

WHAT'S IN A VLACH NAME? PATRONYMS, DOUBLE NAMING AND ETHNIC IDENTITY OF THE VLACHS OF EASTERN SERBIA*

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has long been recognized by anthropologists that naming people has a clear purpose: it expresses identity and individuality, as well as connectedness to the community or ethnic group to which they belong, and social integration. Naming embeds a person in a family structure, through the family name, yet the first name also emphasizes individuation (Finch, 2008, pp. 711–712). However, the binomial, patronymic system comprised of a person's first name and the family name is relatively new; throughout most of Europe, people used to be identified by their first name, by their father's given name, and often by reference to their lineage and to previous generations (Hanks & Parkin, 2016, p. 214). Even if the binomial system is the norm in Europe today, remnants of the patronymic system still survive, reminiscent of pre-industrial societies.

One society where names play an especially interesting role is that of the Vlachs in Eastern Serbia. The aim of this paper is to investigate the transmission, use, and revival of Vlach patronyms in the Vlach community. The paper examines how the indigenous, customary system of Vlach naming has survived until the present, and how the official, binomial system of naming was molded to the requirements of a foreign, Serbian administration. A distinguishing feature of

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the Vlachs' nomenclature today is the phenomenon of dual naming, Vlach and Serbian, which reflects a double identity, fueled by the bilingualism of the people, and by the two different ways of belonging: to their native, Vlach villages and to the wider Serbian society.

The uneasy relationship between these two systems of naming, private and official, which are also a reflection of intense language contact and acculturation, is also examined. The paper focuses on the recent, early 21st century Vlach cultural revival and the increase of language prestige, which prompted the use of the Vlach naming system outside the strict confines of the village for the first time. Thus, the paper demonstrates that names, a significant element of ethnic identity, are a rich source of continuing insight into the dynamics of Vlach and Serbian language contact in Eastern Serbia.

2. THE VLACHS OF EASTERN SERBIA

The Vlachs are a Romance-speaking population living south of the Danube, in the eastern part of Serbia, an area which borders Romania and Bulgaria. Following the demographic devastation of the region caused by the Ottoman invasion, especially towards the end of the 17th century, migrants from southern and south-western Serbia, as well as from areas north of the Danube, were attracted by the deserted, fertile lands and settled there in successive waves of migration. The 18th and 19th centuries are the period when Romanian-speaking groups from north of the Danube, from the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Banat (today two regions in southern and western Romania, respectively), inhabited the area in greater numbers, forming the ethnic community which is today known as the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia (Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu, 2023, pp. 24–27).

After the 1718 Treaty of Passarowitz, which ended the Austro-Turkish War, the western part of what is now known as Eastern Serbia came under the Austrian administration, which colonized large populations from Banat. These colonizers were mainly shepherds, who found appropriate conditions for pursuing their traditional occupation and way of life in the new land. Apart from these planned colonizations, spontaneous, unplanned dislocations of population from the Romanian principality of Wallachia took place during the Phanariot epoch (1711–1821). At this time, entire villages fled across the Danube in search of better lives and free land, due to the extreme fiscal exploitation by the rulers. In addition, smaller groups, sometimes made up of single families and individuals, came to Serbia from north of the Danube throughout the 19th century (Djordjević, 1906, pp. 57–58; Ocetea, 1979, p. 163).

The newcomers brought their livestock, their language (a dialectal variety of Romanian), and their double system of naming, which will be discussed

in this paper. The language developed independently from standard Romanian, with which it has had only occasional contact during the last century (Huțanu & Sorescu-Marinković, 2018). The language is called *vlaški* in Serbian, mirroring the ethnonym used for and by the community, *Vlasi*, when they speak Serbian, and *rumînește* in the vernacular, in which the Vlachs call themselves *rumîñ*. Given that the language, which almost exclusively existed in the oral vernacular until the beginning of the 21st century, was recently standardized (2022), in this paper, I will use the term *Vlach* to refer to this archaic variety of Romanian, strongly influenced by contact with the Serbian language.

According to the data provided by the 2011 Serbian population census, the Vlach community officially numbers 35,330 members, but at the same time, 43,095 people declared their mother tongue to be Vlach (Census, 2011, pp. 21, 54). The most recent census, in 2022, only recorded 21,013 Vlachs (Census, 2022a, p. 21), and 23,216 persons whose mother tongue was Vlach (Census, 2022b). For comparison, the 1953 census registered 28,047 Vlachs, but 198,861 people whose mother tongue was Vlach. This longstanding discrepancy between the declared ethnicity and mother tongue of the Vlachs, visible at all censuses after World War II, apart from the last one, is the result of complex historical and demographic development of the Vlach community and the wider social context (Knežević, 2019, pp. 463–466), and it indicates that “at least some of the members of the community have multiple, intersecting identities, with their ethnic loyalty directed mainly toward the national state, and their linguistic one mainly toward the local variety” (Huțanu, 2021, p. 237). Among other things, these multiple identities are fueled by the Vlachs’ bilingualism, but also by their double names: the official Serbian one, and the non-official Vlach name.

3. NAMES AND NAMING SYSTEMS IN ROMANIAN VILLAGES

Romanian family names appeared at a certain stage of society’s development due to the need to identify two or several people who bore the same first name. For example, if there were two people with the name *Ion*, the person’s individualization began with the help of the patronym, or father’s name (*Ion al lui Vasile* ‘Ion (son) of Vasile’, *Ion al lui Petru* ‘Ion (son) of Petru’, etc.), or, more rarely, the matronym, the mother’s name (*Ion al Marfei* ‘Ion (son) of Marfa’, *Ion al Irinei* ‘Ion (son) of Irina’, etc.), formed with the help of the Romanian genitive suffix *al (lui)* (‘of, belonging to’) (Graur, 1965, pp. 73, 89; Jordan, 1983, p. 9). The transition to this double naming started in the 16th century, first among the ruling class, then in other social classes (Constantinescu, 1963, p. XXIII); the formation of the family name with the help of the Romanian patronym in the genitive case was only one of the six possible ways of family name formation (p. XXIV).

Over time, the naming process evolved, with family names becoming strictly necessary elements for official identification. In most of the cases, a suffix was added to the patronym, either a Romanian one (e.g., *-escu*, *-eanu*, *-aşcu*, etc.) or a suffix of another origin (Greek, Slavic), leading to names like *Vasilescu*, *Vasilache*, *Vasiliiu*, *Vasilenco*, *Vasilciuc*, *Vasiliev*, etc. (p. XXXVI).

In the first half of the last century, Romanian scholars drew attention to a specific phenomenon: the existence of two separate naming systems in the space of the Romanian village — an official one and a non-official one that is of equal historical and social significance (Stahl, 1934, pp. 83–85; Paşca, 1936, p. 61). The non-official system of naming is the one of interest to us, as it was transferred to the newly founded Vlach villages in Eastern Serbia by the migrants and colonists.

In his extended onomastic study about personal names and animal names in a microregion situated in central Romania at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains and along the river Olt (Rom. *Țara Oltului*), the Romanian philologist Ștefan Paşca details the two naming systems existent in this part of Romania, saying the following about the non-official system:

The popular system of denomination presents itself in different forms than the official one, although it is the product of the same psychological, social, and economic factors as the official one. Indeed, an individual whose name is Matei Fogoroş in official documents is known under the name Mateiu lui Neofit (after his father) in the vernacular, and when he marries, under the name Mateiu Ghik'a Popii (after his father-in-law). The popular denomination formula is, therefore, very different from the official one, meaning it is more flexible, less rigid, [and] it can change from one date to another, depending on the circumstances of an individual's life. (...) The popular system of denomination is more real and expressive than the official one, as it pays attention to the individual's social situation. It is, nevertheless, less practical, because it can be useful to a smaller nucleus of individuals; it addresses an intimate circle of individuals who closely know each other and it becomes enigmatic for more distant social nuclei (Paşca, 1936, pp. 71–72, transl. — ASM).

Paşca bases his linguistic analysis on a sociological study by Henry H. Stahl, the founder of Romanian historical sociology, which had been published only two years earlier, in 1934. In Stahl's study on the onomastic system of Drăguş, a village in Transylvania, he notices that the social village organization based on lineages (*rudenii de ceată*) was undergoing a process of dissolution at the time and was heading towards individualization. However, he found several domains of contemporary social life which had kept traces of this almost obsolete form of social organization; one of them was the customary onomastic system.

According to Stahl, every person in the village of Drăguş had multiple names: 1) an official, ID name, used only on occasions in which the villagers came into contact with the state life; for example, at the town hall, at the tax office, at elections, at school, in the army; 2) a *policră*, or private, non-official name, which

could be: a) common for a bigger group of relatives, b) common for a household, or c) the name of an individual; and 3) a nickname, purely individual. The predominant system was that of names belonging to a household, classification 2b (1934, p. 84). The term *policră*, which is obsolete in standard Romanian today, but is frequently used in Vlach, is the approximate equivalent of “patronym” in this customary onomastic system. I will use the Vlach term throughout the rest of the text.

Both naming systems, the official and the private, customary one, indicate an individual's belonging to a group of relatives. But as the family changes, it is natural that the naming system changes accordingly. However, as opposed to the official naming system, which is more rigid, the customary name is sensitive to all changes which appear over time as far as an individual's relationships go, and is therefore more flexible and better reflects the realities of the village. Stahl makes the observation that the villagers never call each other by their official name, but always by their unofficial, customary one (Stahl, 1934, p. 86).

The most frequent formula for the customary, unofficial naming is the one which correlates somebody's personal name with the name of the individual to whom they “belong” family-wise: *Valere a lui Rogozel, Cuț'a Crețului*, where *a (lui)* is the genitive particle denoting belonging. Sometimes the formula encompasses the successive enumeration of the names of more individuals in a genealogical or kinship relation, e.g., *Nișca Cuții Botului, Neofitu Nichii Ghichii Oanii, Hir'a lui Nic'a Mărinii* (Stahl, 1934, p. 87).

Indicating one's belonging to someone else through name can have more aspects: an individual can be directly connected to another individual, who is always their father, mother, or husband, but an individual can also be connected to an entire group of relatives who bear a certain name, a group name, or a patronym. As a rule, both the name of the lineage and of the individual to whom belonging is shown, are male; marking descent on a maternal line is rare (p. 87). Generally, what plays the most important role in the naming system of an individual is the household, considered the main social unit.

4. THE NAMES OF THE VLACHS: BETWEEN OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE

When the Vlachs started arriving south of the Danube in the 18th century, they brought this double naming system with them. At the time, it was widespread in the villages of the Romanian principalities. While the official naming system was probably not completely standardized yet, the customary, non-official one regulated the relationships within the village. It has survived in an unaltered form until today, because as an unwritten system only known among the Vlachs, it was out of the reach of laws or bans in the new lands they settled.

As far as the official naming system of the Vlachs is concerned, it became fixed and Serbianized over time. There were two important periods when this happened: during the 19th century, when the Serbianization of family names took place, and in the first half of the 20th century, when first names were Serbianized. However, this should not necessarily be understood in terms of forced linguistic or ethnical assimilation, but also due to acculturation.

During the first half of the 19th century, when the Serbian villages began to stratify, the suffix *-ić* was added to the family name by rich peasant families as a fashionable marker of nobility. This phenomenon easily penetrated the Vlach villages as well (Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu, 2023, p. 220). There were no established family names in the Principality of Serbia before 1815, when Serbia became autonomous within the Ottoman Empire, but the family names would change from generation to generation. After this date, a Serbian administration was progressively organized. In 1851, with the intention of introducing land registries in the territory of the Principality of Serbia, Prince Aleksandar Karadjordjević issued a directive that ordered the establishment of permanent, hereditary family names. The administration assigned family names either on the basis of the head of the household's baptismal name or on the patronyms in the line of descent. Due to this directive, the family names of the Vlachs in the region were also Serbianized, by adding Serbian suffixes (*-ić*, *-ević* or *-ović*) to the name. Some heads of households thus became founders of a line: if a head of household was named *Trifu*, the patronym for his children and all his descendants became *Trifunović* (Dimitrijević-Rufu, 1998, p. 58). However, this only became a well-established practice in Serbia after the 1900s, because at the time, it was difficult to enforce the law in a very short time (Glišić, 2017, p. 67).

In many other cases, the Vlachs' family names were originally surnames or nicknames, with a clear meaning derived from a word denoting a characteristic feature, an occupation, an animal or a place of origin. It is not clear what factors determined the assignment of family names derived from baptismal names, patronyms or nicknames, as the administration was not unitary in that period and the rules were not strict clear in that regard. Most probably, in some cases, the head of the family had a say in establishing the family name, while in other cases, the clerks were the ones who made the decisions.

Nevertheless, the Vlach family names which stem from surnames and nicknames are still easily decipherable today, in spite of the added Serbian suffixes. They can be divided into several categories, derived from words denoting: 1) a characteristic feature, object or food, e.g., *Buzatović* (< Rom. *buzat* 'thick-lipped' + *-ović*), *Mamaligić* (< Rom. *mămăligă* 'polenta' + *-ić*), *Šeršelović*/*Šeršeljević*

(< Rom. *cercel* 'earring' + *-ović/-ević*), *Šćopić/Šćopulović* (< Rom. *șchiop(ul)* 'lame' + *-ić/-ović*), *Strajinović* (< Rom. *străin* 'foreigner' + *-ović*), *Šujeranović* (< Rom. *șuier* 'whistle' + *-(an)ović*); 2) an occupation, e.g., *Bukatarović* (< Rom. *bucătar* 'cook' + *-ović*), *Karburnarević* (< Rom. *cărbunar* 'coalman' + *-ević*), *Krojitorević* (< Rom. *croitor* 'tailor' + *-ević*), *Lautarović/Lautarević* (< Rom. *lăutar* 'musician' + *-ović/-ević*), *Vražitorović* (< Rom. *vrăjitor* 'sorcerer' + *-ović*); 3) a place of origin or ethnonym, e.g., *Caranović* (< Rom. *țăran* 'from Țara Românească (Oltenia)' + *-ović*), *Erdeljanović* (< Rom. *ardelean* 'from Ardeal' + *-ović*), *Nemcanović* (< Rom. *neamț* 'German' + *-(an)ović*), *Olčanović* (< Rom. *oltean* 'from Oltenia' + *-ović*), *Ungurjanović* (< Rom. *ungurean* 'from Hungary' + *-ović*); 4) animals, e.g., *Lupić* (< Rom. *lup* 'wolf' + *-ić*), *Ursulović* (< Rom. *urs(ul)* 'bear' + *-ović*), *Vulpić* (< Rom. *vulpe* 'fox' + *-ić*).

As far as the Serbianization of personal names is concerned, it is mainly connected to an order issued in 1899 by the bishop of Timok, Melentije Hilandarac (1857–1921), which required priests to only give Serbian names to newborns, selected from a list of names displayed on a board in Serbian Orthodox churches (Glišić, 2017, p. 67). Even though these lists were not displayed in the churches in the Braničevo and Homolje districts, they still greatly influenced the onomastic system of Vlach villages (p. 67). Thus, all baptismal names became Serbian, at least officially; in reality, they were modified for the internal use of the Vlach community: either the Serbian name was replaced by its Vlach equivalent, or it was phonetically adapted to a point where it was sometimes difficult to recognize the original Serbian name (Dimitrijević-Rufu, 1998, p. 61).

As a result, the personal names of Romanian origin found on Vlach tombstones in the cemeteries of Eastern Serbia belong to individuals born before 1945 (Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu, 2023, p. 220), and most of them even before the end of the 19th century. These names are spelled in accordance with Serbian conventions, e.g., *Aurika* (cf. Rom. *Aurica*), *Balaša* (cf. Rom. *Bălașa*), *Dokija* (cf. Rom. *Dochia*), *Flora/Florika* (cf. Rom. *Florea/Florica*), *Gergina/Georgina* (cf. Rom. *Gherghina/Gheorghina*), *Jon/Jona/Joana* (cf. Rom. *Ion/Ioana*), *Kirica* (cf. Rom. *Chirița*), *Lapadat/Lapadata* (cf. Rom. *Lăpădat/Lăpădata*), *Njice* (cf. Rom. *Niță*), *Paun* (cf. Rom. *Păun*), *Strain* (cf. Rom. *Străin*), *Trailo* (cf. Rom. *Trăilă*), *Trandafir/Trandafil/Trndafil* (cf. Rom. *Trandafir*).

However, not all of the colonizers initially had names of Romanian origin. In fact, the percentage was rather small. In his previously mentioned onomastic study, Ștefan Pașca noted that in central Romania, at least at the beginning of the 20th century, the share of Romanian personal names was significantly reduced in favor of Slavic ones, due to the long-lasting Slavic cultural influence in the region:

“The church and state life which our forefathers have had for almost a thousand years under the Slavs was definitely a decisive factor for the radical transformation of the list of Romanian baptismal names, namely their replacement with Slavic names” (Pașca, 1936, p. 35, transl. — ASM). Today, the majority of adult Vlachs have Serbian first names.

The double naming system, which was noticed by Romanian scholars in the first half of the 20th century in some Romanian villages and interpreted as a remnant of an almost obsolete form of social organization in traditional peasant societies, is still used in Vlach villages today. In his study about the multiple identity of the Vlachs in the village of Melnica (whom he calls Romanians), the French anthropologist of Vlach origin Dejan Dimitrijević-Rufu (1998, p. 62) explains that each individual has two names and two identities: an official, Serbian one, and a non-official, Vlach one, used in the village, which is the collective unit of reference in traditional peasant societies.

Dimitrijević-Rufu goes on to explain the system of Vlach naming in Serbia, which is identical to the one described in Romania: all persons belonging to a lineage bear the same patronym. When the Vlachs arrived in Serbia, they brought this naming system and it has remained unchanged. Usually, three generations suffice to identify and classify an individual and a household in a line of descent, but there are cases where five generations are listed, e.g., *Voica lu Floaria lu Angia lu Lica lu Gheorghe* (p. 55).

It should be emphasized once more that the village was the main point of reference as far as the Vlach naming system is concerned. Outside the village, when the official Serbian name was not used, an individual was referred to by their baptismal name, their Vlach patronym and their village. Dimitrijević-Rufu noticed that if the village was not included in the identification of an individual, errors could occur — even celestial ones:

An informant (Zinca) told me the story of an old gentleman who was one of her relatives and who died; when he reached Heaven he was sent back to earth because it was not his turn to die; the archangels had confused Petar Miljkovic of Menița with Petar Miljkovic of Ireșnița (Dimitrijević-Rufu, 1998, p. 56).

The separate, unofficial system of Vlach naming, still in use today, has been also mentioned by other Vlach authors. Paun Es Durlić, for example, emphasizes the importance of the family affiliation for the ritual of *namenjvanje* (an offering to the dead), which is an obligatory act in every sacral ceremony. For example, the third and last day of the *praznjik* (Ser. *slava*, an important holiday in honor of the patron saint) represents a kind of memorial service dedicated to the dead members of the family, to whom the food is offered, following the position in

the genealogy and the order of death. The woman who is offering the food starts with the name of the last person who died and goes back all the way to the head of the household, the founder of that particular lineage, whose name is mentioned with piety (Durlić, in press).

Finally, it must also be mentioned that, in some remote Vlach villages of Eastern Serbia, one could still encounter persons who did not know what their official Serbian name was only two decades ago, because they were illiterate or did not have to leave the village and interact with the authorities. On the other hand, even today younger Vlachs discover with surprise the official names of their grandparents only when they die and they see the grandparents' names in the obituaries.

5. OFFICIALIZING THE VLACH NON-OFFICIAL IDENTITY

This section focuses on the recent phenomenon of using the private Vlach name in writing, so that it is on par with the official Serbian one. This must be connected to and analyzed in the context of increased prestige and visibility of the language, which has happened in the past 20 years (Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu, 2023, pp. 31–32). Namely, in the early 2000s, different writing systems for the vernacular were created, followed by the adoption of an official system. The language was introduced in schools; writing, translating, and publishing in Vlach increased; and finally, the language was standardized in 2022. Officializing the Vlach private names, which so far have been exclusively connected to a person's village and never written down, but orally transmitted, might mean a stronger affirmation of a person's Vlach identity, which was considered by many to be less prestigious than the Serbian one until recently.

In terms of data and methodology, I use several sources and data sets and a mixed-method approach, with both quantitative and qualitative findings included. First, I offer an overview of the publications in Vlach or which are bilingual in Vlach and Serbian, most of which have been printed in the last 15 years. Then I discuss the ones which are published by the authors using their Vlach patronyms. Second, I address the issue of parish registers of the Romanian Orthodox church in Eastern Serbia, kept starting in 2004, in which all names of the deceased individuals are written using the double naming system: the private Vlach one and the official Serbian one. Third, I use data offered by the linguistic landscape of the cemeteries in Eastern Serbia, on the basis of the photographs I took between 2016 and 2022 in more than 30 Vlach cemeteries and deposited in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade. I created a database of more than 2,500 names carved on tombstones, as well as epitaphs and other inscriptions.

This name database was analyzed to see if and where the Vlach names are written on tombstones.

Fourth, I use online ethnography — more specifically, the systematic observation of the *Vlasi na kvadrat* Facebook page, launched in 2016, to understand and follow the way in which the Vlach identity is constructed in the interaction between the members and administrator of the page. The use of the genitive particle *alu* of the Vlach patronym is one of the important ways in which belonging to the Vlach community is expressed. Finally, I rely on the initial conclusions drawn from the pilot sociolinguistic questionnaire designed and applied within the framework of the project *Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia (VLingS)*, carried out by the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade between 2022 and 2024. The answers to one of the questions in the questionnaire, regarding the use of an individual's private Vlach name, are discussed.

6. PUBLICATIONS IN VLACH

Even if the use of the Vlach name by the authors of books published in Vlach is a recent phenomenon, as is otherwise using the Vlach language in writing, the first person who ever published a book under their Vlach patronym was Janko Simeonović in 1946. Simeonović was the first editor of the “Vorba noastră” (Our Word) newspaper, which represents the Vlach community's first significant attempt to write in the vernacular and was published as the official paper of the Zaječar branch of the National Front of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1949 (Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu, 2023, pp. 113–117). Even if he only used his official, Serbian name in connection to the newspaper, in 1946, Simeonović published *Kančikatoarja partizanjaska* (The Partisan Songbook), a collection of partisan poems composed by him and signed with his Vlach patronym, J. lu Moana Simeonović (2023, pp. 117–119).

After “Vorba noastră” was discontinued in 1949, writing in the vernacular became an isolated and private matter. This only changed after the turn of the millennium, when Vlach started to be used in writing, systems for rendering the vernacular were created, the language was introduced in schools (starting in 2013), and was recently standardized (2022). Ljubiša lu Boža Kići is one of the most prolific Vlach authors, whose activity spanning the past 15 years includes collecting traditional Vlach stories and poems (2010, 2011), compiling dictionaries (2004), and translating the New Testament into Vlach (2006) (Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu, 2023, pp. 126–132). Ljubiša lu Boža Kići is the Vlach name of Ljubiša Niculović, which he never uses when signing his books (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Cover of a book in Vlach, written in the Cyrillic alphabet, which includes the author's Vlach patronym, Ljubiša lu Boža Kići

In the last 20 years, many Vlach authors chose to sign their books (also) using their Vlach patronyms. Most of them are affiliated with the Gergina Association, formed in Negotin in 2009, with the aim of preserving the cultural heritage of the Vlachs in the Negotin and Timok districts, but also more widely in Serbia. The graphic system created by the Gergina Association in 2012 was later adopted and confirmed for official use by the Vlach National Council, which acknowledged the use of both Latin and Cyrillic scripts. To date, the Gergina Association has published more than 30 books.¹

The most prolific author affiliated with the Gergina Association is Sină alu Čeloju (official name: Siniša Čelojević), who has authored and co-authored several books in recent years: collections of Vlach ballads (alu Čeloju and alu Šušu, 2019), folk songs (alu Čeloju, 2022), erotic stories (alu Miľă alu Koljică and alu Čeloju, 2022), incantations (Čelojević and Ispirović, 2021), dictionaries (Čelojević, Dajić-Grimplinović and Čelojević, 2018). He published these books under his Vlach patronym, his official Serbian name, or both.

¹ More about the Gergina Association on their site: <http://www.gergina.org.rs/>.

Other authors who use their Vlach patronyms to sign their books, most of them published by the Gergina Association, are: Jovan Miljković — *Jovica alu Šušu* (alu Čeloju & alu Šušu, 2019), Slobodan Cvetić — *Slobodan alu Milă alu Koljičă* (alu Milă alu Koljičă, 2019; alu Milă alu Koljičă & alu Čeloju, 2022), Krsta Stanković — *Kīrsta alu Jovănjenju* (alu Jovănjenju, 2018), Vlastimir Abrašević — *Vlasta alu Abraš* (alu Jovanjenju and alu Abraš, 2016), Stanoje Njagojević — *Stanoie lu Niagoie* (Njagojević, 2006). However, the Vlach patronym of Slobodan Golubović, another prolific Vlach author, is coined on a different model, not with the help of the genitive masculine particle *alu* (of), but with the accusative particle *d(ă)* (from): *dPasujoni* (Golubović dPasujoni, 2013).

Nevertheless, the Vlach names which appear on the book covers are not only the names of the authors, but also of the characters. For example, Elvis alu Ćobanu is the humorous namesake of a collection of short funny stories. The book, published by the Gergina Association in 2013, is apparently based on a real person's life (Vojinović, 2013).

Even if Paun Es Durlić, an ethnologist and author of Vlach origin, has not published any of his books using the Vlach patronym with which he is known in his native village (Paun alu Gīergina alu Stīeva Durlja), in his studies, he mentions the interlocutors using both Serbian and Vlach names, e.g., *Petar Perić — Pătru Maricī, Nikola Petrović — Koljičă Topoljnišanu, Desanka Stefanović — Desanka lu Buoža, Rosa Novaković — Rosa lu Novak, and Ikonija Paunović — Ana Žuržan* (Durlić, 2020).

6.1. Parish Registers

A turning point in the contemporary history of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia and their religious life was the establishment of the Romanian Orthodox church in the region in 2004. Before (and also after) this date, the Vlachs officially belonged to the Serbian Orthodox church, but their vernacular religion was and still is the dominating expression of their religious lives (Sorescu-Marinković, 2022, pp. 314–315). In 2004, the priest Bojan Aleksandrović (Boian al Lisăndroaichi) defied the Serbian authorities and built a Romanian Orthodox church on his private property in the village of Malajnica, which fueled a fierce ecumenical and diplomatic conflict between Serbia and Romania and their respective Christian Orthodox churches (Novaković & Djurdjević, 2015, pp. 57–65). Today, there are eight Romanian Orthodox churches in Eastern Serbia in which religious services are offered in standard Romanian and the Vlach variety (Sorescu-Marinković, 2022, p. 320).

Over time, the first Romanian Orthodox church in Eastern Serbia, in Malajnica, developed into a monastery: the Orthodox Church-Monastery of the Saints

Archangels. Aleksandrović is pastor of the parish in Malajnica and protopope of Dacia Ripensis. The handwritten parish registers of burials performed by him and other priests in Malajnica, but also in several other Romanian Orthodox parishes in Eastern Serbia, present entries which feature a lot of information. Apart from the place and date of birth and death, cause of death, and the religious affiliation of the deceased, the registers include both names of the deceased: the Vlach, non-official one (which always comes first) and the Serbian one, in parenthesis, e.g., *Iovana-Vanca muierea a lu* (wife of) *Milă al Streichi* (*Jovana Strejić*), *Van Trușcă* (*Jovan Jovanović*), *Maria văduva a lu* (widow of) *Colă Chițu* (*Marija Uruković*), *Milu al Milii* (*Milorad Milić*), *Gheorghîța văduva a lu* (widow of) *Miria al lu Cârcu* (*Prvulović*), *Velizar al lu Gheorge al lu Mărin* (*Marinović*), *Păun-Nică al Ivițonilor* (*Paunović*), *Milcea al lu Ion Udubariu* (*Milča Udubarević*), *Liubița văduva a lu* (widow of) *Ceda al lu Truță al Mariș* (*Jonić*), *Draga muierea a lu* (wife of) *Simeon al lu Smilieni* (*Smiljanić*), *Maria văduva a lu* (widow of) *Colă Chițu* (*Marija Uruković*), *Milu al Milii* (*Milorad Milić*). As one can see, the Vlach name often contains explicit family relations added to the patronym, e.g., “wife of”, “widow of” (see Figure 2).

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Matricola mortilor a bisericii ortodoxe Române

1	2	3	4	5	6
Nr.	Numele, prenumele, cognatul (profesia) si locul de nastere al celui care a murit	Localitate a morii	Anul, luna, ziua si ora morii (B.M.)	Anul, luna si ziua morii (B.M.)	Localitatea bisericii ortodoxe
	<i>S. Iovana văduva a lu Streigha al lu Trușani (Pădurea Sărat) Lu Clăucești</i>	<i>Clăucești</i>	<i>2011 iulie 27</i>	<i>2011 iulie 28</i>	<i>Clăucești mormânt subteran</i>
42	<i>rumăna ortodoxă Dăsa al lu Boja al lu Chița (Dămină Dămină) Lu Măhăuțuța</i>	<i>Măhăuțuța</i>	<i>2014 august 23</i>	<i>2014 august 29</i>	<i>Măhăuțuța mormânt al său</i>
43	<i>rumăna ortodoxă Măria al lu Șerban (Dămină Șerban) văduva al lu Măhăuțuța</i>	<i>Măhăuțuța</i>	<i>2014 octombrie 12 la 1038</i>	<i>2014 octombrie 13</i>	<i>Măhăuțuța mormânt al său</i>
44	<i>rumăna ortodoxă Vera al lu Vană (Șerban) Lu Fermeș</i>	<i>Fermeș</i>	<i>2014 octombrie 14 la 1958</i>	<i>2014 octombrie 18</i>	<i>Fermeș mormânt subteran</i>
45	<i>rumăna ortodoxă Vanca a lu Șerban (Măhăuțuța) văduva Lu Șerban</i>	<i>Șerban</i>	<i>2014 noiembrie 8 la 1958</i>	<i>2014 noiembrie 9</i>	<i>Șerban mormânt subteran</i>
46	<i>rumăna ortodoxă Dăsa văduva a lu Călașu (Măhăuțuța) Lu Măhăuțuța</i>	<i>Măhăuțuța (șp. tel.)</i>	<i>2014 noiembrie 16 la 1958</i>	<i>2014 noiembrie 18</i>	<i>Măhăuțuța mormânt al său</i>
47	<i>rumăna ortodoxă Dăsa văduva a lu Dobroștea - al lu Călașu (Măhăuțuța) Lu Măhăuțuța (Măhăuțuța)</i>	<i>Măhăuțuța</i>	<i>2014 decembrie 29 la 1958</i>	<i>2014 decembrie 31</i>	<i>Măhăuțuța mormânt al său</i>
48	<i>rumăna ortodoxă</i>		<i>la 1958</i>		

Figure 2. File in the register of the Romanian Orthodox parish of Malajnica, which contains both the unofficial Vlach and official Serbian names of the deceased

6.2. Names on Tombstones

In 2022, the cemetery of the Orthodox Church-Monastery of the Saints Archangels in Malajnica had seven graves. The seven people buried there belonged to the same family, the Aleksandrović family. On the tombstones of the four people born between 1859 and 1893, the inscription was in Vlach only: *Miloş al Lisăndroaichi (1859–1939)*, *Stanca muierea lu (wife of) Miloş al Lisăndroaichi (1862–1915)*, *Stanoie alu Miloş al Lisăndroaichi (1887–1915)*, and *Miloş al lu Miloş al Lisăndroaichi (1893–1915)*. Nevertheless, on the tombstones of the three people born in the 20th century, the Serbian official family name, *Aleksandrović*, was added after the Vlach one: *Ljubomir al lu Tadija al Lisăndroaichi Aleksandrović (1932–2017)*, *Mitra a Lisăndroaichi Aleksandrović (1934–2019)*, and *Miroslav al Lisăndroaichi Aleksandrović (1954–2017)*.

However, having the Vlach name carved on the tombstone is the exception rather than the rule. In the other Vlach cemeteries of Eastern Serbia, the deceased have only their Serbian names written on the tombstones, generally in Cyrillic. Nevertheless, of the 30 cemeteries I photographically documented between 2016 and 2022, which depict more than 2,500 names, in two cemeteries there were a few tombstones where the Vlach patronym was also added: one in the village of Dušanovac (Negotin municipality) and another one in the village of Korbovo (Kladovo municipality).²

In the Dušanovac cemetery, which we visited in 2016, we came across three tombstones which also presented the Vlach patronyms in addition to the official Serbian names. The first one had *Kikić Jelena* and *Kosta* written on the front side, the Serbian names, in Cyrillic script, while on the back side, there were the hypocoristic names and the Vlach patronym: *Ljana ši Kostika Aljčoni* (in Cyrillic script as well with the conjunction “and” in Vlach in between). The second one followed the same model: *Kolovljanović Dušan* and *Dušanka* on the front side, and *Alu Dronđa* on the back, all in Cyrillic. The third featured one of the very few inscriptions in Latin script, with both the Serbian and the Vlach name on the front side of the tombstone: *Dragić — Almiri Ljuba* and *Mila*. It should be mentioned that all three tombstones were recently erected, by the very people whose names were carved there, who were born between 1929 and 1948, as it is a widespread practice in Eastern Serbia to erect your own funerary monument while you are still alive (Huţanu & Sorescu-Marinković, 2023, p. 222).

In contrast, in the Korbovo cemetery, which we visited in 2017, we came across more tombstones with double names or only the Vlach patronym, some

² I visited and documented photographically most of the cemeteries in Eastern Serbia together with Monica Huţanu.

of which were not very new, e.g., *Ivašković Vojislav alu Deđe* (1908–1982) and *Ljuba lu Žuveće* (1914–1964). Examples of other double names are *Popović — alu Živeće* (see Figure 3), *Popović — alu Džidže*, and *Nikolić — Alukrecu*. All inscriptions were in Cyrillic, and both Serbian and Vlach names were on the front side of the tombstones. In contrast to the cemetery in Dušanovac, all the tombstones from Korbovo were erected by the family members after the individuals' deaths.

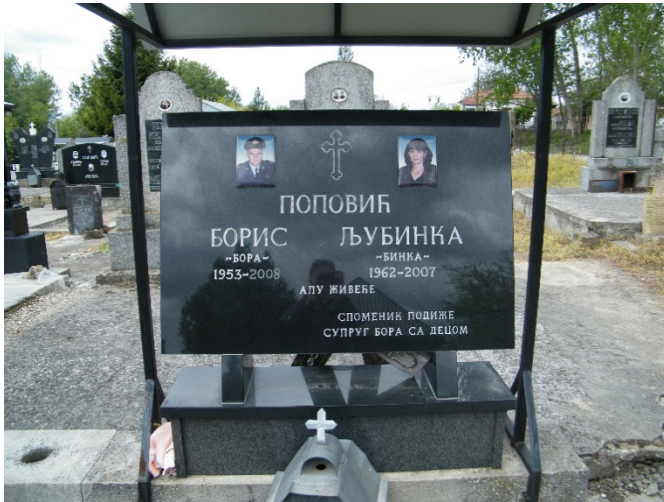


Figure 3. Tombstone with both the Serbian and Vlach family names of the deceased. Korbovo cemetery, 2017, photo credit: the author

6.3. Vlach Identity on the Internet

The *Vlasi na kvadrat* Facebook page (www.facebook.com/vlasi2/), which approximately translates to “Vlachs Squared”, was launched in October 2016. The page approaches the linguistic and regional features of the Vlach community in Eastern Serbia in a humorous way, and is very appreciated by the younger generation (Huțanu, 2021, p. 241). At the end of 2022, the page had 33,000 followers, while more than one million unique users have visited the page.

The posts on the page, created by its anonymous administrator, cover a wide range of topics dealing mainly with the unique habits of Vlachs living in their native village or abroad, from Vlach magic to Vlach funeral customs, to traditional food and music, to the “intricate family relationships in the village, where everybody is distantly connected to everybody” (Huțanu, 2021, p. 243). According

to Monica Huțanu, the administrator and the followers of the page construct and perform a hybrid identity, which is at the same time local (Vlach) and Serbian, and therefore have an extended linguistic repertoire at one's disposal (p. 243).

One important way to express identity and index Vlachness on the *Vlasi na kvadrat* Facebook page is by mentioning specific Vlach names and by using the patronymic particle *alu* ('of, belonging to') (Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu, 2023, p. 178). In addition, the question "Alkujješ?" (Which family do you belong to?) has been used in many recurring memes connected to the life in the Vlach village, where an individual is located in the system of family relations. The administrator is counting on the amused reaction of the readers who are acquainted with this double naming system and might not use it themselves, but definitely do not reject it or distance themselves from it. What is even more unique is that the patronymic particle is not reserved only for the members of the community, but is used to make international names sound Vlach, such as *Don Trailović alu Volta* (John Travolta), *Hari alu Potter* (Harry Potter), *Leonardo alu Kapra* (Leonardo di Caprio), and *Toni alu Soprano* (Tony Soprano).

Over time, the use of the Vlach name has imposed itself as one of the important topics in defining what being Vlach means today, so the memes and posts on this subject have become more elaborate, and the number of visitors who joined the discussions greater. On July 8, 2022, for example, the post "Koj NADIMAK mora ima u svako vlaško selo?" (Which patronym must exist in every Vlach village?) triggered almost 300 comments, which was the greatest number of responses to any post that year. Apart from the many answers containing actual Vlach patronyms (*alu Turku*, *alu Srbu*, *Gica a lu Milan*, *alu Zeka*, *alu Broska*, *alu Kalu*), the followers of the page also engaged in discussions about the function and meaning of the particle *alu*.

7. SOCIOLINGUISTIC DATA

Vlach is one of the vulnerable linguistic varieties spoken in Serbia, mainly due to the low prestige of the language until recently, reduced intergenerational transmission, and lack of institutional support (Sorescu-Marinković et al., 2020, pp. 90–91). As such, it was included in the *Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia (VLingS)* project, which aims to create a precise tool for assessing the degree of language endangerment and vulnerability, and to apply it to a statistically significant sample of speakers in Serbia who speak the following linguistic varieties: Aromanian, Banat Bulgarian, Vojvodina Rusyn, Judezmo, Romani, Megleno-Romanian, Vlach, and Bayash Romanian.³

³ More about it on the site of the project (<https://vlings.rs/>).

The pilot sociolinguistic questionnaire conceived and tested during the first year of the project (Mirić, 2022; Sokolović & Paunović Rodić, 2022). The questionnaire will be updated and the pool of participants expanded for later phases of the project. The initial questionnaire has 190 open and closed questions in 15 thematic categories, including literacy, domains of language use, language acquisition and intergenerational transmission, the media, ethnic and cultural identity, language preservation, and revitalization. One of the categories, on institutional support and the linguistic landscape, includes the question: “Do you privately use the Vlach version of your name?”, with a follow-up question, if the answer is affirmative: “What is your Vlach name?”⁴

Out of the 44 Vlach interviewees who filled the questionnaire in this initial phase of research, 20 (45.45%) answered the question affirmatively, revealed their Vlach name to the researcher, and offered details about the use of the name within the local community, the way it was formed, and the Vlach names of their other family members.⁵ This was one of the questions which triggered the greatest number of digressions from the interlocutors who replied affirmatively, which points to the importance they attach to their Vlach name and to the need to explain it.

Apart from the quantitative and qualitative data offered by this specific question in the sociolinguistic questionnaire, the researchers also found out about the existence of private registers of the patronyms in certain Vlach villages, made by Vlach individuals interested in their ancestry and the social history of their villages. An example of this is the one in the village of Šipikovo (Zaječar municipality), which contains 162 handwritten Vlach patronyms, e.g., *alu Buda*, *alu Ciganu*, *alu Čupitu*, *alu Čurja*, *alu Daba*, *alu Dinu*, *alu Dujna*, *alu Firi*, *alu Fišku*, *alu Florović*, *alu Gitan*, *alu Kirku*, *alu Kolkovete*, *alu Kuku*, *alu Malašu*, *alu Mati*, *alu Mijaj*, *alu Mitruca*, *alu Mušat*, *alu Narodu*, *alu Nica al Rimni*, *alu Nical Babi*, *alu Pistricu*, *alu Rudarju*, *alu Stanču*, *alu Stînga*, *alu Ulju*, *alu Vana al Malaši*, *alu Zdravku*, *alu Živu*.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The double identity of the Vlachs, also expressed by the double naming system — with official names being Serbian and private names Vlach — has been preserved until today. The Vlach name has a person's home village as its main point of reference, where the name indicates the social relations between different households and lineages. Because the Vlach name is not usually written down,

⁴ Participants who speak other vulnerable languages in Serbia also had to answer this question, for their particular language or variety.

⁵ The identity of all the respondents who took part in the first phase of this research project is protected, which is why I am not giving any examples of Vlach names.

but transmitted from generation to generation, it is relevant only in the context of the village, while the Serbian name is used in all official instances, both inside and outside the village.

However, during the last two decades, with the advance of language rights for this community, the creation of Vlach writing systems and the language starting to be used in writing, the Vlach names started to be written down: on the cover of books authored by Vlachs, on tombstones, in parish registers, or on the internet. The double identity which has been noticed by researchers is now being more emphasized than ever, as the Vlach name is no longer exclusively private, but is starting to gain the same visibility as the Serbian one.

Sometimes the Vlach identity expressed by the use of the Vlach patronym is still connected to the village, like in the situation of the double naming on tombstones or in parish register. At other times, the Vlach name is used to illustrate the specific, double identity of the population in a more abstract sense, not necessarily to show a connection to a certain village, as is the case when Vlach names are used on the internet. However, when the Vlach names appear as authors' names on books, they transgress the confines of the village and aim to address a much wider audience.

Finally, it should be said that using the Vlach name in writing is not yet a widespread phenomenon. What I found relevant was the mere existence of the written Vlach names, as a new development that definitely signals a shift in the attitude towards identity and language. This affirmation of the Vlach identity, which for now is still irrelevant both in the linguistic landscape and in other domains, but from a statistical point of view, is definitely symptomatic of change. It remains to be seen whether the trend will continue and whether the Vlach name will gain more relevance outside the village and be used more intensively.

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SUMMARY

This paper discusses the existence of two different systems of naming used among the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia: a private one, based on their Vlach patronyms, used exclusively in their home villages and transmitted only orally, and an official, Serbian one. After presenting an overview of Romanian names and naming practices in the 18th–19th centuries, with a focus on the double naming system, the author explains how the Vlachs kept their Vlach patronyms after settling in Eastern Serbia, and how the second, official naming system, was Serbianized over time. In the second half of the paper, the author focuses on the recent phenomenon of the private, Vlach name gaining visibility and being used in writing, starting with the turn of the millennium, based on a variety of data sets. The increased visibility of the Vlach naming system reflects the recent increased prestige of the language, which was standardized and has started to be used in writing. The paper demonstrates that the double naming of the Vlachs reflects their dual, contextual identity, while the use in writing of the Vlach names signals an important shift in the attitude towards identity and language.