

The Role of Non-Formal Education in the Ethnic Minorities Social Identity Construction. Case Study: Ethnic Turks and Tatars in Romania

Melinda Dincă,¹ Daniel Lucheaş²

¹Sociology Department, West University of Timişoara, melinda.dinca@e-uvv.ro

²Sociology Department, West University of Timişoara, daniel.luchea@e-uvv.ro

Abstract

Turks and Tatars communities from Romania conform to Islamic religious practices, share a common language, and have the capacity to preserve their cultural heritage. Our research focuses on describing, from the subjects' perspective, the main socialization agents in preserving the social identity of Turks and Tatars.

Data collection was performed using direct non-participant observation, semi-structured individual interviews and visual investigative techniques of social networks. Written documents, such as journal publications and data from official social statistic reports, were also used. The empirical research was carried out between 2012 and 2014, and included over 100 interviews with Turks, Tartar individuals, and representatives of ethnic organizations.

The analysis shows that social identity is shaped mainly by the non-formal education, inside the family, ethnic community, and social network constructed in relation within their own ethnic group.

Keywords

Social Identity; Cultural heritage; Muslim communities; Turks; Tatars; Non-formal education

I. Introduction

The Turkish and Tatar communities in Romania follow Islamic religious practices, share a common language, have the capacity to preserve their cultural heritage, and have the tendency of forming enclaves within the Turkish-Tatar communities. Their identity positioning within the ethnic structure of the Romanian population – over 85% Christian Orthodox ethnic Romanians – largely explains the endogamic and enclavization tendencies of the Turkish and Tatar communities. However, the Turks and Tatars in the Romanian historical region of Dobruja have also showed a high capacity for creative response to social changes (Stern, Cicala, 1991:108) demonstrating social inclusion, social and political participation, frequent social interactions and mutual respect for the cultural heritage of each ethnic group within the Dobruja ethnic mix. The present research focuses on the ongoing negotiations of boundaries between Muslim Turk and Tatar groups and the other Christian ethnic groups in Dobruja.

„It is important to recognize that although ethnic categories take into account cultural differences, the features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant.” (Barth, 1969: 14) From this perspective, our research focuses on identifying and describing, from the standpoint of our subjects, the main socialization agents in preserving and passing on the cultural heritage and social identity of Turkish and Tatar ethnic cultures in Dobruja.

Data generation has been conducted in repeated visits undertaken in 2012-2014 in the historical region of Dobruja, where more than 90% of the ethnic Turks and the ethnic Tatars in Romania live (RNSI, 2011). The aim of the research is to describe the cultural heritage and analyse the dynamic of social identity in the Turkish and Tatar communities in Romania. Nonetheless, this article focuses solely on the dynamic of formal and non-formal education. The present paper outlines the results of a quantitative analysis of education, as an institutional means of inter-generational transmission of values, religious traditions and social practices in the Turkish and Tatar communities in Romania. The rest of the article is organized as follows: The next section describes the research method. The following parts of the study deal with the forms of education currently institutionalized in the Turkish and Tatar communities in Romania: (1) the family and the neighbourhood community, where non-formal education prevails; (2) school, as a representative of formal education; and (3) the civil society, which has the role of mediator between the values of the traditional family in the communities focused on and school, aiming at the preservation of ethnic identity, as well as the social integration of the members of the two communities.

II. Methodology

Knowledge based on empirical research depends to a great extent on the way in which the research is organised. In this case, the research design was based on the interpretive tradition in the social sciences, considered suitable for the exploration of the meaning of social processes such as socialization and education through formal and non-formal social institutions. Max Weber, the father of the interpretive approach, postulates that the empirical study of concrete reality aims at understanding the unique characteristics of the reality in which we move: “We wish to understand on the one hand the relationships and the *cultural significance of individual events* in their contemporary manifestations and on the other the causes of their being historically *so and not otherwise*” (Weber, 1949: 72). Contemporary interpretive research paradigms show that social activities can only be

understood contextually, and social facts lose their deterministic characteristics, being instead seen as created by the community members through social practices. (Blaikie, 2010: 191-195) The research resorts to a qualitative approach, since this method lends itself to investigations of “richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity, rather than being embarrassed and inconvenienced by them”. (Mason, 2004: 1)

Group belonging relies on those social factors that are statistically relevant for the members of the group, not on the social factors we measure objectively as relevant for that particular group (social and economic factors, demographic factors, etc.). The characteristics most frequently encountered in the individuals that make up a group as compared to the ‘averages’ attributed to another group are not important; the only ones that matter are those perceived and accepted by the members of the group as defining for group belonging. (Barth, 1969: 10) When the members of the ethnic group interact or refer to the interaction with the relevant non-members, they reveal the characteristics which they consider, define and validate as defining for the group they belong to, and which serve as criteria of belonging and exclusion. Starting from the assumptions of the Norwegian sociologist Fredrik Barth and resorting to the critical apparatus proposed by the sociological and psychological theories of social identity – identity salience, self-categorization, role identities –, the present study analyses the perspective of the members of the Tatar and Turkish communities upon the processes involved in social identity construction and social identity dynamic. (Hogg, Terry, White, 1995; Tajfel, Turner, 1986; Weigert, 1986; Cerulo, 1997; Stryker, Burke, 2000; Brewer, 2001; Herrmann, Risse-Kappen, Brewer, 2004)

Data collection was performed using direct non-participant observation, semi-structured individual interviews and visual investigative analysis of social networks. An interview guide and an observation guide were used, with discussion themes such as: the history of the community, the natural, social and economic resources of the community, occupations and income sources, community infrastructure and access to utilities, migration, social identity (social distance measurement scales, the use of the mother tongue, mixed marriages vs. the tendency towards endogamy), elements of cultural heritage, the relation with the local institutions, the relation with ethnic organizations, the problems of the community, the views on the future of the community. The issues outlined in the research instrument ensured that all the discussion themes were covered, but each interview crystallized following a conversation dynamic adapted to each interviewee. In carrying out the interviews, special attention was paid to formulating the questions and adapting the topic of the interview to each interviewee and interview situation. At the same time, interest and openness were displayed towards the sensitive problems brought up by the interviewees when these were considered relevant for the study. The interviews were carried out in Romanian and later transcribed verbatim, and translated into English. Written documents, such as journal publications and data from official social statistic reports, were also used.

In total, the empirical study included over 100 individual interviews and 10 group interviews. The majority (70%) of the respondents are self-identified Turks, Tatars or individuals of mixed Turkish-Tatar ethnicity. Some interviews (30%) were also conducted with community leaders and representatives of the local authorities, such as the Imam, the Turkish teacher, and active members of the Turkish and Tatar ethnic organizations.

III. The family and the community as non-formal learning environments

During the communist regime, the intervention of the Romanian state through systematization, urbanization, the development of industry, the collectivization of agriculture and the abolition of

private property resulted in a decrease in the rural population, which had represented the numerically predominant population up to that point, in work force migration in under-populated areas such as Dobruja, as well as in the mixing of population in order to avoid homogeneous groups and communities, which were potentially problematic for the Communist Party. Nationalist discourse prevailed in cultural and educational institutions, and thus during the Ceaușescu period (1962-1989) mother tongue education became extinct in Dobruja, while the rights of minorities to civic and political representation and to the preservation of their identity and culture practically disappeared from social and cultural life. During the whole period of the communist regime, the inter-generational transmission of the cultural heritage of the Turkish and Tatar minorities in Dobruja took place almost exclusively orally and within the family. This part of the paper will outline the role of the family in passing on the cultural heritage to children by means of non-formal education.

Despite the devastating effects of recent history upon the ethnic identity of Turks and Tatars in Romania, the raw image given by statistic data shows a strong shared attachment of the members to the defining elements of the two ethnic communities: ethnic and religious self-identification and the knowledge of the mother tongue. For example, the distribution of the resident population by mother tongue and ethnicity also provides interesting information: 85.6% of the ethnic Turks used to speak Turkish in the family in their childhood, while the rest declared Romanian as their mother tongue. (RNSI, 2012)

As an institution responsible for primary socialization, the family is a child's first teacher of the mother tongue, of social practices, of values, of traditions, of role prescriptions shared by the community and of the aspects of behaviour necessary in the organisation of social life.

In the particular case of the Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja, groups which have the status of national minorities in relation to the members of the dominant culture, the institutional social strategies and practices related to the transmission of cultural heritage are limited. For example, public education in minority mother tongues was absent in Romania for half a century¹, which had a major impact on limiting the methods available for the preservation of the cultural elements belonging to the ethnic Turks and Tatars in Romania. If some of the other ethnic groups in Romania have schools in their native languages for the basic levels of education (kindergartens and schools teaching in German, Hungarian, Serbian, etc.), the Turks and Tatars do not have access to such an institutional framework. Nowadays, the Turkish language, elements of Turkish culture and civilization and the Islamic religion are optional classes in the curriculum of public schools attended by Turkish and Tatar children. There are no similar opportunities for the Tatar language and for the transmission of the Tatar cultural heritage.

Despite the fact that the Muslim community in Romania considers that it has not been subjected to a limitation of their Islamic religious practices, as the Mufti Office and mosques continued to be active throughout the communist regime and are still active nowadays, Islam is not taught in schools as an optional subject, unlike the religions of other minority ethnic groups in Romania. In this context, throughout their recent history, family and kinship relationship networks have primarily been responsible for the preservation and cultivation of the minority mother tongues, for passing on customs, traditions and socio-cultural practices, and instilling the traditional systems of rules and Islamic values into the younger generations.

The person to whom a child is most attached and who cares for the child, generally the mother or grandmother in the Turkish and Tatar families, is the one considered by all respondents to have a

¹ Starting with the 1960s, schools that taught in Tatar and Turkish were closed. Since the 1990s, at the request of parents and ethnic organizations, middle schools where Turkish and Tatar children were enrolled once again started organizing optional courses in Turkish language and Islam.

dominant or a decision-making role in what concerns the children's education. Even today, when mother tongue public education no longer exists, some of the respondents state that when they started 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 interact only within their own culture and in their mother tongue.

"Family is very important to us. Family and traditions are everything, if I may say so. [...] Religion and all the other things were kept in the family. We talked about customs and traditions within the family. And of course parents teach the mother tongue to children at home." (Journalist, female, 39 years old, ethnic Tatar, Constanța, September 2013)

"(Where did you learn to sing and dance Tatar dances?) - We used to sing with my grandmother, at home. We used to sing Tatar songs with my mum's mother." (Choreographer of the Cobadin UDTTMR² Tatar dance groups, female, 41 years old, mixed Turkish-Tatar ethnicity, Cobadin, July 2013)

The social life is structured and functions according to Islamic prescriptions in all the Turkish and Tatar families and communities in Dobruja. The presence of specific ritual objects – the Koran, framed excerpts from the Koran, items of clothing, items of ritual hygiene, etc. – reveal the organization of the habitat and of the family life in accordance with Muslim traditions. The five daily prayers – Namaz –, and the practices related to fasting and to important life events are all learned in the family and under the guidance of the Imam, within the courses organized for children at the mosque. Girls learn household rules very early, they know how to cook traditional dishes, stretch dough for chiburekki, kobete and cantiq and how to prepare ritual food for religious celebrations and ceremonies. At the same time, hygiene rules derived from religious texts are learned during early childhood. 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, are current practices learned by children from their mothers after early education, around the ages of 8-9.

The strong commitment to Islamic values structures the family and determines the paths taken by the respondents' lives, crucially intervening in key events at different stages of life. Thus, the Muslim ceremony of Sünnət³, the obligation of choosing a marriage partner from the same religious community, 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 Ramazan 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.

Similarly, the social life guided by the pillars of Islam involves faith, piety, honesty and social solidarity, which are the basis of the system of rules and values in every Muslim family. Naturally, the Imam, the educational activities organized by the mosques, the meetings of community members occasioned by religious feasts, religious studies and Arabic courses regularly organized at mosques

²The Democratic Union of Turco-Islamic Tatars of Romania

³ Some of the respondents use the Christian term of "baptism" referring to elements of the *Sünnət* rite, 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, out of a desire of making 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).

refine the knowledge acquired within the family, securely reinforcing a sense of belonging to the same religious community, and give meaning to the events of adult life. But it is during childhood that 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.

"First of all, in Islam there is no intermediary. If I want to know religion, I go and study it, I go deeper and deeper. If, I don't know, if it gets me, I discuss it with a leader of that organization or with an Imam of mine or, if necessary, with a Mufti. [...] But a simple Muslim must know the essentials, the basics of religion." (Mufti, male, 36 years old, ethnic Tatar, Constanța, July 2013)

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

The dynamics of social mobility, increasing labour migration and rural-urban migration during the communist regime and immediately afterwards, coupled with the falling number of Turkish-Tatar people in the total population, are inevitable prerequisites for an increase in mixed marriages. Despite this, the Muslim community in Dobruja is conservative in this respect. 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 halls⁴ confirms the small number of mixed marriages.

"Turkish and Tatar families support young people's participation in these "toplantis" ⁵. Why? Because 99% of those who participate in these "toplantis" are ethnic Turks and Tatars and, in order to perpetuate their specific identity, Turkish and Tatar families want the young to marry within the same ethnic communities. (General Secretary of the UDTR⁶, Turkish language teacher, ethnic Turk, Constanța, September 2013)

"When you bring me someone who is not of the same ethnicity, I'm already very hurt. I'll get over it, because I'm a parent, I am the mother of my children. But I don't want to imagine, God forbid! I don't judge, they may love each other, I can see this in someone else's case, but I don't want it to happen to me." (President of the UDTTMR branch in Cobadin, female, 44 years old, ethnic Tatar, Cobadin, March 2014)

"There used to be a problem related to the marriages between Turks and Tatars. Families did not quite agree with this. But now this is only a small issue, because both Turks and Tatars belong to, are of Turkic origin and share the same religion, i.e. Islam." (General Secretary of the UDTR, male, ethnic Turk, Turkish language teacher, Constanța, September 2013)

"We don't quite agree because of religion. In life, everything is OK as it is, but when the end comes. Each of us goes in his or her direction, goes to another cemetery. This is what complicates matters. As for the rest, eh, they are people just like us. They're good, trustworthy, they get along well. Only this, the final resting place, it complicates matters for us. Because they go to different places. They can't have a single grave. It's not allowed. But what can we do?" (Female, 78 years old, ethnic Tatar, Ovidiu, April 2014)

⁴An 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

⁵ The meetings of the Muslim youngsters, regularly organized and occasioned by religious and lay celebrations, represent another important bond of community life. Such evening events or gatherings are known by the inhabitants of Dobruja as "toplanti". Toplantı (Turkish) means gathering, meeting, reunion.

⁶ The Turkish Democratic Union of Romania

III. Formal education as a means for transmitting the elements of ethnic and religious identity

This part of the paper aims to describe the social and cultural model of ethnic Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja and the way in which this cultural heritage is transmitted from one generation to the next by means of the systems, mechanisms and resources of formal education.

From the perspective of social identity dynamic, F. Barth shows that the salient characteristic of minority groups consists of the organization of activities and interactions. The social system is organized in activity sectors which are open and inclusive for the members of the majority group, while for the members of minority groups some of the status-role positions are only open within the group they belong to and have no relevance and equal value within the dominant social system. In what concerns formal education, in the Romanian social field a Romanian language teacher has a social status and social prestige superior to those of a Turkish language teacher. Fredrik Barth speaks of “a disparity between values and organizational facilities: prized goals are outside the field organized by the minority's culture and categories. Though such systems contain several ethnic groups, interaction it takes place entirely within the framework of the dominant, majority group's statuses and institutions, where identity as a minority member gives no basis for action, though it may in varying degrees represent a disability in assuming the operative statuses.” (Barth, 1969: 31)

Family, as a primary socialization agent, represents for the community the first social environment in which a young child learns status role prescriptions, the main cultural values, the mother tongue, 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. In other ethnic communities than the dominant one, the set of cultural values and rules, the language and other ethnic identity elements are inculcated almost exclusively by the family. In the case of the Turkish and Tatar communities in Romania, which do not represent a numerically significant minority population within the country's total population (less than 0.15% of the Romanian population), and which show substantial differences compared to other ethnic groups living alongside the Romanian majority, the institutional frameworks for passing on the cultural heritage and ethnic identity are even fewer.

For the respondents, the use of the mother tongue invests the individual with all of the characteristics deriving from his/her inclusion in their ethnic community. 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.

“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)

“I didn't learn Tatar or Turkish in school. (At home, who used to mainly speak in Tatar?) My mother. We learned the basics from our grandparents.” (Librarian, ethnic Tatar, Ovidiu, September 2013)

In general, integration in small ethnic communities is associated with a high degree of religiosity, both in the case of the older generations and in that of children. “As applied to religion, the social

capital approach posits that social networks externally regulate religious expression in accordance with group norms. From a social identity approach, group norms shape individual attitudes and behaviours through the identification of the self with the group." (Maliepaard, Phalet, 2012: 134) The fact that they belong to Islam, the tendency to preserve the traditional family model and the endogamic marital behaviour are the main elements that distinguish the Turkish and Tatar population from the Romanian-Orthodox culture, but also from other ethnic groups they coexist with. Primarily, "religion is here [in Dobruja] that cultural component of ethnicity that functions as a community binder and that creates the specific difference from the country's majority population" (Chirițoiu et al., 2009: 110) In a Christian society, where 86.5% of the Romanian population are Christian Orthodox (RNSI, 2012), with Romanian as an official language taught in every public school in Romania and used by all public institutions, prescriptions regarding values and behaviours are acquired by the new generations of Turkish and Tatar Muslims mainly within 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. 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 only through the family and the ethnic community they belong to.

With regard to the school as an agent in the recognition, preservation, and the systematic and structured transmission of the contents belonging to the ethnic cultural heritage – literature, arts, culture, traditions and mother tongue -, at present, the Romanian educational system only provides this set of benefits to the Turkish ethnic group, but not to the Tatar minority. In compliance with the law, the Romanian public school system currently employs 70-80 teachers who teach Turkish Language courses in primary and middle schools and the History and Traditions of the Turkish Minority in the 6th and 7th grades of middle school in about 50 schools in Constanța and Tulcea counties, where most of the ethnic Turkish and Tatar residents in Romania live. Thus, for the Muslim community in Romania, the creation of an institutional legal framework and the professionalization of teachers who teach Turkish language and Islamic religion in public schools, as well as the organization and development of courses on Islamic religion by mosques and religious and ethnic non-governmental organizations, are important gains for the preservation of ethnic identity and for the transmission of traditions and Islamic precepts between generations in an institutional framework, alongside that of the family.

"(Did you attend school in the Tatar language?) - Yes. In the forties. Then we had the Tatar school. We had classes both in Romanian and in Tatar. (Here, in Ovidiu?) - Yes. (And when was the school closed?) - When the Russians came. In forty-five. And then there was no more school..." (Female, 78 years old, ethnic Tatar, Ovidiu, April 2014)

IV. Discussion: the influence of traditionalism on access to education and academic success

The school functions as an agent of anticipatory socialization, making the transition of the individual from the traditional micro-society of the family to the civil macrosociety. After 1950, the following are among the major themes discussed in the social sciences: the lack of correlation between access to education and academic success and the relationship between education and social freedom. Starting from the fundamental theories in sociology – those based on Durkheim, Weber and Marx –, a new image of education is created, namely that of the school as an institution which

legitimizes and propagates the power of those who control it. The agents of socialization – the family, the school, the state – are considered responsible for social integration through a process of instilling submission, of internalizing alienation and propagating desirable axiological contents. The research of the authors who share this perspective – P. Bourdieu, J. P. Passeron, R. Boudon, C. Bandelot, B. Bernstein, H. Garfinkel, E. Goffman – shows that inequalities in education reside in the relationship between education and social belonging.

These perspectives upon academic success and competence highlight cultural and social inequalities in what concerns access to education, inequalities caused by social stratification. Whether we are speaking of the cultural habitus (Bordieu), or discussing the theory of rational choice in terms of cost benefit (Boudon), the belonging of individuals to a certain social category involves the internalization of certain objectives as subjective hopes and the captivity within the social status prescriptions of the family and the social category to which one belongs. The organisation of daily life, the educational style, parental practices, the positioning within the interactional field, depend on the social and economic status and on the family's cultural heritage.

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, in Constanța County, we could identify social intervention projects⁷ addressing the issues of access to education, academic failure and the 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 (the national average is of 14.3%, and the average of the ethnic Turkish population is of 9.2%), and for secondary education (the national average is of 24.3% and the average of the ethnic Turkish population is of 19.2%). At the same time, the ethnic Turkish population presents an alarmingly large number of uneducated people (the national average is of 3% and the average within the Turkish population is of 15%). (RNSI, 2012)

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 (the national average is of 14.3%, while in the case of Tatars it is of 16.8%), and the same trend is maintained in the case of high school graduates (24.3% is the national average, while 29.11% of Tatars have graduated from high school). As for the frequency of uneducated people, Tatars record an average (2.5%) which is close to the national average (3%).

The structure of the resident population aged 10 years and over by gender, ethnicity and level of education shows a lower level of education among women in general, in the case of both the national average, the Turks and the Tatars. 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 and community in Dobruja, by the low employment rate among Turkish women, and by their 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

⁷ 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 Buzzești neighbourhoods), Pitești, Bacău – during the school year 2010-2011, by the Research Institute for the Quality of Life

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.

The analysis of the interviews taken during the research reveals several characteristics of the social organisation of the Turkish and Tatar community, which may explain at least partially the low level of schooling in the case of women of Turkish and Tatar origin. The family is the central social institution in Turkish and Tatar communities. The foundation of a family represents an alliance between two families, but also a strengthening of the network of alliances within the community, as marriages are predominantly endogamic. The community is a site of belonging, of self-preservation and of the protection of Islamic values and of the elements of ethnic identity. In Turkish and Tatar communities, the strong social control limits the freedom and autonomy of the individuals. The family is the institution where cultural and religious values are preserved and transmitted from one generation to another especially with the help of the woman, as one who carries the main responsibilities regarding the home and the children's education. Marriages are not decided by the family, but marriage with a person who does not belong to the same ethnic group, and especially one who does not belong to the Muslim community, is problematic. Faithfulness and respecting Muslim traditions are appreciated and result in the social recognition of one's ethnic belonging.

Beyond these characteristics shared by the two ethnic groups and deriving to a great extent from Muslim prescription, the Tatar community has several distinctive features, revealed by the present research during the analysis of the dynamic of self-identification and hetero-identification describing the inter-ethnic relations between the two communities. More precisely, by measuring social distance, the results of the analysis show that Tatars place themselves at a larger social distance from ethnic Turks, while the members of the Turkish community have a higher level of acceptance towards Tatars. This positioning of ethnic Tatars in relation to ethnic Turks is confirmed also in what concerns the level of endogamy, where the research shows ethnic Tatars only accept marriage to ethnic Turks in exceptional cases, while ethnic Turks are more willing to accept ethnic Tatars and use only one criterion of discrimination in what marriage is concerned, namely religious affiliation.

Another differentiating characteristic concerns the social value assigned to formal education and to the occupational insertion within the formal labour market by each of the two ethnic communities. The members of the Turkish community support a higher degree of paternalism in the organisation and functioning of the family and a more reduced social mobility of women. The members of the Tatar community underline the preoccupation of the community for the modernity of women and the access of women to the labour market. Among our interviewees there are multiple examples of ethnic Tatar women who are active in highly specialized professions or examples of successful entrepreneurship, and many female ethnic Tatar interviewees are university graduates and have successful careers.

In what concerns the preservation and propagation of the social and cultural model, our ethnic Tatar interlocutors value formal education, state that the most important indicator of success in life is the level of education, and declare their unconditional support for their children who are to achieve as high a level of education as possible. Generally, ethnic Tatars have decided on an educational path for their children, are well informed on the available options, on the demand for various types of specialists on the labour market, and they participate actively in supporting their child in complying with school demands. In contrast, ethnic Turkish parents more rarely have such a well-defined plan regarding their children's educational and professional future and are less active participants in guiding and controlling their children's schooling.

Additionally, in the literature there are research and explanatory theories which ascribe the lack of academic success to dominant success models, models which are specific to the individualist perspective, to Western societies and to intellectual elites, and less characteristic for traditional

communities organised in a collectivist manner. One of these models of academic success is independence. As a characteristic of the successful model, independence is closely connected to an individualist worldview. This worldview is more frequently encountered in men than in women, more widespread in Western societies than in Eastern ones, in industrialized societies than in non-industrialized ones, and among intellectuals rather than among the members of the working class. Thus, the model of the independence of the young adult should not ignore the “cultural values of many ethnic minority groups, which focus on centrality of the family and interdependence.”(Wolf et al., 2009)

In the context of the expectation of autonomy which exists in our institutions – “learn to do things by yourself” –, the connection with the support, and perhaps even the intervention of the parents, are all the more important in helping school children who come from different social backgrounds to keep their balance and to make progress in a challenging environment. The emotional and financial support of the parents is an important indicator of young adults’ success. (Kohn, 2015: 123-128) Studies clearly show that when parents can and want to support their children financially and emotionally even after they turn 20, these have more chances of earning stability and autonomy after the age of thirty. (Arnett, Fishel: 2013: 278-280). “Institutionalized cultural norms” are highly inadequate for the young adults who are the first in their family to attend university. This inadequacy creates for these young students a hidden educational disadvantage which affects negatively their academic results.” (Stephens et al., 2012)

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