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TYPES OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES WITHIN ROMANIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: The multiplicity of Islamic interpretations is reflected in the heterogeneous nature of the Romanian Muslim communities. The internal fragmentation and disunity of Muslim communities, intra-Islamic difficulties, ideological and sectarian rivalry, success of Salafism among certain groups, the absence of stronger and more visible Islamic alternative discourses and the lack of interest in finding adequate mechanisms to facilitate the integration of the new Muslims in society are some of the general problems of the Romanian Muslims. Local Islamic revival has an ethno-cultural dimension (Tatar-Turks community), a religious and even a political one as external disputes are imported in the Romanian context and affects the way Muslims define and practice Islam. Some Roma and indigenous Tatar-Turkish adopted the neo-traditionalism consolidated in the second half of the last century and promoted by the most active Sunni NGOs in Romania. Some converts emancipated from the ideological control by conservative and neoconservative Islamic currents and are in search of progressive or mystical interpretations; other new Muslims found safety in the Salafi's certitudes and rigid rules. Case study findings presented in this article may suggest that the more it depends on formal rituals, external behavior and rigid canonical displays of religiosity, the more fragile the Muslim identity becomes. A vulnerable constructed Self conceives differences and alterity as an attack against personal identity, hence the increasing aggressive and intolerant, superior Salafi attitudes. The more it is built on universal (and Islamic) values, inner experience, ethical convictions, the more open and capable of integrating alterity and fostering positive relations with people of different religions becomes Muslim identity.

Key Words: Romanian Muslims, radicalism, traditionalism, fundamentalism, religiosity, Muslim identities, Islam

Islam underwent a dual process of universalization and localization once it spread to other societies; the specific, contingent elements of the Arabian original cultural context were discarded and only the essential and non-negotiable elements were retained. This universalized message was further adapted to local customs and needs¹. In Romania, this process of universalization and adaptation generated at least two models of integration and ethno-religious identity present in the public and institutional discourse: the territorialized, historical, ethnic Dobrogea model – based on intense cooperation between the local religious and political institutions regarding the preserving of a symbolic, ethnic identity concentrated on regional traditions, customs, language – and the “universal Islam” model that enforces not a symbolic religious role, but a completely different way of living. However, multicultural Romanian public policies are insensitive to the internal heterogeneity of ethno-cultural Muslim groups and to their different problems related to integration, facilitating only one way of expressing the Islamic identity².

In Romania, according to the latest official census data (2011), there are 64,337 Muslims³ (34,685 men and 29,652 women) out of which 26,903 are Turks, 20,060 Tatars, 3,356 Roma Muslims, 6,281 Romanian Muslims and 6,906 of another ethnicity. Muslims represent almost 0.3% of the Romanian population and most of them live in urban areas: 43,279 in Constanta and 9,037 in Bucharest.

There is an internal heterogeneity of the minority Muslim communities in Romania, many of different ethnicities, manifesting various degrees of integration in society, from complete assimilation and acculturation to even somewhat hostile ideological-based dissociation. In fact, we can speak of a multitude of Muslim communities that are quite isolated and closed, rarely interact with each other, are organized on to ethnic criteria, but that also intersect and are grouped according to sectarian, national, linguistic and, more recently, to political factors. Inter-group relations are complex and complicated, there is strife, tensions, criticism, but also isolated or “clandestine” collaboration; each group could be divided into other sub-groups. The conflicts and dynamics that occur outside the borders, especially in the Middle East, are imported and reflected to different degrees in the Romanian Muslim communities⁴; while Muslims in Romania—except the Tatar-Turkish and Roma communities that subscribe to a completely different paradigm—are less preoccupied with their local situation, well-being and integration in the Romanian society it still cannot be said that they developed a *sui generis* identity specific to understanding Islam in a European context. The second generation of newcomers is still young and it is still early to predict their orientation; the converts are still in the process of learning and dominated by the submissive phase of the received knowers who rely on the knowledge disseminated by external authorities and rarely dare to challenge what they were taught to perceive as religious authorities.

The inner diversity of Islam as a religious tradition is reflected by the different ways in which Muslims living in Romania interpret the Islamic faith according to the local determinations. In this short research we will try to analyze the way in which various categories of Muslims living in Romania understand and manifest religiosity in the Romanian context. We define religiosity as the personal relation of an individual to his faith, the way believers experience and formulate their relationship to religion⁵. As a supplementary methodological tool, we analyzed major Romanian Islamic sites, Facebook official pages and blogs and conducted 7 in-depth interviews; persons who represent different sections of the Muslim communities—some with a certain religious authority—were selected. In order to identify the nuances that mark the Muslims' interaction and "orthopraxis" in the relations with the representatives of different religious groups, especially Christians, we tracked the way some major Romanian Islamic official organizations reacted during relevant non Islamic events as Christmas celebration. We took into consideration the Islamic verdicts that they disseminated in that period regarding the degree of "Islamic" legitimacy of congratulating Christians and participating, if invited, to Christmas celebrations. This case study can be relevant especially for the Turkish-Tatar and convert communities as their connections with Christians who are part of their family, friends, neighbors or colleagues, are unavoidably deeper. Christian celebrations, as we will see, activate and amplify complex, delicate reactions of defining and constructing Muslim identity and religiosity in relation to the local non-Islamic context.

Old Muslim Communities

The Tatar-Turkish Community

A chronicle regarding the Seljuq dynasty, completed in 1424, records the first colonization of the South-Eastern part of the Romanian territory (Dobrogea) by a group of tens of thousands of Anatolian Turkmen Muslims between 1263-1264. At the end of the same century, Dobrogea is included in a Tatar state, formed by Nogay, ruler of the Golden Horde; another Tatar state existed in the same region in the latter half of the 14th century, facilitating the five century long Ottoman occupation⁶. After the first Sultan Bayezid I's (1389-1402) strategic conquest, Tatars were brought in the Babadag area; Sultan Mehmet (1419-1420) recovered Dobrogea from Wallachia voievode Mircea the Old and colonized it with Tatars and Turkomans from Asia Minor. Finally, Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512) extended the conquered area all the way to Chilia and Cetatea Albă and brought Volga Tatars in Northern Dobrogea and Southern Basarabia⁷. Two other waves of Tatars populated the Ottoman Dobrogea after the Russian-Turkish War and the annexation of Crimea (1783) by the Russians and after the Crimean War (1853-1856).

However, during the Romanian War of Independence (1877-1878) an estimated number of 90,000 Muslims emigrated from the province. The process of cultural homogenization, ethnical colonization, economical modernization and national integration of Dobrogea into Romania took place between 1878-1913⁸. During the interbellum period, the Turkish-Tatar community manifested predominantly as an ethnic community, united by common cultural and historical elements; during communism, their fragile consolidation as a censored and different religious community allowed, nevertheless, the survival of some ethnic, cultural and social particularities. Communist persecutions and social discrimination⁹ generated a suppression of the ethnic and religious spiritual manifestations in the Turkish-Tatar community and a submissive acceptance of the regime as citizens and representatives of a minority. After 1990, the ethnic identity was reinforced, Tatars asserting their special identity and language (Crimean origin), but in the context of the Turkic affiliation¹⁰. The rising generation was influenced less by Islam as the old generation could preserve with difficulty some Islamic practices while connecting Islam to festivals, life cycle events, ethnic traditions.

The Muftiate is the only religious official institution that represents Muslims from Romania and promotes a local understanding of the Hanafi Sunni Islamic school of thought. The affirmative action of the Romanian Government allowing members of ethnic minorities to be represented in Parliament is positively valued by the community as a means of fostering good inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations. Georgy Lederer's assertion that the non-fundamentalist, Western-minded, secular, loyal to the government Islam is what West would wish Islam were except it is not the authentic Islam by Middle Eastern standards¹¹ seems to apply to these partially conflicting interpretations of local Turkish-Tatar Islam and the "universal" Islam materialized in the more latent or open conflict between the present Mufti, Yusuf Muurat, and several graduates that studied abroad and are affiliated to some active Islamic NGOs, accused of promoting a "radical Islam". Actually, the contested NGOs embrace a neotraditionalist¹² form of Islam, but even in its controversial fundamentalist formulations as detailed in the writings of Abu 'l-A'la Mawdudi (translated in Romanian language) or Sayyid Qutb. Quite many of the books published by these NGOs belong to authors who are strong supporters of Muslim Brotherhood movement or directly affiliated to it. The Mufti Yusuf Muurat publicly and repeatedly denounced the content of some of these books, declaring that Muslims in Romania must not be indoctrinated with these new, imported Islamic ideas.

On the other hand, the Mufti is challenged by many of the newcomer and convert Muslims who claim he lacks competence and presents a softened form of Islam that excessively compromises Islamic principles and rules because of political subservience. In fact, the theological competence is a relative accusation, the overwhelming display of tolerance is a

matter of Islamic interpretation and represents a beneficial discourse that should be maintained and promoted, especially in the tensed political contemporary context. The reciprocal criticism represents a strife for authority and power to control the discourse about Islam in Romania and it is a paradoxical situation as the legitimate, nominal credibility belongs with the Muftiate, but the concrete influence and impact on the less numerous non Turkish-Tatar communities can be attributed to the much more well-endowed and active NGOs. Nevertheless, at least in the official discourses, all local Muslims respect the institution of the Muftiate as it represents their officially recognized national leadership and try to foster a peaceful relation with it.

Before this recently aggravated conflict, local Muslims often participated in both Muftiate programs and activities organized by rival NGOs. The respective NGOs help the local community, repair even mosques that are in the Muftiate's care, distribute food during the Ramadan, trying to fulfill what they consider to be the Muftiate's duties that are obstructed by the lack of funds or involvement. Some of the local imams who officially serve the Muftiate, also burdened by a precarious financial status (many of them must find another job in order to cover their living expenses, even as singers), possess insufficient Islamic knowledge and often seek advice from the NGOs' imams regarding some verdicts or Islamic opinions on different issues¹³. On the other hand, the Romanian Mufti, Yusuf Muraat, underlined repeatedly that the disputed NGOs charity work cannot compensate the ideological danger posed by the dissemination of a new, imported understanding of Islam that exhibits more intolerant attitudes in relation to non Muslims.

Undoubtedly, the dominant discourse of the indigenous Turkish-Tatar Muslim community constituted a specific Dobrogean multiethnic and Islamic model and was systematically centered on tolerance, openness and harmonious cohabitation for centuries, despite the Russian-Turkish or Romanian-Turkish wars¹⁴. This Muslim population was also affected by communist atheist educational policies which resulted in a high degree of assimilation, secular orientation and a-religious behaviour of its members, doubled, however, by a more recent revivalist Islamic tendency ignited by the new formed Islamic NGOs. According to a report regarding the danger of radicalization¹⁵ within autochthon Romanian Muslim community, most of the subjects insistently assume the ethical and social values that prove their integration and acceptance by the majority, constructing a tolerant self image built on the Islamic and local tradition. The following proof was invoked: Islam is a culture of peace; the Prophet manifested tolerance and understanding of people belonging to other religions, especially to Christians; preserving the old Dobrogean functional model of dialogue and mutual respect and understanding¹⁶. Respondents accept the normal traditional religious behavior and refuse the assumption of radicalism associated to the daily prayers (57.5%), to fasting during the Ramadan (62.5%),

pilgrimage to Mekka (67.5%)¹⁷, not celebrating icons or objects (70%). However, the more abstract and less visible a religious habit is, the more easily is to be observed by a minority sensitive to the values of sociability and education. Therefore, refusing to enter the places of worship of other religious groups (35%), not having friends of other religions (72.5%), wearing the veil / hijab (40%) or full face veil (62.5%)¹⁸, not eating pork (35%) and not drinking alcohol (40%) are perceived as radicalization signs and recent practices; especially the practical dietary regulations are difficult to be kept in a majority of the population which perceives them as abnormal and even antisocial.¹⁹

Case study - the verdict on Christmas. The Tatar-Turkish Muslims represent a religious- historical ethnic minority formed as a concentrated regional community. These Muslims have no problem congratulating Christians, sharing food and gifts, visiting them on Christian celebrations, as it is part of the normal cohabitation. The pragmatic experience of the normal members of a community who interacts daily with people belonging to a different religion created a stable, individual and collective, responsible tolerant behavior and vision regarding the social interaction that cannot be easily silenced by radical Islamic precepts. Extreme ideologies and manifestations are the privilege of an elite. The Mufti visits churches and participates in specific Christian events, considering Christians their brothers; congratulations and participation in different celebrations on Christmas is a natural, non-problematic routine.²⁰

The Albanian Muslim Community

During World War I many Albanians immigrated to Romania from the Balkan Peninsula, but they are perfectly integrated in the Tatar-Turkish community by marriage, custom, tradition and by sharing graveyards and mosques.²¹ In what concerns religiosity, they assimilated the local Tatar-Turkish model.

Muslim Rroma community

Most probably, after the Rroma people transited Persia, coming from India, and immigrated to Armenia, one of the ways they entered the Byzantine Empire was after the Armenians were dislocated by the Seljuk armies.²² Between the 9th and the 15th centuries, they arrived on the European continent in consecutive waves, but their first official registered entrance in Romania was in 1385, in a document that confirmed the grant of 40 Gypsy families by Voivode Dan I to a local monastery.²³ The Ottoman invasion in the Balkans during the 14-15th century generated the Rroma population migration together with the Turks either as servants in the Empire army (auxiliary soldiers or craftsmen), or as workers in the reconstruction of the area. Regular taxes that were received also from the Gypsies during the Ottoman Empire allowed the registration of various

data regarding their community, Roma being treated in general as an ethnic group. Muslim Roma enjoyed some small privileges, tax incentives.²⁴

In Romania, Muslim Roma arrived in the early 16th century in Dobrogea as a division (*sanjak*) of some Gypsies serving the Ottoman army, according to the Specific Law for the Gypsies of Rumelia in 1530, and the Law for the supervision of the *sanjak* of Gypsies of 1541, fact that does not exclude the Roma that came from other areas in the Ottoman dominated regions and embraced Islam.²⁵ Until 1856, Roma were subjected to serfdom, being treated as property of the ruler, monasteries or boyars. After the Roma Holocaust / *Pojramos* in 1940, when over 11,000 Roma died while being deported to Transnistria, the communist policies of assimilation, ethnic homogeneity and the forced sedentarization policies deeply affected their nomadic style of life. Thus a change emerged in their occupation—from artisans, traditional craftsmen they became seasonal laborers, petty traders, domestic servants and day laborers in the city outskirts; social marginalization continued.

Most of the Horahane Roma live in Northern Dobrogea, but also in Calarasi or Bucharest, in a smaller number; the largest Horahane community is in Babadag. They speak more languages, according to the social interest and context: Horahane, a Romani (Turkish) dialect, quite difficult to be understood by other Roma, spoken inside the community, especially by women and children; Turkish, one of the languages daily spoken in the area; Romanian and some basic Arabic in their prayers.²⁶ Some old persons also speak Romani.

There are almost no historical, social, anthropological and religious studies regarding the present Muslim Roma community in Romania. This community is quite isolated, prejudice and discrimination functioning against them on a multiple level. The majority of the Romanian population rejects them because of the social stigma and all the negative stereotypes associated with the Gypsies. Their adhesion to Islam does not significantly influence this attitude as the strongest, decisive identity marker is the ethnic one.

The native Turkish-Tatar Muslim community accepts them only as “ignorant” Muslims because they lack religious knowledge and ignore basic Islamic practices; some Romanian converts do not accept them as Muslims at all and interpret their interest to Islam as an opportunist way of getting social help by visiting the mosques or Islamic centers. Because of mainly social reasons, the non Roma native Muslims are generally embarrassed and cautious in collaborating, affiliating with them or actively integrating Horahane Roma in the larger Muslim community. Some non-Roma Muslims are even happy when Roma Muslims convert to Christianity. Native Turkish Muslims identify them as “Roma”, not as Turks.

The other Roma communities label them as “Turks” and the official Romanian Roma NGOs do not interfere in their community affairs,

respecting their special cultural attachment; however they did integrate Horahane Roma in different local social programs, eligibility being based only on ethnicity. In fact, Muslim Roma identify themselves as Horahane / Xoraxane / Corahai / Xoraxaj Roma, meaning “the one who speaks Turkish”, in the Romani language. In the first part of the last century, over 20,000 Spoitori Roma (traditionally galvanizers of metal pots) and Boldens (*Boldo* in Romanes means “baptized”) —previously Muslims—were collectively converted to Christianity by being stimulated with high rewards: plots of land, the opportunity to build their own house. Nevertheless, they preserved one Muslim name and one Christian name, they did not accept any icons or religious symbols that anthropomorphize God and celebrated Hâdârlez instead of Eastern in the house.²⁷ A general tendency in the Romanian Roma community is that once the individuals succeed in being socially integrated, they try to deny, hide or ignore their ethnic background in order to avoid the social stigma. The same happens in the Muslim Roma community: if some individuals get a higher education or integrate in the local Tatar-Turkish or the larger Romanian society, they tend to identify themselves as Turks; many of them already left to Turkey. Other Muslim Roma try to be in contact with the local Turkish or Tatar-Turkish social or Islamic organizations, but do not have an organization of their own.

Horahane Roma belong to the Sunni branch of Islam and follow the Hanafi school. They maintain the practice of circumcision, a ritual marking the two to seven year old aged boys' entrance in the community as purified members. The ancestral traditional Roma culture of purity centered on the categories of *ujo* (pure) and *melalo* (impure) is enhanced and confirmed by the Islamic prescriptions regarding the *halal* (allowed) and *haram* (prohibited); the traditional rituals that include charms and other specific traditions regulate the life of the Roma. Divination and the belief in demons are other strong religious representations that might externally contradict the Islamic faith but nevertheless are integrated in the Horahane Roma spiritual life. The community is consolidated by two types of relations: blood ties and Hanamic tradition, namely, the vow between parents that their offsprings will intermarry.²⁸ They also imported from Christianity the tradition of godfathers, these usually being chosen from the people of authority that could protect the new couple.

Hâdârlez, called the “Turkish” or “Gypsy Easter”, a very syncretic spring festival that unites many Christian and Muslim symbols²⁹, is celebrated by all Muslims from Dobrogea on the 6th of May; Muslim Gypsy invested the practice of jumping over the fire set in front of their houses with purifying qualities, considering it an expiatory ritual and also, reminiscence of their ancestral beliefs, as a powerful method of expelling the bad spirits.³⁰ They also light candles, give alms and receive alms; lambs are slaughtered for protection from diseases and good fortune.

Nowadays Roma Muslims work for sanitation companies, perform manual work on docks, serve as helps in the markets or on construction sites, beg and engage in petty thefts. They live off child support payments or, the luckiest ones, off the meager social assistance offered to them. Poverty is widespread and severe. Muslim Roma are affected by the high level of exclusion on the labor market even if they have higher education – one of the reasons for not declaring their ethnic background. Women do not engage in prostitution, but are the most exploited in the community; some of them are allowed to attend school up to no more than the 4th grade³¹. They marry early (girls at 13-14 years old, boys at 15-18) in an almost still endogamous society, few of them are polygamous but, strangely enough, without respecting traditional Islamic limitations (one person in Babadag had 12 wives, another one 5). Consanguinity (marriages between second degree relatives) is still present. Men do not wear traditional clothing anymore; women gave up the veil, but cover their hair partially with a red scarf; some still wear *shalvari*. The girl receives *mahr* – dowry – and her virginity is checked. It is said that Roma Muslims from Tulcea, for example, resisted conversions even if they were granted social help from Pentecostal Christians. In general, Roma Muslims do not participate in collective mosque events, except for the main annual Islamic celebrations and sometimes for the Friday prayers.

Roma Muslims were and are still *pariah* in the Romanian society. Accused of refusing to integrate in and adjust to mainstream social life, they are unilaterally blamed for their traditions, the social, economic, educational causes of their *status quo* being approached in an ineffective manner as it does not take into consideration their own views of the social organization and the necessity of preserving their collective identity. Being oppressed for centuries, their opportunism (a particular basis of Roma ethnogenesis) in embracing the local religion is understandable given their precarious social condition and the necessity to survive and be tolerated by adapting to the dominant cult and culture. Nevertheless, the cohesion and integrity of Roma community was maintained by holding strong to specific values of Roma religiosity whose essence is constituted by an esoteric spirituality.

Vasile Ionescu explains this syncretic Roma spirit of assuming different ideologies while still preserving a sense of solid spiritual identity by emphasizing the original oriental Roma religious and cultural fundamentals centered on the individual relation with the divinity.³² Roma did not have churches or mosques in Romania, they were not attracted to an institutionalized method of experimenting the closeness to divinity; trance, different forms of meditation similar to Islamic *dhikr*, music³³ and dance were values of the general Roma spirituality and means of ecstatic union with divinity in a world that is just a Purgatory (sin is not eternal). These Roma practices and their mystical view of life and God resemble deeply, in the author's opinion, the Sufi type of spiritual, interior culture

and they resisted obstinately to any external formal conversion imposed by the rules of the mundane realm.³⁴ The fundamental Roma spiritual elements interacted with and adopted different shapes according to the resonant elements from Christianity or Islam. Therefore, Muslim Roma religiosity cannot be understood unless a shift of paradigm is operated as they do not subscribe to any rigoristic definition of Islam. Their religiosity conforms to a model of expression full of pathos. Theoretically the Qur'an marks their religious guidance, but practically, as Roma tradition does not revolve around a book, the other direct, immediate, non-discursive, individual ways of connecting with and melting into the Divine is what functions. Of course, Vasile Ionescu emphasizes, the lack of appetency for modernity and the confinement to the past are negative effects of this Roma spirituality. Roma intellectual elites should assume the process of unblocking tradition and modernizing their own culture in order to preserve its ethos, assuming the ethic imperatives of civility.

If some Muslim Roma lost their religious consciousness completely and others preserved it in an essential form as a mystical communion with the divinity, lately there has been a wave of Islamic reviviscence among some Roma Muslims that try to conform to a more conventional, institutionalized understanding of Islam. Nerdin Bari, the president of one of the most active Islamic NGOs in Romania, *Islam Today Cultural Center* Constanta, who has been in direct contact with all Muslim communities in the area due to the many charitable and educational programs endorsed over the past years, declared that in Dobrogea four types of Roma Muslims could be identified. The first one is comprised of the emancipated, modern, newly rich Turkish Muslims; only their new generation started to attend the school. The lack of education is still widespread despite their financial means exhibited intentionally in their possessions (houses, carpets in the yard, expensive clothes etc) and lavish, overt donations at weddings or other public events. One of the most crowded mosques in the area belongs to them, some of them fast even more than the local non-Roma Muslims; they respect the Qu'ran (they would say the truth if asked to swear on Qu'ran, they do not steal from the mosques) and the imams. Some of the Roma Muslims studied in Turkey and came back to their community to serve as local imams; the improvement of the social status allowed for more contacts with the local Turkish-Tatar community, but also with Turkish businessmen from Turkey and stimulated a religious fervor.

Another category is that of the poor Turkish Roma who used to have a nomadic life, travelling through villages offering their services as potters, now found in a difficult situation and decreasing in numbers; they are more isolated and get in contact with the official Muslims only on special events (weddings, deaths and celebrations). Other Roma Muslims, attracted by the Tatar's cultural status, pretend they are Tatars, but their language is too corrupt to be recognized by Tatars as part of their

community. The last Roma group assumes an Islamic identity and has a special language, *hâdârî* that is different from both Turkish and Rromani. All of these practicing Roma Muslims imitate and adopt the customs of the Tatar-Turkish community, including the “non-Islamic” ones, according to the mainstream “universal” Islam criteria: celebrating Hâdârlez, offering alms (a Christian imported tradition), asking money for reading the Qu’ran for the dead or at other events, sacrificing a lamb on the tomb of a Sufi saint and many other local “unorthodox” traditions. Some Roma Muslims do not bury the deceased on the same day, but hold a wake for him, as in the Christian funeral ritual.

New Muslim Communities

The New Comer Community

As we mentioned above, the religiosity of the indigenous Tatar-Turkish Muslims reflects the religiosity manifested in general in post-communist Romania, the religiosity of the Roma Muslims has different patterns of manifestation that range from deeply mystical, individual re-connection to divinity to conventional local Islam. The newcomer and convert Muslims subscribe to different paradigms, often more intense and problematic if analyzed in relation to the Romanian context.

Many Muslims entered the country especially between 1970-1980 in the communist era, due to the political and economic collaboration between Romania and some African and Arab countries.³⁵ After 1989, many Arabs (from Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine), Iranians, Kurds (Turkish and Iraqi) entered Romania, but their community is completely isolated by the old Muslim community. They have their own schools, mosques, cultural centers etc and are not a stable community.³⁶ After the European Union accession (2007) migrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, North Africa (Algeria and Morocco) became more numerous. The members of this category are very diverse: many do not have higher education, some are students or former students, businessmen, professionals, economic migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers. These immigrants invested in Islamic education, publications, scholarships, mosques, engaged in charities and established associations and foundations.

Dispersed all over the country, the new comers’ cultural understanding of Islam interferes, collides and sometimes overlaps with the indigenous Romanian Muslims interpretation of Islam; if the latter are more integrated in or sometimes even completely assimilated by the Romanian society, the former often have difficulties in adjusting to it. To the old, local Muslims’ syncretic religious elements, popular superstitions and local traditions considered innovations in *Shari’ah*, they oppose the different versions of official mainstream Islam popular especially in Middle East. However, if initially the newcomers’ communities displayed a certain degree of anti-Western attitudes, we cannot stereotype them. Ma-

ny have accommodated and adjusted to the Romanian society to different degrees: some have become nominal Muslims, completely assimilated and secularized, others started to develop a positive attitude towards Western cultural values, often identifying the connection with the Islamic ones, while preserving their religious identity. Many learnt to understand religion as a private matter of consciousness. Of course, another category remained isolated and hostile to the local culture, be it Islamic or secular, rigidly opposing their Islamic ideals to the Western world, perceived as a monolithic, homogenous reality that concentrated only the antinomic values of Islam. In general, a stronger conservative view is manifested among the members of this community as the inherent tendency of preserving their own culture is also associated with a certain way of understanding Islam.

Converts

We must specify that the convert Muslim Romanian community—even if it does have some particular traits that could individualize it—is not ideologically separated from the newcomers', but mainly diversely affiliated to it. Converts represent “a minority inside of a minority” and also the product and the mediators of the meeting between Islam and Europe; they offer legitimation and confirmation of choosing Islam.³⁷ The freer and the more non-problematic the rejection of some cultural traditions associated with Islam—a less conditioned dynamic that allows the passage through different phases of understanding Islam, as Islam is perceived as a conscious, spiritual choice—the better is the Romanian convert community's capacity to integrate their Islamic and European identities. On the other hand, in accordance with the ideological prism through which Islam is internalized, converts can manifest dramatic changes, including the repudiation of everything related to the Western culture, vision that can weaken even their family ties and compromise their integration in the Romanian society. They are the ones who long to live in an “Islamic” country and feel their spiritual life would be better, if their choices and those of the people around them were limited to traditional Islamic views.

Even if many of the “relational conversions” have a striking feminine dimension, lately “rational”, intellectual conversions³⁸ have also dominated both genders in Romania. Converts have two official Islamic organizations to represent them: ARCI (Association of Romanian Converts to Islam) and the Romanian Muslims Association, but they mostly attach themselves to other NGOs dominated by immigrants according to their preferred interpretation of Islam.

The newcomer and convert Muslim communities are organized and re-grouped according to multiple intersections with other national and sectarian factors. We will try to emphasize and exemplify different modalities of manifesting religiosity according to these additional lines.

Sunni groups

Sunnis represent the majority of Muslims in Romania; they are better organized and more active than the other confessional groups. The following interview with the president of Islam Today Cultural Center Bucharest, Abu Ula Al Ghaiti, outlines some of the common ritualistic dimensions that permeate the religiosity of a newcomer of Arab ethnicity intensely involved in promoting Islamic activities and knowledge. The interviewee declares that his personal expression of faith is manifested through prayer, fast, going to Hajj, isolation in the mosque for praying and reflecting; being a believer is associated with higher responsibility and a stronger sense of duty, especially in turning people to God. He speaks often and in different contexts about Islam and initiates the discussions trying to explain certain misconceptions. The most important practice of manifesting religiosity is moral behavior. He prefers the teachings of the scholars who are living in Europe or travel here often as they can understand better the local problems and can offer more flexible solutions. He encountered no difficulties in practicing Islam in Romania, but considers that the Muslim community is not effectively integrated in the larger society.

The president of *Crescent Foundation*, Nakechbandi Ahmed, offers a similar perspective: faith fluctuates, but it is necessary to remain within certain limits in order for the Muslim to be identified as a believer; the supreme goal in life is Allah and religion is just a means to it that consists of good intention and correct practice. The real manifestation of the belief in the heart is in the external good behaviour and good character is exhibited in relation with any human being. As an individual, he admits that he practices Islam better in Romania and has more religious freedom, but considers that a country with a dominant Muslim population offers better conditions from the perspective of the community that respects the Islamic tradition.

Case study - the verdict on Christmas. Muslim Sisters Association advised, according to some neotraditionalist Sunni scholars' verdicts, not to celebrate the festivities of non-Muslims because some ignorant Muslims celebrate Christmas as they celebrate the two Islamic fests or even more, and this is unlawful. However, exchanging gifts and congratulations is allowed if it does not involve any explicit or implicit recognition of any aspects of Christian faith and if there is some relationship or fellowship link that deems positive social interaction. "As for patriotic or national celebrations and festivities, such as Independence Day, Union Day, Mother's Day, Childhood Day and the such, there is no objection whatsoever to a Muslim congratulating others in those regards, and indeed to participate therein as a citizen of those lands, while observing Islamic manners and controls in all matters."³⁹ The influent Islam Today Foundation emphasizes the same ideas: it is allowed to congratulate Christians,

Muslims must respect their beliefs, traditions, but it is forbidden to imitate them. Muslims cannot lose their own identity and religion. Celebrating non Islamic religious events is a sign of weak belief and ignorance and a shameful adoption of immoral traditions; the main argument is that following different customs means worshiping and worshiping anything that was not required in Islam is strictly forbidden.⁴⁰ Both NGOs did not publicly or officially issue any congratulatory message to Christians on any religious Christian celebration.

This intermediary type of discourse allows us to distinguish between a latent conflict and a frail definition and delimitation of the Muslim Self in a different cultural context. The construction of Muslim identity and religiosity depends on the expurgation and isolation from any other non-Islamic elements. What is not religion-related is tolerated.

However, another Sunni association, less active than the previous ones and guiding a smaller and more heterogeneous Muslim community, *the Iasi Cultural and Islamic Centre*, posted directly a congratulatory message to Christians, wishing them a Merry Christmas, health, peace and joy.⁴¹ Surprisingly, without mentioning the origin of the copy paste, but putting aside the Sunni-Shia rivalry, they quoted the explanation offered by the Shi'a *Association Gate of Knowledge (Poarta Cunoasterii)*, even if it contained the verdicts of some ayatollahs. The Sunni-Shi'a hostility was overcome for the sake of argumentation, but a trace of discomfort remained as the association cautiously avoided quoting the original source.

Sufi groups

A different way of expressing Islamic religiosity within the Romanian Muslim communities belongs to the Sufi-oriented Muslims that are either intellectual Romanian converts who approach Islam from an esoteric metaphysical perspective, in the line of Rene Guenon's perennialism, or Sufi Turkish Muslims that attend special mosques centered on a more intense ritualistic Sufi practice, or converts and immigrants that follow a special Sunni-Sufi interpretation of Islam promoted in Romania by the Fattabiouni project that is quite paradigmatic for this group.

The *Fattabiouni* discourse, even if centered on *Sunnah* as a valid prophetic model, differs dramatically from the Salafi one that emphasizes only its legalist role. Bolbol Ana-Maria, one of the initiators of this project in Romania, asserts that individual religiosity must be approached holistically: even if, externally, it is manifested by the normal ritualistic acts (prayer, charity, fasting etc), must necessarily be doubled internally by a conscious self-analytical process of incessantly improving your character, attitude that automatically reverberates positively in the social interaction and integration. "Being religious means respecting the moral values" and the main practice of manifesting this religiosity is "through the servitude towards the other human beings, irrespective of their race,

religion or social condition". "A means of measuring religiosity consists in the love for God... and in the way we allow our characters to be improved and be positively transformed by the Prophetic traditions"; the practice of some formal injunctions is sterile if not associated with a personal *metanoia*.

The freedom of religion and democracy specific to the European Romanian context helps the Islamic manifestation of religiosity with one exception: labor market discrimination of women who wear the veil. Islam and Western culture are not seen in conflict, but rather united by the same set of human values; being a Muslim convert does not mean abandoning the national identity and culture in favor of adopting the Arab culture. Variety is allowed in the manifestations of religiosity as long as Islamic principles are respected. The tendency of victimization and self-isolation of some Muslims creates a unilateral, negative view on Western culture that fosters biased and radical attitudes towards it; this problematic social condition could otherwise be prevented by active, "programmed" integration and by the involvement of Muslims in various social and cultural streams of society.

We note some fundamental special traits of this type of Sufi religiosity: its universality—religiosity is perceived as a value and not as formal norms or rigid acts; major emphasis is placed on morality and ethics; acceptance of multiple identities that can coexist in a European context; spiritual discipline that involves notions of love and purification of the heart.

Case study – the verdict on Christmas. The Fattabiouni team congratulates constantly the groups of other faiths on their celebrations (Christmas, Eastern, Passover etc) and also on other type of non-religious events (1st of March, National Day, New Year Eve etc). They do not identify any threat on the Muslim identity or incompatibility with the Islamic rules.

Shi'a Groups

Shiites are an isolated minority in Romania. The Gate of Knowledge (Poarta Cunoasterii) is the only association that has recently started to publish books and articles about Shi'a Islam in the Romanian language, with a special emphasis on the mystical and philosophical dimension of the Islamic tradition. The rituals and sources of knowledge are usually similar with those from the country of origin; there are no significant local interpretations promoted as mosque discourses concentrate on basic religious subjects that are not influenced by a European context.

Asked about Islamic religiosity, the representative of *Islamic Cultural Center Grozavesti* emphasized that Qur'an and *Sunnah* are the main sources of guidance in daily life that promote an uncompromised humanistic theology. This is what determines him to identify, besides the five Islamic obligations, as one of the main manifestations of religiosity the effort of trying to be "a real human being and humane according to the imam Ali's

model: «... be aware that people fall under one of two categories: they are either your brother and sister in faith, or they are your counterpart in humanity»." He sees the moral and useful social behaviour as a spiritual test and part of the religion as "the human being must work for this life as he would live forever and work for the Afterlife as if he would die tomorrow". Islam and Western culture are inevitably connected by their common spiritual origin and this allows the interviewee to identify a set of common values; as a refugee, since he has been living in Romania, his belief became stronger and had no difficulties in practicing Islam.

Case study - the verdict on Christmas. Poarta Cunoasterii Association dedicated a long article to the event, explaining why congratulating non-Muslims or even participating together with Christian friends or family in the Christmas festivals or in other non-Muslim festivals is allowed.⁴² The arguments were rational and religious, based on the verdicts of some aya-tollahs that sanctioned this kind of participation as long as the individual continues to respect Islamic dietary regulations and moral behaviour. Being together with your non-Muslim family or friends or colleagues does not mean you automatically abandon your beliefs and agree to or adopt some Christian beliefs as faith is a conscious, assumed conviction and does not change just because you are in a place or in a certain circumstance. Being in good relations with other human beings and being together with them at their happy or tragic events is part of *muamalat*, social interactions, not of *aqidah*, personal Islamic beliefs. Especially Christmas has a strong Islamic resonance as the Qur'an mentions the day when Jesus was born as a blessed day. However, despite the quite general open Shiite discourse promoted in the mosques or in the virtual space regarding this issue, there were some Shia Muslims who exhibited more intolerant attitudes to Christians, sometimes even paradoxically reiterating the Salafi discourse on Christmas celebrations. It is worth noting that the Salafi methodology has pervaded many Islamic groups, even groups who are officially hostile to this more radical ideology.

Salafi groups

The Salafis manifested a rising influence in Romania in the last seven years, most of the Romanian converts being familiarized with Islam, at first, through the Salafi lens. There are no statistics regarding the predominance of the different Islamic interpretations within the new Muslim groups, but it can be said that the most vocal and the most visible virtual public discourse belongs to the Salafi groups. The converts community is mainly a virtual one, manifested, organized and nourished ideologically by the virtual space, therefore these discourses have an important impact in shaping a certain understanding of Islam. On the other hand, Salafism as a simplified and reductionist interpretative Islamic method has widely penetrated the Muslim communities so that even other confessional

groups involuntarily adopted a type of argumentation alien to their own tradition.⁴³ This can be noticed even in Romania.

The success of Salafism in Romania is strange as Muslims here do not live in an Islamophobic environment that could foster fundamentalist reactions. The possible explanations could be: the believer's unconditional obedience to scholars (the most active sites and preachers are the Salafi ones supported by the Saudi petrodollars—Romanian converts just reproduce a decontextualized, universal truth); a preference for a dichotomous, un-nuanced reasoning; the need for certainty and simple anti-intellectualist recipes of embracing a validated, mainly externally expressed religiosity; the lack of more visible, more promoted Islamic alternatives.

Case study – the verdict on Christmas. *Islamhouse Romania*, an official Salafi site, posted a verdict quoting the opinion of some famous scholars: celebrating or simply participating in any religious festivals other than the only two Islamic celebrations is completely forbidden, *haram*, regardless of the reason behind it (even simple manifestation of friendship or timidity in rejecting the offer of joining the non-Muslims), as it means making a compromise in Islam and helps enhancing the pride of the unbelievers regarding their religion. The *fatwa* is valid regarding any non-Muslim celebration, not just Christmas. Any imitation of the unbelievers is an innovation as Muslims were asked to differentiate themselves from Christians and Jews.⁴⁴ Another active convert Romanian blogger, *Eternal Peace (Pacea Eterna)*, dedicated three articles to Christmas event, full with verses and *ahadith* selected to support the Salafis ideas exposed above. The conclusion was that indulgence in participating to non-Muslim celebrations destroys the Muslim's faith and amounts to clear disobedience and ungratefulness to Allah and to a disruption of the natural hierarchy: "Islam and Muslims are the ones who must be followed (imitated) and not the ones who follow others". The punishment for imitating the unbelievers is being resurrected in the Afterlife with them (in the same category).⁴⁵

The Romanian Salafi groups reflect obediently the general Salafi view. Their identity discourse is constructed in opposition to a homogenous, negatively stereotyped Western Self; religious exclusivism, antagonism and a discordant relationship between Muslims and the religious Other are general characteristics of Salafi *manhaj*.⁴⁶ Salafism offers a strong identity in a hostile—or so perceived—society; this helps them form more united and cohesive groups. Puritanism is augmented by supremacist pretensions and self-righteous arrogance toward the Other⁴⁷; condescendence towards Christians and the Muslim Salafi superiority complex are obvious in the verdicts mentioned above.

New Tendencies: Progressive Muslims

Almost nonexistent in the Romanian Islamic landscape, on an organizational level, is the progressive Muslim perspective. One of the defining characteristics of the progressive Islamic interpretation of sacred texts, beside its multiple critical approach, is represented by the promotion of an Islamic vision that is compatible with Western norms and institutions.⁴⁸ The inherited Islamic traditions are deconstructed critically by exerting a new *ijtihad* based on contemporary suppositions regarding gender equality, human solidarity, pluralism, social justice and on a more contextual and historical presentation of the whole diverse range of Islamic interpretations and practices.⁴⁹ Some very few converts started to expand, by individual study, their interest in the progressive Islam. They are still not organized in specific formal or informal groups – but they are trying – and do not have an impact on the larger Romanian Muslim communities, representing very isolated and divergent voices. Nevertheless, their set of ideas, values and the methodology adopted in understanding the Islamic texts is in accordance with the progressive Islamic vision.

A converted Romanian Muslim woman, previously a traditionalist Sunni, recently interested in progressive interpretations of Islam, marks her main transformations in understanding Islam and manifesting religiosity: she still values positively and practices the major Islamic religious duties (prayer, charity, fasting), but she feels she enhanced her religiosity by accepting the preeminence of the ethical Quranic values over many prophetic traditions and by cultivating the love towards any human being, disregarding his/her religious or a-religious adhesion. This is a programmatic non-judgmental attitude based on the Quranic principle of the divinity as the only Judge of the truth and piety of every individual. Antisectarian and antiextremist discourses became a constant Islamic assumed attitude; the individual pursue of complex religious and non-religious knowledge is associated with humility and modesty due to the acceptance of the possibility of a plurality of perspectives. Paradoxically, beside the common problem regarding the discrimination in the labor market of a *hijabi* woman, in Romania she experiences problems while trying to integrate in the general new Muslim communities that proved to be still hostile and inflexible while confronted with some delicate, controversial, antisectarian or too liberal topics.

Case study – the verdict on Christmas. The very few progressive Muslims interviewed had no problem congratulating Christians and participating to Christmas feasts.

Discussion

Four different Muslim communities exhibited the most relaxed and confident attitude towards the interaction with non-Muslims during their celebrations. The largest one is represented by indigenous Romanian Sunni Muslims who have a long tradition of tolerance based on certain theological interpretations of Islam and consolidated by the local practical experience of cohabitation. Many other Sunni Muslims that assume an individual reasoning and assessment of their actions—despite the opposite official guidance of some prudent Islamic NGOs—adopted the same attitude. If we take into consideration this historical, constant background, it is feasible to suppose that post-socialist Muslims are moderate not because their religiosity was diminished in a secular and forced homogenous society, even if this is generally true regarding many individuals belonging to different religious traditions striving to survive in a communist regime, but because they had already understood Islamic religiosity in a localized context. Personal knowledge and practice of religion (*aqiydah*) may have been negatively affected in that era, but the local Islamic understanding of social interactions (*muamalat*) was preserved and transmitted as such.

Sufi and Shi'a Muslims' confessional difference in displaying religiosity is tributary to a mystical dimension of Islam that balances the extreme ritualistic and formalistic manifestations of personal belief with a more ethical, even emotional and humanistic perspective conceived as a of an esoteric unity and communion of humanity. Progressive Muslims endorsed the same approach but using a terminology specific to Western culture as religious pluralism, human rights, etc.

Case study findings may suggest that the more it depends on formal rituals, external behavior and rigid canonical displays of religiosity, the more fragile the Muslim identity becomes. A vulnerable constructed Self conceives differences and alterity as an attack against personal identity, hence the increasing aggressive and intolerant, superior Salafi attitudes. The more it is built on universal (and Islamic) values, inner experience, ethical convictions, the more open and capable of integrating alterity and fostering positive relations with people of different religions becomes Muslim identity.

Conclusion

Romanian mainstream population tends to racialize Muslims and treat them as a homogenous block; however, the multiplicity of Islamic interpretations is reflected in the heterogeneous nature of the Romanian Muslim communities. The internal fragmentation and disunity of Muslim communities, intra-Islamic difficulties, ideological and sectarian rivalry,

success of Salafism among certain groups, the absence of stronger and more visible Islamic alternative discourses and the lack of interest in finding adequate mechanisms to facilitate the integration of the new Muslims in society are some of the general problems of the Romanian Muslims. Olivier Roy analyzed the recognition of Islam as a faith and the disconnection from culture. This is a process that has recently started to manifest itself in Romania, mainly among converts and part of the newcomers.

Local Islamic revival has an ethno-cultural dimension (Tatar-Turks community), a religious and even a political one as external disputes are imported in the Romanian context and affects the way Muslims define and practice Islam. Islamic revival manifests differently within the various Muslim groups: some Roma and indigenous Tatar-Turkish adopted the neo-traditionalism consolidated in the second half of the last century and promoted by the most active Sunni NGOs in Romania. Some converts emancipated from the ideological control by conservative and neoconservative Islamic currents and are in search of progressive or mystical interpretations; other new Muslims found peace and safety in the Salafi's certitudes and rigid rules.

Even if we identified different and disputing Islamic Romanian institutions (Muftiate versus the most active Islamic NGOs, but not only these), the interaction that anyway exists at least at the level of the ordinary Muslim population should be transformed into an open collaboration and positive, healthy competition. Internal solidarity of the community could be achieved by transforming the already moderate institution of the Muftiate in a moderating factor able to systematize a cohesive interpretation of Islam consonant with the values of the Romanian society (democracy, social justice, gender equality, freedom of consciousness, religious pluralism etc). The development of a local form of higher Islamic education could offer an alternative option to importing other interpretations of Islam specific to different social and political contexts. Conceptual tools and more sophisticated Islamic reinterpretations that enforce a "multiple critique" could be extracted from the progressive Islamic analysis.

Notes

¹ Martin van Bruinessen, "Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe: Discipline, Authority, and Personal Quest", in *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 3.

² Gyula Kozák, "Islam, identitate și integrare la musulmanii din România", *Sfera Politicii* 138 (2009).

³ The figure might be closer to 100,000 if we take into consideration the non official records (Nuredin Ibram 2007: 135) and the fact that many Roma do not

declare their ethnicity and religion. See Nuredin Ibram, *Musulmanii în România*, (Constanta: Golden Publishing House, 2007), 135.

⁴ See, for example, the way in which Sunni-Shi'a conflicts were perpetuated in the Romanian convert communities – Alak Alina, “The Sunni-Shi'a Conflict as Reflected in Romanian Muslim Community”, *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on Stress & Coping* 20/3 (Routledge 2015).

⁵ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁶ Gemil Tasin, “Peste un mileniu de existență a populației turco-tătare pe teritoriul României”, in *Moștenirea istorică a tătarilor*, ed. Gemil Tasin and Pienaru Nagy, (București, 2010): 8-10. Accessed online on 02.16.2014, <http://tatar.ro/publicatii/Tahsin%20Gemil/PESTE%20UN%20MILENIU.pdf>

⁷ George Grigore, “Muslims in Romania”, *ISIM Newsletter* 3/99 (1999), 34.

⁸ Constantin Iordachi, “Citizenship, Nation and State-Building: The Integration of Northern Dobrogea into Romania, 1878-1913”, *Russian and East European Studies* 1607, (2002): 8.

⁹ If in 1900 there were 260 mosques in Dobrogea, now there are only 80 mosques left, all belonging to the Muftiate.

¹⁰ Adriana Cupcea, “Construcția identitară la comunitățile turcă și tătară din Dobrogea”, *Romanian Minority Studies*, 49, (2013).

¹¹ Georgy Lederer, “Contemporary Islam in East Europe”, *Conflict Studies Research Centre* (1999): 25.

¹² I use here the term “neotraditionalist” according to the classification of Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Abu Rabi'i and others as referring to the last century popular apologetic presentation of the classical Islamic tradition that voluntarily omits and hides some problematic aspects of the premodern understanding of Islam in order to formally adjust to the requirements of a new epoch. Neotraditionalists selectively invoke some psychological, social or scientific Western studies that support their thesis while openly declaring their opposition to Western values and lifestyle. The neotraditionalist rhetoric was co-opted by fundamentalist Islamist movements as a means to legitimize the return to Sharia'h.

¹³ Interview Bari Nerdin, Islamul Azi, Constanta, 02.06.2014.

¹⁴ Nuredin Ibram, *Musulmanii in Romania*, (Constanta: Golden Publishing House, 2007), 162-164.

¹⁵ Paradoxically, in Romania fundamentalist tendencies manifest more within the majority religion than the minority groups. See Sandu Frunză, Mihaela Frunză, Claudiu Herțeliu, “The Situation of Islam in Romania”, in *Studying and preventing the radicalization of Islam. What school communities can do? Final reports Bulgaria, Morocco, Romania & Spain*, ed. Beatriz Molina Rueda, (Granada: Universidad de Granada, Granada, 2009), 187-242; and Veronica Mohammed-Salih, *Minoritarul religios: musulman/musulmană în spațiul public românesc*, (București: Femeia Musulmană, 2013).

¹⁶ The research does not claim to represent a general objective perspective on the whole Turkish-Tatar Muslim community, but it is relevant for the way the members of this community perceive themselves and their community.

¹⁷ Many value *hajj* as a social status suitable for old age.

¹⁸ Many women that belong to the Tatar-Turkish communities do not usually wear the veil.

¹⁹ Frunză, 232-242.

²⁰ http://adevarul.ro/locale/constant/muftiul-yusuf-muurat-liderul-musulmanilor-tara-nostra-Inainte-roman-1_5118a17c4b62ed5875fb8af7/index.html

²¹ Grigore, 34.

²² John Sampson, "On the Origin and Early Migrations of the Gypsies", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2/4 (1923): 165; 157-8.

²³ Dinu Giurescu, *Țara Românească în secolele XIV și XV*, (București: Editura Științifică, 1973), 257.

²⁴ Marushiakova Elena, Veselin Popov, *Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire: A Contribution to the History of the Balkans*, (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 27-29; 34.

²⁵ Oprisan Ana, George Grigore, "The Muslim Gypsies in Romania", *Regional Issues/Eastern Europe*, ISIM NEWSLETTER 8 / 0 1, (1999): 32.

²⁶ Oprisan&Grigore, 32.

²⁷ Vasile Ionescu, *Furtună și Melancolie*, (Iași: Editura Universitatea de Arte George Enescu, 2013). Beside the books, an individual interview with the author provided more information.

²⁸ Oprisan&Grigore, 32.

²⁹ Couroucli, Maria, "Saint George The Anatolian: Master of Frontiers", in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, ed. Dionigi Albera, Maria Couroucli, (Indiana University Press and MMSH, 2012), 132-133.

³⁰ Oprisan&Grigore, 32.

³¹ Some boys study up to the 8th grade in order to be able to obtain a driving license. See Petre Covacef, "Țigani musulmani din Dobrogea", *Transilvania* 4-5, (2007): 40-54.

³² Vasile Ionescu, interview.

³³ Gypsy singers' (*lăutari*) special musical tradition.

³⁴ Many Orthodox or Catholic Roma are converting to the Pentecostal confession nowadays, but the explanation does not reside only in the financial help offered to them as a stimulus for conversion, but also in the promotion of the religious ecstatic techniques and state, *glossolalia* etc.

³⁵ Chiriac, M., M. Robotin, *Necunoscuții de lângă noi. Rezidenți, refugiați, solicitanți de azil, migranți ilegali în România*, Report executed within the program "Minority Rights in Practice in South Eastern Europe" by the Center of Resources for Ethnocultural Diversity, 2006.

³⁶ Grigore, 34.

³⁷ Kevin Brice, *A minority within a minority: A report on Converts to Islam in the United Kingdom*, (UK: Faith Matters, 2010).

³⁸ Stefano Allievi, "Converts and the Making of European Islam", in *ISIMNewsletter* 11, (2002): 1; 26.

³⁹ The Association quoted the following verdict:

<http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/morals-and-manners/social-manners/169282-congratulating-non-muslims-on-their-festive-occasions.html>. On December 22, 2013.

https://www.facebook.com/asociatiasurorimusulmane?ref=br_tf Identical attitudes and verdicts were reiterated on Christmas and Eastern celebrations in 2014.

⁴⁰ <http://islamulazi.ro/forum/index.php?showtopic=6155>. Last accessed on 10th

of February 2014.

⁴¹ On December 25, 2013. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Centrul-Cultural-si-Islamic-Iasi/201468506660857> In 2014 the association maintained its open attitude and constantly issued congratulatory messages on Christian celebrations.

⁴² <http://poartacunoasterii.com/pot-musulmanii-celebra-craciunul-alaturi-de-crestini/> The same verdicts were disseminated in 2014.

⁴³ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001).

⁴⁴ http://www.islamhouse.com/452580/ro/ro/fatwa/Opinii_cu_privire_la_celebra_rea_Cr%C4%83ciunului_de_c%C4%83tre_musulmani_%C5%9Fi_decorarea_propriil_or_case_cu_baloane Identical verdicts were promoted in 2014.

⁴⁵ <http://islamulpaceaeterna.wordpress.com/2013/12/23/islamul-este-religia-ce-trebuie-urmata-si-nu-cea-care-ii-urmeaza-pe-altii/> The same articles and verdicts were promoted during Christian celebrations in 2014.

⁴⁶ Adis Duderija, *Constructing a Religiously Ideal "Believer" and "Woman" in Islam: Neo-traditional Salafi and Progressive Muslims' Methods of Interpretation*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 96.

⁴⁷ Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Ugly Modern and the Modern Ugly: Reclaiming Beautiful in Islam", in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 58.

⁴⁸ Adis Duderija, "Progressive Muslims — Defining and Delineating Identities and Ways of Being a Muslim", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30/1 (2010): 127-136.

⁴⁹ See more on progressive Muslim interpretations in Farid Esack, "In Search of Progressive Islam Beyond 9/11", in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

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