

Marius Vasiluță ȘTEFĂNESCU (Editor)

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ȘTIINȚE PSIHO-SOCIALE: **Mihaela Tomiță; Simona Maria Stănescu**

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Chapter XIV
EDUCATION, FAMILY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION OF MUSLIM WOMAN.
CASE STUDY: TURKISH-TATAR COMMUNITIES FROM DOBRUJA
Melinda DINCĂ

Abstract

Our work aims to identify the path of Muslim women social integration in the Romanian Christian Orthodox society. The work describes the main social, cultural and religious dimensions shaping integration models for Muslim woman. By using in-depth interviews, life stories and observation in the Turks and Tatars communities from the southeastern part of Romania, the study investigates Muslim women's efforts to pass on the main elements of their culture, traditions and ethnic identity to younger generations, by means of family and kinship networks

Keywords:

Muslim woman, social integration, religion and cultural heritage

Introduction: research methodology

The purpose of the present research is to identify the actions Turkish and Tatar communities have taken in order to preserve their ethnic and religious specificity. The investigation conducted within this study is mainly qualitative and based on the interpretive social sciences theories (Blaikie, 2010; Halbwachs, 1992; Manson, 2005). Data collection was performed using direct non-participant observation, semi-structured indepth individual interviews. Written documents, such as local monographs, journal publications, and data from official social statistic reports, were also used.

The respondents selected to participate in the study were selected using the snowball technique, on the recommendation of other respondents, based on the criterion of ethnicity and on their willingness to share their knowledge and life stories, as Turks and Tatars who lived in the multicultural area of Dobruja. Not surprisingly, most of the respondents (approx. 60%) are women and are aged 40 years and over. Among our respondents young people aged between 18 and 25 represent 25% of those interviewed. For the present study we used 50 individual interviews.

The Dobruja historical region was selected due to its multicultural specificity and for representing the Romanian region with the biggest density of Turkish-Tatar population. As far as ethnicity is concerned, the population is made up of Romanians, Aromanians, Bulgarians, Turks, Tatars, Roma, Jews, Greeks, Russians, Lipovans, Ukrainians, Germans, Italians, Hungarians, Serbs, etc

The results of the 2011 Population and Housing Census in Romania show that:

- about 90% of the ethnic Turks at the national level were recorded in Dobruja.
- most of the ethnic Tatars are concentrated in Dobruja, about 97% (19.6 thousand people).
- 86% of the ethnic Turks used to speak Turkish in the family, in childhood, while the rest declared Romanian as their mother tongue.

Findings

Cultural heritage of children - the primary socialisation agents

The present study aims at identifying the cultural heritage and the identity characteristics of Turks and Tatars, which are passed on and reinforced intergenerationally by the women in their family, during early childhood.

As a primary social institution, the family is the only social context where a child begins to learn the mother tongue, the social practices, and the role prescriptions, which will guide his life.

Throughout early education and during the first six years of childhood, the family passes on and develops the use of language, a system of rules - customs and habits -, roles within the family and community, behaviour, health and nutrition-related habits, and represents the main model for relating to the world and to life.

Due to their status of 'national minorities' in relation to the members of the dominant culture, Turks and Tatars have limited institutional strategies and practices for the transmission of their cultural heritage. For example, for half a century there has been no state education in the mother tongues of these minorities in Romania, which has had a major impact in terms of

limiting the ways in which cultural elements belonging to the ethnic Turks and Tatars in Romania can be preserved.

If some of the other ethnic groups in Romania have the benefit of school instruction in their mother tongue at the level of basic education¹⁰, for Turks and Tatars in Dobruja no such institutional framework exists. Nevertheless, Turkish language, elements of Turkish culture and civilization and Islamic religion are optional subjects in the curriculum of the state schools attended by ethnic Turkish and Tatar children. On the other hand, in the case of the Tatar, language and the transmission of elements of the Tatar cultural heritage, no such opportunity exists.

Language is learned within the family as a mother tongue and is thus passed on by the parents and by the grandparents who care for the child. Throughout their recent history, family and kinship relationship networks have primarily been responsible for preserving and cultivating minority mother tongues, passing on customs, traditions and socio-cultural practices, and instilling traditional systems of rules and values in the younger generations.

In the case of Turkish and Tatar children, the elements of the cultural heritage, the language and the Muslim prescriptions are passed on mainly through oral culture and through the family. Mother or grandmother has a dominant or decision-making role in what concerns the children's education. The person to whom the child is most attached and who cares for the child, and who in Turkish and Tatar families is generally the Even today, when mother-tongue public education no longer exists, some of the respondents state that when they started going to school they were fluent only in their mother tongue and had poor knowledge of conversational Romanian due to the fact that at home they used to socialize only within their own culture and in their mother tongue.

Regardless of age, gender or level of education, all our respondents stated that they learned the traditions and customs related to food, hygiene, the importance of religious prescriptions, and how to relate to family and community members, during their childhood, within their family.

Concerning hygiene and nutrition rules, Turkish and Tatar families in Dobruja strictly observe the customs and traditions related to the culture of their ethnic group and Islamic prescriptions. Girls learn household rules very

¹⁰ kindergartens and schools with instruction in German, Hungarian, Serbian, etc.

early, they know how to cook traditional dishes and ritual food for religious celebrations and ceremonies. Hygiene rules are learned during early childhood, around the ages of 8-9. The "*abdest*" – the washing of the hands, face, forehead, nose, ears, and limbs before "*Namaz*" and the ritual washing of the entire body in certain specific situations such as childbirth, menses, sex, postpartum period and death – is a current practice learned by children from their mothers. All ritual objects used for prayer can actually be found in the homes of Turks and Tatars, and children mainly learn religious morality from their mothers.

"My Turkish grandmother taught me the prayers. I used to go to the mosque too, during the fasting period. I used to go there and keep the fast." (Female, member of a family of mixed Turkish-Tatar ethnicity, 37 years old, Lumina, October 2013)

The Muslim ceremony of "*Sünnet*"¹¹, the revalidation of the respect for the elderly through kinship-strengthening visits that take place during the two main religious holidays of the year – "*Kurban Bayram*" and "*Ramazam Bayram*" –, religious ceremonies in which the ancestors are honoured, burial and mourning processions according to Muslim rites are all manifestations of the main Islamic precepts. During childhood, Islamic values and firm attitudes are established, ensuring that they will govern the social and religious life of the individual throughout his or her entire life. All the respondents mentioned as a salient attribute of their social identity the fact that they belong to the Islamic faith: "*We are Muslims*". By providing examples and detailed descriptions of activities, they show a high level of knowledge concerning religious prescriptions and an active social participation, in compliance with the rules and values of the Muslim community in Dobruja.

¹¹ Some of the respondents use the Christian term of "baptism" referring to elements of the Sunnet ceremony, such as the circumcision of boys and receiving the Muslim name within the religious ceremony performed by the Imam. In many reports, interlocutors refer to Muslim rites or practices using the Christian correspondents or elements of the Romanian culture, wishing to make themselves understood by the Romanian interviewers. Similarly, in their discussions with Romanian people, they often use such phrases, explaining them in relation to the dominant culture, the Romanian culture. Major Muslim celebrations like Ramazan Bayram and Kurban Bayram (the feast of sacrifice) are sometimes called *our Christmas* and *our Easter*. Another example is Zakat - one of the five pillars of faith in the Islamic tradition, which involves providing food and sharing the wether by well-off people during the celebration taking place at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, and which is sometimes presented using the Christian-Orthodox term of *pomana* (memorial meal).

In a Christian society¹² and with Romanian as an official language, prescriptions regarding values and behaviours are acquired by the new generations of Turkish and Tatar Muslims mainly by means of the institution of the family. In the case of Romanian children, it is mainly the task of educational institutions to instil in them the system of rules and values; language, literature, art and culture-related knowledge are acquired, simultaneously, through the family and through school, through the art clubs, media, and cultural institutions that are present in every community.

For the respondents, the use of the mother tongue – along with all the traditions, customs, religious feasts, symbols, the identification with ethnic heroes, customs and social values – is one of the central elements of ethnic identity. As such, it invests the individual with all of the characteristics deriving from his/her inclusion in their ethnic community.

In the case of the Turks and Tatars in Dobruja, their mother tongue is learned since early childhood, within the family. Once they enter the public education system where teaching takes place in Romanian, children use their mother tongue less frequently. Families understand that academic success and performance depend on how well they master Romanian language and literature, and in order to make learning easier, homework and school preparation are all conducted in Romanian. However, the mother tongue is still used, mainly within the extended kinship network, at community events, during religious feasts or on other occasions when the members of the ethnic community get together. Although at present the family is still the primary agent in the acquisition of the mother tongue, in the last decade the ethnic organizations of the Turkish-Tatar communities have been intensely concerned with facilitating children's access to Turkish and Tatar language courses. Teachers have been brought in to work within these organizations and language courses are organized in their branch offices in Dobruja.

"There are Tatar language speakers and they speak it very well. I'm a speaker also. I used to hear the language in my family all the time and I can say I speak it quite well." (Teacher at the Romanian-Turkish Kindergarten No. 58 in Constanța, ethnic Tatar, September 2013)

"I learned Tatar from my father. He was a teacher and he was very..., he insisted on us learning Tatar and we used to speak in Tatar with the adults."

¹² 86.5% of the Romanian population is Christian Orthodox, according to the Romanian Population Census of 2011.

(Turkish language and Islamic religion teacher, 43 years old, ethnic Tatar, Ovidiu, September 2013)

“For instance, when I was little, I didn’t speak Romanian until I went to kindergarten, I didn’t know any Romanian word. If you asked me something in Romanian, I didn’t understand.” (Female, 37 years old, ethnic Turk, Lumina, October 2013)

Gender roles in Turkish-Tatar communities

In the Turkish-Tatar community in Dobruja, the opinion on mixed marriages is somewhat reserved.

Of the two communities we have studied, the Tatar community is less open to mixed marriages, even within the same religious community, which includes Turks and Turkish-Roma. The analysis of the data in the social statistics provided by town halls¹³ confirms the small number of mixed marriages. Respondents perceive mixed marriages with members of the Christian communities as becoming problematic only after children are born, when the family must decide on *Sunnet* according to one religious tradition or the other. Later on in life, if one spouse does not convert to the other’s religion, there is the issue of burying the couple according to different ceremonies, which requires burial in different cemeteries. A Christian spouse converting to Islam is considered to be an exceptional practice, and there are few reports on mixed families where successful conversions took place. Some of the respondents reported cases where spouses converted to Islam for the purpose of marriage, but, after divorce or their partner’s death, they stopped participating in the life of the Muslim community and ceased to educate their children according to the Muslim tradition.

Mixed marriages issues: Christian spouse converting to Islam is considered to be an exceptional practices; deciding the *sünnet* or baptism of the new-borns – Muslim or Christian? -; burying the couple according to different ceremonies, which requires burial in different cemeteries

In mixed religion families, the order, the set of rules and values governing the relations between husband and wife and parents and children

¹³An analysis of the demographic indicators of marriage and cohabitation relationships, conducted with employees of the Welfare Department of Cobadin Town Hall in April 2014 and with the Register Office of Independența Town Hall in July 2013.

change in content (Fox, 1967). The Muslim wife enters an egalitarian relationship with her Orthodox-Christian husband regarding such matters as providing for the family, managing their household budget, and taking decisions related to children's education. Similarly, Muslim ritual practices related to the food and hygiene of household members are affected within the couple relationship (Maliepaard, Phalet, 2012). In a mixed family with an Orthodox-Christian husband, the Muslim mother's role involves different responsibilities. The Romanian Christian-Orthodox husband may consider certain practices to be submissive and related to their different religious traditions: for example, a Tatar or Turkish wife's belief in her sole responsibility to carry out household chores (cleaning the house, cooking, etc.), and in the acceptance of the dominant position of the husband and eldest son in relation to the wife-mother and their daughters. A Muslim wife married to a Christian husband may find herself cooking pork for him and allowing him to help her by getting involved in household chores, while accepting the independence, responsibility and equal treatment of her daughters.

Thus, gender and family roles have changed not only in the mixed families, but also in the religiously and ethnically homogenous Muslim families in Dobruja. The results of the present study show that, for instance, women's employability, and in general the social integration of Turkish and Tatar women in Romania, have resulted in greater sharing of money management between spouses, with the woman's role crossing the limits of her social isolation and moving beyond the circle of kinship relationships, into higher levels of socio-economic skills for women and children. All these changes are considered to be modern as compared to the life style of women in other countries with Muslim communities known to our interlocutors (e.g. Turkey, Bulgaria).

"It's hard for everybody, but they learn. You have to adjust to the family where you're going. At home, you have different ways, and they have different ways, and so on. [...] When the bride went to live with her parents-in-law, she used to take over all the chores of the mother-in-law, the cooking and washing. That's what it was like! That's how it was! She had to be a "selemet" (in Turkish – housewife). Girls were sought depending on this. I even told my mother that "my mother-in-law did this and that". And my mother said: "That's it! This is what to be married to a man means. You went away, you won't come back to me!" If you didn't like it, you couldn't come back home. No!" (Female, 55 years old, ethnic Turk, Cobadin, March 2014)

However, despite these changes, the social integration of Muslim women in Romania has taken place without changing the traditional role of women, i.e. the role of preserving and passing on the mother tongue, values and tradition within the family.

Within the family, the woman still holds the main role in passing on the elements of the Muslim culture and in instilling the elements of ethnic identity in children. All the young people and the adults interviewed note the mother's role in shaping their own identity and emphasize the importance of this internalized model in all the important decisions they take in their adult life.

The impact of learning the Islamic values, the system of rules regulating their relation with the family and community, learning the practices and customs concerning hygiene, nutrition and conduct, strongly manifest themselves during adult life in the endogamic behaviour, in choosing a life partner from the same ethnic group, and in practicing the same gender roles within the family they build.

Thus, for the Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja, the cultural model arising from the ethnic and, especially, religious belonging is faithfully reproduced from one generation to another mainly through the mother, despite the changes in the socio-political context of society.

Family, as a primary socialisation agent, represents for the community the first social environment in which a young child learns status role prescriptions, the main cultural values, the language, and the perspective upon the world and upon life. Within the dominant culture, part of this social learning is taken care of by the basic socialization institutions outside the family, such as the kindergarten, the school, the neighbourhood, the acquaintance and friend network, or children's clubs.

Throughout the communist period, Turkish and Tatar minorities in Dobruja transmitted their cultural heritage between generations almost exclusively by oral means, within the family. *"Not used in schools, government, justice, the mother tongue was virtually limited to the closed framework of the family or Islamic celebrations."* (Gîlă, 2011: 20) After the fall of communism, the reassertion process of Turkish and Tatar minority rights was initiated by the European Union directives, by the establishment of politically and culturally representative organizations in Dobruja in the

1990s¹⁴, by the development of international relations between Romania and Turkey and by the introduction of Turkish language and Islamic religion as optional subjects in public middle schools. These institutional changes that have occurred over the past 25 years multiply the possibilities of preserving the two minorities' cultural heritage and provide opportunities for learning literary Turkish outside the family.

Discussion: Education as a resource of social integration

Schools of the Muslim community have a long tradition in the historical Romanian Region of Dobruja. Famous over the centuries, the Islamic Seminary of Babadag, Tulcea County, was *"established in 1610 by General Gazi Ali Paşa*.

The seminary was closed during the communist regime, in the period 1967-1994.

Since the early 1960s, for a quarter of a century, all primary and secondary schools, as well as other educational institutions, which organized Turkish, or Tatar language, literature and culture courses or other courses taught in Turkish and Tatar, reduced their activity.

After the fall of communism in Romania, the recognition of minority rights have contributed to a recovery of the ethnic identity of the two groups in question. Thus, in the two decades of Romanian democracy, the legal framework for studying the mother tongue was created, and courses were set up in public schools and other educational organizations, under the auspices of ethnic or religious organizations.

Together, the Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja form the majority of Muslims in Romania. These two ethnic groups have a history of migration, define themselves as religious, are attached to the Sunni Islamic religious values and practices and show a high degree of ethnic and religious cohesion. For them, the religion classes taught in school have a key role in preserving cultural continuity and social cohesion, and in rebuilding the ethnic and religious identities which, for several decades, until 1990, were passed on exclusively orally and within the kinship network.

¹⁴ The current UDTR (The Turkish Democratic Union of Romania), UDTTMR (The Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania), TIAD (The Association of Turkish Businessmen), The Yunus Emr Turkish Cultural Centre, Constanța etc.

Sociodemographic data recorded for the Romanian population show that the members of the two ethnic communities analyzed in our study have a strong attachment to their mother tongue. The Turks, Tatars, Turkish Roma and members of mixed families state that their mother tongue is either Turkish or Tatar.

In the case of the Tatars, the study of the Tatar language and the transmission of elements of Tatar history, literature, art and folklore take place by means of courses and cultural events outside the public education system. In an institutional framework, Tatar language courses or Tatar dance and song classes are organized almost exclusively by the non-governmental organizations of the Tatar community and by mosques. The older members of the Tatar community learned Tatar in school until the 1950s, but the active generations, as well as the younger ones, have learned the Tatar language and traditions and have assimilated their ethnic identity within the family exclusively. Many respondents believe that the disadvantage represented by the absence of Tatar language and Tatar culture and traditions classes in mainstream education is somewhat compensated by the fact that Tatar children have access to Turkish language courses.

However, the fact that most Tatar children are enrolled in *Turkish language* and *History and traditions of the Turkish minority* classes is seen by most respondents as a form of dilution of their ethnic identity and of assimilating Tatars into the Turkish community of Romania. The Turkish state, through its educational institutions and cultural and religious organizations, provides financial support, textbooks, Turkish language books, offers free educational and specialization programs in Islamic theology for young Muslims in Romania, etc. Turkish and Tatar families and young people are attracted by these benefits, by the opportunity to become more familiar with the Turkic cultural heritage and to consolidate their Islamic religious identity.

One of the structural issues faced by the Turkish community in Romania is the low level of education as compared to the national average. Statistics show a restricted stock of education in Turkish families. Also, at the level of Constanța County, we could identify social intervention projects¹⁵

¹⁵ For example, the SOPHR/23/2.2/G/40709 project entitled "A necessary support for Roma and Turkish students in Constanța County" implemented in schools in south-eastern Romania - Medgidia, Buhuși, Bucharest (Ferentari and Buzești neighbourhoods), Pitești, Bacău – during the school year 2010-2011, by the Research Institute for the Quality of Life

addressing the issues of access to education, school failure and dropout risk for Roma and Turkish children. The data recorded by the 2011 Population and Housing Census in Romania shows that the educational level of the ethnic Turkish population is well below the national average for higher education graduates and for secondary education. At the same time, the ethnic Turkish population presents an alarmingly large number of uneducated people.

Higher education graduates: the national average is 14.3%, for Turkish population is of 9.2%, the Tatars average is 16.8%

Secondary education: the national average is of 24.3% and the average of the ethnic Turkish population is of 19.2%, the Tatar average is 29.11%

Uneducated people: the national average is of 3% and the average within the Turkish population is of 15%, the Tatar average is 2.5%

On the other hand, the data is also eloquent as an illustration of the value placed on education among ethnic Tatars. Therefore, the average of all Tatars graduating from a higher education institution exceeds the national average, and the same trend is maintained in the case of high school graduates. As for the frequency of uneducated people, Tatars record an average (2.5%), which is close to the national average (3%).

In the case of Turkish women, we notice a maximum level of primary school graduation (4 grades) for half of the female population and a high rate of functional illiteracy. The low level of education that characterizes the Turkish ethnic group and especially Turkish women can be explained by the prevalence of traditional practices within the Turkish family, by the low employment rate among Turkish women, and by her prevailing role in domestic activities.

In contrast, the modernization efforts of the Tatar community over the last two decades are strongly reflected in women's emancipation, in the Tatar women's active role within the socio-economic environment, and in their high level of education, which exceeds the national average and is at a considerable distance from the level of education of Turkish women.

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