Subversive heteroglossia:
Narrating Greek-Albanian language use in North-Western Greece

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Abstract

In the research on borderscapes, particularly in the Albanian-Greek borderland, explorations of identities and fluidity of socio-cultural boundaries play a key role. Based on several ethnographic interviews and participatory observation during short-term fieldwork in the Konitsa region of North-Western Greece, this study aims to explore the metalinguistic narratives of the local people coming from Albanian/Arvanitika-speaking families. We observe how Albanian and Greek language use is narrated across several generations of these families, shaping narratives of place-making and belonging. Drawing upon the theory of cultural intimacy, studies of linguistic ideologies, and discourse analysis, we examine the multiple controversies in our research participants' metalinguistic narratives and indexical signs such as code-switching. Using an anthropological lens, we also trace how these people's personal stories are affected by national discourses, and how the state's discourses infiltrate local peoples' metalinguistic narratives. As previous studies have shown, in a situation of *heteroglossia*, the low-prestige language is perceived "through the eyes" of the dominant language. Nonetheless, when *subversive heteroglossia* occurs, the dominant linguistic ideology is also internalized by the speakers, but it is deviated and reassessed in the attempt to build spaces of cultural intimacy.

Key-words: Linguistic anthropology, Borderscapes, Balkans, Identity, Cultural intimacy, Subversive heteroglossia.

Our research team, consisting of three Greek and one Russian young female researchers, began their fieldwork in Konitsa on a scorching summer afternoon of 2018.[2] We took our notebooks and audio recorders and headed towards the house of Zafer's family. It was a two-story house with a cozy terrace on the ground floor. We walked in and were warmly greeted by an elderly couple, our friend and research participant Zafer's grandparents. The terrace was small, we could barely fit around a patio table, and the situation was initially somewhat awkward. At a point, Mr. Selim said: 'Now, nobody can tell that my wife is an Albanian woman. She speaks Greek very well! But yeah...Whatever... If we go inside [meaning: to Albania], we can communicate!' and he laughed.

This small passage from our conversation with Mr. Selim reflects a widely circulated idea in social sciences that power relations are generated, reproduced, and revealed through language. In his theory on the symbolic power of language, Pierre Bourdieu (1991) has pointed out that an official language (in our case, the Greek language) is inextricably linked with the state and its reproduction process. According to Bourdieu, everyday language use, however mundane it may seem, is embedded within the social structure that it describes and helps to reproduce. This official language is used in all public and official domains, and all the other languages are compared to it as the only legitimate one (Bourdieu 1991, 45). In this article, we focus on the narrations about Albanian and Greek language use among the local families with a history of family connections to the places that nowadays are located on the other side of the border, in Albania.

Since linguist Michael Silverstein introduced the term *linguistic ideologies* and defined them as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979, 193), the study of people's accounts on their linguistic experience has played an important role in anthropology. Kathryn Woolard, for example, noted that a focus on linguistic ideologies "allows us to relate the microculture of communicative action to political economic considerations of power and social inequality, to confront macrosocial constraints on language behavior, and to connect discourse with lived experiences" (Woolard 1998, 27). In the present case study, we use the lens of linguistic ideologies to explore the entanglement of identity and place-making on the nation-state's margins.

Over the recent decades, borders and borderlands have attracted much attention among researchers in social sciences, anthropologists not being an exception. In these studies, borderlands are often described as complex geographic and symbolic spaces in which negotiations of power and sovereignty together with construction and reconfiguration of socio-cultural identities and boundaries become particularly intense and revealing (Wilson and Donnan 2012) while the experience of people living in the borderlands is conceptualized as the one of exceptional uncertainty, marginality, and liminality (Green 2005; Agier 2016). The very concept of borderlands goes beyond borders as geographical and political phenomena but also looks into the construction of symbolic boundaries through social interactions and negotiations of power and deals with the problem of cultural borderlands – spaces of inconsistencies and heterogeneity which are often overseen or marginalized by the dominant categorizations (Donnan and Wilson 1999, 19-43). Taking into consideration all three dimensions of borders and borderlands, in the present research, we draw attention to the role of the political border in

the narratives of our research participants, and we analyze how their identities are being shaped by the powerful state-induced categorizations and in the process of local-level social interactions. Yet, an even stronger emphasis is being made on how our research participants' stories and metalinguistic narratives represent a cultural borderland, embodying an experience of heterogeneity and inconsistency which the established cultural narratives fail to express.

As Bourdieu has indicated, monolingual communities are a product of imagination (Bourdieu 1991). Historically, in the region of today's Greek Epirus and Southern Albania, the population was far from being monolingual. At least to an extent, this is also the case today. However, in the past, the categorizations used to describe the people living in the region were quite distinct from the ones that are used today when the international borders have long been present (Hart 1999, 197-198). As Sarah Green noted in her book on the borderlands, it is striking how categorizations used in the region can often conflict. Sometimes they can seem to make no sense, although people act as if everything is obvious and there is a distinct difference between those categories (Green 2005, 59).

According to Vasilis Nitsiakos (2010), people living on both sides of the border would cross it systematically due to kinship relations, business, or educational reasons. The regular trans-local communication was not affected by the Albanian state's foundation in 1912 after the Balkan wars. As Nitsiakos highlights, the national border never coincided with the ethnic and cultural boundaries between populations. The ethnic mosaic was so complex that it was impossible to draw the border in any unambiguous way. Regarding our case, it is worth noticing that the supposedly 'objective' marker of national identity, the language, was also inapplicable (Nitsiakos 2010, 40). Subjective self-definitions would always conflict with each other, with the social practices, and with the top-down categorizations, making it impossible to define any distinctive homogeneous groups (Nitsiakos 2010, 55-56).

The sealing of the border after the rise of the communist regime interrupted the communication between the two sides. Besides, both areas underwent a national homogenization process, with pressure applied to every group identified as 'the other.' In 1990 with Albania's communist regime's fall, two sides of the border re-connected, and the socio-cultural flow was re-established. Vasilis Nitsiakos characterizes the border region as a zone of extreme intimacy, real and symbolic (Nitsiakos 2010, 40). In the context of migration and intense cross-border cultural and social exchanges, the meaning of old and new categorizations is being reinvented, and various social and political actors creatively use them for their own needs (see, e.g., de Rapper 2004, 2005, 2008).

According to several studies (e.g., Hart 1999, Green 2005), in Epirus and Southern Albania, speaking a language has never automatically excluded other identifications. Thus, speaking Albanian or Arvanitika in Epirus does not imply an identification with the Albanian nationality, and vice versa. Nonetheless, living in a modern state, where homogeneity is imperative, people get affected by its often-violent effects, especially in heterogeneous populations that live in the border zones (Hart 1999, 204). As we observed, with the popularity of Golden Dawn[3] growing in the past years, the lives of the diverse people in the area remain fragile and precarious, refugees from Syria or elsewhere being the most endangered ones. As a result, people whose families once lived in a world where diversity was normalized are now entrapped between the competing nationalist imperatives (Cowan 2011, 107).

In order to avoid the nation-state's hegemonic discourse, in our attempt to describe the families with Albanian roots in the Konitsa area, we draw upon a deterritorialized approach, suggested by Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Vasilis Nitsiakos (2010), which allows us to consider the fluidity of identifications and boundaries. Having given up the idea of 'Greek' and 'Albanian' classification, we have decided to approach our interviewees from the perspective of language use and its interpretation in the metalinguistic discourse. Inspired by the sociolinguistic lens of identity construction, we, as ethnographers, 'construct' our research participants based on the powerful interface of language and subjectivity.

Entering our research field, we tried not to get biased by the national discourses' preconstructed categories. How should we refer to our research participants? Albanians? Greeks? Do they constitute a community? Should we approach them as a minority? The truth is that there are no simple answers to these questions. What can be claimed is that our research participants primarily defined themselves as *Konitsiotes* or the 'locals,' stressing their belonging to the place. According to Potiropoulos, a strong local identity is a part of the collective self's construction, establishing "unity and continuity in space and time, modernity and post-modernity" (Potiropoulos 2014, 96). As we will demonstrate further, the local dimension of identity construction plays a key role in how our interlocutors perceive their 'linguistic selves' and make sense of the contradictions and gaps between their intimate experiences and the top-down categorizations of the nation-state. In other words, here we deal with *place-making*, namely the construction of space and identity, based on difference and sameness, identification and alterity (Harrington 2004).

Our attempt to capture the interplay of language and identity in our research participants' narratives, as micro-geographic as it may seem, follows the logic of multi-sited ethnography described by George Marcus (1995). We explore how the shared agencies, symbols, and everyday practices are manifested in two different locations, following the cultural meanings and identities circulating in diffuse time and space. During our short-term ethnographic fieldwork, we interviewed in total eight people, six in the town of Konitsa and two in the village of Plikati, forty-four kilometers away. Adopting Marcus's (1995) approach, we attempt to trace the logic of relationships, translations, and association among the sites. We focused on two locations belonging to the same border area. In both of them, switching between Albanian and Greek language has been, paradoxically, at the same time normalized and contested throughout different historical periods and among different social situations. In this 2018 project, we employed various ethnographic techniques such as semi-structured interviews, open discussions, observation, taking field notes, audio-recording, and taking pictures in our fieldwork. Drawing upon the ethnography of speech perspective (Hymes 1964), we specifically focused on noticing and recording the oral discourse and paid attention to the subtle nuances in language use. Following our interest in linguistic ideologies, we paid particular attention to patterns of metalinguistic discourse, contextualizing those within our research participants' life stories. Our analysis of the data employed the perspective of qualitative discourse analysis based on interpretative logic, which avoids reification and essentialization of knowledge regimes (Keller 2005).

Picture No. 1 – Semi-demolished Bektashi *turbe*[4]. Konitsa, July 2018

Linguistic ideologies and cultural intimacy

In his aspiring work on the Arvanitika communities in Beotia, the anthropologist and linguist Lucas Tsitsipis (1997) has offered to use the concepts of congruent and contradictory discourses to analyze the linguistic ideologies in the Arvanitika speakers' narratives. Adopting the term from Mikhail Bakhtin, he calls the sociolinguistic situation in Greece with the evident domination of Greek over the minority languages a situation of *heteroglossia*, a relationship between languages when one language "is seen through the eyes of the other" (Tsitsipis 1997, 106). In such a situation, the Arvanitika speakers adopt the state's ideology promoting the prestigious status of the Greek language and produce congruent metalinguistic discourses. However, they also reflect on the community language's, Arvanitika, solidarity function, hence producing contradictory discourses.

Given the ethnographical and theoretical relevance of these ideas, they seem to present a perfect starting point for our analysis of the linguistic ideologies in the narratives of our research participants from Konitsa and Plikati. However, two crucial aspects differentiate our case from Tsitsipis's work. Firstly, urbanization and bureaucratization processes developing during his research timeframe have now gone way further. Subsequently, the division between people living in the local community's inner world and having little to do with the nation-state's outer world and those who have to intensively deal with the state institutions and the broader society has changed. Among the local communities' living members, a significant majority has experienced 'dealing with the state.' As a result, for them, the intimacy associated with the 'minority' language and belonging to the local community (as opposed to the imagined community of the nation-state perceived as homogeneous) has come into conflict with the ideas of social success and of being a 'proper' member of the (Greek) society. Besides, there is one more aspect that makes the cases of Konitsa and Plikati different from the Arvanites

communities of Beotia, with which Tsitsipis worked. The closeness of the border, the trans-local cross-border connections, and the history of separations and reunions have dramatically influenced how our research participants perceive the roles of languages in their family histories and personal biographies. Thus, their discursive practices can hardly be adequately described merely in terms of coherent and contradictory discourses. Although the concepts of contradiction and coherency might be quite helpful here, their meaning and function have to be revisited and reconfigured to better serve our understanding of the people's stories.

In the following parts of the article, we aim to show that while contradictions and discursive conflicts are characteristic of our interlocutors' narratives about languages, they can also creatively employ elements of various discourses to make sense of these contradictions and maintain the coherency of their stories. To better understand these discursive strategies, we suggest approaching them in the context of Michael Herzfeld's ideas about *cultural intimacy* and *disemia* as the basis of the nation-state's life (Herzfeld 2016). In the analysis that follows, we suggest interpreting the tension between the contradictory ideas in our research participants' narratives as a discursive encoding of cultural intimacy on three levels: firstly, as a reflection of the disemia underlying the Greek national narrative characterized, on the one hand, by the desire for homogeneity and historical continuity of the Greek culture and statehood and, on the other hand, by the intimate spaces of diversity and 'otherness'; secondly, as a part of the complex relations between the intimacies of the two neighboring nation-states, Greece and Albania; thirdly, as a discursive incarnation of the specific regime of cultural intimacy produced by the very border, which allows for the creation of intimate symbolic spaces where the contradictions and contestations between the elements of conflicting discourses reinforce the sense of intimacy and belonging in the local border communities (on cultural intimacy in the Albanian-Greek borderlands, see also Zheltova 2019). While all three aspects of cultural intimacy remain equally essential, we will primarily focus on the first and the third ones in this article. While the conflict between the hegemonic narrative of the Greek national ideology and the intimate personal histories of 'otherness' is present in all our research participants' stories, the particular way of dealing with this conflict varies significantly from one interviewee to another.

'How come we don't speak!': Discursive shifts in Adile's and Rekiye's stories.

In the first interview with Adile (84 years old) and Selim (in his 80s), such a conflict between the hegemonic narrative and intimate experience leads to our interlocutor's mistrust and lack of interest. Adile is quite reserved and rather seems to avoid speaking about her family origin from a border town that is nowadays a part of Albania. She is also quite cautious about sharing her experience of dealing with the two languages throughout her life.

Although she provides us with some details about her mother coming to Konitsa from Albania and does not hide the fact that Albanian was her first language, she seems pretty uncomfortable speaking about these topics. Her husband's comment about her being a proper 'local of Konitsa' and 'nobody being able to tell that she is not Greek' further facilitates understanding of her behavior. Talking about her connections to the 'Albanian other' could

endanger her social status as a 'proper Greek,' a status she has been building up to throughout her life.

Our conversation with the other elderly female research participant from Konitsa, Rekiye (82 years old), demonstrates a different discursive strategy of dealing with this conflict. While she is generally much more open about her connection to the Albanian language and her origins in Leskovik, the normative Greek national discourse is also present in her narrative. For example, she repeatedly mentions that 'the life of minorities in Greece has been good' (even though she also describes the tragic outcomes of the population exchanges). Simultaneously, her narration is full of emotionally charged references to her Albanian relatives 'left behind' in Leskovik, to their reunion after the opening of the border, and to the fact that she misses the Albanian language. In contrast with Adile, for whom constructing an identity of an 'authentic *Konitsiotis*' meant silencing or at least being reserved and selective about mentioning her Albanian origin, for Rekiye, being an 'authentic Konitsiot' and an 'Albanian' or, as she puts it, a 'Turk,' constitutes no contradiction.[5] Rekiye incorporates this perspective in the complex picture of the place and its history, resolving the tension between the narrative's competing levels. The subtle boundary between the normative level and the intimacy level of discourse is even more evident when her son intervenes in the conversation. For example, when discussing the Albanian language in the family, he stresses that the elder relatives mostly did not know that many songs in Albanian and learned the Greek ones. When discussing the Albanian families' rights in Greece, he stresses that 'there has never been any lousy regard towards the minorities from the state, and no severe ethnic conflict has taken place in the region.' The son introduces a normative attitude, which contrasts with the more intimate perspective of Rekiye. However, at these moments, Rekiye switches to this discourse, too, agreeing, 'how good their life in Greece has been.' She also says that she does not know any songs in Albanian. However, when the conversation is over, and we are about to leave, she comes to us and in a low voice, but sounding very emotional, she cites several lines from a song in Albanian coming from Leskovik and praising its beauty.

Rekiye, in contrast with Adile, had Greek as her first language since she was born in Konitsa. Her father was a local Greek speaker, and her mother, although an Albanian native speaker, mostly spoke Greek to her in her early years. In her childhood and teen years, she had learned Albanian from Adile's mother, Fadime, whom she became related to after her brother Selim married Adile. As we can assume, the fact that Rekiye's first language was Greek made her feel more socially secure as a member of the Greek-speaking society. That could explain why she felt more secure about openly expressing her emotional connection to Albanian than did Adile, who had to go through the process of linguistic resocialization in her childhood. This fact could also explain why Rekiye eagerly switched to Albanian during the interview when suggested doing so by the Albanian-speaking interviewer, while Adile never responded to the interviewer's attempt to make a small talk in Albanian. These code-switches in Rekiye's speech, among others, indicate the shifts between the different levels of discourse – the public normative discourse of homogeneity and the intimate discourse of diversity – and encode the disemia of cultural intimacy, as in the following examples:

Int 1.: [In Greek] Did your mother teach you Albanian?
R: [In Greek] How come we don't speak! We certainly do speak the language!

Int 2: [in Albanian] I also know a little Albanian.
R: [in Albanian, enthusiastic] You know Albanian?
Int 2: [In Albanian] Yes, yes, I do.
R: [In Albanian] But you are from Russia, aren't you?
Int 2: [In Albanian] Yes, I learned the language at the university.
[Rekiye laughs]
R's husband: [in Albanian, laughing] She knows, she knows!

Furthermore, during a discussion in Greek about tourism in Albania, Rekiye suddenly started speaking Albanian to the Albanian-speaking interviewer:

R: [laughing, in Albanian] We can talk Albanian with you!
Int 2: [in Albanian] Yes, I like it a lot!
R: [in Albanian] Yes, yes, I also like it so much... I like it...
Int 2: [in Albanian] Do you miss the Albanian language?
R: [in Albanian] Yes, Yes, I do...

Of particular interest are several moments in the conversation when Rekiye speaks about their relatives in Leskovik and relations with them reinforced after the border's opening. In the following example, the discussion on our potential research trip to Leskovik serves as a trigger for the code-switching:

/Talk in Greek about the relatives in Leskovik and our potential research trip there/
R: They only speak Albanian, they don't know any Greek.
Int. 2: Well, I guess if we go, we will be able to communicate.
R: [In Albanian] Speak Albanian!
Int. 2: [In Albanian] Yes, we will speak Albanian .
R: [In Albanian] When I went there for the first time, they would ask me, 'How come you know Albanian? Where did you learn it?' – I would tell them, 'I learned it from one old woman.'
Int. 2: [In Albanian] Yes…
R: [In Albanian] This is what I told them…

While the discussion on our plans to visit Leskovik is a structural trigger for the code-switching, the change of code on its own seems to trigger a shift to a more intimate level of discourse. It makes Rekiye remember the emotional moment in her life when she, for the first time, traveled to the place where her family originated from. Her knowledge of Albanian was crucial back then in forming a common ground for intimacy with her new-found relatives. At the same time, her particular language choice to narrate this experience helps her establish a connection between the content of her story (the emotional moment from the past) and the ongoing communicative situation (sharing advice on travel to Leskovik with young researchers showing interest in this aspect of her identity). Her switching to Albanian mirrors the intimacy of the situation described (the signified) in the way it is being described (the signifier).

Picture No. 2 – Doing fieldwork on the border. Saying 'Goodbye' after our conversation with Rekiye. Konitsa, July 2018

Speaking 'clearly,' speaking 'heavily,' 'like in a city,' 'like in a village': Placing the local idioms in Eleni's and Christina's stories

Like in the interviews from Konitsa, in the stories of our research participants from Plikati, one can notice the tension between the Greek state ideology of homogeneity and the intimate local experience of diversity. Both Eleni (in her 70s) and Christina (in her 80s) have internalized this discursive conflict, which is visible in the way they discuss their linguistic experience. On the one hand, they eagerly tell us about the use of Arvanitika in their families. On the other hand, they both remember how the schoolteacher used to prohibit the kids from speaking Arvanitika at school, and they comment positively on this practice, saying, 'It was a good thing that he did.'

Our conversation with Eleni naturally focused on the place of the local ways of speaking (both Arvanitika and Greek) in the context of other idioms of the two languages spoken in different regions. In her reflection, Eleni attempts to trace the relations of the local idioms with the two 'significant others' – the Greek and the Albanian – and in both cases, she stresses the positive status assigned to the local way of speaking. In order to highlight the differences between the idioms, in both Greek and Albanian, she uses the Greek terms *kathara* (clearly) and *varia* (heavily), which are closely associated with the sociolinguistic history of the Greek language. These terms come from the Greek metalinguistic discourse (Kotrotsou-Lontou 2004; Mackridge 2009; Archakis 2019) [6] and imply the relations of power between different regional and social varieties of Greek as well as the two versions of the standard – *Katharevousa* (the clear language) and *Dhimotiki* (the people's language):

> E.: Our language is not Albanian, it is Arvanitika. Arvanites exist in many places… However, I can't understand them. We talked with one [Arvanite] colleague [from a

> different region], and he said that he didn't understand me. They speak 'heavily,' we speak 'clearly.'
> Int: What does it mean to speak 'heavily'?
> E: Well, there are some words, we say them one way, they say them differently. We have the same thing with Greek. They speak one way in Macedonia, another way here in Epirus, and differently in Crete. When I went to work [in Athens], nobody could tell that I was from Epirus. They'd say, 'It's impossible' – because I spoke very 'clearly'.
> E: Albanians used the word *uly* to say 'sit down,' while we use *uny*. When I heard *uly* for the first time, I didn't understand it. After some years, I did. This is our way of speaking, the 'clearer' one. Here we speak 'clearly', both in Greek and Arvanitika.

The idea of a language being 'clear' is, in this case, closely connected to the one of an 'authentic' language saved in time without alteration:

> E: When they started coming, they'd hear, for example, that we use the word *lugë* ('spoon'), and they'd say 'Look, they have kept our old language here!'. They told us how they call it – I don't remember now.[7] And, by the way, the word was very *varia* (heavy). And they said 'You are keeping our language clear!'.

As one can see, Eleni uses the terminology genealogically (Foucault 1980) related to the Greek national discourse to describe the local idioms, and she uses the same terms for the Greek and Arvanitika ones. Such choice of words resolves the discursive tension and allows her to create a symbolic space of intimacy linked to the sense of belonging to the place and embed the idea of the local into the idea of the national. This example brings us back to the concept of *heteroglossia*, which Tsitsipis adopted from Bakhtin's work and used to describe the relationship between Arvanitika and Greek and which he defined as a situation when "one language is seen through the eyes of the other" (Tsitsipis 1997, 106). Indeed, the way Eleni uses the Greek terms to describe and evaluate the Arvanitika idiom seems a perfect example of a language "seen through the eyes of the other". However, this situation's peculiarity lies in the fact that 'the other's' perspective is not used to undermine the Arvanitika idiom's status, but quite the opposite – to praise it as being 'clear' and 'authentic.' Revisiting Herzfeld's concept of *subversive archaism* (Herzfeld 2019), we introduce *subversive heteroglossia.* When such *subversive heteroglossia* occurs, the internalized dominant linguistic ideology is reassessed and used in ways that deviate from the original ideology.

In contrast, the other interviewee from Plikati, Christina, uses a reverse version of this terminology when telling her story. She uses the term *Katharevousa* (clear language) or *Protevousianika* (the city's language) to describe the way they speak in Albania. On the contrary, Plikati's way of speaking Arvanitika is characterized as *Choriatika* (the language of the village), although, when using it, she points out the same peculiarities of the idiom which Eleni described as 'speaking *kathara'* (clearly):

> The language is the same, but they [the people in Albania, the migrants from Albania in Plikati] speak it differently. They speak a clear language (*Katharevousa*) while we speak as villagers (*Choriatika*). Many words cannot be understood.
> If you want to learn the language, you go to school, and there you can learn the clear language (*Katharevousa*).
> I can communicate in Arvanitika with people from Albania, but they speak differently, here we speak as villagers (*Choriatika*); they speak like people from the city (*Protevousianika*).

This difference in Eleni's and Christina's discourses may (at least to some extent) be explained by the differences in the two women's life stories. Christina represents an older generation with restricted access to education (she only had a chance to finish three years of school when World War II broke out, and she was sent to evacuation). Eleni, in contrast, had better access to education. She also lived and worked in Athens for many years. It may be the case that she perceives her 'linguistic self' quite confidently and securely (in terms of social prestige), while Christina's perception of the way she speaks Arvanitika is influenced by her self-perception as a 'village person' of lower status in comparison to an educated 'city person.'

Another aspect of Eleni's and Christina's stories is the way they stress the practical value of knowing a language, for example:

> Some years ago, Eleni travelled to the Czech Republic with several girlfriends of hers. They spent some time in Prague and visited some other places around the country, including Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad). When having a stroll around the town, they saw a small jewelry shop with many beautiful things on sale. It turned out that the salesman was an Albanian-speaking guy from Skopje, and Eleni talked Arvanitika to him. He was so happy that he gave away the beautiful rings that Eleni and her friends had chosen for themselves for a much better price. Eleni's friends were delighted and surprised about this, and Eleni concluded the story by saying, 'By the way, this moment made me feel very proud!'.

Christina told another story regarding her ability to understand Russian, which she had picked up in evacuation during the War:

> Some years ago, three Russian men came to visit the village. They spoke perfect Greek, but once Christina heard two of them discuss in Russian that they would steal the most sacred and precious icon from the village church. Christina revealed them, and the icon was kept safe in the village. 'This is how' – she concluded proudly, 'the icon was saved by my language'.

These two stories are both concluded by overt expressions of affective affiliation with a language other than Greek, which is not typical for Eleni and Christina. However, the feeling of pride is not associated with the language on its own, but rather with the pragmatic role the storyteller's command of this language plays in a particular social situation and how it positively affects the storyteller's social self's status. We assume that when the discourses of

homogeneity are dominant, and mistrust towards diversity expressions is shared, the pragmatic dimension of language use paradoxically becomes the safe space to express affectivity linked with language.

Picture No. 3 – Albania is right behind the mountains. Plikati, July 2018

Conclusions

Through the micro-level analysis of personal narratives contextualized in the macro-processes of the nation-state's life, we have revealed the spaces of cultural intimacy created through such discursive tools as code-switching, use of specific terminology to describe languages, and storytelling. Exploring such is equally essential for nation-states and borderlands' anthropological theorization and understanding how everyday social reality is being constructed through language.

Cultural landscapes of the past have been strongly affected by the bordering processes. Speaking with our research participants and walking around Konitsa, we were able to trace the past processes of place-making in the physical landscape (e.g., the semi-demolished bektashi *turbe*) and the still present spaces of cultural intimacy in the metalinguistic discourse. Today, the ruins of shared sacred places are the symbol of homogenization of the public space. However, the discursive patterns that we traced in our interlocutors' personal stories construct a cultural borderland (Donnan and Wilson 1999), a symbolic space acceptive of all the inconsistencies and contradictions in the intimate personal experience.

As we hope to have shown by our case study, a focus on discursive strategies of particular people in particular contexts and attention to the patterns of linguistic ideologies in their talk allows access to the otherwise hidden meanings of everyday linguistic practices. Such practices

play a crucial role in constructing the people's social reality and making sense of their connection to the place in the broader context of the nation-state.

Our case study has demonstrated how shared patterns of cultural imaginaries – with their specific terminology and 'grammar' of social relations between people and languages – can be creatively used and transformed for one's unique life story. Having demonstrated merely one example of how *subversive heteroglossia* works, we here suggest that further elaboration on the dynamics between linguistic ideologies and the social and individual dimensions of language use can enrich the field of anthropological research on social boundaries.

Notes

[1] Our engagement with the topic emerged within the framework of the 13th International Konitsa Summer School in Anthropology, Ethnography and Comparative Folklore of the Balkans in 2018. The case study was supervised by Paris Potiropoulos (Hellenic Folklore Research Center), to whom we owe special thanks for his insightful comments and guidance throughout the research. Also, we would like to thank the organizers of the summer school, the lecturers, and visiting speakers for the enlightening discussions. We thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors of this Special Issue, Davide Carnevale and Thomas Wilson, for their valuable suggestions and comments. Last but not least, we are infinitely grateful to our research participants who treated us with kindness, shared their stories, and made this research possible. Ekaterina Zheltova's participation in the research was supported by the Charles University Grant Agency (GAUK, 2018; project #946218), the SVV project of the Institute of International Studies, FSV UK, No. 260954/2021, and CEFRES (CEFRES, USR 3138 CNRS-MEAE). All photos in this paper are taken by the researchers and belong to the researchers' personal archive.

[2] This fieldwork activity was carried out in Konitsa and Plikati, in Northwestern Greece, on the border between the Greek and Albanian states. The town of Konitsa is the economic and administrative center of the Greek Konitsa municipality. Throughout the 20th century, a large part of the population participated in population exchanges (many 'Muslims'/ 'Albanian speakers' left for Turkey and Albania, while the refugees from Asia Minor came to settle in the area). Plikati is located in very close proximity to the border. It was historically populated by Arvanitika speakers. Until the 20th century, it was mostly inhabited by Orthodox populations with some Muslim families that left (mostly during the population exchanges). Despite the language shift, the older residents still speak Arvanitika, although Greek is the predominant language. While our research participants from Plikati define themselves as Orthodox, our interlocutors from Konitsa culturally affiliate with Bektashism, a Sufi dervish branch of Islam.

[3] The presence of Golden Dawn, a Greek far-right political party, in the Konitsa municipality is one of the factors increasing long-established racist and xenophobic beliefs, commonly found in this border area. Among others, they have also been directed at the Albanian migrants in Konitsa. Yet, years of neighborhood and proximity have made the dynamics of interaction more complex, bringing together in one space discriminatory ideologies and practices of neighborly coexistence.

[4] *Turbe* is a spiritual leader's (*baba*) tomb, an important sacred site in Bektashism.

[5] Following the tradition dating back to the Ottoman times, the term 'Turk' is often used to refer to all Muslim people regardless of their national, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic affiliation. In the case of Albanian-Greek borderlands, the term is sometimes used to refer to Albanians in general.

[6] The 'Language issue' in Greece, namely the discussion on the appropriate form of the official national language, arose several decades before the Greek Independence War at the dawn of the 19th century. The Greek 'national awakening' started a debate between the archaists, who favored the reinstallation of a linguistic form inspired by the ancient Greek, and the Dhimotikistes, who advocated for the everyday spoken form of Greek. The divide between Katharevousa and Dhimotiki, which intertwined within the county's major political and ideological questions, has been central to the public sphere for more than 150 years. Katharevousa functioned as a symbol of the connectedness with the ancient Greek past and followed the Enlightenment values, while Dhimotiki represented 'the people' and aimed to include diverse social elements into one undivided national narrative, expressing the 'soul of the ethnos'. Finally, Dhimotiki was established as the official language in 1964. During the Greek Dictatorship of 1967-1974, there was a short turn towards Katharevousa, yet since 1976 Dhimotiki has been the official national language.

[7] In standard Albanian, the usual word for 'spoon' is *lugë* as well.

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