

Identity Issues: Turkish-Tatar Community in Dobrogea

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Abstract

Recognized as the area with the richest ethnic mosaic in Romania, Dobrogea can be a model of interculturality for the other geographical areas of the country, as there is a model of relationship that could be replicated in other regions where there is interethnic coexistence. As far as the communities in the south-eastern part of Romania are concerned, it should be noted that, over time, it has been noticed how most people associate the term "Dobrogea" with the label "seaside". It could be said that the overwhelming majority of tourists are more attracted by this idea (possibly 'delta'), 'beach', 'fun' than by getting to know the region, the local people, the history of this place, visiting cultural-historical sites. This is why Dobrogea remains for many Romanians "an unknown in their own home".

Keywords: identity, ethnic mosaic, Romania, interculturality, culture, solidarity, social identity

Dobrogea, as an area of interethnic settlement

On the basis of the awareness of ethnic identity, the members of an ethnic group build a specific community, manifested by close relations between them and a slight isolation from others. Ethnic characteristics are learned and passed on from generation to generation; at the same time members of ethnic groups change their views significantly under the influence of the majority with whom they come into contact. The theoretical framework is represented by multiple theories on concepts such as "ethnicity", "ethnocity", "culture", "multiculturalism", "solidarity", "social identity", "social interaction", etc., all with specific reference to the Dobrogea area.

Interculturality is a desirable option for coexisting populations, just as multiculturalism is a solution for coexisting populations. In fact, I believe that both variants of culturalism correspond to stages of integration of some populations (e.g. the Roma population) into the life of the majority population. Multiculturalism thus corresponds to co-existence in the sense of living together, i.e. living in the same place without assuming anything other than mutual tolerance within the framework of

well-established rules that are necessarily respected by all those involved in the context.

Dobrogea, as an area of interethnic settlement, imposes itself on attention through a model of open intercultural consociation, whose representation is decoded both at the level of material culture and at the level of immaterial culture, of the traditional civilization of this area. The model of co-location has in turn generated the free manifestation of multiculturalism, based on acceptance and understanding of the other.

The coexistence of Romanians with other ethnic groups (Ukrainians, Lipovenes) since before the 19th-20th centuries, determined - in the Dobrogea area - similarities in the manifestation of some facts and aspects of traditional life.

The relationship of ethnicities with life frameworks and manifestations - in a territory of ethnic co-location - generates the phenomena of: - ethnic co-location - ethnic coexistence.

Turks and Tatars – Within the Literature

Within the literature, but also from a general institutional perspective, the two ethnic groups, Turks and Tatars, often benefit from being placed within monolithic syntagms, either of ethnic configuration - the Turkish-Tatar minority, or of religious configuration - the Muslim community. Today, the approach of the two ethnic groups as two distinct communities is necessary not only because of the evolution of their political and institutional organisation in the post-communist period. The rationale for such an approach also involves the relationship between ethnic self-representations and Turkish-Tatar mutual representations. At a deeper level of analysis two defining cores of Turkish and Tatar identity discourses can be identified, one of convergence and one of separation between the two groups.

On the one hand, there is the common core of belonging to the Turkic world, and on the other hand there is a specifically Tatar core, represented by Crimean origins, from the interwar period, a decisive element in the current delimitation of the Tatar identity discourse from the Turkish one.

In terms of the issue of self-identification during the communist period, in the case of Turks and Tatars, but also in terms of mutual identification and the general perception of society, their situation was obviously influenced by the communist state's policy towards minorities. The creation of the single working people meant a homogenization of society, and the integration of all citizens, regardless of nationality, into the egalitarian communist society meant a homogenization, even an assimilation, both social and national (Florea 1975: 82, 83). As a result, at the level of groups and individuals, the interviews conducted with members of the Turkish and Tatar communities reveal a fading of ethnic identity, whose space of unfolding was often the family and the home, as personal space. On the other hand, the blurring of the sense of ethnic belonging during this period, resulting from and motivated by the

concern for social and professional adaptation within communist society. In the case of families directly targeted by the repression of the authorities, life in communism appears to be lived from the perspective of personal drama. The ethnic values of spirituality therefore take second place to the primacy of material survival under the communist regime.

Both Turks and Tatars have emphasized in terms of Turkish-Tatar mutual identification the absence of major lines of differentiation between the two ethnic groups for this period. The arguments refer to the practice of the common Muslim religion, mixed marriages between Turks and Tatars, common customs, education based on the sense of common belonging to the Turkic world.

From the perspective of the members of the two communities, Turkish and Tatar, this organisational, administrative and representative separation in the post-communist period is motivated strictly from a material point of view, by the possibility of obtaining two separate funding from the state budget for two separate unions, one representing the Turkish minority, the other the Tatar minority.

Conclusion

Despite these identity variations and claims to the specificity of their own ethnic group, both Turkish and Tatar perspectives, both individual and official, recognize the link between the two ethnic groups, identified by commonalities such as religious affinity, common customs and belonging to the Turkic world.

Most Turks and Tatars accept in their daily social contact the perception and classification of themselves as belonging to this local ethnic category, although exploration at a deeper level reveals an identity discourse that is far from unitary, on the contrary, fragmented between the acceptance of belonging to a Turkish-Tatar community, or to a Tatar community aware of its own ethnic specificity, or to a unitary Turkish community including both Turks and Tatars. In conclusion, we can say that in fact the social contact with the majority leads ethnic Turks and Tatars to accept this ethnic, Turkish-Tatar pattern quite easily in their daily social experiences. In fact, it is a pattern imposed more from the general perception of society, and therefore a product of otherness, of the historical, social and political reality that has taken shape from 1878 to the present day.

Today, the situation of mixed marriages reveals the importance of the religious element in the identity structure of Turks and Tatars, through the interfaith and interethnic behaviours and attitudes that they generate in this context.

This article is part of the DECIDE Project - Development through entrepreneurial education and innovative doctoral and postdoctoral research", Project code POCU/380/6/13/125031, project co-funded by the European Social Fund through the Human Capital Operational Programme 2014 - 2020".

We managed to get in touch with several people from the target group, thus better understanding their typical problems and information. The issue of intermarriage illustrates on the one hand a historical sub-stratum, the importance of belonging to the religious community, and at the same time reveals an ongoing social trend, which gives us a perspective on future developments, but at the same time reveals the primacy of religious identity over ethnic identity within the two ethnic groups.

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