

STUDII DE ATELIER. CERCETAREA MINORITĂȚILOR NAȚIONALE DIN ROMÂNIA
WORKING PAPERS IN ROMANIAN MINORITY STUDIES
MŰHELYTANULMÁNYOK A ROMÁNIAI KISEBBSÉGEKRŐL

Nr. 63

Adriana Cupcea

**ASSERTING ETHNICITY:
THE TATARS FROM DOBRUJA
(ROMANIA)**



INSTITUTUL PENTRU
STUDIAREA PROBLEMELOR
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Abstract

■ The research is a descriptive analysis of the ethnic identity dynamics of Tatars in Dobruja. We tried to identify how the ethnic identity of the Tatar community of Dobruja, of Sunni Islamic faith was rediscovered and reconfigured after 1990.

The research analyses the representative reorganization on ethnic basis that took place after the fall of the communist regime, emphasizing the ways of action and interaction of this organization in the community, through which ethnic and religious traditions, became important elements in the identity reconstruction of Dobruja Tatars during this period. We also followed the way the ethnic specificity articulates in the inner ethnic group, in different social contexts, in the religious life, in linguistic situations, in family relations and in economic contexts.

From the methodological point of view, the research is based on the field research (interviews, participative observation) conducted in urban and rural communities of Tatars in Constanța county, where the largest Tatar communities of Dobrogea live.

Rezumat

■ Cercetarea este o analiză descriptivă a dinamicilor identității etnice la tătarii din Dobrogea. Am încercat să identificăm modul în care identitatea etnică a comunității tătare, de religie musulmană sunnită din Dobrogea, a fost redescoperită și reconfigurată după 1990.

Cercetarea surprinde reorganizarea reprezentativă pe baze etnice, care a avut loc după căderea comunismului, subliniind modalitățile de acțiune și interacțiune în comunitate, a organizației reprezentative a tătarelor, prin care sărbătorile și tradițiile, etnice și religioase, au devenit elemente importante în procesul de reconstrucție identitară a tătarelor dobrogeni, în această perioadă. De asemenea am urmărit modul în care se articulează particularitatea etnică în cadrul grupului etnic tatar în diferite contexte ale vieții sociale, în viața religioasă, în situații lingvistice, în relații de familie și în viața economică.

Din punct de vedere metodologic, cercetarea se bazează pe anchetele de teren (interviuri, observație participativă) realizate în comunitățile urbane și rurale de tătari din județul Constanța, unde trăiesc cele mai mari comunități de tătari.



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ASSERTING ETHNICITY: THE TATARS FROM DOBRUJA (ROMANIA)

Methodology

■ This research is aimed at the descriptive analysis of the modes and dynamics of the manifestation of ethnic identity at the Tatars from Dobruja. We have tried to identify the way in which the ethnic identity of the Tatar community of Sunni Islamic faith has been rediscovered and reconfigured after 1990. Our research identifies their representative reorganization on an ethnic basis after the fall of communism, emphasizing the modalities of action and interaction within the community and the representative organization of the Tatars, through which the ethnic and religious festivities and traditions have become important elements in the identity reconstruction of the Dobrujan Tatars in this period. Also, we have followed the way in which ethnic particularity articulates itself within the ethnic group of the Tatars in various contexts of social and religious life, linguistic situations, family relationships, and economic life.

From a methodological point of view, this research is based on empirical investigation and the interpretive understanding of the data gathered through qualitative methods, documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, participative observation, and informal conversations within the urban and rural Tatar communities of the county Constanța, from the localities Constanța, Medgidia, Ovidiu, Valu lui Traian, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Amzacea, and Tătaru. The focusing of the research on the county Constanța is evidently due to the fact that it is here that the largest Tatar communities of Dobruja live.¹

In the selection of our interlocutors we did not follow a pre-established pattern, our sole criterion being their membership in the Tatar ethnic group and their selection being based on the “snowball” method of personal contacts. The contacts established through the branches of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania have been most useful in this respect. In fact, many of our interlocutors are members of the ethnic and religious elite of the communities included in our field investigation. The list of our interviews includes two focus groups, one in the locality Mihail Kogălniceanu, and one in the city Ovidiu. Our first interview was conducted at the union headquarters with members of the community closely connected to the representative organization of the Tatars, and the interview from Ovidiu took place at the local mosque, with members of the community reunited by the religious practice of the Friday prayer. The locations of the two interviews are also relevant for the two focal points which are capable of reuniting the members of the community: the ethnic organization and the place of worship, the mosque.

As to the age of the interlocutors, both male and female in equal numbers, it has been between 18 and 75, with the higher prevalence of the middle-aged and especially the elderly, simply because their greater openness to sharing their life experiences.

1 For details on the demographic distribution of the Tatar ethnic group, see: http://www.ispmn.gov.ro/maps/county/etnii2011_tatar.



The background of the community

■ The Tatars from Dobruja have represented a less known and discussed community within contemporary society, both in the mass-media and academically. The bibliography related to this community consists, with few exceptions, of the works of authors from within the community, the Tatars being most often included along with the Turks from Dobruja either in the Turkish-Tatar community or in the Islamic religious community. Notwithstanding all these inconsistencies in their image and perception within the Romanian collective mentality, the Tatars from Dobruja represent a historic community which is integrated and adapted from an ethno-cultural and economic point of view into Romanian society as a whole and the society of Dobruja particularly.

The Tatar presence in the territory of Dobruja dates back to the 13th century (Gemil: 2010) and is associated with the extension of the authority of the Golden Horde, more exactly the Nogay tribes, over the northern coast of the Black Sea, consolidated during the Ottoman period. After the integration of Dobruja under the Ottoman administration at the end of the 16th century, the settlement and the development of the Tatars in Dobruja intersects with that of the Turks arriving from Asia Minor and established here as colonists due to the political and economic interests of the Ottoman Empire in this region (Iordachi 2002: 170). This colonization policy linked to the mouth of the Danube responded to military and political requirements of the Ottoman Empire, such as strengthening their control in a region of vital strategic importance, increasing the ratio of the Muslim population as a factor of pressure and control over the Christian populations, and the exploitation of their qualities as excellent warriors (Oberländer Târnoveanu, Adam 2005: 32).

An important period for the consolidation of Tatar presence in this area was that of the Russian-Austrian-Turkish wars, during which more intense migratory waves have settled in Dobruja. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the Tatars of the Kırım (Crimean) group of the larger Tatar population have also entered the territory of Dobruja. The first migratory wave of the Crimean Tatars has followed the annexation of the Crimean Khanate by Tsarist Russia in 1783 (Oberländer – Târnoveanu – Adam 2005: 5), and the second the Crimean War (1853-1856), during which the Tatars have been dispossessed of their properties and consequently have left the villages and cities of Crimea (Iordachi 2002: 170).

At the time of the annexation of Northern Dobruja to Romania, after the 1877-1878 war, although our data is not very precise, the most credible source is represented by a statistical table obtained by the French consulate in Tulcea, which mentions the number of 71.146 Tatars from a total of 225.753 (Karpát 2003: 228). In the period following their integration in Romania, a conglomerate of economic and social factors will trigger the emigration of Turks and Tatars from Dobruja toward the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. Thus, the process of internal colonization by Romanians in this area, the changes of the landholding system, and the proe-migration propaganda within the Turkish and Tatar communities by the newly established Turkish state (1923) (Oberländer – Târnoveanu – Adam 2005: 44-46) were factors which accelerated the phenomenon of Turkish and Tatar emigration between the two World Wars.

The outbreak of World War II and the necessity to secure the borders forced the Romanian government to stop the emigration of the Turkish and Tatar population. Nevertheless, there will be a drastic decrease in their number, as it can be seen from the data of the population census of 1948, at which time the Turks and the Tatars were registered together. At this census, their common number was established at 28.782, while the population census of 1956 registered 14.329 Turks and 20.460 Tatars (Recensământ 2002, vol. IV). At the following two censuses of the communist period, in 1966 and 1977, the number of the Tatars was determined to be 22.151 and 23.369 (Recensământ 2002, vol. IV).

The first population census of the post-communist period, held in 1992, registered 29.832 Turks and 24.956 Tatars (Recensământ 2002, vol. IV), while the following census, that of 2011, established a number of 28.226 Turks and 20.464 Tatars (Recensământul Populației și al locuințelor: 2011). This decreasing demographic trend is a source of discontent within the Tatar community. From the leaders to the simple members of the community, among the Tatars it is widely believed that their community is, in fact, much larger than reflected by the official data, and its number exceeds that of the Turks in Romania. The figures circulated within the community vary according to interlocutor between 30.000,²

2 Interview with M. F., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013; Interview with O. E., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013, Interview with G. A., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013.

35.000,³ and 37.000,⁴ up to even 40.000⁵ ethnic Tatars. These figures are relevant for their impact on the self-image and the relationship to other ethnic groups of the Tatar community, and rely upon an unofficial internal population census held by the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania with the aid of its branches, and where these branches are lacking, on estimations based on the national population census⁶ or by the imams. This unofficial census is facilitated by the closer internal relationships characteristic for localities inhabited by smaller and more compact communities. An example for this is the city Ovidiu, where the 2011 official population census established a figure of 396 Tatar residents, while the internal census estimates some 770 ethnic Tatars. The census is much more difficult to be carried out within larger urban areas such as Constanța, where the Tatar community is larger, but also more dispersed and consequently more difficult to be monitored numerically.⁷

As to the causes for the discrepancies between the census figures invoked by the ethnic Tatars, both on the official level and that of the community in general, these are linked to the supposedly flawed procedure of the official census, due to the confusion between the terms “Turk” and “Tatar” made by the census workers and, thus, to their way of addressing the questions to the population. Another frequently invoked motive is that a consistent number of Tatars declare themselves Turks due to the absence of a Tatar state. The *sense of discovery*, triggered by this situation, compensated already during the communist period by the placement of the Tatars under the protectorate of Turkey, was amplified after 1990. This development took place in a context in which the protectorate of Turkey was merely symbolic during the communist period, contributing more to the mental comfort of the Tatar population, than having practical value. After 1989, the protectorate of Turkey will become more concrete through the financial aid received not only by the Turkish but the Tatar community as well, on the educational, cultural, and economic level. The active presence of Turkey in all these areas is invoked by a significant number of ethnic Tatars as a solid argument for some of their co-ethnics declaring themselves Turks.⁸ In some cases, the pragmatic argument of the advantages which could be gained in the case of a hypothetical emigration to Turkey, such as the easier obtaining of citizenship and integration within the host society, is also invoked. Additionally, according to the Tatars, the adoption of the much more profitable Turkish identity by a sizeable population of Muslim Roma from Dobruja, the so-called “*xoraxaj*”, also represents an important motive for their numerical inferiority to the Turkish community.⁹

After the fall of communism in Romania, in 1989, the revitalization of spiritual life was implicitly accompanied by an institutional revitalization. Thus, the Turkish Muslim Democratic Union of Romania was already created in the last days of December 1989 (Gemil 2012: 351). Following some divergences within the community, the organization split in two: the Ethnic Turkish Minority Union of Romania, which later adopted the name “Turkish Democratic Union of Romania”, and the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania, both organizations with the main declared objective of conserving and perpetuating the cultural and traditional values of the ethnic Turks, respectively Tatars.

3 Interview with O. E., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013.

4 Interview with G. A., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013.

5 Interview with Gelil Eserghep, president of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania, 16 September 2013.

6 Information supplied by the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania.

7 Interview with Gelil Eserghep, president of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania, 16 September 2013.

8 Interview with M. K., member of the Tatar community, 19 September 2013.

9 Ibid.



The representative organization: the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania

■ During its more than 20 years of existence, the Union, which has its headquarters in Constanța, has established 31 branches in the counties Constanța and Tulcea, and one each in Brașov¹⁰ and Bucharest¹¹. During the last years, a trend of polarization of a part of the Tatar intellectuals toward the capital could be observed. During this period, the union leadership was generally held by members of the intellectual and economic elite of the community, i.e. professors, lawyers, engineers, and businessmen.

Some of the 31 branches from the Dobruja region are concentrated around more compact and cohesive communities, with a strong economic and intellectual, and in some cases religious, local elite, usually involved in the local leadership of the Union. This is the case with some urban localities generally inhabited by a medium-sized population, such as Medgidia (Mecidiye) or Ovidiu (Kanara), but also with rural localities such as Valu lui Traian (Hasancea) or Mihail Kogălniceanu (Karamurat), both categories situated in the vicinity of the municipality of Constanța and next to important roads, being thus active localities from an economic point of view.

There are, however, some localities where the presence of the Union, although it also has its branches and representatives there, is merely symbolic. This is the case with some more isolated Tatar communities, situated in less-favoured regions and lacking in economic opportunities, which are reduced in number due to the migration of the active population toward the urban centres and consist mainly of elderly people. This is the case with Tătaru (Azaplar), the former centre of the Tatars in Romania between the two World Wars, currently inhabited by approximately 150 ethnic Tatars,¹² the majority of them pensioners of the former agricultural cooperative. Other localities in a similar situation are Osmancea and Cotu Văii, both located in the county Constanța.

The county seat, the city Constanța, represents a particular case within the context of the Tatar communities of Dobruja. Since it is an urban agglomeration with a population of 254.693 people, notwithstanding the fact that it hosts the largest community of ethnic Tatars in Romania, which consists of 7.379 people according to the population census of 2011 (*Recensământul populației și al locuințelor*: 2011), the Tatar community of this city is characterized by a high degree of dispersion. Due to these conditions, inter-community relations are harder to be cultivated and consolidated here than within the medium-sized or small localities, which have the advantage specific for rural localities, i.e. that the members of community mutually know each other well (Bold – Buciuman – Drăghici 2003: 60-62).

Ethnopolitics

■ Within this community context, the Union has assumed the role of the polarization of the Tatar community. The right to free expression, regained after 1990, has been interpreted by the Union as the recovery of the right to unity of the community, defined as a second family for every Tatar living in Romania. Thus, the politics of the Union were aimed at attracting new members and ensuring a certain level of cohesion at the level of the community through actions principally directed at the rediscovery, conservation, and transmission of the main cultural values of the Tatar community: Tatar language, Islam, and the customs and traditions specific for this ethnic group. For this purpose, the strategy of the Union was centred on some essential action points, i.e. education, press aimed at ethnic Tatars, the younger generation, the role of women within society, relationships with the Tatar

10 According to the census data of 2011, 9 ethnic Tatars live in Brașov. See: *Recensământul populației și al locuințelor* [Population and Housing Census], 2011.

11 According to the census data of 2011, 388 ethnic Tatars live in Bucharest. See: *Recensământul populației și al locuințelor* [Population and Housing Census], 2011.

12 Interview with G. E., mayor of the municipality Comana, 17 September 2013.

communities of the diaspora, all these domains being reflected by the profiles of the activity committees of the Union.¹³

The reactivation of ethnic and religious identity: celebrations and traditions

The reactivation of the ethnic and religious identity has taken place after 1990 both at the individual level and at the organized level of the Union, through the reestablishment of the links with the homeland, Crimea, and the protector state, Turkey. Through its Commission for Culture, Cults and Traditions, the Union has provided an organized framework for the rediscovery of ethnic and religious identity, with the agenda of identifying all ethnic and religious festivities in order to officialise them. Professor Nuredin Ibram, the current president of this commission, has told us about the discovery of a new tradition, the Mevlid Kandili (Birth of Prophet),¹⁴ thus introduced on the list of religious holidays during which different celebratory activities are organized annually. Elaborating on the situation from the communist period, Ibram emphasizes the atmosphere of restraint and fear in which the two major Muslim holidays, the only two religious holidays respected before 1989, Ramazan Bayram¹⁵ and Kurban Bayram,¹⁶ were celebrated. At the same time, he also highlights the institutional impulse for rediscovering religious identity during the communist period.

About the other religious festivities (with the exception of Ramazan Bayram and Kurban Bayram) we really didn't know much back then. Personally, after having investigated the religious phenomenon and the way in which religion is practiced today, I have found that we have, in fact, a great number of holidays, about which we had no knowledge before 1989, such as the Miraç Kandili (Prophet Muhammed's Ascent to Heaven) and Berat Kandili (the Forgiveness of the Sins). In other words, we have regained our religious identity through our gaining knowledge about some dates, facts, events, and histories of the Prophet, and we have also gained new possibilities of promoting this religion within the Muslim community.¹⁷

In fact, when asked about the history and the traditions specific to the Tatars as an ethnic group, a great part of the interviewed subjects emphasizes the fact that they had their first contact with these at the events organized by the Union.

Other annual holidays which are celebrated within the Union include both religious holidays which are, incidentally, common with the ethnic Turks, such as the Kutlu Doğum Haftası (the *Week of the Holy*

13 Commission on Culture, Religious Cults and Traditions; Commission on Schools and Education; Commission on Youth and Sports Activities, etc.

14 There are five holy evenings in Islam: Mevlid Kandili (the Birth of the Prophet), celebrated at the 12th day of the 3rd month of the Muslim calendar. This is the first of the enlightened nights of Muslims, called "Kandili" (Mevlid Kandili – the Birth of Prophet Muhammd, Regaip Kandili – the Night of the Prophet's conception, Miraç Kandili – the Night of Prophet Muhammad's ascent to Heaven, Berat Kandili – the Night of Forgiveness of Sins, and Kadir Gecesi – the Night of the Revelation of the Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad). The dates of these celebrations are fixed. The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar having twelve months, and each month has a number of days equal to one complete lunar cycle. Thus, the Islamic year has 354 days, 11 days less than the solar year, which is adopted worldwide. Consequently, Islamic celebrations are held 11 days earlier each year than the last, relative to the solar calendar.

15 Kurban Bayram (the Feast of the Sacrifice) is an homage to the Prophet Ibrahim, who, faced with the choice between sacrificing his own son and his devotion to Allah, chooses the second option. As compensation, Allah sends him a ram which is sacrificed instead of his son, who will live. The sacrifice of the ram, whose flesh is then divided in three parts – one part for the members of the family, one for friends and neighbours, and one for the needy –, is a traditional obligation of any economically autonomous Muslim with a good financial situation. The fulfilment of this obligation strengthens the intra- and inter-community ties through increasing the feeling of solidarity. After the Bayram prayer (Bayram Namazı), which is mandatorily performed in the Mosque, and after the men have visited the houses of the people who died throughout the year, where they read the Quran, four days of relaxation follow with traditional meals, visits paid to parents, grandparents, and friends, which strengthen the family and the community. See Ibram 2011: 55.

16 Along with the Feast of the Sacrifice, the Ramazan Bayram (the Feast of the Fast, or the Feast of Sweets) is another important religious celebration of Islam. It is an occasion for strengthening and consolidating the Turkish community. The month of the fast (which lasts 30 days) fulfils the function of physically and mentally strengthening Muslims. It ends with the Bayram Namazı religious service and is followed by three days of joy, relaxation, and reconciliation. See Ibram 2011: 55.

17 Interview with N. I., member of the Tatar community, 31 January 2013.



Birth), and holidays of pre-Islamic origin, which are accepted by Islam, e.g. Aşure,¹⁸ Hidrellez,¹⁹ and Newruz.²⁰

From the perspective of secular holidays, we can witness a triple cultural orientation. The first one is the initial approach toward Romania,²¹ their adoptive country, and the second orientation is toward the Turkish cultural world, an element reflected by the double celebration of some secular holidays, which are declared official holidays in Romania, such as Women's Day (8 March) and Children's Day (1 June), and also their correspondents within Turkish culture, Mother's Day in Turkey (celebrated on the second Sunday in the month of May) and Children's Day in Turkey (23 April). As a third historical and cultural orientation, we can distinguish the celebration of ethnically specific national holidays, linked to the commemoration of historically, ethnically, and spiritually significant events for the collective consciousness of the Tatars, such as the deportation of the Crimean Tatars by Stalin on 18 May 1944; the Day of Tatar Language, celebrated on 5 May, the date on which the Turkish-Tatar bilingual journal *Renkler* (Colors) was published in 1987; 13 December, the day of the proclamation of the Crimean People's Republic in 1917, declared in 2006 the Day of Tatar Ethnicity in Romania. The establishment of an independent Tatar state on the Crimean Peninsula in 1917, after the downfall of the Russian Empire, which was abolished under Bolshevik pressure in 1918, has represented and continues to represent to many Crimean Tatars, including the historically and politically conscious Tatars of Dobruja, the single historical period since 1783 in which their national aspirations have become reality (Fisher, 1978: 120). The local motivation of choosing this day for the celebration of Tatar ethnicity symbolizes both the perception of the existence of an independent Crimean Tatar state as an ideal and idealized historical situation and simultaneously expresses the conservation of the ties to the ancestors and the homeland territory, Crimea, within the context of the historically, politically, and geographically specific Tatar culture of Dobruja.

*We, Tatars, have created ourselves a culture of our own, inspired by the millenary traditions of our ancestors [...], and now, the celebration of the Day of Tatar Ethnicity is among the most important themes of our community. Our spiritual connection to the homeland, Crimea, has never ceased.*²²

After 1990, the organized effort of the Union to rediscover ethnic identity is also evident from the fact that its Commission for Culture has established days of celebration or commemoration of Tatar personalities from Dobruja, the Tatar diaspora and also the homeland, who have been leaders or members of the national movement for the creation of a Tatar state in the Crimea: Numan Çelebi Cihan – the first president of the independent Crimean People's Republic, Mehmet Niyazi – the national poet of the Tatars, İsmail Gaspıralı – Crimean pedagogue, editor, and politician, Müstecip Ülküsal²³ – lawyer, founder of the Tatar journal *Emel* (Ideal), born in the village Tataru (Azaplar).

18 Aşure is the celebration which takes places from the 10th day of the first lunar month of the Muslim calendar, the Muharrem. At the day of the Aşure, a traditional recipe is prepared, which is inherited from generation to generation. The Aşure desert is prepared from at least two types of cereal, fruits, pearl barley and sugar, dates and pistachio nuts, etc. The legend associated with this celebration is related to Noah. After the flood, everyone on the ark left to search for food. While they were gone, Noah prepared them a snack from the leftovers he found on the ark. This is where the tradition of preparing the Aşure desert comes from. During the period of the Ottoman Empire, the Aşure desert was put in special bowls and shared with everybody. Nowadays, Muslims fast, pray, and prepare the Aşure, which is shared with friends, relatives, neighbours, and the people in need.

19 Hidrellez is an ethno-cultural and religious celebration which is annually held on 6 May, marking the arrival of the warm season. At this date, Muslims visit the graves of their loved ones and of saints, clean the graves and put flowers on them, read prayers from the Quran and offer donations and support to widows and orphans. The religious services and the commemoration of the dead are followed by folklore and musical programs and picnics. See İbram 2011: 52.

20 The Newruz is a feast of spring and the renewal of nature. The etymology of the term Newruz is: "new" = 'new', "ruz" = 'day', which in Persian means 'a new day'. This celebration is rooted in Zoroastrianism, and thus it has pre-Islamic origins, and it is celebrated on 21 March in the entire Turkish world. Newruz symbolizes the call to life, the rebirth of the ancestors, and the ascent to the sun. Within the traditional communities which have survived under the communist regime until 1960-1965, when the effects of industrialization and urbanization have also begun to influence them, Muslims used to bump into each other eggs which were painted with onion-skin, the thrown-away shells symbolizing the riddance from everything which is ugly and the cold weather. At Newruz, the religious ritual was followed by games, songs, and wrestling bouts (*kureş*), all taking place in the open air, accompanied by the consumption of traditional foods. Children also used to go carolling from house to house, singing songs of spring and being rewarded with sweets and handkerchiefs embroidered with flowers.

21 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013. See İbram 2011: 53.

22 *Caş* (The youth), 2007, no. 110 (October), p. 10, <http://www.tatar.ro/publicatii/Cas/Cas%20Octombrie%202007.pdf>, last accessed on 25 November 2013.

23 *Karadeniz*, 2012, no. 228 (June, special issue), p. 3, [uniuneatatar.ro/?dl_id=2](http://www.uniuneatatar.ro/?dl_id=2), last accessed on 25 November 2013.

An important contribution of the Union relies in rediscovering and perpetuating the tradition of the *kureş*,²⁴ the national sport of the Tatars, a folk wrestling style in which the fighters highlight their physical and psychological qualities. Through its branches, the Union organizes annually *kureş* competitions, which usually start at 1 May in the locality Valu lui Traian and continue in other localities inhabited by ethnic Tatars, turning into a larger celebration of the community. According to the tradition, at the end of the competition, the winner goes home with a wether and the defeated is compensated with a *bayrak*²⁵ (i.e. a tree decorated with 7 or 9 pieces of clothing). Generally, the meaning of this sport for ethnic Tatars consists in its ancestral origins and, thus, in ties to the previous generations, the *kureş* being described as *the kind of wrestling practised by our ancestors*.²⁶ Some of the interview subjects emphasize the ritualistic and social functions fulfilled *earlier* by these bouts of wrestling, which used to take place during weddings. Although the term "*earlier*"²⁷ is not clearly defined chronologically, the interlocutors' discourse reveals that they are referring to the period between the World Wars and the first decades of the communist regime, when these traditions were still alive.

*It reappeared just recently, after '89. Previously, the Tatar wrestling bouts were practised only at weddings. For instance, the bouts were held at the groom's when the bride arrived, and now, after the Revolution, they are held weekly in an organized manner.*²⁸

The Tatar wrestling bouts are relevant not merely as events which mark the affirmation of ethnicity, but also from the perspective of defining inter-ethnic relationships, both on the level of the official and individual discourse of the Tatars.

*All kinds of nationalities join in. This year the wether was won by a Macedonian. [...] We do not discriminate whether someone is Romanian, Armenian, Lipovenian, or whatever someone might be, he is welcome.*²⁹

Also, in order to perpetuate the tradition of Tatar folklore, artistic ensembles have been established in Valu lui Traian, Constanța, Medgidia, Mangalia, and Mihail Kogălniceanu. The Festival of Turkish-Tatar Folk Costume, Dance, and Song, organized by the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania,³⁰ which has reached its 21st instalment in 2015, reunites all these folk ensembles from Dobruja along with ensembles invited from the Ukraine, Crimea, Turkey, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Kazakhstan. Thus, the festival represents an important event also for the consolidation of the ties between the Tatar communities from their territory of origin and the diaspora. The two days of the festival are a veritable parade of folk costume, which takes place on horseback, on foot, and on Dobrujan carts, with the participation of both the local as well as the invited ensembles. Based on the tradition of Dobrujan interculturality, the festival includes in its program, along with the Tatar, Turkish, and Romanian artistic performances, those of other ethnic communities living in Dobruja: Greek, Aromanian, Slovakian, Russian, Lipovenian, Bulgarian, and Roma.³¹

Among the efforts to consolidate ethnic identity, there is also the active participation of the Union in organizing scientific conferences and symposiums, along with its support for publishing and releasing books in the domain of literature, linguistics, and history. Several scientific manifestations are organized by the union in collaboration with the Department of History and Political Science of the Ovidius University of Constanța. One of the examples is the symposium entitled *From the History of the Tatars*, which has reached its 4th instalment in 2012, and at which specialists of this field of research discuss subjects related to the local history of the Tatar community of Dobruja and also themes from the general history of the Tatars. In most cases, the talks delivered at these conferences and symposiums are published with the financial aid of the Union in collective volumes of scientific studies.³² One of the most remarkable

24 The Kureş wrestling bouts are part of the popular culture of the peoples from Central Asia; the name "*kureş*" itself comes from belts worn by the wrestlers (the so-called "*pehlivani*") during the matches.

25 In literal translation: "flag".

26 Interview with I. A., member of the Tatar community, 19 September 2013.

27 Interview with D. C., member of the Tatar community, 20 September 2013.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 See the International Festival of Festival of Turkish-Tatar Folk Costume, Dance, and Song, <http://uniuneatatar.ro/blog/articole/736/festivalul-international-al-portului-dansului-si-cantecului-popular-turco-tatar.html>, last accessed on 25 November 2013.

31 Program of the International Festival of Festival of Turkish-Tatar Folk Costume, Dance, and Song, XIXth edition, 5-8 September 2013, Soveja Summer Theatre, Constanța, Romania.

32 Such as the *Moștenirea istorică a tătarilor* (The cultural heritage of the Tatars), vols. I-II, published in 2010 and 2012, edited by university professor Tahsin Gemil and Nagy Pienaru, and *Tătarii în istoria românilor* (The Tatars in the history



editorial achievement is *the Turkish–Tatar–Romanian Dictionary*, conceived by Kerim Altay and Leyla Kerim and published in 1997.

In order to achieve the main objective of the Union, i.e. reactivating and promoting ethnic identity among the Tatar community, the journal *Karadeniz* (The Black Sea), the press organ of the Union, began to be published as early as 1990, and has since become the main medium for the dissemination and popularization of the cultural, scientific, and sports events organized by the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania. Ever since its founding, the journal has been bilingual, including texts both in Turkish and Tatar, along with texts in Romanian after 1994. Additionally, in 2012, texts in English have also been introduced. The initial and primary orientation toward the Turkish world is reflected by the publishing of texts in Turkish until 1994, justified by the need to strengthen the ties which have been severed during fifty years of communism and by the material motivation of the financial aid which was expected from Turkey as a capitalist state. The fact that texts in Romanian were added after 1994 reflects the coming to terms of the Tatars with the real situation of their community, the decision being motivated by the lack of Turkish and Tatar language knowledge of the younger and middle generation, since these segments of the population know Turkish and Tatar only on a rudimentary level.³³ This situation is a consequence of the lack of education and publications in their native language during the communist period, one of the major problems the Tatar community had to face after 1990. At the same time, their orientation toward the host state and their local surroundings is emphasized by their awareness of the need to be recognized as an ethnic group in Romania³⁴ and for the deconstruction of the stereotype of the Tatars as barbarians, disseminated within the collective mentality of the alterity through the school textbooks of the communist period, along with the need to neutralize the confusion between Turks and Tatars as a commitment to the affirmation of particularity and an identity not necessarily separated from that of the Turks, but specifically Tatar in character.

Currently, the journal offers information on cultural, religious, and administrative issues of the community, linked to the commemoration of certain important personalities and to religious and secular holidays celebrated by the Tatar community of Dobruja, Turkey, and the homeland territory, Crimea. The journal is distributed to the community through the branches of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania. Additionally, Radio T, which was founded in 2009, in collaboration with the Turkish Democratic Union of Romania and the Great Mufti's Office of Muslim Community in Romania (Vainovski – Mihai 2012: 492), with financial support from the Turkish state, offers another instrument for the promotion of Tatar language, along with ethnically relevant and cultural events, in order to consolidate and conserve the ethnic identity of the community. The radio station broadcasts from the municipality of Constanța, both in Turkish and Tatar language, and includes a programme that is broadcasted exclusively in Tatar language, entitled *Ana tilim, tatlı tilim* (Mother tongue, my sweet mother tongue), news in Tatar, programmes dedicated to the activities of the Union and to the traditions, history, and culture of the Tatars, along with commemorations of notable personalities of Tatar ethnicity. The radio station also has a programme dedicated to children, which offers readings of Tatar folk tales. The programmes of Radio T are interspersed with melodies from the Crimean repertoire; however, there is no local music, since according to its transmission permit, the radio station can only play the music of the countries of origin, i.e. Turkey and Crimea.³⁵

From 2010 onwards, the journal *Karadeniz* includes two supplements entitled *Kadınlar Dünyası* (The world of women) and *Caş* (Youth) (Vainovski – Mihai 2012: 492), which have two specific target audiences and also reflect two other major orientations of the Union's activities and interests from recent years. With the same major objective of the conservation and perpetuation of ethnic identity, respectively of the values and principles specific for Tatar ethnicity, the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania has focused its energies on the feminine component of the community and the younger generation, which is reflected by their active participation both on the organizational level and within the different activities of the Union. In order to attract these two components of the community, the Demo-

of the Romanians), vols. I-II, published in 2004 and 2005, edited by university teacher Marian Cojoc.

33 *Karadeniz* (The Black Sea), 1994, vol. IV, no. 25/1, p. 5.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Karadeniz* (The Black Sea), 2012, no. 228 (June, special issue), p. 2, uniuneatatara.ro/?dl_id=2, last accessed on 25 November 2013.

cratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania has created the youth organization Ismail Gaspirali and the women's organization.

Generally, the activities of the youth organization are directed at objectives such as the conservation of traditions and the maintaining of ties with the country of origin and the Tatar communities of the diaspora, their actions fulfilling partially cultural and religious and partially social and humanitarian functions.

The category of cultural activities includes the Festival of Turkish-Tatar Folk Costume, Dance, and Song, as well as seminars on ethnic and religious subjects, aimed at explaining the signification of some major events from the history and culture of the Tatars and of the Islamic religion: *The Day of Tatar Language*, *The Importance of the Month Ramazan*, *The Holy Kadir Night*, and *Mevlid Kandili*. On the cultural level, the activities of the organization fall within the category of the general initiatives of the Commission for Culture, including book presentations of Tatar authors and Tatar folklore anthologies, along with the commemoration of important personalities of the Tatar community. The attempt to promote the Union among the young Tatars fulfils a double function. On one hand, it serves to increase the human and electoral capital of the Union, since the organization thus attempts to attract to its ranks the members of the younger generation. On the other hand, it also fulfils a social function through the organization of certain social events, such as the *toplantı*, i.e. evening banquets organized for the Tatar youth, the Şuberek³⁶ Akşamı (Şuberek Banquets) at which foods of the traditional Tatar cuisine are prepared, and sports events, such as the Ismail Gaspiralı Football Cup.³⁷ These opportunities for meeting and socializing of the Tatar youth also have the role of strengthening social ties, along with creating and maintaining social networks ensuring the cohesion, conservation, and perpetuation of Tatar society.

One of the main directions taken by the politicians of the Union consists in the education of the younger generation of Tatars in the spirit of their ethnic values, creating at the level of official discourse the levers through which assimilation can be avoided and the persistence and the future of the community can be ensured. The education of the youth is deemed to be important both in the sense of transmitting ethnic values and in order to ensure a high intellectual level for the community. Education as such represents for the Tatars one of the main values, as it is reflected by the motto of the *Karadeniz*, cited from Ismail Gaspiralı³⁸: *Dilde, fikirde, işte, birlik!* (Unity in language, thought, and action!). As we have already emphasized, according to the Tatars themselves, they are the ethnic community with the second highest percentage of intellectuals in Romania, after the Armenians.³⁹ In 2013, the then-serving vice president of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania, speaking about the initiative of the Commission for Education of rewarding the ethnic Tatar young people who have achieved good results at the pre-collegiate students' competitions, entitled "Rewarding value, recognizing excellence", has emphasized, in order to support this point, which represents one of the main elements of the Tatars' self-representation and also of their perception by others, that *from the 400 children who have won prizes at the county level, almost 100, which is to say, 23%, are from our community, although we represent only about 12% of the total population of Constanța*. Denis Ibadula, lecturer at the Department of Mathematics and Informatics of the Ovidius University of Constanța, further specifies this by citing the case of the mathematics team from 2013 of the county Constanța, consisting of 19 children, 5 of whom are Tatars.⁴⁰

At the same time, at the level of the official discourse of the Union, Tatar women also occupy an important place within the community, from the perspective of their role in the transmission of Tatar language and traditions, as well as in the education of the children and the youth. The discourse of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania emphasizes the fact that the conservation of the identity values of the Romanian Tatars is in large measure also due to the active participation of women in the life of the community. The efforts of the women's organization of the Union are concentrated upon promoting the secular and religious customs and traditions, e.g. organizing Iftar meals,⁴¹

36 Şuberek is a traditional food of both Turkish and Tatar cuisine; it is a pie made with beef or sheep meat.

37 *Caș*, 2012, no. 228 (June, special issue), pp. 19-24, uniuneatatara.ro/?dl_id=2, last accessed on 25 November 2013.

38 Ismail Gaspiralı – Tatar pedagogue, editor, and politician from Crimea.

39 Interview with M. F., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013; Interview with O. E., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013.

40 Interview with D. I., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

41 The Iftar is the meal eaten by Muslims in the evening, right after sunset, during Ramazan, which concludes the fasting. Interview with E. E., 2 August 2014. See Gulevich 2004: 305.



celebrating the two Bayrams, granting humanitarian aid on these occasions to women and the elderly who are living in difficult material circumstances, organizing *tepreş* (outside banquets), Tatar poetry and folk song contests, Tatar gastronomy contests, and book launches of Tatar authors. The Women's Organization also created the so-called "Tatar Room" at the headquarters of the Union,⁴² which reproduces the traditional Tatar room with objects of folk art collected from Dobrujan villages, such as hand-woven towels with a decorative role, handkerchiefs used at the wedding ritual, dowry chests, tea and coffee services, and traditional folk costumes.

Tatar women consider that this traditional role of transmitting ethnic, cultural, and religious values within the family falls to them, but at the same time they also emphasize the prejudices of society, which are associated with the Muslim element of the identity of Turkish and Tatar women. Speaking about a project of the Women's Organization, carried out in June 2013 in collaboration with the Romanian women's magazine *Avantaj*, entitled "The role of the Turkish-Tatar woman in modern society", Denis Ibadula relates that *those from Avantaje, when they first came, expected to find us, as we are also Muslims, to find women wearing the feregea*,⁴³ and the impact was huge, since we contradicted this myth, because there is nothing anachronistic in their situation, and they are modern women, with children and careers, who combine professional with family life, women with Facebook accounts, and women who sometimes go out to clubs.⁴⁴

One of the declared priorities of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania consists in developing their external relationships with the Tatars from the territory of origin, Crimea, and the diaspora from Central Asia. This objective is also found at the level of the different commissions of the union, the Women's Organization and the Youth's Organization. Their ties with Tatars abroad are mainly cultural and dedicated to the sharing and perpetuating of traditions. Mostly, these connections are maintained through mutual visits of the delegations of the representative organizations on the occasions of conferences, symposia, and seminars on subjects related to the history, culture, and economics of the regions where the Tatar communities live,⁴⁵ i.e. Crimea, Turkey, and Central Asia (Azerbaijan, Tatarstan). Also, Tatar athletes from Dobruja, Crimea, Turkey and Bulgaria reciprocally participate at the *tepreşes* and bouts of *kureş* wrestling organized by the communities from these regions. Similarly, the folklore ensembles of the more important branches of the Union participate at festivals and go on tours in Turkey, Bulgaria, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and Macedonia. The International Festival of Festival of Turkish-Tatar Folk Costume, Dance, and Song, represents for the Union a chance to consolidate the ties with the territory of origin, the Tatar diaspora and generally the countries of the Turkish world, with folk ensembles invited from the Ukraine, Crimea, Turkey, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Kazakhstan. This triple orientation within the external relationships of the Tatar community in Romania, toward Crimea, Turkey, and Central Asia, is also reflected by the types of meetings organized by the Youth Organization Ismail Gaspıralı between 2008 and 2012, i.e. the World Forum of Tatar Youth, held in the Republic of Tatarstan, the International Congress of Crimean Tatar Youth, and the World Youth Congress of the Turkish World,⁴⁶ and also by the activities of the Women's Organization of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania, such as the Balkanian Turkish Women's Congress or the relationships established with the Crimean Tatar's organization from Ciftlikkoy through visiting this town in Turkey.⁴⁷

In their relationship with the Tatars from the diaspora, the Dobrujan Tatars appear as a solid community which has succeeded in preserving its ethnic identity, in contrast to Tatars from other countries, such as Poland or Bulgaria, where they have been assimilated to the Turkish communities. As such, the

42 *Kadınlar Dünyası* (The world of women), 2012, no. 228 (June, special issue), pp. 19-24, uniuneatatara.ro/?dl_id=2, last accessed on 25 November 2013, pp.13-16.

43 Veil worn by Muslim women.

44 Interview with D. I., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

45 One such example is the symposium entitled "Azerbaijan – History, Geography, Economy, Culture", organized on 1 October 2011, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Bucharest, at the headquarters of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania. See *Karadeniz*, 2012, no. 228 (June, special issue), p. 8, uniuneatatara.ro/?dl_id=2, last accessed on 25 November 2013.

46 *Caş* (The youth), 2012, no. 228 (June, special issue), pp. 19-24, uniuneatatara.ro/?dl_id=2, last accessed on 25 November 2013.

47 *Kadınlar Dünyası* (The world of women), no. 228 (special issue), June 2012, pp. 19-24, uniuneatatara.ro/?dl_id=2, last accessed on 25 November 2013, pp. 13-16.

Tatars from Dobruja place themselves in the role of a possible nucleus for the Tatar diaspora.⁴⁸ Along with this status of the nucleus for the Tatar diaspora, due to their capacity to resist assimilation, they also claim the role of the link between Turkish communities worldwide and the European Union on the basis of the geographic positioning of Dobruja. At every public event organized by the Union of Tatars of Romania, the following four flags are displayed: the flag of Romania as the host state and the flag of Crimea as the territory of origin, the Turkish flag as a sign of belonging to the Turkish world and a reference to Turkey as their protector state, and the flag of the European Union.

Ethnicity, language, and education

■ The rallying of the Tatar elite along with that of the ethnic Turks at the beginning of the '90s to Turkish culture and their engagement in reactivating Turkish ethnic identity was reflected especially in the continued efforts of the Tatar elite to reorganize the education system in Turkish language.⁴⁹ Retrospectively, the majority of this elite assesses that, on one hand, this approach ended in failure on the long term, but at the same time, on the other hand, it also represented a pragmatic imperative in the political and economic context of the post-Decembrist period, also motivated by the readiness of Turkey to assume the role of the protector as the motherland of the Tatar and the Turkish community of Romania.⁵⁰ The specific investments which were provided for the immediate revitalization of some central institutions of Turkish education, e.g. the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk Pedagogical and Theological High School,⁵¹ along with the Turkish contribution to teacher training and the providing of teaching materials have offered decisive arguments for the orientation of the Tatar elite in this direction.

The pragmatic implications of this type of discourse are reflected by the attitudes toward the issue of the reorganization of the Turkish language education, in the context of which the moral duty of Turkey as motherland to financially contribute to the reconstruction of Turkish culture and language within the community of Dobruja has been emphasized. In fact, the interest for the affirmation of the Tatar ethnic identity, not necessarily as separated but as simply different, has manifested itself primarily through the attitude toward education in Tatar language, which has become one of the main preoccupations of the Union since 2005,⁵² and through the care taken in the drafting of textbooks for the future Tatar-language community schools,⁵³ whose activity has commenced in Autumn 2006 within the branches of the Union from the larger communities.⁵⁴ It could be said that, from this period, the Tatar language becomes an essential element in the affirmation of ethnicity.

The inability to introduce in schools the study of Tatar language as a mother tongue in the post-communist period represents, from the perspective of the Tatars, one of the serious shortcomings of the community and a hiatus within the process of rediscovering and conserving ethnic identity. The interest to introduce Tatar language as an optional subject in the schools of Dobruja started to gain

48 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

49 Ibid.

50 Interview with T. G., member of the Tatar community, 25 June 2014.

51 The current name of the institution is "Kemal Atatürk National College".

52 The necessity of studying Tatar language was first addressed in the Romanian Parliament by MP Ament Aledin at the session of 10 April 2007 of the Chamber of Deputies. See *Karadeniz*, 2007, vol. XVIII, no. 4/169 (April), p. 1.

53 Currently, the majority of ethnic Tatar pupils studies Turkish as their mother tongue, since Tatar language cannot be studied within the state education system. Tatar language is taught only in community schools, which function since 2006 at the larger branches of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania, and from the 2008-2009 school year as an optional subject in some schools in Constanța county. Because of the lack of any form of higher education which could ensure the training of Tatar language teachers, as the Tatar language department of the Ovidius University has been abolished in 1972, Tatar language is currently taught by ethnic Tatar teachers, some of whom are retired, and whose specialization is in Romanian or Turkish language. Interview with A. A., member of the Tatar community, 1 April 2014; Interview with V. O., member of the Turkish community, 20 May 2014; Interview with N. O., member of the Tatar community, 23 September 2013; Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

54 *Karadeniz*, 2008, vol. XIX, no. 7/183 (July), p. 2.



momentum in 2007-2008. One of the problems identified in this context was the lack of Tatar-speaking teachers, since there was and there is no higher education institution recognized by the Ministry of Education which could provide the training of qualified teachers. The few remaining specialists in this domain are the graduates of the Tatar language section of the Department of Oriental Languages of the University of Bucharest, which was shut down during the communist period in 1965-1966 (Ibram 1998: 178). Another problem identified in this context is the lack of a standardized Tatar language, since the Tatar spoken in Dobruja and the one from Crimea have certain characteristics of vocabulary, orthography, pronunciation, and syntax, determined by their development within different historical and territorial contexts. Specifically, the Tatar language of Dobruja shows influences of Romanian, while the Tatar spoken in Crimea was influenced by Russian.

It is important to mention that Tatar language was included in the second part of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, which presents the general principles that are applied to all minority and regional languages of a given territory, yet without mentioning any appropriate measures. One of the primary aspects specified by the Charter is the recognition of these languages and the respect for the geographic area where they are spoken. Along with the prohibition of discrimination, this second part asks for the preservation of minority and regional languages through education both for the sake of their speakers and those who do not speak them and the strengthening of contacts between the speakers of different languages (Călușer – Gorcea – Moșteanu 2002: 10). Due to the establishment of certain specific provisions for the languages included in the third part of the Charter, related to their application within domains such as education, justice, administration, public services, cultural activities, and economic and social life, the members of the Tatar community consider it a mistake that Tatar language was not included in this category. According to them, the exclusion of Tatar language from the third group of protected languages, which includes the native languages of the minorities which benefit from education in their mother tongue within state institutions, has been an obstacle in the way of studying Tatar language as a mother tongue within schools.

In this respect, in 2008, a conference on minority and regional languages from the Black Sea region, focusing especially on Tatar language, was organized at the Cotroceni Palace with the active participation of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania. The main objective of this conference was to call attention to the mistake made in 2007, when the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* was ratified, with the exclusion of Tatar language from the category of the languages specified in the third part, which offered increased protection for these languages. The participants of the conference have emphasized the necessity of actions for remedying this problem from a legislative point of view. Likewise, in the same year, in order to compensate for the lack of Tatar-speaking teachers, the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania has organized a summer university focused on the topic of “the program and school curriculum for the teaching of Tatar language” at the Ovidius University in Constanța within the programs conducted under the auspices of the Black Sea Universities Network. The courses were held by two professors from the Tatar Language Department of the Technical and Pedagogical University of Simferopol, Crimea, and by professors from Romania. One of the areas of partnership between the Ovidius University and the University of Simferopol were the courses of the summer university at which the teachers from Romania who wanted to specialize in the teaching of Tatar at pre-school and primary school (preparatory group) level, had the possibility to study the contents of the school curriculums and methodologies of teaching the Tatar mother tongue as an optional subject at the primary school level, along with the teaching methods, means, and other multimedia instruments to be used within the teaching process.

The main conclusions of these discussions were that the Tatar language spoken in Dobruja is a *dialect and a component of the Tatar language*⁵⁵ and that the principal measures to be taken should be the unification and standardization of the literary Tatar language and the adoption of an official unitary alphabet, since the Tatar community of Crimea used the Cyrillic alphabet under the influence of the Russian cultural area, and the community from Dobruja the Latin alphabet. These topics were also discussed at the World Crimean Tatars Congress held in 2009, where it was emphasized that measures should be taken for the standardization of the language and the adoption of the Latin alphabet instead of the Cyrillic. However, this decision could not be adopted, since the majority of Tatar speakers from

55 Interview with E. M., member of the Tatar community, 22 May 2014.

Crimea are elderly people, and the change of the alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin would draw a wedge and even sever the ties between the leadership of the community and its members.⁵⁶

In spite of these obstacles, the leaders of the Tatar community attempt to take action in order to counteract the loss of language among the youth through an institutional initiative of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania, consisting in language courses organized at some of its branches and the introduction of Tatar language as an optional subject approved at the primary school level for some schools in the county Constanța,⁵⁷ under the subject name “Tatar customs and traditions”, which includes the teaching of Tatar language.

The revitalization of this element is considered both at the level of individual opinions and at the institutional level essential for the future evolution of the Tatar community. The lack of the possibility to study Tatar language as a mother tongue is connected with one of the main current problems of the Tatar community from Dobruja, i.e. the lack of Tatar linguistic knowledge among the youth, seen either as a consequence of the psychological inhibition to speak the mother tongue in public, which was predominant in the communist period,⁵⁸ and of the suppression of written culture and of education in Tatar language,⁵⁹ or as an effect of the contact with the majority, which intervenes at the time of the integration of children within the pre-school educational system, i.e. at around three years.⁶⁰

The family and especially the contact with the older generations represents the medium in which some of the ethnic Tatar children come into contact with the Tatar mother tongue, although there are Tatar families which communicate with their children exclusively in Romanian. Currently, most ethnic Tatar pupils study Turkish as mother tongue, since Tatar language is not an available option within the public education system, and it is only taught within the community schools established in 2006 at the larger branches of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania and, since 2008-2009, as an optional subject in a small number of schools from the county Constanța.⁶¹ The motives invoked by the parents for their option of the study of Turkish as mother tongue are linked to the lack of the accessibility of Tatar language studies and the utility of Turkish knowledge for the future of their children, as compared to the Tatar language, which does not offer them practical perspectives for their future integration in the labour market, neither in Dobruja or in the state capital of Romania, nor within the Turkish companies in Turkey or Germany, where the largest Turkish community of Europe lives.⁶² One of the obstacles in the way of the extension of teaching Tatar language as an optional subject consists in the lack of qualified teachers and the derisory salaries of the persons who could be integrated within the educational system as substitute teachers. The problem of the accredited teaching staff represents partially a consequence of the development within the domain of Turkish-language education in the communist period, since the specialization in Tatar language offered by the Department of Oriental Languages at the University of Bucharest (Ibram 1998: 178) was abolished in the second part of the '60s, and is partially also an effect of the post-communist developments. Along with the lack of qualified

56 Ibid.

57 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 28 January 2013.

58 Interview with N. I., member of the Tatar community, 31 January 2013.

59 In the immediate aftermath of the law adopted in 1948, the separation of the schools of Dobruja in Turkish and Tatar schools was encouraged, and the state experimented with teaching the Tatar dialect imported from the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The long-term effect on the community was non-existent, as confirmed by the members of the Tatar community who were integrated within the Tatar education system during that period. The main inadvertence resided in the fact that the manuals that had to be used were written in Cyrillic script, while the Tatars from Dobruja used the Latin alphabet. Additionally, there was no harmonization regarding the elements of history, culture, and spirituality, these subjects conveying information about the Tatars from Kazan. The teaching of elements of Dobrujan Tatar culture was left at the sole discretion of the teachers. After the 1948 reform, a Tatar Pedagogical High School was established in Constanța, which functioned until 1960 and dealt with the training of Turkish and Tatar language teachers from Dobruja, while the Muslim Seminary of Medgidia only trained so-called “*hodzhi*”. The seminary, established in 1610, was closed down in 1965-1966, followed by the abolishment of the specialization in Tatar language offered by the Department Oriental Languages of the University of Bucharest. For a more detailed discussion, see Cupcea 2013: 11.

60 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013; Interview with D. I., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

61 Interview with Vildan Bormambet, inspector of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, Bucharest, 20 May 2014.

62 Interview with N. O., member of the Tatar community, 23 September 2013; Interview with E. M., member of the Tatar community, 14 October 2013.



teachers and a standardized literary language, the most frequently cited explanation for the fact that a Tatar-language education system has not been established after 1990 is the problem of the missing infrastructure, or more precisely, the lack of Tatar-language textbooks, a fact that led the Union and its representatives to become involved in the reorganization of Turkish-language education. The dis-availability of Turkey to support this revitalization in terms of logistics also contributed to this situation, as did the argument based on the utility and the larger extension of Turkish, the official language of a capitalist state which not only offered its financial support in this matter, but also presented the larger part of the Tatar community with the opportunities of an extended labour market and a protection, an idea already alive at the level of public consciousness in the communist period. The way in which G. E., a history teacher from Medgidia, recounts the establishment of Turkish-language education, is also relevant for the present opinion according to which, as a result of the presence and the financial aid of Turkey granted to the two ethnic communities of Dobruja (the Turks and the Tatars), a process of assimilation of the Tatars from Dobruja into the Turkish community is currently taking place, an opinion which can be found both at the level of the Tatar intellectual elite and at the level of the ordinary members of the community.

After 1990, the idea of education in the languages of the ethnic communities appeared, and we started with Turkish... The textbooks used in the '60s, from which I myself have also learned, did not exist anymore, and we needed people then to write these manuals, since those who have written the older ones did not live anymore, and we didn't have any specialists, so then we turned for help to the Turkish state. And the Turkish state offered itself immediately, since it is evidently very eager when it comes to something like this, because it gained a whole community, without any major efforts, for only a couple of thousand books. We introduced these textbooks into the system, with the endorsement of the school inspectorate and the minister, and thus our children began to learn Turkish. Only later did we realize that we are heading with sure steps toward assimilation, and instead of being assimilated into the Romanian majority, we will be assimilated by the Turkish community, which is much smaller in Dobruja than the Tatar community, and this will simply happen because the Turkish state financially and spiritually supports us.⁶³

In the community schools of the Union, which also offer tutoring for subjects such as English or mathematics, the teaching of Tatar consists of weekly one or two-hour language classes. Generally, these courses are held during the weekend, and in most cases, as in Constanța, they take place at the premises of the Union's branches. The teachers who conduct classes within this system are retired teachers who have previously taught different subjects and are ethnic Tatars, being thus native speakers of the language. In Constanța, the Tatar language is taught by a Romanian language teacher.

In 2013, the Tatar language courses of the Mehmet Nyiazi community school, which functions within the institutional framework of the Constanța branch of the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania, were frequented by more than 40 students, separated in two groups, the beginners from 1st to 4th grade and a secondary group with students from the 5th to the 7th grade. The number of students has increased in 2013 as compared to 2012, when there was only one group of students from the 1st to the 7th grade. Pupils from the 8th grade do not attend the Tatar language courses because of their busy schedule due to the upcoming aptitude examination, which marks the end of the secondary cycle. The Tatar language textbooks were edited at the expense of the Union and drawn up following the consultation of a group of teachers who guided themselves by the Tatar language textbooks used in the '50s in the Tatar language education of those times. N. I., a Tatar language teacher at the Mehmet Nyiazi community school of Constanța, considers that these textbooks represent an improved version of the older ones, since the current Tatar language lessons are based mainly on elements of vocabulary and conversation.⁶⁴

The problem of the lack of qualified teachers for Tatar language persists, since there are no Tatar language departments for their training at the universities. In order to solve this problem, a protocol for cooperation was signed in September 2008 in Constanța between the Ovidius University of Constanța and the Technical and Pedagogical University of Simferopol for the training of teachers from the Dobruja region in the domains of Tatar language and literature. However, the annexation of Crimea

63 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

64 Information supplied by Neriman Ibraim, Tatar language teacher at the Mehmet Nyiazi community school in Constanța, 24 October 2013.

by Russia in March 2014 and the disruption of the ties to the Tatar community from this territory has led to the failure of this project within the changed geopolitical context of the region.

At the same time, the perspectives of building up a career and the advantages of the integration within the labour market due to Turkish language knowledge lead to the enrollment of ethnic Tatar pupils and students in education institutions where teaching is partially in Turkish. This is the case of the Kemal Atatürk National College in Medgidia, founded in partnership with the Ministry of Education of Turkey in 1995, which revitalized the tradition of the former Muslim Seminary of Romania. The National College, or more exactly, the specialization in Islamic theology within its teaching program, represents the educational option for Muslims of any ethnicity who want to choose a career in theology. This specialization is responsible for the formation of imams, but since girls also have the right to attend, the graduates of theology are also entitled to teach Turkish language and Muslim religion at the level of compulsory education. The language of study for all specializations is Romanian, with the exception of the study classes for Islamic theology,⁶⁵ where Turkish is partially used due to certain specialized subjects that are taught.⁶⁶ Besides these state-financed schools, two private high schools with an academic program in IT have been opened in Constanța and București, offering its courses in Romanian, Turkish, and English. These high schools are open to and frequented by ethnic Turkish and Tatar pupils along with Romanians and other ethnicities.

The possibility for training as a Turkish language teacher is offered by the Turkish language departments of the universities of Bucharest and Constanța. Last but not least, it must also be mentioned that there is a Turkish language department at the Faculty of Applied Modern Languages at the Lumina University of South-East Europe. Also, a large number of graduates of the Kemal Atatürk National College from Medgidia and the University College Kemal Atatürk for Primary School Teachers are employed within the educational system as Turkish language teachers. The latter educational institution, established in 2000, offered full-time courses for a study period of three years (Murvai 2002: 1-17) and was abolished in 2007.⁶⁷

Besides the state-financed educational institutions, Turkish is studied either as mother tongue (in the case of Turkish and Tatar pupils) or as a modern language within the institutions of the educational complex "Lumina" (functioning under the auspices of the Gülen movement): the two private high schools with an IT profile from București and Constanța, the International School of Bucharest, and the Spectrum schools (București, Constanța, Cluj, Iași, Timisoara, Ploiești). These are open to and frequented by both ethnic Turkish and Tatar pupils and by Romanians and other ethnicities.

The students of the Turkish Language Department of the Ovidius University of Constanța are of both Turkish and Tatar as well as Romanian ethnicity, and there are also Turkish citizens who have come to study in Romania. The decision in favour of the in-depth study of Turkish is largely due to the employment opportunities offered by the knowledge of this language. There is a collaboration between the teachers of the Turkish Language Department and the Turkish Businessmen's Association of Dobruja, as well as with the Turkish Consulate and the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre, in order to offer scholarships for the study of Turkish language in Turkey and, evidently, for their absorption by the labour market for the benefit of the students of the Ovidius University.⁶⁸

65 Along with Islamic theology, the Kemal Atatürk National College also has classes with pedagogical profile, with specialization as educator and teacher, classes with humanities profile, with specialization in philology, and two classes with sciences profile, specialization in mathematics and informatics.

66 Interview with Accan Mologani, director of the Kemal Atatürk National College, Medgidia, 19 September 2013.

67 The college was opened in the 2000-2001 school year, based on a protocol signed between the Ministry of National Education of Romania and the Ministry of Education of Turkey, being conceived as a continuation of the Kemal Atatürk National College of Medgidia. The College of Educators was abolished in 2007, following the Law no. 288/24 June 2004, which imposed the choice between the abolishment of short-term education in university colleges and their transformation into bachelor studies. Similarly, the obligation imposed in 2011 on teachers from the pre-university level to equate their short-term studies of 3 years with bachelor studies has led to the loss of qualification of a large part of the Turkish language teaching staff, who failed to complete their studies. At the same time, it is also to be mentioned that there are graduates of this college who teach Islam as unqualified teachers, since the pupils of this college have also studied subjects of the religion module during its existence. For more details about the Kemal Atatürk University College for Teachers, see Ibram 2011: 84-104.

68 Interview with dr. Hasan Neriman, lecturer at the Faculty of Letters of the Ovidius University of Constanța, 14 October 2013.



The scholarship to Turkey opens up another perspective for many students. Some of them, mostly the female students, choose to remain in Turkey, opting for marriages with Turkish citizens, while the male students return to Romania in a larger percentage, and are employed at the companies of the Turkish businessmen.⁶⁹

The Turkish influence

■ After 1990, the presence of Turkey in the life of both the Turkish and the Tatar community of Dobruja made itself felt in every domain: cultural, religious, and economic. Through the Turkish Consulate of Constanța, and later through such institutions as the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre, the Turkish state has become actively involved in organizing Turkish-language education, granting scholarships to Turkey, and setting up Turkish language courses for all age groups. At the same time, the Turkish Consulate is also actively involved in the renovation of the mosques from Dobruja, both financially and from the point of view of human resources, e.g. through establishing the connection between the local communities with craftsmen from Turkey. The active presence of the firms of Turkish businesspeople also involves the pragmatic argument for many Tatars for choosing the rapprochement with Turkish culture, which manifests itself in the preference of the parents for their children to learn the Turkish language⁷⁰ and in some cases and contexts even leads to the preference for Turkish identity.⁷¹

As to the Turkish presence in the economic field, the profiles of these firms are very diverse. Some of them are involved in the food business, with restaurants and butcheries which commercialize *halal* flesh. These are present in all the localities with larger Muslim communities, as in Medgidia or Valu lui Traian, and in Constanța they are situated in the same area, that of the Piața Griviței. Along with bovine and lamb meat, these shops also sell different products imported from Turkey, such as spices and Turkish delight. The business areas in which the Turkish firms are involved in range from the food domain to plastic products and construction work.

One example for the food businesses is that of the candy company Sultana from Medgidia, which produces and commercializes along with general pastry products, other, specifically Oriental baked goods, such as *baklava*, *kurabyie* (cookies), and various types of Turkish delight. This business belongs to Tatar individuals who are in partnership with a Turkish businessman, but it is also claimed at the level of the general perception by ethnic Turks, according to whom the business belongs to ethnic Turks in Medgidia, and who emphasize the Turkish character of the factory, based on the specifically Turkish nature of some of the food products.

The employees of these firms are both Turks and Tatars, as well as Romanians or people of other ethnicities, but the essential condition in their selection by the Turkish investors is the knowledge of Turkish language within the domains in which the type of work needs this. Businesses which belong to the members of the Tatar community are present on the economic market of Dobruja in the areas of commerce and industry, transportation, and provision of services through transportation firms, hotels, restaurants, and wood processing workshops.

At the beginning of the '90s, economic immigration towards Turkey was prevalent as a first option both among Turks and Tatars, due primarily to the advantages of their language abilities, the cultural similarities, and not least, the geographic proximity, which was exploited immediately after 1989 by both Turkish and local transport and travel companies. However, there was and is no marked interest from ethnic Tatars in obtaining Turkish citizenship or settling down in Turkey, not even in the period immediately after the fall of communism. As a matter of fact, Turkish citizenship can be obtained either through marriage with a Turkish citizen or through application, the latter conditioned by residence and the exercise of the right to work for five years in Turkey.⁷²

69 Ibid.

70 Interview with E. E., member of the Tatar community, 2 August 2014.

71 Interview with N. I., member of the Tatar community, 22 Mai 2014.

72 Information supplied by the Turkish Embassy in Bucharest, May 2014.

The interest of Tatars for Turkey was at the beginning both economic and touristic, for it to gradually become more touristic. Besides the difficulty of obtaining in Turkey an economic and social status similar to the one already held in the host state, the integration of Romania in the European Union and the access to the advantages of free circulation of people working in the EU determined the shift of the centre of interest of economic immigration from Turkey toward the European states, and especially Germany, which host the largest Turkish community in Europe. The immigration of the workforce is directed especially toward domains such as the food business, constructions, and businesses owned by ethnic Turks who immigrated to Germany, ethnic Turkish or Tatar employees being favoured by them in the hiring process due to their knowledge of Turkish.

This phenomenon is more accentuated in the case of ethnic Turks from Dobruja and more sporadic at the Tatars, in the case of whom one can rather speak of *brain drain*, since those who have settled down in Germany and other Nordic states are mostly engineers, doctors, and teachers, thus generally people working in liberal professions, with an advanced level of education.

Identitary hypostases: between ethnicity and religion

1. The hypostasis of ethnic identity

As we have already emphasized above, after the fall of communism in Romania in 1989, the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania has contributed to the compensatory process of returning to the identity elements established in the inter-war period, such as the affiliation to the Turkish world, the Crimean origins, the relationship with the territory of origin, Crimea, and the protector state, Turkey, which re-establishes the Tatar community in its ethnic hypostasis. Although the contribution of the organizational and organized mobilization is discernible and recognized within the community, this rediscovery and vertical reactivation of Tatar identity was rather a mass phenomenon that took place on the institutional, group, and individual levels, and was then transmitted to the surrounding ethnicities.

*These differences between Tatars and Turks have appeared after the revolution. In my village there is not a single Turk, but we have not once been called Tatars, only Turks. Especially before (the Romanian Revolution of 1989). After that, they separated us, or we separated ourselves from each other.*⁷³

The territory of origin: Crimea

For the Kırım Tatars, Crimea is the *par excellence* territory of origin, and the Crimean origins represent an important part of their self-concept. The history of the flight of their ancestors, which is more recent than in the case of the Turks, and can be chronologically placed to the period of the Russian-Turkish wars from the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, also plays a significant role within this context. Thus, in the case of the Kırım Tatars, identity discourse is built upon the Crimean origins and Crimea as a *territory, homeland, and the true fatherland of the Tatars, "the territory of our ancestors"*.⁷⁴ Crimea appears not merely as a characteristic of Tatars as an ethnic community, but also as a personal heritage in the case of the elderly, within the context of the migration of each family. Family has and had a decisive role for the transmission of the consciousness of the Crimean origins, transferring to the descendants the personal histories of the migration. These personal narratives of the migration, which are transmitted from one generation to the next, are sometimes complex and detailed, sometimes partial, and in certain cases merely informative. There are also cases in which these narratives, having existed at the level of the family consciousness, have been recognized, explored, and cultivated after the fall of communism. Due both to the geopolitical context of the communist regimes of this region and

73 Interview with H. M., member of the Tatar community, 17 October 2013.

74 Interview with N. O., member of the Tatar community, 23 September 2013; Interview with G. A., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013; Interview with M. A., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.



especially to the drastic decline of the number of Tatars after their deportation in 1944, the family ties to Crimea were broken, and the reconnection took place first on the official and only later, gradually, on the personal level, through the establishment of personal relationships and friendships with members of the Tatar community from Crimea.

The breach created by communism represents the period of the so-called “*forbidden Crimea*” from the perspective of the visceral fear of a large part of ethnic Tatars to be associated with the Crimean problem, an association synonymous in the Romania of Gheorghiu-Dej with the repression dictated by the NKVD. Tatar discourse directly recognizes Crimean origins as a strong nucleus of their identity. These origins represent a distinguishing element inherent in their identity structure,⁷⁵ which passed into a state of latency during the almost fifty years of communism and was rediscovered after 1990 (although in some cases it remained latent even after 1989).

*...after '90, when we had the opportunity to declare our identity, we called ourselves «Tatars», and it is well-known that we have not forgotten our Crimean origins, but we had no connections with Crimea, considering the fact that there was no one to have connections with in the first place, since not a single soul was left there after '44.*⁷⁶

*My father was born in 1906 to Tatars, but I don't know where they have come from. Who paid attention to such things back then? I don't recall where they have come from. I have no idea about this. They never told me. (...) I don't know anything about Crimea. I didn't have any connections with them, and I have never been to Crimea. I never left the village, I've never even been to the seaside resort. With my four children, how could I could have?*⁷⁷

*My mother may also be from Crimea, but nobody told me about such matters. When I was born, it was communism. The problem was that they (the Crimean Tatars) went against communism (...), so the Russians locked them up. I know this from history, I've learned it after communism...*⁷⁸

The rediscovery of origins had a double impulse. On one hand, it had an organized character, since the Union offered the framework for the reconstruction of identity for the community after 1990. In this regard, it is relevant to cite the testimony of a member of the Tatar community who admits that he has learned about the genocide committed against the Crimean Tatars on 18 May 1944, only after 1990, within the Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania.⁷⁹ Similarly, the majority of the members of the community has visited Crimea for the first time on trips organized by the Union in collaboration with the local Tatar organizations from Crimea. On the other hand, along with the organized rediscovery of origins there was a similar impulse on the individual level, manifested through their affirmation and exploration, often taking the specific form of the wish to visit or revisit Crimea as the place to which one is bound through one's ancestors. As such, the contact with Crimea after 1989 generates commemorations and recollections which reveal nostalgia and the sense of loss of this territory, along with the retrospective construction of an idealized image:

*I wanted to see a Crimea with the eyes of the adult who's past 40 years, a Crimea which I have dreamt about as a child and when I was young. And I have come to know that nothing from our folklore and our tales about Crimea is false. The beauty and the generosity of this land...*⁸⁰

*Crimea is a superb region, a harmonious combination between mountains and sea, with a Mediterranean climate. The Tatar women are beautiful. Their dances are so graceful...*⁸¹

In some cases, the Crimean origins are further specified through pinpointing the location where their ancestor have come from, most members of the ethnic Tatar community of Romania referring in this respect to the region of Kerç and Bahcesaray.

The ancestors from my mother's side have settled down in 1860 in the Sarighiol region, in the village of Akbaş (Albeşti). They have come from the village Kazantıp from the Kerç region after the Crimean War (1853-1856). I have looked for my ancestors. Two years ago I've been to Kerç. When I was there, a Russian man named Vanea guided me to the Tatar quarter, where they have recently built a beautiful mosque. However,

75 Interview with M. F., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013.

76 Interview with O. E., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013.

77 Interview with M. A., member of the Tatar community, 17 September 2013.

78 Interview with M. R., member of the Tatar community, 17 September 2013.

79 Interview with M. F., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013.

80 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

81 Interview with E. E., member of the Tatar community, 17 October 2013.

*my questions about the ancestral village have remained unanswered. Coming back from their Uzbekistan exile, they knew nothing of this village, but I knew about it from the tales of my ancestors, how in those times, in 1850, especially after the Crimean War, every hope of regaining independence has been lost.*⁸²

After the fall of communism, although many of the Tatars deported by Stalin to Central Asia in 1944 have come back to their native land, the members of the Tatar community of Dobruja, in spite of regaining their rights and freedoms, which they could have used for repatriation, have chosen to stay in Romania and limited themselves to mere voyages and trips to their territory of origin. This decision was deeply influenced by their breaking apart from Crimea and their Crimean origins, brought about by almost five decades of communist rule, but also by factors such as the lack of a Crimean Tatar state and Crimea's territorial affiliation to the Ukraine, a less economically developed country than Romania, and thus the inferior living conditions they would have enjoyed there than in the localities of Dobruja. Not least, the linguistic, cultural, and economic incompatibility, created by decades of Soviet influence, and especially the remaining of Crimea within the Russian sphere of influence, even after the dismantling of the communist bloc, were decisive factors for this development.

*There were no contacts with Crimea before 1989, and even now the Ukrainians do not really like it when we visit there. Crimea still belongs to the Ukraine... They speak Russian, we speak Romanian. When we cannot find the right word, we say it in Romanian, and they do the same with Russian.*⁸³

*There are almost no contacts with our Tatars from Crimea, as Crimea is in the Ukraine. Also, it is known that the economic situation of the Ukraine is somewhat worse than ours here in Romania...*⁸⁴

After the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 2014, the relationships which have been rebuilt in the post-communist period have ceased on all levels, both formally and informally, along with any kind of visits to the territory of origin.

Group identities: Kırım and Nogay

In the case of the Nogay Tatars, their only invoked difference to the Kırım is linguistic, and it is limited to phonetic, lexical, and pronunciation elements, the latter being *more guttural than Crimean pronunciation*.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, at the level of their self-image and perception by others, there exists within the community a Kırım and a Nogay consciousness. At the declarative level, the existence of these two types of ethnic consciousness among the Dogrogean Tatars appears as a simple element of identification and self-identification of the individuals and their localities of origin, which does not correspond to or generates specific differentiations in everyday life. The most often cited argument in this context rests on minute linguistic differences of *pronunciation*⁸⁶ between the Nogay and the Kırım.

*It is known that there are some Nogay villages – for instance, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Lumina, Ovidiu, Ciocârlia de Sus, Ciocârlia de Jos... There is a great mixture between Nogay and Kırım in Medgidia and Constanța. Their differentiation is not upheld anymore. I myself am the best example for this. My father is Nogay and my mother is Kırım. They married 46 years ago. Nowadays, the difference is even less respected.*⁸⁷

Deeper discourse analysis reveals, however, that the difference relies more upon the conscience of the territory of origin, in which the differences created by the history and chronology of their settlement in Dobruja manifest themselves.

In the case of the Kırım, their relationship to Crimea is, consciously or not, more recent, which can also be identified in the simple fact that they point to Crimea as to their place of origin. From a historical and chronological perspective, they relate themselves to the late mediaeval and early modern period, i.e. the only period of the existence of a Tatar state as part of the Crimean Khanate, which survived the breakup of the Golden Horde, between 1441 and 1783, when it was annexed by Catherine the Great.

82 Interview with G. A., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

83 Interview with A. S., member of the Tatar community, 23 September 2013.

84 Interview with M. A., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

85 Interview with H. N., member of the Tatar community, 14 October 2013.

86 Interview with N. U., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

87 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.



At the same time, the Nogay emphasize the initial, Central Asiatic origins of the Tatars, identified territorially with the Far East⁸⁸ or Kazakhstan⁸⁹, depending on the interviewed person. The chronological relationship with these origins is dependent upon the knowledge and the selection operated by the memory of each individual with respect to the different waves of the Nogay, who have come to Dobruja from the 13th to the 17th century.

*We have been here longer than those who have come from Crimea, for seven of eight hundred years.*⁹⁰

*All these localities around here, both Mihail Kogălniceanu and Valu lui Traian, were founded by Tatars around 1500-1600.*⁹¹

Thus, in the case of the Nogay Tatars, we can observe the emphasis upon their ancient settlement in Dobruja, which precedes that of the Kırım, who have started to arrive in the 17th and 18th centuries.⁹² Their seniority in Dobruja is invested in the Nogay discourse with an aprioric character both as compared to the Kırım and also as compared to the Romanian majority, offering elements to their local specificity and pride as indigenous inhabitants of the territory, but without any demanding character. Hence, along with the Central Asia territories as a space of ancestral origins, the territory of Dobruja in its actual form, as integrated within Romania, also represents the territory of reference as the homeland of the Nogay Tatars.

*Much of the Kırım have really come from Crimea or have Crimean origins, which is a peninsula that lies in the Ukraine, but we Nogay do not really have much to do with this. This is because our population has many branches, and we are Nogay, and we are we are the oldest inhabitants here. And as far as what I myself consider personally to be my home country – well, I don't want to get into any polemics with anyone, but I consider my home country to be Romania. We've been here already when the Romanians were not. (The first Mocan families have arrived at the end of the 19th century.) [...] We have respected our religion, we have come here, and since then we inhabit these lands, since 1651. (He refers to a date specified by the monograph of the locality Mihail Kogălniceanu.) And the Romanians weren't even here back then, as they themselves admit it, but we do not come forward to say that this is our country and we want this and that... We live in perfect harmony with the majority population.*⁹³

At the same time, in some cases, when it comes to the history of their origins, be it Crimean or Nogay, the accent is placed upon the settlement of the Tatars on the territory of Dobruja, or more exactly, on the Tatar origins of the localities from Dobruja, emphasizing especially the essential role of the Tatars in the formation of Dobruja as we know it today. At the level of the official discourse one can observe a certain homogenization of the history of the Tatar community in Dobruja by combining the specific elements of the Kırım and the Nogay group, i.e. the relationship with Crimea on one hand, and the seniority of the Nogay in Dobruja on the other hand.

*We have been the most important ethnic element and the most important community of Dobruja for centuries, at least from the second part of the 13th century and up to the end of the 19th century, until about 1900. We were the majority population also during the Ottoman occupation, at least here in Dobruja. The Ottomans have come at the end of the 14th century and in the first decade of the 15th century. And also in the 15th and the 16th century, up to the 19th century, all foreign travellers, and also the Romanians, mention the Tatar community as being the most numerous.*⁹⁴

Romania and Dobruja

One aspect to be emphasized in the context of the discussion about history is the fact that, in the case of the Tatars, the consciousness of origins is associated with a strong attachment to Romania. Not even in the case of the Kırım Tatars, at whom, although one cannot find the attachment to any *de facto* Tatar state, there is the clear geographical determination of the territory of origins, the awareness of

88 Interview with D. C., member of the Tatar community, 20 September 2013.

89 Interview with D. C., member of the Tatar community, 20 September 2013

90 Interview with S. O., member of the Tatar community, 23 September 2013.

91 Interview with D. C., member of the Tatar community, 20 September 2013.

92 Ibid.

93 Interview with D. C., member of the Tatar community, 20 September 2013.

94 Interview with M. A., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

their origins does not lead to an absolutisation of their identity in this regard. If Crimea represents for the Crimean Tatars the ancestral homeland of their forefathers, then Romania is the homeland of the present, the mother country of the current generations. At the level of the Crimean collective mentality, the duality persists between Crimea as the first and somewhat imaginary homeland, the eternal Green Island (Yeşil Ada) where the ancestors have come from, and the real homeland, Romania, *the second or the adoptive motherland* where they were born, raised, and imagine their futures as an ethnic community and as individuals.⁹⁵

*We are still longing for our homeland, even though we will not leave Romania. This is now our motherland. Your homeland is where you live and where you feel fine.*⁹⁶

Last but not least, the substrate of Dobrujan identity also ensures a consistent basis for the process of self-definition of the Tatars. This element is associated with their ethnic self-perception within the context of the cultural particularity of the region. Tatar discourse constantly appeals to the often invoked concept within public discourse, on the administrative, academic, and mass-media level, of the Dobrujan model of interethnic and religious cohabitation, while trying to explain this apparently theoretical concept for alterity as an actually experienced reality whose roots have to be sought within the Ottoman historical past of the region.

*I feel at home in Dobruja. I have lived for six years in Ankara, but I did not feel at home, because all that surrounds me is a part of me. I grew up with all that is here, and I consider myself to belong to Dobruja, to be a Dobrujan... Our Dobruja is a region where you can live in peace, and the Turks and Tatars are loved by Romanians.*⁹⁷

According to Tatar intellectual discourse, the explanation for this ethnic harmony has its basis in the *Pax Ottomana* characteristic for the 16th and 17th centuries of the Ottoman period, which granted large autonomy to the communities that lived here, and implicitly in the relaxed structure of the Ottoman Empire, seen as a conglomerate of people, religions, and contradictory loyalties (Stavrianos, 2000: 840). In some opinions, the source of the peaceful coexistence, characteristic for Dobruja in the present, can be identified in the internal autonomy granted to some of the communities in exchange for the payment of certain taxes and fees, the lack of assimilation policies and religious proselytism by the Ottoman authorities, also expressed through the persistence of the administrative system based on the millets into which the members of the accepted creeds were organized.

*Just think of the fact that Dobruja belonged for 500 years to the Empire, and the Empire has imposed its own rules, according to which everybody had to get along, everyone had to speak with everyone, and there could be no problems. So, you see [...], the Empire had its rules, and it also imposed them here, and the population had this tradition of good neighbourliness.*⁹⁸

Turkey

For a part of the Tatar population of Dobruja, the connection with the Tatar national movement in Crimea also played an important role in the conservation of the consciousness of Crimean origins through stimulating their national feelings. The activation of this movement in Turkey, through some Tatar leaders from Crimea and also from Dobruja, consolidated the perception of Turkey as the protector state of the Tatars. Since the dream of the motherland was shattered by the deportation of Tatars in 1944, Crimea appears from this perspective as a lost territory, while Turkey is perceived as a second homeland of the Tatars, the protector state or *devlet baba*, literally, the "father-state" (Williams 2001: 280), an expression used in Tatar intellectual circles.⁹⁹

*...The Turks have considered us Tatars their children, and they have always given us their support.*¹⁰⁰

This perception of Turkey as the protector, or "father-state", is at the same time also a reminiscence or an inheritance from the Ottoman period. The conscience of having belonged once to the Ottoman Em

95 Ibid.

96 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

97 Interview with H. N., member of the Tatar community, 14 October 2013.

98 Interview with H. N., member of the Tatar community, 14 October 2013.

99 Interview with T. G., member of the Tatar community, 11 January 2013.

100 Interview with G. A., member of the Tatar community, 29 January 2013.



pire has been and still is parallel with viewing Turkey as the heir of the former empire. Thus, Turkey has become the territory with which the Tatars affiliate themselves, due to historical, cultural, and religious affinities, along with the Turks. The post-Ottoman Turkish nationalism promoted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk within the Turkish republic established in 1923 also played an important role in this affiliation. Turkish nationalism, as an ideology which was at the basis of the new Turkish state, also contributed to the formation of a new conscience, adapted to the new political realities of the inter-war period. More specifically, in the context of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire as a structure within which Muslim solidarity prevailed as a form of identification, the new nationalistic ideology offered the Turks and Tatars from Dobruja an essential identity component, the pride of being part of the Turkish world. Thus, we could say that Turkish nationalism contributed to the inflation of the emigrationist tendencies of this population, whose members felt marginalized and disadvantaged as citizens of the Romanian state after the annexation of Northern Dobruja to Romania in 1878. Considering the secularization tendencies initiated in Turkey after 1923, religious causes did not prevail as a motivation for the emigration of Turks and Tatars from Dobruja to Turkey. This tendency was more related to the adoption of a new cultural and political, as well as economical affiliation and, implicitly, protection. This wave of emigration, which started at the beginning of the 19th century and continued in the inter-war period, has become a very restricted phenomenon during the communist period. Achieved either through legal means, by submitting a dossier to the communist authorities, which also had to contain a residency acceptance by the Turkish state, or illegally by fleeing the country, Tatar and Turkish immigration in communist Romania was a phenomenon limited to a couple of hundred of people.¹⁰¹

The tightening of the relationships between the regime from Ankara and communist Romania, beginning in 1964-1965¹⁰², and the authorization of visits to Turkey every two years for citizens with Turkish and Tatar origins, who had relatives in Turkey, had an important impact on the strengthening of the mental ties with Turkey during the '70s and the '80s, although not for the entire Tatar population. The diplomatic and cultural relationships and the informational connection established with the two territories of reference, Turkey and Crimea, were re-established only after the fall of communism, leading to a rediscovery and vertical reactivation of Tatar identity on the institutional, group, and individual levels (Cupcea 2013: 25).

Currently, at the level of Tatar discourse, attitudes are contradictory. Three main directions can be distinguished. In the case of a certain segment of the Tatar population, the belonging of the Tatars in the Turkish world is emphasized by appealing to the common Turkish origins, connected territorially to Central Asia, and also to the common Ottoman historical past, since Dobruja and then Crimea were part of the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, Turkish protectorate of the Tatars is invoked as a historical fact dating back to the beginnings of Ottoman administration in Dobruja, which continued in the contemporary period of the Turkish republic as the inheritor of the empire. At this level, Turkey is sometimes presented in the almost lyrical hypostasis of the eternal protector. Crimean Tatar anti-Sovietism, which is a part of the historical and cultural identity of Crimean Tatars and is currently more characteristic for the older generations, manifests itself in this context, in which there is no Tatar state and Crimeea is annexed by Russia, through contributing to the perception of the Turkish state as the place of refuge where several generations of Tatars have fled from the impact of Russia in its many hypostases on the scene of history: the Tsarist regime which annexed Crimea in 1783, ending the existence of the Crimean Khanate as a state, the Bolshevik regime, which destroyed the Crimean People's Republic of 1917, and currently the Russian Federation with its influence over Ukraine.

*We have a common history reaching back for centuries. It is not an accident that in 1458 Giray Khan asks for the help of the Ottoman Empire, being aware that the influence of the Russians is increasing in this area.*¹⁰³

*Since we are part of the Turkish family, they support us too, and other than Romania it is the only state worldwide which truly represents us.*¹⁰⁴

101 Interview with T. G., member of the Tatar community, 30 October 2013.

102 Overall, the Cold War era was a period of diplomatic distancing between Romania and the Ankara government. An exception from this is the agreement signed on 30 July 1966 in Istanbul, which regulated the scientific and artistic exchanges between the Romanian Socialist Republic and the Turkish Republic, the agreement on civil air transport, signed in Ankara on 2 May 1966, and the agreement on cooperation in the domain of tourism, signed in Istanbul on 29 July 1966. See Felezeu – Cupcea 2013: 72.

103 Interview with G. A., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

104 Interview with M. A., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

However, from the perspective of some members of the Tatar community, this support of the Turkish state is perceived as a potential factor of neutralization of Tatar identity, which manifests itself through a Turkization process that, according to them, will become constantly more influential due to the increasingly active presence of Turkey in Dobruja, within all areas of life. This presence is an expression of Turkey's external policy toward the Muslim populations of the Balkans, which also extends over the Dobrujan Turks and Tatars.

*Turkey is involved in many activities, in the building of mosques and places of worship, and their restoration. Turkey's help is beneficial, especially in these times of crisis. They help many countries where, in general, there are Muslims. [...] I do not think that we have Turkish origins. But they both (the Turks living in Turkey and those in Dobruja) think that we do. Well, they want to Turcize us a little bit, that's the main idea.*¹⁰⁵

Those members of the Tatar community who subscribe to this discourse of Turcization emphasize from this perspective the confrontation of the Tatar community, through some of its members, with the preference, conscious or not, intentional or reflexive, for a Turkish identity. After 1989, the presence of the Turkish state is being felt through the financial aid received not only by the Turkish but by Tatar community as well, on the educational, cultural, and economic level. The active presence of Turkey in all these areas is invoked by a significant number of ethnic Tatars as a solid argument for some of their coethnics declaring themselves Turks.¹⁰⁶ In some cases, the pragmatic argument of the advantages which could be gained in the case of a hypothetical emigration to Turkey, such as the easier obtaining of citizenship and integration within the host society, is also invoked.

2. The religious hypostasis

From the perspective of the official discourse of the muftiate, the representative institution of the Muslim community in Romania, ethnicity is not necessarily representative for the constitution, relationships, or even the perception of the members of the community. The structuring of the religious community is diachronic and, thus, chronological and historical criteria prevail within the constitution of the community, with emphasis on the fact that a potential categorization of the community *is not aimed at diving it, but at better understanding its structure.*¹⁰⁷

Consequently, a distinction is made between four categories. The first consists of the autochthonous Muslims, *who have been here for more than eight centuries, from the 13th century, when the first Muslims have come here, in 1263, to Babadag.*¹⁰⁸ The second category of Muslims have come to Romania during the communist regime and after 1990, they have obtained citizenship and have currently reached their second generation. These Muslims have come predominantly from the Arab countries. The third category includes Muslims who have come from Muslim countries and Turkey, also after 1990, for economic reasons or to study, and have meanwhile obtained Romanian citizenship. The fourth category consists of the new Muslims who have converted to Islam from another religion.¹⁰⁹

The Tatars from Dobruja belong to the category of autochthonous Muslims, and along with the Turks and Albanians, they form the Muslim community which is representative for Dobruja region. Thus, ethnicity is relevant only for the clearer determination of the compositional structure of the Dobrujan community. In this context, ethnicity denotes the regional distinction of the Muslim community living in this territory, but it is not essential. The essential defining characteristic for the autochthonous Muslim community is a historical one, strongly associated with the local history of Dobruja, and it consists, both on the level of official discourse and on the individual level, in their inherent relationship to the seniority of Dobrujan Muslims and to the authenticity conferred by this factor, as against other Muslim communities both from the Balkans and from Western Europe (see Kozak 2009).

*We are not made Muslims, we are born Muslims.*¹¹⁰

105 Interview with M. K., member of the Tatar community, 19 September 2013.
Interview with N. U., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

106 Ibid.

107 Interview with Y. M., mufti of the Romanian Muslim community, 31 January 2013.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

110 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.



*Both the Bosnians and the Kosovar are far behind us. They were Christians and were Islamized by the Turks...*¹¹¹

From the perspective of religious identity, it is important to note that, for Muslims in general, religion is a way of life and acts as the depositary of the ethnic element through the social and cultural behaviours which it generates and which finally take shape as parts of an ethnic particularism of identity. In the case of the Turks and Tatars from Dobruja, this particularism is related to the common identity content of affiliation to the Turkish world.

Thus, the religious hypostasis is that of the convergence between the two communities as represented by the primary element of identity of the religious and cultural affiliation of Islam, the customs of this religion, the common Turkish origins, and the common historical affinities, dating back to the period of the Ottoman Empire. The meeting between the Turks and the Tatars acquires cultural and religious meanings through their shared social and cultural realities generated by Islam. Thus, weddings, naming ceremonies, and funerals organized according to Islamic tradition, as well as the major Muslim religious celebrations, Kurban Bayram and Ramazan Bayram, and the worldly ones, e.g. Kidırlez and Newruz, along with the pre-Islamic festivities accepted by Islam, such as Aşure, have represented and continue to represent for Turks and Tatars moments of reunion as a Muslim religious community.

Ethnic and religious interferences

1. Mixt marriages

The instinct for self-conservation is one of the defining characteristic of the Tatars both according to the general perception of other ethnic groups and according to their own self-perception, determined by their status as a people lacking the protection of a national state. As a consequence, Tatars are not fond of the idea of mixt marriages, and they try to turn toward their own community as a reaction against assimilation. This tendency was also verified statistically by a research from 2010, according to which the proportion of homogenous marriages among the Dobrujan Tatars is 86,6%, which means that from 6126 married men, 5304 have partners of the same ethnicity. A statistically insignificant portion of Tatars lives in mixt marriages, 8,7% of them choosing ethnic Romanian partners, and 4,7% are married to partners of other ethnicities (Kiss, Veress 2010: 69).

Currently, the qualitative analysis of the field data reveals the importance of the religious element in the context of marriages, and implicitly, within the Tatar identity structure, through the inter-confessional and inter-ethnic behaviours and attitudes which it generates within this context. Thus, for Tatars, the marriage between an ethnic Tatar and a Turkish person does not raise any problems on either of the sides, since in this case, due to the importance of the religious factor within the identity structure and its extension to the cycle of everyday life, the mixt marriage determines the Tatars to position themselves along with the Turks in the hypostasis of their religious affiliation to Islam.

In the case of mixt marriages between Tatars and Romanians we do not necessarily find a pattern which is repeated and strictly respected. In general, the prevailing principle is that of the agreement reached by the couple, in the case of which each of the newly married keep their own religion and leave it to the children to decide for themselves between Christianity and Islam:

*We have agreed with my husband (an Orthodox Christian) to introduce to her (daughter) both religions, and when she reaches the age when she can choose, then she can choose for herself what she wants to become.*¹¹²

The real issue with mixed marriages between Tatars and Romanians is, however, that of the religious legitimacy of the marriage, perceived by a large part of the Tatar society, including some of the younger people, as clandestine. This attitude is also reflected by the testimony of a 26-year-old young woman:

111 Interview with D. C., member of the Tatar community, 20 September 2013.

112 Interview with Z. M., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

*Some reach the agreement that each should keep their own religion. I as a Muslim do not agree with this, since there also has to be a religious wedding. In their case, however, there isn't, because they have to do the wedding either according to the Orthodox or to the Muslim religion.*¹¹³

Although the principle of the couple's agreement prevails in the case of mixt marriages, this does not generate, as stated above, a general pattern which would exclude conversions the from one religion to the other, i.e. from Orthodox Christianity to Islam or vice versa.

In the case of mixt marriages, the paternal lineage is often decisive for choosing the name-giving ceremony. Thus, if the father is Muslim, the children are also raised as Muslims. It can be said that in these cases the families adopt a bicultural attitude, regardless the official religious option, and elements specific for both cultures, Muslim and Christian, are mutually transferred, from the celebration of the two *Bayrams* holidays, *Ramazan Bayram* and *Kurban Bayram*, along with the Orthodox Christian holidays, such as Easter and Christmas, up to culinary customs.

*My daughter-in-law is a Christian from Malul cu Flori. There was a celebration in their village within the larger family [...]. The fact that our families have become related through marriage made us share customs, foods, and traditions. When we celebrate the Bayram, they know, and we mutually greet each other for the holidays. They have also learnt from us to cook in the Tatar way...*¹¹⁴

However, there are also cases in which, although the paternal line is followed from a religious point of view, the mother, due to the fact that she spends more time with the family, thus exerting a greater emotional influence, becomes the decisive factor for the future choice of ethnicity of the children, both in the case of marriages between Tatar and Turks and in that of Tatars and Romanians. The future choice of ethnicity is also largely dependent on the relationships with the older generations of the family, which also represent decisive factors for the formation of the ethnic identity of each individual, along with the ethnic profile of the community in which the children develop.

2. Individual overlaps in identity: Turk, Tatar, Turko-Tatar

The phenomenon of mixt marriages later also generates identity overlaps. These can be felt and have consequences at the level of the self-concept and self-perception of each individual, not only on the ethnic but also on the personal level.

The exploration of the self-identification process of Dobrujan Tatars and Turks also reveals the overlap between the Turkish and Tatar ethnic strata in some individual cases. This is the situation for individuals who stem from mixed marriages, i.e. whose one parent is Turkish and the other is Tatar. In their case, there is a preference for the term *Turko-Tatars*, emphasizing the overall mixture between the two communities during their centuries of cohabitation in Dobruja. In certain situation, these individuals can also experience a certain confusion of identity from an ethnic point of view, whose roots reach back into childhood and which sometimes extends into maturity.

*In my childhood, when I did something nasty, they used to tell me: Well, you will not take after us Tatars, you will take after them Turks, or vice versa. Depending on where I went to. When I went to the Tatars, they used to tell me: come, our Tatar girl. At the other side, I could hear the same... It was somewhat difficult, because you have to adapt, and as a child I did not even understand why certain questions are asked of me and why they brand me with certain adjectives... They probably referred to some genes not necessarily associated with the family but with the community.*¹¹⁵

There is also the case of people who have in their family tree both Turks and Tatars, ethnicity representing for them a question of personal choice, influenced either by the prevailing element within their family tree or by certain which favour one or the other of the two ethnicities.

*The grandfather on my father's side is from Crimea, and my grandmother is Turkish, and my grandfather from my mother's side is also Tatar, but he is Nogay, and my grandmother is Tatar (Kırım), so, I would be like 25% Turkish, 25% Nogay, and about 50% Kırım.*¹¹⁶

113 Interview with E. M., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

114 Interview with G. A., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

115 Interview with N. U., member of the Tatar community, 16 September 2013.

116 Interview with H. N., member of the Tatar community, 14 October 2013.



Although in most situations the paternal line is decisive for the choice of ethnicity, there are also cases in which the mother, as has been said above, transmits along with her mother tongue the future preference for her own ethnicity to her children.

Last but not least, there are also some ethnic Tatars who, due to their professional or circumstantial closeness to Turkish culture, as most frequently in the case of Turkish language teachers, experience a profound sentiment of affiliation to the Turkish world, which implicitly leads to the option in favour of Turkish ethnicity.

*I am a Tatar woman, but I have studied in Turkish schools and I have served Turkish culture. I cannot write a poem in Tatar language, because I have never learned Tatar language in school, only Turkish.*¹¹⁷

Mother tongue

■ As of their mother tongue, the majority of the Dogrogean Tatars, 17.495 people considered it to be Tatar language, 2.564 have chosen Romanian, and 215 opted for Turkish according to the data of the 2011 census (Recensământul Populației stabile după etnie și limba maternă 2011).

Researches reveal a situation of bilingualism which we can find in the case of the older members of the Tatar community, who are speakers of both Tatar and Romanian. For them, Tatar represents their first language which forms a part of the social and mental structure of each individual, while Romanian is a secondary language which they have learned only later. Thus, in the case of the older generations, Tatar language represents an identity code of their belonging to the Tatar ethnic group. At the same time, it also has important intimate connotations, since Tatar language belongs to an inherited ethnic identity along with the origins, the history, and the migration narrative of the ancestors, which have all been conveyed to them by the previous generations of the family.

*Crimea is the territory of origin of the Tatars... I have been tied to this problem from my adolescence, both by the education I have received within my family and by the fact that we spoke in Tatar, although we had no schools. The identity of a people can be conserved through language.*¹¹⁸

From the perspective of the Tatar mother tongue, the problem lies with the middle and the younger generation of the community. Those of the middle generation, whose childhood and adolescence was spent during communism, have learned the native language along with the elements of religious education from the older generations. However, they do not assume the same role of transmitting the native language to the younger generations, and the language spoken within Tatar families which belong to the active population is mostly Romanian and only in a smaller percentage Tatar.

*We are all Tatars in the family, but we also speak in Romanian. We all speak it, whether you want it or not, one switches involuntarily to Romanian.*¹¹⁹

This phenomenon is even more characteristic for mixed marriages between Tatars and Turks, and also between Tatars and Romanians. However, in spite of all these developments, the influence of the older generations is still being felt at the level of today's younger generation. Most of the children who have older family members learn the Tatar mother tongue as their first language starting from their early childhood. The contact with Romanian language takes place only later, at the moment of their integration into the state educational system. The contact with the ethnic majority is followed either by a breaking apart from the Tatar mother tongue and the intervention of a gradual process of forgetting the native language, or by the formation of a Tatar/Romanian bilingualism of the child, depending on the linguistic and cultural behaviour of the family.

*I have learned the Tatar language in my family from my grandparents. When I started kindergarten with my sister, we were not familiar with Romanian. And as we started kindergarten, we also started to speak Romanian.*¹²⁰

117 Interview with E. E., member of the Turkish community, 17 October 2013.

118 Interview with N. O., member of the Tatar community, 23 September 2013.

119 Interview with M. K., member of the Tatar community, 19 September 2013.

120 Interview with E. M., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

Many middle-aged subjects we have interviewed invoke pragmatic causes for this type of linguistic development, such as the lack of the practical utility of learning Tatar and the useless intellectual strain put on young people, in most cases associated with the preference for Turkish language, the knowledge of which offers, according to many parents, the future perspective of a favourable professional development for their children.

*Children learn Turkish language in school and they turn toward Turkish because everyone thinks that they can do something with Turkish, because it is an advanced language and an advanced country, and furthermore, there are so many Turkish nations from the ex-Soviet Union. So then you think about the future of your child. Where can he use the language? And you think about the chances for hiring and the options for studying abroad. The choice is made by the parents.*¹²¹

However, the orientation toward Turkish language acquisition must not be seen strictly from the perspective of the present and the social and economic advantages it carries today. Rather, it is a process whose beginnings can be traced back to the inter-war period, during which, under the influence of the political and cultural developments related to the Tatars from Dobruja and Crimea, a cultural and affective orientation toward Turkey took place.

This orientation toward Turkey, respectively Turkish culture and language, leads to a situation of Turkish/Tatar/Romanian trilingualism for an important part of the Tatar community across all generations, especially since Tatar speakers emphasize the facility with which they can assimilate Turkish language skills due to the linguistic similarities which they recognize between the two languages, compared by them to the similarities between Romanian and Italian language.¹²²

Linguists estimate that the overlap between Turkish and Tatar language is 70%, noting that although there are some phonetic and lexical differences, their syntactic structure is identical and they have common Turkish roots.

Overall, the increasingly limited use of Tatar language by the younger generations is associated with another linguistic phenomenon, namely the alteration of the Tatar language spoken in Dobruja through Turkish and Romanian linguistic borrowings. This development is the result of a socio-economically and culturally motivated acculturation process, which, as we have already emphasized, is caused by the influence of Turkish culture, and implicitly, Turkish language, and also by the lack of interest for their own language, due to the fact that Tatar is not the official language of any state capable of exercising legitimate legal protection over the Dobrujan Tatars, a role which is increasingly adopted by Turkey. The direction of the acculturation influences on the Tatars from Dobruja is a double one. The impact of the Romanian language spoken by the majority, be it conscious and/or voluntary or involuntary, depending on each case, can be strongly felt in the context of the Tatars' adaptation and integration into society and is generally associated with linguistic acculturation. Hasan Neriman, lecturer at the of the Faculty of Letters of the Ovidius University, emphasizes the tendency of Tatar children who study Turkish as a native language in school to use words borrowed from Turkish language when speaking Tatar. At the same time, Tatar pupils who do not study Turkish in school tend toward phonetic borrowings from Romanian.¹²³

This acculturation phenomenon is also observed by the history teacher G. E., who mentions in this context the absence of Tatar language from the school curriculum, starting from the '70s and continuing after 1990, and thus the lack of access both of the middle and the young generation to the study of the literary Tatar language.

*Some weeks ago I was at a cultural manifestation of ours, where there were both Crimean children and ours. They had communication problems. The Crimean children spoke Tatar mixed with Russian, while ours spoke Tatar mixed with Romanian. And they did not understand each other. Only the Tatar words matched. Lately, I tell young people that they speak a language which I call "ta-tu-ro". It starts with Tatar and continues with Turkish, which we study in schools in Dobruja since 1990, and with Romanian. This is the language that our young people speak.*¹²⁴

121 Interview with G.E., member of the Tatar community, 18 September 2013.

122 Ibid.

123 Interview with dr. Hasan Neriman, lecturer at the of the Faculty of Letters of the Ovidius University of Constanța, 14 October 2013.

124 Interview with G. E., member of the Tatar community, 18 September, 2013.



The loss of the habit of speaking Tatar is largely due to the lack of use of this language during the communist period and the lack of access to Tatar literature. In these conditions, Tatar language survived in Dobruja exclusively through oral means, a fact which is reflected today by the limited lexical fund that is enriched with neologisms borrowed from Romanian and Turkish.

Additionally, although there have been no such explicit restrictions, some interviewed subjects mention a certain kind of psychological inhibition felt throughout the communist era, which prevented them from speaking their mother tongue in public,¹²⁵ especially in the urban area.

The future of the community

■ From the point of view of shaping their future, the most important problems of the Tatar community of Dobruja are currently the loss of the habit of speaking Tatar and even the lack of knowledge of their mother tongue, characteristic for the younger generation, along with the lack of Tatar-language education. In these circumstances, at least a part of the members of the community are very aware of the danger of the definitive disappearance of Tatar language from the medium of direct communication, which can happen within a couple of decades. Those who take this position consider that ethnic identity will be conserved at the level of the community conscience, which will ensure the perpetuation of the “Tatar” ethnonym, primarily defined through the history of the community and their commitment to Islam.

Metin Omer, who teaches Tatar history and civilization at the Ovidius University, holds the opinion that the members of the Tatar community have a problem with the definition of Tatar identity, namely in understanding what it means to be Tatar from the point of view of their history. Thus, the isolation brought about by communism and the strict limiting of the information sources to the history manuals of the communist era are also reflected currently by the Tatar mentality in Dobruja through the near-complete identification of their knowledge about Tatars with the history of the Tatar-Mongolian Empire, which is to say, with the Mongolian origins of the Tatars. Consequently, Tatar mentality has been infiltrated by the hypotheses of Russian historiography, which especially emphasizes the theory of the Mongolian origins of the Tatars, and at the same time it was deprived of access to Western scholarly works, which tend to view Tatars as a component of the proto-Turkish world. At the same time, the Tatar community of Dobruja also lacks knowledge about the period of the Khanate of the Golden Horde, the Crimean Khanate, and the Tatar National Movement from the beginning of the 20th century, in other words, about some of the essential historical periods for the formation of Tatar historical identity. Thus, in order to fill this information gap, the optional course “The history and civilization of the Tatars” was introduced in 2014 at the Ovidius University, being primarily dedicated to and frequented by the members of the community. Most of the members of the Tatar community of Dobruja consider that their survival as a community largely depends upon the interest for the history of the Tatars and the commitment to getting to know this history by the younger generation, and also upon their commitment to Islam and the ethnic and religious traditions of the community. The conservation of their mother tongue remains one of the most important problems for the Tatars, since its use within everyday communication represents a mere personal choice with symbolic implications.

Before the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014, permanently maintaining the ties with the Tatars from the territory of origin was an essential component for the shaping of their future. Consequently, the framework for the maintenance of Tatar identity has been defined by the touristic visits and the trips organized by the Union to Crimea, the cultural exchanges with the Crimean community, and contacts at both the official and personal level.

The termination of contacts with Crimea after its annexation in 2014 was followed by the cessation of both formal and informal relationships. At the official level, the community reoriented itself towards

125 Interview with N. I., member of the Tatar community, 31 January 2013.

the structure represented by the World Crimean Tatars Congress, which reunites the representatives of the Tatar communities of the diaspora. Established in 2009, the Congress reunited in 2015 in Ankara, under the protectorate of Turkey, taking as its aim to defend the interests of Crimean Tatars, the freeing of Crimea from Russian occupation, its return to the Ukraine and establishing within it an autonomous Crimean Republic to which Crimean Tatars would have a right as an autochthonous population of the peninsula.

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DESPRE INSTITUTUL PENTRU STUDIEREA PROBLEMELOR MINORITĂȚILOR NAȚIONALE

INSTITUTUL PENTRU STUDIEREA PROBLEMELOR MINORITĂȚILOR NAȚIONALE (ISPMN) funcționează ca instituție publică și ca personalitate juridică în subordinea Guvernului și sub coordonarea Departamentului pentru Relații Interetnice. Sediul Institutului este în municipiul Cluj-Napoca.

Scop și activități de baza

Studierea și cercetarea inter- și pluridisciplinară a păstrării, dezvoltării și exprimării identității etnice, studiarea aspectelor sociologice, istorice, culturale, lingvistice, religioase sau de altă natură ale minorităților naționale și ale altor comunități etnice din România.

Direcții principale de cercetare

Schimbare de abordare în România, în domeniul politicilor față de minoritățile naționale: analiza politico-instituțională a istoriei recente;
Dinamica etno-demografică a minorităților din România;
Revitalizare etnică sau asimilare? Identități în tranziție, analiza transformărilor identitare la minoritățile etnice din România;
Analiza rolului jucat de etnicitate în dinamica stratificării sociale din România;
Patrimoniul cultural instituțional al minorităților din România;
Patternuri ale segregării etnice;
Bilingvismul: modalități de producere, atitudini și politici publice;
Noi imigranți în România: modele de încorporare și integrare.

ABOUT THE ROMANIAN INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON NATIONAL MINORITIES

The ROMANIAN INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON NATIONAL MINORITIES (RIRNM) is a legally constituted public entity under the authority of the Romanian Government. It is based in Cluj-Napoca.

Aim

The inter- and multidisciplinary study and research of the preservation, development and expression of ethnic identity, as well as social, historic, cultural, linguistic, religious or other aspects of national minorities and of other ethnic communities in Romania.

Major research areas

Changing policies regarding national minorities in Romania: political and institutional analyses of recent history;
Ethno-demographic dynamics of minorities in Romania;
Identities in transition – ethnic enlivening or assimilation? (analysis of transformations in the identity of national minorities from Romania);
Analysis of the role of ethnicity in the social stratification dynamics in Romania;
The institutional cultural heritage of minorities in Romania;
Ethnic segregation patterns;
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Recent immigrants to Romania: patterns of social and economic integration.

A NEMZETI KISEBBSÉGGUTATÓ INTÉZETRŐL

A kolozsvári székhelyű, jogi személyként működő NEMZETI KISEBBSÉGGUTATÓ INTÉZET (NKI) a Román Kormány hatáskörébe tartozó közintézmény.

Célok

A romániai nemzeti kisebbségek és más etnikai közösségek etnikai identitásmegőrzésének, -változásainak, -kifejeződésének, valamint ezek szociológiai, történelmi, kulturális, nyelvészeti, vallásos és más jellegű aspektusainak kutatása, tanulmányozása.

Főbb kutatási irányvonalak

A romániai kisebbségpolitikában történő változások elemzése: jelenkortörténetre vonatkozó intézménypolitikai elemzések;
A romániai kisebbségek népességdemográfiai jellemzői;
Átmeneti identitások – etnikai revitalizálás vagy asszimiláció? (a romániai kisebbségek identitásában végbemenő változások elemzése);
Az etnicitás szerepe a társadalmi rétegződésben;
A romániai nemzeti kisebbségek kulturális öröksége;
Az etnikai szegregáció modelljei;
A kétnyelvűség módozatai, az ehhez kapcsolódó attitűdök és közpolitikák;
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