eordaia. The growing demand for Macedonian songs led to the formation of new musical groups. Notable examples include Nikos Botsfaris (Eordaios 2020) from Loutraki with his orchestra *Voreioi* (ΘΕΟΦΙΛΟΣ ΚΑΡΑΜΠΙΑΣΗΣ 2013) and Christos Tsiptaris (Γιώργος Θάνου 2020) from Promachoi, Aridaia.

Orchestras, like those from Western Macedonia, started performing in the villages of Central Macedonia and vice versa. By expanding their professional networks a standard repertoire was built. Consequently, each region's distinct musical and dance characteristics started to blur. Despite the growing popularity of Macedonian songs, their public events continued to be perceived as a symbol of distinct identity, different from Greek national identity.

Patrons attending festivals featuring these songs were often labelled as enemies of the nation and targeted as propagandists, agents, and national threats. Far-right newspapers, journalists, Macedonian fighter associations, and church leaders frequently made statements and demonstrations in the public sphere to remind people of the "tentacles of foreign propaganda" and the need for rigorous action to combat the phenomenon. (NOIAZOMAI 2011)

Highlighting the 'authentic' local tradition

From 2010 onward, the course of events changed significantly. Recognizing the difficult nature of the situation, individuals who perceived themselves as guardians of the Greek identity started arguing that 'foreign' songs, particularly those originating from North Macedonia, among other regions, especially ones containing political messages, should be excluded. This mindset dictates that singing exclusively 'our own' songs is the only way to preserve and honour the 'authentic' local tradition.

The leading advocate of this perspective was the Panhellenic Federation of Macedonian Associations (PFMA), established in 2014 with a mission to safeguard and preserve the "authentic" Macedonian tradition. During workshops and conferences, Federation members emphasized the threat posed by songs composed in Northern Macedonia and elsewhere, popular among youth at festivals, which they believe distort the true essence of the local culture.

During a convention in Ptolemaida in order to discuss forming a new organization dedicated to promoting Macedonian songs, George Tatsios, the president of the Federation, asserted that excluding the songs was actually preferable. He argued that including the songs could act as a divisive element among the Greeks of Macedonia, particularly for those groups in Eastern Macedonia, who have endured hardship under Bulgarian rule. (ΤΑ ΝΕΑ ΤΗΣ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΪΔΑΣ 2015)

Meanwhile, Macedonian festivals organized under the auspices of the PFMA, held in locations like Sitaria of Florina, the Kaftatzoglio stadium in Thessaloniki, and Amphipolis, celebrate the Greek identity of Macedonia without acknowledging the existence of Macedonian songs. Additionally, modern advocates of the Greekness of Macedonia, utilizing social media, strive to underline that "Slavic-speaking inhabitants of Macedonia fought for the Greek identity of the region during the Macedonian struggle." They share Macedonian songs online, such as *Pavle Rakoftseto* (Macedonia Ntopioi 2011) (about the Macedonian hero Pavlos Rakovitis), the lament for Tellos Agras (Το σπιτάκι της Μέλιας 2014), and songs about Pavlos Melas, (Macedonia Ntopioi 2011) to demonstrate that even Macedonian songs can reinforce the Greek consciousness.

Despite efforts made to highlight Macedonian songs, ironically, these songs will not be heard at any gatherings, even by their own advocates. A good example is the event organized by the PFMA in Skidra, on January 21, 2017, titled "Symposium on Macedonian Tradition and History - Prefecture of

Pella" (ΠΑΝΕΛΛΗΝΙΑ ΟΜΟΣΠΟΝΔΙΑ 2017). At this symposium, the president discussed a Macedonian dirge from the Ptolemaida area. He directed the attention of the audience toward the Byzantine style of the dirge, its musical connections to Epirus, using it as a clear testament to the historical and cultural continuity of Greek heritage.

At the same conference, Stella Delios, (ΚΑΘΡΕΦΤΗΣ πέλλας 2017), a dance teacher from Edessa, stated her opinion as if "playing the devil's advocate", is the way she put it. She questioned the PFMA as to why, despite playing various songs at their events, they choose not to include "dopia" (local) ones, referring specifically to Macedonian songs. The President's response was assertive and in line with his previous remarks made in Ptolemaida, further emphasizing that everyone has the right to sing in their own language.

Additionally, the President addressed the issue of local residents being misled by what he calls the "*clever ones of tradition*". He criticized them for encouraging people to sing in their language while, paradoxically, they promoted songs in "Skopiana" (from Skopje) rather than truly "local" ones. He also emphasized the lack of research in this area, pointing out a significant gap that the collaboration between the PFMA and the University of Macedonia aims to fill. This partnership intends to establish a chair dedicated to Macedonian tradition, with the goal of fostering the authentic Macedonian heritage. The agreement for this initiative was signed in 2016 by Achilleas Zapranis, the then-rector at the University of Macedonia, and Georgios Tatsios, the president of the PFMA. However, despite the formal agreement, this ambitious project shall remain only on paper (ΠΑΝΕΛΛΗΝΙΑ ΟΜΟΣΠΟΝΔΙΑ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΩΝ ΣΥΛΛΟΓΩΝ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΩΝ 2016).

In the next phase of this evolving situation, Macedonian song will undergo a process of partial legitimization, due to removal of any anti-Hellenic irredentist elements. Moreover, the PFMA, in an effort to protect what they perceive as an innocent and unaware public participating in festivals, categorized Macedonian songs on their website according to their lyrical content. These songs were represented with Greek translations, aiming to dispel any "confusion among the native Macedonians," as indicated by the subtitle of the article (ΠΑΝΕΛΛΗΝΙΑ ΟΜΟΣΠΟΝΔΙΑ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΩΝ ΣΥΛΛΟΓΩΝ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΩΝ 2019).

The categorization devised by the PFMA encompasses a broad range of songs, directly related to significant historical and political events in the region. This includes songs of the Ilinden Revolution, the Macedonian Struggle, the Balkan Wars, the Greek Civil War, in addition to two other categories including songs about the Slavic aspirations in the Aegean, and songs about the autonomy of Macedonia-- Composed in Northern Macedonia and other locations.

Similarly aligned with the approach of the PFMA, Christos Batsis, a member of the organization, mayor of the municipality of Almopia at the time, and next mayoral candidate, made a notable move. During the 2023 pre-election campaign he distributed a booklet titled "The Irredentist

Songs." This publication featured a list of twelve songs, some written in Cyrillic Macedonian and others in Latin script, accompanied by a translation in Greek. In addition, Batsis addressed nearly all the regional orchestras, whose music had been a part of his upbringing and continues to resonate with him to this day.

In his remarks, Batsis identifies the failure to record local songs as a significant error. He suggests that dance instructors and musicians collaborate to create an "*impeccable collection of elements that can be flawlessly transferred to the next generation*". Alongside this, he advises the inhabitants of his area to be conscious of what they listen to and dance to. He stresses the importance of respecting their roots and traditions, which he believes some have attempted to distort.

Macedonian Song Today: where it's included, where it's left out

Today, one could argue that Macedonian song has been destigmatized, and several factors do support this observation. For example, there is no official law or state intervention from governmental authorities putting any restrictions on these songs. In most communities, public events organized often feature songs, including ones with political messages. In Athens and Thessaloniki, Macedonian songs are heard on dance nights organized by associations, cultural centres, and bars. On state television, the program *The Secrets of Egnatia* with Nikos Kipourgos (MUSIC VAULT 2023) presents song as a cultural characteristic of the regions along the Egnatia Odos.

Despite the above, can we assert that Macedonian song has been fully destigmatized? The answer is negative. As mentioned earlier, events under the auspices of municipal, regional, or ecclesiastical authorities still leave these songs out. The TV show *The Salt of the Earth* (ERTFLIX) hosted by Lambros Liavas on state television, exclusively dealing with Greek tradition, enjoys great popularity throughout the country. However, the show has never featured Macedonian songs, nor has it invited any orchestras from Central or Western Macedonia to perform these songs, even if only as instrumental pieces. Specifically, when presenting dances and songs from the Serres and Drama regions, the show should still acknowledge the existence of another language in the area.

Many Western and Central Macedonia communities still need to integrate Macedonian songs into their events. In Eastern Macedonia, people and many cultural associations act as if song never existed in any language other than Greek. Unfortunately, regardless of claims that singing Macedonian songs spontaneously is allowed today, my personal experience indicates the opposite. Those who listen to and sing Macedonian songs do so with a sense of risk, fearing stigmatization. They feel that what they are doing is not accepted by the broader society, verges on deviance and requires them to justify why they sing these songs. There have been several instances where event organizers, addressing the orchestra, requested a change in the musical repertoire to include songs from other regions of Greece, suggesting it was "too much" and needed to be "broken up".

The current situation is aptly captured in a remark made by the president of the cultural association of Meliti. Before the Meliti dance group performed a song at an event in Marina Naousa in 2012, he wryly commented on the absence of singing, quoting a phrase his grandmother used to say: "Tshedoi! Only Charlie Chaplin made silent films back in 1920!" (Gigenis Makedonas 2012) However, the question still remains poignant, and unresolved, in today's Greek society: "Pesna ki ima? Will there be singing?"

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