

SÎNZIANA PREDA

FAITH AND PRACTICE ARE DIFFERENT MATTERS IN ISLAM

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Abstract: After the fall of the communist regime in Romania, in the name of their shared religious faith, a series of religious NGOs from Turkey and other Islamic countries expressed their readiness to support the members of the two communities in their search for their lost religious identity after the religious constraints enforced by the communist regime had been lifted in 1989. The fieldwork undertaken as part of a research project on the two historical Muslim communities in Dobruja, the Turks and the Tatars, has shown the involvement of some religious organizations in the life of these ethnic groups. The present study analyzes the feedback on the actions of the aforementioned organizations as they are depicted in oral testimonies recorded in 2013 and 2014 and in written texts (magazines, press releases). The aim of this paper is the description of the interactions between the old Muslim community of Dobruja and their co-believers who volunteered to support them through religious education and social work directed at the disadvantaged groups. Discussing their religious beliefs caused the individuals we interviewed to reflect on another version of Islam, unknown to them before 1990 and promoted today by those who read the Quran literally and follow it to the letter.

Key Words: Turks, Tatars, Islam, Quran, Dobruja, religious foundations, confessional identity

The analysis¹ of the cultural heritage pertaining to the two traditional² minorities from the Romanian Southwest³ has shown that one of their most important means of legitimation is confessional identity. Their Islamic faith set these groups apart from others in the multi-ethnic landscape of this former Ottoman province⁴ and contributed consistently to maintaining their ethnic unity, especially through endogamy. The Islam practiced in these communities is defined by the cohabitation with Christian groups (Eastern Orthodox and Catholic), even if the interactions with these groups were strained for a long time due to segregation, the lack of a common tongue, differences in religion and mentality. During the 20th Century, the communication and interaction between the ethnic groups in Dobruja improved and this process was helped along by the Romanian state until the Second World War. The totalitarian atheist regime of Romania that followed altered the natural progression of minority cultures in Romania. Moreover, it limited the religious freedom of all its citizens. The consequences were visible in the case of the Turkish and Tatar believers as well.

The closing of the religious seminary in Medgidia in 1967, where Muslim religious leaders used to be trained, the inexistence theological departments in universities and the communist anti-religious propaganda have left their mark on the confessional identity of these groups. The absence of ties to religious institutions in Turkey and the general lack of interest in pursuing a career (mission) as an imam (a poorly paid occupation and because of the reduced size of the congregation in rural communities) caused religious education to take place especially at home. Once a new political system was in place after 1990⁵, the situation began to improve – freedom of religion was reinstated, the seminary was reopened (initially as a theological high school which became the “Kemal Atatürk” National College) and the ties with the Republic of Turkey were reestablished. This is the context in which organizations such as “Taiba”, “Tuna” and “Selimiye” were created. Founded in 1999 in Bucharest, the former of these three aimed to fulfill the “religious and spiritual needs of the Muslim population” and to help with the “alleviation, relief, as well as the improvement of the suffering, hardship and shortcomings of all Muslims and non-Muslims.”⁶ The Tuna Foundation was also founded in Bucharest in the mid-1990s and has a cultural agenda which focuses on the consolidation of ties between Romania and Turkey. The goals of this organization are to become familiar with the Turkish tangible and intangible cultural heritage and to offer social assistance to certain groups.⁷ The social programs define the intentions and actions of all the these foundations: the Selimiye Association for Mutual Aid has recently opened a soup kitchen in Mangalia, and the Islamic Service Foundation offer their material and spiritual (religious) support in places with large Turkish and Tatar communities⁸ (Cobadin village, Valul lui Traian village and cities like Medgidia, Tulcea, Brăila, Constanța, București).

People facing financial difficulties, regardless of religion or citizenship, may benefit from the support offered by these foundations, but they especially cater for the needs of the old Muslim community of Romania, intending to communicate to them the essence of Islamic culture: "Given the fact that most individuals who benefit from our support have Muslim origin [religion, author's note], our foundation has programs which teach reciting the Quran and following Muslim rites and provides the space in which religious those rites can be performed."⁹ After 1989, through courses taught by imams who had come from the Republic of Turkey, with the support of the Islamic Muftiate of Romania and of foundations like Tuna, learning how to read the Quran in Arabic became possible. "Why? What was the purpose? So that they could at least read the verses, so that they could pray."¹⁰ Among the Turkish and Tatar elders of Dobruja, there are still individuals today who are familiar with the Arabic alphabet and can read religious texts with relative ease.¹¹ Once the Latin alphabet was introduced during the interwar period, Arabic was no longer studied. During the Communist period, Turkish translations of the Quran circulated.

Since the 1990s, Arabic editions of the Quran were donated to mosques in Dobruja, thus raising the problem of accessibility for their Turkish and Tatar followers. The courses were particularly appealing to the elderly, who make up most of those who attend mosques, especially in villages. "At 60, I learnt how to read Arabic."¹² Another targeted group were school children: some of them live in homes or "iurt" (from Turkish word "yurt") built with funds provided by Taiba and the the Islamic Service Foundation. "They come from this Islamic foundation, but I don't know what it's called, if it even has a name. They call it Islamic foundation, and it has a mullah who comes here for an hour or two; he meets with the children and teaches them prayers. Those who are more advanced learn to write in Arabic, I think."¹³ As it is, in the view of the leaders of these foundations, it is especially the younger generations who need to become more familiar with the teachings of Islam ("promoting and spreading Islamic culture"¹⁴) since they grow up in a non-Muslim society, defined by different cultural schemata.

The image of organizations such as Tuna and Taiba was constructed during the past decade through their implication in the life of the Dobruja communities at certain important moments such as religious holidays of Islamic calendar or in times of need (for example, the floods of 2005). During the fasting days preceding the Ramazan Bayram, Tatar and Turkish believers receive aid from these Muslim foundations as well. "My wife, my daughter and I, all three of us fasted and the Union sometimes sends us aid, a package now and then. Oil, sugar, rice, flower, whatever they have. Sometimes the Arabs send things too, or the Muftiate."¹⁵ "Arab" is the term that members of the Turkish and Tatar communities in Southwestern Romania use to refer to the citizens of various Arab states,

as well as the leaders of the Islamic foundations.

On Kurban Bayram, when animals are sacrificed for the souls of the departed or for the health and wellbeing of the family, meat is given to the poor.¹⁶ The two representative unions¹⁷ and the above-mentioned foundations give out packages containing meat (and other food items) to the members of the Turkish and Tatar communities of Dobruja. "The Feast of Sacrifice" (or Kurban Bayram) was also an opportunity for unions and religious organizations to work together. In 2005, the event brought together representatives of the U.D.T.R.¹⁸, of the Turkish Consulate in Constanța, of the Islamic Muftiate, of the Taiba foundation, local authorities and Turkish business people. In 2014, the Tatar Union along with the Tuna foundation and the Constanța city hall gave out approximately 4.000 kebabs¹⁹, a gesture which improved the image of these institutions considerably. It is not just holidays which offer the opportunity for these institutions to make their presence felt. Taiba stood out through the monthly aid offered to people of lesser means, some of whom were identified and recommended by the Turkish Union. "The Taiba foundation is active in the social protection field, aiming to offer aid to all disadvantaged groups (the elderly, the unemployed, the disabled, the sick, widowed women, the poor) in order to offer these groups a more dignified, more decent and more civilized living."²⁰

Larger-scale actions of the foundation which have remained in the collective memory of the Dobruja communities are connected to the floods of 2005. The Constanța county was one of the most affected in the country. Taiba sent tons of potatoes to the villagers of Tuzla²¹, offered money to the families who had suffered major losses²² and together with other foundations supplied them with food, clothing, building materials etc.²³ Their involvement was evident not only in the online media, but also in the official publication of the U.D.T.R., the newspaper "Hakses", in which the president of the Religion Committee stated: "I wish to point out the financial aid that this well-meaning foundation gave to orphans, those affected by the floods as well as Muslims in need."²⁴ The support offered by these organizations takes other forms as well:

"for instance, we had a problem in Ovidiu, the foundation helped her because she couldn't take it anymore, a nasty form of cancer. (You mean there was a woman here who was ill?) – Yes, she was very young, she was 26, and she had run out of money...(Was she Muslim?) – Yes. And they helped her like that...I find that good. (This foundation that helped her is also from Ovidiu?) – No. From Constanta. (Is it an Islamic foundation?) – Yes, Islamic."²⁵

Not all those who benefit from the support of these foundations are Muslim. Numerous social cases (such as single mothers, without a stable income to support their children²⁶) are helped regardless of their religious denomination. The Tuna foundation is mainly concerned with groups that are at risk socially, such as rural communities. In Dobromir, where the Turkish minority outnumbers the Romanian population²⁷, the financial situation of many individuals of Turkish ethnicity determined Tuna to intervene in Văleni and Lespezi by providing basic supplies (food, clothing, blankets and duvets, footwear to ease the access of children to school).²⁸

The foundations have also made their presence felt through organizing meals on the "Iftar" (supper during the month of Ramadan at the end of each day of fasting).

"Last year I remember that Taiba, I think, came and organized an Iftar meal at the mosque for the men who had attended the service. And some four or five years ago, Tuna came and organized a meal for Muslims, an Iftar meal, at the community center for the whole community. (For both men and women?)²⁹ – For both men and women, yes."³⁰

The foundations also helped rebuild some of the mosques of Constanta county³¹; last but not least, the organizations financially supported all individuals who wished to perform one of "the Five Pillars of Islam [...] One of the pillars is that once in a lifetime, if you can, you should go on Hajj. Hajj means pilgrimage to [Mecca], to the holy places."³² People who have taken the ritual journey "Hajj"³³, and men who thus receive the title of "hagiu" (plural "hagii") may help the imams perform some of the religious services (the authority of the "hagii" also includes family issues such as divorce and inheritance, his opinion being capable of resolving a conflict³⁴). The journey to Saudi Arabia, accommodation near Mecca implies a substantial financial effort which the elderly (the age segment which contains most pilgrims in Dobruja) cannot afford without the help of their family and other sponsors. Financial aid for this sort of journey, like caring for children in yurts, is considered "almsgiving."³⁵ "It is a type of help, it's...It seems beautiful to me to help; those who are able should help those who aren't."³⁶

Apart from these contributions, the foundations are associated in collective memory with religious education provided at the headquarters of these organizations, and especially in yurts. Run in both urban and rural areas, these homes house children (segregated by gender) of predominantly Turkish and Tatar ethnicity. The pupils attend state schools and at the yurt, where they live, they dedicate more time

(compared to children outside yurts) to religious activities (they participate in gatherings which explain the principles of Islam, they have a prayer schedule). The Islamic Service Foundation runs two such homes in Constanța, one for boys and one for girls³⁷; in Medgidia and Cobadin, Tuna founded homes where the tenets of the Quran and Turkish are taught.³⁸ These projects are attributed to different agents within the community: “pillars of the community, Turks from here”³⁹, funding “from the Republic of Turkey and other Islamic states”⁴⁰, Turkish businessmen (in the case of Tuna)⁴¹; “these yurts are funded by businessmen from Constanța and Bucharest.”⁴² Often the interviewees mentioned that the rural yurts house children whose parents cannot afford to pay for their accommodation away from home. “A lot of children come here to the yurt (in Cobadin) – have you been to these parts, around Dobromir? Băneasa?”⁴³, from villages where people of Turkish ethnicity live in poverty, where the unemployment rate is as high as 80%. The families are large, they live in inappropriate spaces, earn a living from temporary employment, and the rate of illiteracy is high.⁴⁴ Such living conditions make enrollment in schools a hard-to-achieve goal. Supporting children who come from such environments increases the visibility of the foundations within the communities. “Those who can’t afford it don’t have to pay, but they look after them anyway...For the community, I think it’s good, in my opinion!”⁴⁵

A number of families of modest income see the homes of the foundations as an opportunity to offer their children an education at low cost. The yurts even house the children “during school breaks”⁴⁶, when even the local children attend religious lectures. “The children in the yurts come from disadvantaged families, poor families”⁴⁷ “that cannot afford to pay for their children’s accommodation in cities.”⁴⁸ “For example, there is family – let’s say from a village, Fîntîna Mare, which has no financial means, but the child is good, so they take him to a yurt in Constanța; or in one of the other places – Mangalia, Medgidia, Valul lui Traian, Cobadin. Because the child then goes to school in Constanța, it is easier for him to attend university there later because the children are encouraged and supported to do so.”⁴⁹ Another reason for choosing the yurts is the parents’ trust that their offspring will be safe, more sheltered from worldly temptations; here, they receive a moral and religious education which they perceive as authentic because it comes from a “trusted source”; this is because the teachers in yurts come from Turkey or Arab countries. The behavior of younger generations is an important topic in the Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja, although in Dobruja Muslims have a positive image due to the principles they follow (not drinking alcohol, not eating pork, fasting, praying five times a day, the “zakat”⁵⁰). Especially parents from rural backgrounds disapprove of the changes in their children’s mentality due to the liberties advocated by democracy. “As part and parcel of Romanian society, the Turkish and

Tatar youth has the same type of problems, which do nothing but marginalize a large part of us in one way or another.”⁵¹

Broadly speaking, living in yurts is associated with a rigorous religious education. Advocating the consolidation of Islamic principles, the religious organizations target the most receptive age group, the youth. The possibility that the interest of the youth be kindled and maintained is influenced by such aspects as: their growing up in an era of ongoing secularization at a macrosocial level; their religious education being partially different from that of their parents and grandparents; their acquiring of religious knowledge (especially theoretical) in schools⁵²; unmediated contact with the cultural environment of the Republic of Turkey⁵³ (the society, mosques, religious sentiment professed publicly and privately). The Quran is not interpreted and explained exclusively in the homes: “camps for children are organized with the help of the religious foundations, where they are shown the beauty of Islam.”⁵⁴ A certain need, a desire to know Islam in addition to that which is inspired by the family, community and mosque explains the level of interest that the youth show towards the lectures given by foreign follower of Islam.

“I’ve been to many gatherings where an imam, a mullah, comes and talks about things that...about religion! And he explains why this thing or that thing is banned. And you can ask questions – any question you want – you can’t find the answers to, what’s the reasoning behind some rule. Like pork. This was asked once. (Were these gatherings in Cobadin or somewhere else?) – These gatherings were usually held either at the mosque or at the foundation, in a place where a group of Muslim boys was gathered. They ate, talked, drank tea and in the meantime they spoke about religion.”⁵⁵

Some of the teachings of Islam are not sufficiently clear for most followers of this religion; such gatherings supplement the explanations that the congregation receives at the mosque.

In the last two decades greater efforts were made to promote religious education, a process that takes time and has its ups and downs. “I participated in the Religion Olympics (a school contest for elite students), where I noticed that no progress has occurred in religious education. I can see how pupils are losing interest in Religion and Turkish classes. This is the reality. We should offer the teachers refresher courses.”⁵⁶ Gradually, the imams and religion teachers were offered the chance to study abroad at universities of theology through scholarships offered by the U.D.T.R. or using money out of their own pocket.

“As the other religious denominations, we send the imams or the teachers to instruct the students in the true religion⁵⁷, which teaches peace and respect for other faiths. The Religion Olympics is organized. We offer refresher courses for those who teach Religion in schools. We have the Kemal Atatürk high school in Medgidia, in which not only is the Turkish language taught, but the Islamic faith as well. They are taught by teachers who have been well trained and sent here by the Republic of Turkey. The summer courses which take place in most mosques and where Islam is taught, along with how to read the Quran, help complete religious knowledge and dogma. Apart from that, the Romanian Islamic Service Foundations, the Tuna Foundation, The Islamic and Cultural League of Romania, the Taiba Foundation try to help the Muslim youth to become more familiar with their own religion, offer them free accommodation and food, as well as clothing and money and the possibility to publish books.”⁵⁸

Of these organizations, Taiba seems to have managed to provide the most “religious information for all believer”⁵⁹, starting with the publication of several studies about the Islamic faith and culture (35 works) and a monthly magazine, “Islam Today” (at their own publishing house⁶⁰). The following are among these books: “The Miracle of the Quran in Medicine”, “The Miracle of the Quran in Geology”, “The Miracle of the Quran in Astronomy” (by Adnan al-Sharif⁶¹); “100 Haidth Qudsi”⁶² (2007), “Islam and the Other – Who Recognizes and Who Questions Whom” (by Muhammed 'Amarah, published in 2008). In 2006, head of the Religion Department of the Turkish Union suggested that Taiba also translate other works on Islam, which are “useful to the youth, as well as the elderly”.⁶³

The Internet, especially among the young generation, is another means to promote the vision of these religious NGOs. For this purpose, they started a project for the dissemination of information and teaching about Islam online. “Islam Romania” is a platform which defines itself as “the largest multimedia database on Islam”, “the largest library in Romanian about Islam,” a place where those who are interested can find “the most articles on Islam in Romanian.”⁶⁴ The site offers presentations on books about Islamic doctrine and culture and articles explaining topics such as Sharia law, the duties of the followers of Islam, the status of women in Islam, social or psychological issues, prayer and purity rituals; it also offers free access to the issues of two magazines (“Islam Today” and “Annisaa”). The teachings of Allah are spread to children through

brochures created by the Islamic-Sisters Association (part of the Taiba foundation), whose headquarters is in Constanța.

On the same webpage, under the heading “Online School – Let’s Learn about Islam”, “Romanian speakers everywhere, but especially in Romania and the Republic of Moldova” are offered an online course and quiz on Islam.⁶⁵ For the length of two semesters, subjects such as the following are taught: Quran recitations in Arabic, worship rites, Islam today, the Prophet Muhammad as role model for Muslims, the Islamic creed etc. The project is advertised as a means to increase “the low level of religious education in the Muslim community” and to make up for “the lack of teachers and other educators of Islam in most towns other than Constanța.” The leaders of the foundations⁶⁶ think that the following of basic Islamic principles needs to be perfected in the Dobruja communities, considering that the enculturation phenomenon also altered the understanding of some of these norms. Mottos inspired by the Prophet (“If Allah wishes good onto someone, He bestows understanding of Islam”⁶⁷) are meant to encourage understanding and practicing Islam correctly, untainted by personal or collective interpretation (alien cultural models or the influence of other religions).

An example pointed out by the chairman of the Constanța branch of the Taiba Foundation is the inconsistency between the written word of the Quran and the practice of funeral rites in the Turkish and Tatar communities of Dobruja.⁶⁸ “Generally, memorial meal for the dead is performed as follows: at the funeral, the mullah, the imam perform the whole service. After 3 days, a memorial meal is given, on the 40th day, on the 37th day, on the 52nd day...(And on the 100th day?) – On the 100th day, yes.”⁶⁹ As opposed to this tradition, the sola-scriptura followers show that “this type of memorial meal is not mentioned in the Quran or in the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah’s peace and blessings be bestowed upon him!), nor was it practiced by first-generation Muslims.”⁷⁰ For the Turkish and Tatar communities of Dobruja, oral tradition, passed on from generation to generation, functions as indisputable law. “I know that this is how it’s always been and I follow it accordingly. (Is memorial meal for the dead permitted in Islam?) – I’ve heard talk that it may not be and that it’s actually a pagan custom and...But this is how I’ve seen it done and I respect this tradition...”⁷¹ The community follows the example of their forebears, “the good and the old”⁷², for whom they have enormous respect (evident even today in the custom of kissing the hand of the elders and lifting it to the forehead). The tenets of the Quran are treated with respect, but some of them are new to the collective memory of the community and not sanctified by tradition. They remain alien in spite of being advanced by mullahs sent by the foundations or the Muftiate.

Other disputed practices are also related to funeral customs. Those who are familiar with the holy book, affiliated with the Islamic foundations, question the following: the sacrificing of a ram one day

before Kurban; the cooking of a meal for relatives and neighbors by the family when a loved one passes, even though in Islam this task is assigned to the neighbors⁷³; the organizing of memorial meals for the departed⁷⁴ while neglecting to pray permanently for their souls. “Unfortunately, some of the children were too quick to forget their deceased parents. Some of the Muslims in Dobruja even believe that their only duty to their parents is to give alms in their name (*mevlid*) and to visit their graves on Hidirellez.”⁷⁵ There is no doubt that these beliefs are not in accordance with the practices of Islam; they represent customs taken from the majority.”⁷⁶ A part of the imams of the two communities, too, encourage the people to give up these customs. Graduates of the “Kemal Atatürk” National College, some of whom completed their education in Turkey where they came into contact with canonic norms of the Quran, young imams prize devotion manifested through prayer rather than ritual act. Even so, their urge to give up unorthodox practices does not have the radical tone that representatives of the foundations take; this is because, as part of the community, they grew up with a certain mentality and respect for tradition; on the other hand, they realize that a more radical discourse would only alienate the congregation, whose number is waning as it is in an era in which interest in religion is fading. At the same time, imams know that with the increasing migration to urban areas (where many of ethnic groups live together and the cultural levelling is produced), the religious identity of their believers is the best preserved.⁷⁷

The members of the community we interviewed believe that almsgiving in the name of the departed is useful for them on the other side and goes down as a good deed. Giving meat to the poor on the day before The Feast of Sacrifice can only be a positive act, even though it is not written so in the holy book.

“This isn’t so. It doesn’t exist! I looked it up in the holy book, in the Quran and in the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, to see if it exists. But it doesn’t. The text is clear: first you attend prayer and then you sacrifice the animal. I mean on sacrifice day, a prayer is organized at the mosque, a common prayer, and after this is over, you have to go and sacrifice the animals.”⁷⁸

Giving alms in this way constitutes a temporary good deed⁷⁹; the “enduring alms”, the alms that the individual gives throughout his life, is the only one that will be of use to him after death, the only one which endures. Among the acts which are considered enduring alms, the following stand out: building mosques and Islamic centers, as well as social institutions (orphanages, nursing homes), providing free medical care for

the poor, building wells and planting trees, “donating organs for free (during one’s lifetime or after death)”, publishing books or other materials on Islam.⁸⁰ If these goals are hard to achieve (part of them for financial reasons), the devotee can receive clemency in other ways: educating their children in the faith and preaching the “understanding of Islamic law”.⁸¹

Generally, only some of the above-mentioned recommendations can be put into practice by the average Muslim. During the Ceausescu regime, the professing one’s religious faith was a risk. Attending the mosque or performing religious rituals within the family or the community was not prohibited, but was done without the knowledge of the authorities or, sometimes, with their tacit approval. In such circumstances, promoting Islam openly was out of the question. Islamic doctrine was communicated by learned imams until the seminary in Medgidia was closed, and within the confines of the home afterwards (the family is responsible for passing on the practices/ rituals specific to its culture).

The boost of religious knowledge after 1989 reshaped the spiritual identity of Turkish and Tatar Muslims in Dobruja, who no longer only relate to the Christian majority, but to foreign citizens of Islamic faith who visit Dobruja (businessmen, teachers, imams etc.). In this configuration, the main actor is *tradition*; it allowed for the endurance of the ethos, the ethnic particularity, and thus of a particular way of understanding and practicing religion. Because of its orality, tradition⁸², including religious customs, remains a moral authority for the Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja. This is true in spite of the fact that for more than two decades now the community has been exposed to literature on the Quran and on the Hadith, explanations and scholarly works available in mosques, schools and at lectures organized by the Islamic foundations. Sometimes challenged by the leaders of the latter, tradition constitutes the comfort zone for the members of these two ethnic groups. This comfort zone fades as the processes of secularization⁸³ and acculturation intensify.

The elderly, who are the keepers of tradition, are the least open to changing religious customs. This is understood by the adepts of rigidly following the Quran and the imams of the community castigate them for this fact.

“(Do you think there are unislamic customs?) – Uhm, for example, when we go to memorial meals for the dead. (So...) – To officiate. We officiate as the Quran dictates, but there are customs that have been borrowed from Christianity: you have to bring a glass of sherbet and place it in front of the imam for him to bless. This does not exist in Islam. It’s written nowhere that they have to bring sherbet to the imam for him to pray over...But it’s borrowed

from the Christian tradition where you bring water and the priest blesses it. (And you grew up with these customs, didn't you?) – Yes. Yes. (And now you are supposed to remove them from the practice.) – Once I realized that they don't exist, it's not right what we are doing and it is written nowhere in the Quran that this is how it should be done...The Tradition of the Prophet doesn't say that either: of course we are supposed to remove them from practice, are we not?"⁸⁴

What fuels this discord are the stakes of the different actors. For the average individuals of the community, faith is no less valid because it incorporates foreign elements. For purists, on the other hand, strict adherence to the canon represents the guarantee of a particular religious identity, strong and invulnerable. In their opinion, the borrowing of Christian models, which is understandable in a certain historical context, is no longer justifiable today. "It should be mentioned that such ceremonies [memorial meals for the deceased, author's note] had an important role during the communist period because they occasioned the meeting of Muslims. Today, however, Muslims misunderstand the purpose of these meetings, considering them part of Islam, and even blame those who don't take part in them or don't agree with their practice."⁸⁵ The members of these communities, however, see their religious identity as an organic whole, which was shaped in time, combining the holy word with local customs, more or less typical of their ethnic background. Their main concern is preserving the practice, not correcting it. "We remember what our parents did. What they did, we'll do the same."⁸⁶

This discrepancy between the views of the Dobruja Muslims and those affiliated with the foundations is evident in the discourse of the religious leaders of the two minorities. In spite of the communist regime's restrictions of religion, of the fact that the imams were forced to be employed in other jobs as well, and of the ties between these communities and other Islamic countries being virtually severed, the religious identity of this Muslim enclave remained well defined. The community members think that it is precisely this identity that sustained and is sustaining their ethnicity; they also think that it is religion that helped them endure as a separate entity in the multicultural environment in which they live. The spiritual authorities who represent the Turkish and Tatar communities⁸⁷ admit that they think the Islam practiced by other countries should be familiar to the communities, but they prefer that "religion be learnt in mosques. And, of course, in schools"⁸⁸ recognized by the Romanian state.⁸⁹ They fear the infiltration into the community of "a more radical Islam"⁹⁰, the expression of a religious faith taken to extremes.

“The purpose of these foundations – which are affiliated with more radical religious organizations – is like, is similar to Christian missionaries...from other countries, and it is to spread their ideology. Because somewhere in the Quran, as in the Bible, it says: “Spread the word!” So you are supposed to, as a Muslim, preach, to attract the others to Islam, the true religion in...We don’t practice religious proselytism at the Union [Turkish Union, author’s note] or as a community...”⁹¹

The culture of the Turkish and Tatar minorities describes itself as a tolerant one, refusing to participate in games of power against other groups/cultures. “We try to maintain this cultural climate, which has existed for centuries in Dobruja, this harmonious cohabitation and this respect for the values of other religions and in no way to promote a radical Islam.”⁹² The discourse of the Tatar and Turkish religious leaders is characteristic of Islam in the Balkans, part of a tolerant European Islam⁹³, an Islam which developed in the proximity of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, which cannot be separated from the “local allegiances and [a] shared past in the midst of the family of European peoples.”⁹⁴

The disagreements between those who support the strict following of the Quran and those with moderate ideas about the reading and the practice of Islamic precepts can be explained by their different cultural background, through the different role Islam plays in their respective cultures. While the former condemn disregarding some of the thesis of Islam⁹⁵, the latter see fundamentalism as a greater danger than a passive attitude when it comes to their religious faith.

“I want young Romanian Muslims, of Turkish or Tatar origin, to learn religion from its true source, which is the Quran and the Tradition of the Prophet – with no amendments or interpretations of learned Muslims, Muslim theologians, or political interpretations from other countries. Rather than knowing it like that, being influenced by extremist ideas, I would rather have my children not know religion at all.”⁹⁶

In the aftermath of 9/11, religious extremism, especially Islamic fundamentalism, became one of the greatest fears in Christian societies in the United States and in Europe. As concerning Western Europe, J. Waardenburg sees Islam as a religion “still deeply misunderstood.” The reticent attitude towards Muslims is motivated by the fear of being

invaded by a foreign religion, fear that comes from a medieval conception of the world. Added to this is the fear of violence associated with Islamic terrorism. "Perceived as a religion fundamentally opposed to the Christian religion", Islam stands in opposition to Christian civilization, a "deeply humanistic civilization."⁹⁷

The historical Muslim community of Romania does not want to be identified with any form of fundamentalism and has shown concern about intolerant behaviors and bigotry; this happened on some occasion when the Romanian press⁹⁸ pointed out suspicious activities undertaken by the religious foundations in Dobruja. The accusations of fundamentalism were denied by the foundations: "Our organization is legal, the children are educated appropriately and those who accuse us of fundamentalism are making a grave mistake. The children attend public schools, and we teach them Islam."⁹⁹

The training of the teachers in yurts is not always clear or recognized by the Romanian authorities. In oral sources, these teachers are referred to as "imams" or "mullahs" and it is believed that they come from Turkey.¹⁰⁰ In the mosques of Constanța and smaller cities (Medgidia, Babadag, Hîrșova), such Turkish citizens were sent by the Taiba Foundation.¹⁰¹ Some ten years ago, Islam was the topic of some lectures taught by individuals with no professional training in Constanța; these individuals did not have an authorization of the County Inspectorate for Education.¹⁰² "(Is the religious component strong in yurts?) – There are teachers there who help them study the Quran too, for example, in addition to the education they receive in schools. (Are these teachers Romanian or do they come from abroad as well?) – I think they come from abroad as well."¹⁰³

In addition to Religion class which is compulsory in state schools and the sermons at the mosque, some pupils (especially in secondary school) are exposed to the teachings of missionaries in yurts: most local religious authorities consider their teachings on Islam to be rigid. As a consequence, the congregation is invited to learn about religion from official sources. The foundations are given their due (their contribution to the wellbeing of the society is acknowledged), but they cannot replace the legitimate institutions established to promote the religious identity of Romanian Muslims. "We organize activities for the youth, but we cannot offer what these foundations are offering them. I'm glad that these children, through these foundations, have become more familiar with religion, but religion cannot be known through an intermediary. The fact that these foundations have contributed to expanding the youth's knowledge of religion is a great thing, but it's important to know which part of religion these children have learnt. Because, as I've told you, pure religion is clear, it's in the Quran, there are books, the Quran has been translated into Romanian if they don't speak Turkish. So it is very clear."¹⁰⁴ The spiritual support offered by the Islamic organizations is marginal through their position in Romanian society and their relationship with the Turkish and Tatar

minorities, who do not see them as part of their community despite their shared religious faith. "(Don't the yurts compete with local religious authorities?) – No. (For example Taiba, which attracts Turkish and Tatar children?) – Yes, and don't they come back to us? Doesn't the imam from the mosque perform the service? Does the imam from Taiba come to the mosque? Or does he come to the funeral of their parents? It's the imam from the mosque who officiates, outsiders don't officiate."¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

If the foundations' discourse is characterized by a clear adherence to the principles of Quran¹⁰⁶, the Muslim community's discourse, present for hundreds of years in Dobruja reveals the symbiosis of beliefs, usually specific to multicultural areas. Ethnic coexistence implies interdependence, assimilation, but it does not exclude diversity conservation and cultural differences. "Through a study of three ethnic groups [...] Fredrik Barth challenged an old idea that interaction always leads to assimilation. He showed that ethnic groups can be in contact for generations without assimilating and that they can live in peaceful coexistence."¹⁰⁷ The models of religious teachings and practices – as they were transmitted from generation to generation – are the canon of guidance for the Tatars and Turks; thus, a sense of continuity with the time of the ancestors, preservation and respect of tradition arises.

From such a perspective, for the community members there is no fear of distancing (deviations) from the Muslim teachings. Still leaders of Islamic associations (and, generally, the imams coming from Turkey with the consent of the Islamic Muftiate of Romania) consider the connection to tradition as a contamination, minimizing the importance of the acculturation process. In their opinion, the Ceausescu epoch carries the blame for the "Romanianization" of the spiritual identity for Turks and Tatars; however, the insertion of Christian practices within their religious horizon is much older.¹⁰⁸ For the foreign teachers of the Quran, religious customs from Dobruja should be "sifted", separated from the peoples' traditions and folklore elements whose existence is not certified by the Holy Book of Muslims. Nevertheless, the traditional Muslim community from Dobruja subscribes to a moderate, non-Arab Islam, transmitted through the Ottoman Empire, a "syncretic" Islam which reflects the Turks and Tatars evolution through centuries along with populations of different language and religion. "It's good that we say Islam is just one"¹⁰⁹: an Islam whose expressions differ, shaped from one society to another and generating self-identifications, such as Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims.¹¹⁰

Individuals of same religion relate somehow differently to the Quran and especially to The Prophet Muhammad's words, known as Hadith. "How many people have read the translation of the Quran meanings in their maternal language in order to find the content of the divine message? What does Allah tell us in the Quran? What does He want from us..."¹¹¹ The different understanding of the same religious principles¹¹² maintains the border between the Muslims who are integrated in the Romanian society and the immigrants from the last decades. The former see the faith as a permanent state of spirituality; for others, the religious feeling exists primarily through a scrupulous fulfillment of the practices recommended by doctrine.¹¹³ Affiliation to Islam means sharing the same religion, which does not prevent the different groups from considering themselves as being distinctive from the others. Considered by the Turks and Tatars as otherness, the foundations' members are deemed as a recent and transient presence within the religious landscape of the Muslim enclave in Dobruja.

The foundations plead for the revitalization and the correction of implementation regarding religious doctrine; for locals, the reshuffle, understood as canceling certain habits, is considered unacceptable for those raised according to other cultural patterns. The social support offered by associations such as Tuna or Taiba earn appreciation; but the religious propaganda does not. Undertaken more or less explicitly, the role of the foundations' leaders as religious teachers draws complaints from the local Muslim clergy.

"I do not know if the young people who attend these homes [yurts, author's note] also attend our mosques, because it is an individual matter. I want to say, first of all, we – our religion has, there is a very clear verse: "there is no forcing faith". What do we need to understand? I cannot make a young Muslim, who has reached the age of puberty or adolescent, to come and practice religion. It is his duty, in fact it is his duty to choose, to be able to, if he wants to study religion or to come to the mosque. I cannot take him by force, to bring him, come to the mosque, because, look, you are Muslim and you have to do it. But I do not know what their method of reaching those foundations is and how they come into contact with these foundations. Because, you see, we are not able to stimulate in a specific way these young people."¹¹⁴

Imams originating from the local Turk and Tatar communities want

to maintain the limits of a well-balanced Islam, not a militant one¹¹⁵. The last one, referring, in their opinion, to the Arab world¹¹⁶, is associated with an ultra-conservative discourse and attitude¹¹⁷, which compromises intercultural and interconfessional dialogue.¹¹⁸ “From my point of view, practicing a more radical Islam is a sensitive matter.”¹¹⁹ The Muslims from Dobruja adheres to ecumenism, for preventing the atomization in closed communities, an effort to “avoid globalization of [interfaith] hate”.¹²⁰

Beyond discussing the media portrayal of some religious organizations as extremist, our intention was to analyze the relationship between the Muslim minority of Dobruja and the Islamic foundations which are active here and claim to “explain Islam in its true form.”¹²¹ “According to Esack, a reader should understand the nature of the Qur’an in order to understand its message.”¹²² For the Turks and Tatars from Dobruja, the essence of the Quran is the cultivation of each person's harmonious existence with nature and society as a whole. “Never to lie, to have respect for your neighbour and not to harm anyone. But first and foremost not to hurt yourself. Islam does not teach anybody to do wrong; this is the basis of Islamic beliefs. It teaches the respect of nature and respect for your neighbour, even though he is a Christian. Islam is very good at its roots, just like any other religion. No religions teach you to do wrong, to go and kill someone or to harm someone else...”¹²³ The religious component defines the strong core of the Turks and Tatars’ identity¹²⁴; one of the main preoccupations of the Islamic believer being to pass over to the new generations the known faith practices which are given legitimacy by the fact that they come from ancestors. Even though their mother tongue will be lost, even though folklore will survive in a rather patrimonial way, the Tatar or Turk identity will continue through faith in Allah. Without living the religious fact in a scriptural way¹²⁵ (which does not mean that the religious dimension of Islamic identity is not essential in both the individual and the communities’ acceptance of its legitimacy), the surveyed communities still see religion as a good passed down from their ancestors, a gift whose meanings cannot be separated from the traditional patterns, from the forms transmitted from their ancestors. As a well-known member of the community has stated: “Faith and practice are different matters in Islam.”¹²⁶

Notes

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PNII-RU-TE-2012-3-0077, *Cultural Heritage and Identity Dynamics in the Turkish Tatar Community from Dobroudja*.

² By “traditional minorities” we mean the Turkish and Tatars communities in Southwestern Romania as opposed to Muslim immigrants who came to Dobruja in the last 25 years. As it is, the spiritual leader of the two groups, whose modern

history is integral part of founding of the Romanian state, thinks of them as one of the most important and traditional Muslim communities in Europe. The Mufti Muurat Iusuf, in "Câți musulmani trăiesc în România," January 8, 2015, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.capital.ro/cati-musulmani-traiesc-in-romania.html>.

³ The present study processed a few dozen semi-structured interviews in which a major topic was religious identity and the way in which the members of the Turkish and Tatar communities represent theirs.

⁴ For about five centuries, the Dobruja province was part of the Ottoman Empire; in 1878 it became part of the Romanian state.

⁵ At the end of 1989 the communist regime lead by Nicolae Ceausescu fell in Romania and democracy was reinstated.

⁶ Nicoleta Mocanu, "Fundatia Taiba luptă să-și păstreze supremația în comunitatea musulmană," *Ziua de Constanța*, December 22, 2005, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.ziuaconstanta.ro/stiri/deschidere-editie/fundatia-taiba-lupta-sa-si-pastreze-suprematia-in-comunitatea-musulmana-38966.html>.

⁷ "Despre noi," Fundația Tuna, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.tuna.ro/despre-noi.html>.

⁸ The "missionary zeal often goes easily hand in hand with [...] economic motives; it isn't easy to disentangle one from the other." Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 109.

⁹ "Despre noi," Fundația de Servicii Islamice din România, accessed March 3, 2015, http://fsir.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=54.

¹⁰ B. A., born 1967, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Mangalia, August 25, 2014.

¹¹ N. D., born 1948, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Techirghiol, August 28, 2014.

¹² M. M., born 1951, female, Turk. Interview was conducted in Cobadin, March 2014.

¹³ G. V., born 1970, female, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Independența, July 23, 2013.

¹⁴ "Istoria Islamului in Romania," *Istoria islamului*, accessed April 16, 2015, <http://istoria-islamului.blogspot.ro/2009/02/istoria-islamului-in-romania.html>.

¹⁵ A. N., born 1938, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Murfatlar, August 27, 2014.

¹⁶ Melinda Dincă, "Turkish-Tatar Community Analysis. Between Saving the Cultural Heritage and Celebrating Diversity in Dobrudja," in *Theoretical and Methodological Approaches in Social Sciences: Emerging Perspectives*, ed. Marius Vasiliu Ștefănescu (București: Pro Universitaria, 2014), 74.

¹⁷ The Turkish Democratic Union of Romania and Democratic Union of the Turkish-Muslim Tatars in Romania. In the following, U.D.T.R. and U.D.T.T.M.R.

¹⁸ Ervin Ibrahim, "Recepții de Kurban Bayram," *Hakses* 1 (2005): 8.

¹⁹ "Comunicat de presă," *Uniunea Democrată a Tătarilor Turco-Musulmani din România*, October 3, 2014, accessed March 21, 2015, <http://uniuneatatara.ro/blog/articole/961/comunicat-de-presa-03-10-2014.html>.

²⁰ "Ajutor bănesc din partea Fundației Taiba," *Hakses* 1 (2005): 2.

²¹ Mocanu, "Fundatia Taiba luptă să-și păstreze supremația".

²² Firdevs Veli, "Tuzla," *Hakses* 9 (2005): 3.

²³ Melek Osman, "Ajutor umanitar," *Hakses* 10 (2005): 12.

²⁴ Islam Remzi (President of Religion committee, U.D.T.R.), in Firdevs Veli,

“Interviul lunii,” *Haksess* 3 (2006): 19. In the same issue of the publication, the Tuna, Taiba and Avrasya are thanked for collaborating with the Turkish Union in cultural and humanitarian actions. *Haksess* 12 (2005): 11.

²⁵ E. A.-G., born 1970, female, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Ovidiu, September 25, 2013.

²⁶ Fundația Tuna’s Facebook page, accessed March 31, 2015, <https://ro-ro.facebook.com/festivalul.turcesc/posts/615517085216537>

²⁷ In the village of Văleni, over 95% of the population is of Turkish origin, and over 60% in Lespezi. Nuredin Ibram, “La fața locului,” *Haksess* 12 (2001): 2.

²⁸ Yusuf Küçük, “Tuna vakfi, güldürmeye devam ediyor. Okula gidemeyen Dobromirli çocukların kışlık bot sevinci,” November 11, 2013, accessed March 31, 2015, http://www.zaman.ro/ro/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=59333.

²⁹ Due to gender segregation in communal spaces, the Iftar meals, as well as those organized at baptisms, weddings, funerals, are organized separately, those dedicated to men being followed by those dedicated to women. Lately, as a result of acculturation, common meals are organized (especially in restaurants where friends and acquaintances of different ethnicities also participate).

³⁰ G.V.

³¹ Mocanu, “Fundația Taiba luptă să-și păstreze supremația”.

³² N. D.

³³ Or “hağğ”, Ibram, *Islamul*, 18.

³⁴ Mictat Gârlan, *Metodologia cercetării etnopsihologice* (Iași: Lumen, 2011), 204.

³⁵ B. A., born 1928, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Constanța, September 2, 2013.

³⁶ E. A.-G.

³⁷ Mihai Răzvan Rotaru, “Fundația de Servicii Islamice adună recruți pentru armata lui Allah,” January 9, 2006, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.dezvaluiri.ro/exclusiv/73-fundatia-de-servicii-islamice-aduna-recruti-pentru-armata-lui-allah>.

³⁸ Bogdan Chiriță, “Fundația Tuna luptă pentru instaurarea Califatului turc,” November 15, 2006, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.graiuldobrogei.ro/articole/91-fundatia-tuna-lupta-pentru-instaurarea-califatului-turc.html>.

³⁹ E. A.-G.

⁴⁰ I. M., born 1977, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Constanța, July 26, 2013.

⁴¹ Chiriță, “Fundația Tuna”.

⁴² E. M., born 1939, male, Turk. Interview was conducted in Cobadin, July 25, 2013.

⁴³ N. R., male, Turk. Interview was conducted in Cobadin, July 25, 2013.

⁴⁴ Nuredin, “La fața locului”. The following communities also face financial hardship: “Făurei, Hagieni, where most people live on welfare.” The Mufti Bağış Şahingirai, in Firdevs Veli, “Problemele comunității musulmane,” *Haksess* 6 (2003): 6.

⁴⁵ E. A.-G.

⁴⁶ G. V.

⁴⁷ E. I., born 1975, male, Turk. Interview was conducted in Constanța, September 4, 2013.

⁴⁸ E. A.-G.

⁴⁹ E. I.

⁵⁰ In Arab, "Az-Zakat", *Coranul cel Sfânt. Traducerea sensurilor și comentarii* (1th edition), ed. Asociația Studenților Musulmani din România (Timișoara: Islam, 1997). Translated in Romanian as "danie" (almsgiving), it consists of products or money which every Muslim pays (if he has the means to do so). The Zakat is a pillar of Islam and just a form of personal devotion. "but in fact a part of the larger socio-financial system of Islam." Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Zakāh: A Comprehensive Study of Zakāh Regulations and Philosophy in the Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah* (The Other Press, 2011), xix.

⁵¹ Mihai Isac, "Necesitatea moralei religioase," *Hakses* 2 (2003): 3.

⁵² In the Romanian educational system, in classes where more than 20% of the students are part of an ethnic minority, classes are organized (if the parents demand it) to teach the pupils their mother tongue. Turkish and Tatar pupils can choose to attend Islamic Religion class one hour per week.

⁵³ After the fall of communism, and once the ties to their "homeland" were reestablished and strengthened many Turkish and Tatar youth went to Turkey (which they had previously been familiar with only through the stories of the parents) to visit their relatives (repatriated during the interwar period, through a protocol signed by the two states) or to work for a period of time, having the advantage of speaking the language and having the same religion.

⁵⁴ Mufti Bağış Şahingirai, in Veli, "Problemele comunității musulmane," 6.

⁵⁵ S. A., born 1989, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Cobadin, July 25, 2013.

⁵⁶ Islam Remzi, in Veli, "Interviul lunii," 19.

⁵⁷ "The clear word of the Book helps to direct people on the path of salvation and to guide them." Marjana Harget, "Perceptions of Islamic Soteriology and its Interpretations," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* vol. 13 issue 38 (2014): 41.

⁵⁸ Mufti Bağış Şahingirai, in Veli, "Problemele comunității musulmane," 6.

⁵⁹ "Istoria Islamului în Romania," February 14, 2009, accessed April 4, 2015, <http://istoria-islamului.blogspot.ro/2009/02/istoria-islamului-in-romania.html>.

⁶⁰ Mocanu, "Fundatia Taiba luptă să-și păstreze supremația".

⁶¹ "On 25 November this year at Constanta Community Center three books from the Taiba collection were launched. [...] Some members of the U.D.T.R. were also invited to attend this event. Our union was represented by Mr. Remzi Islam, the president of the Religion Committee, as well as many other members. The moderator of this event was Mr. Enghin Cherim, the representative of the Taiba foundation in Constanța. The chairman of the Taiba foundation, Dr. Naji Abu Al-Ula, held a speech, and so did the manager of the "Petre Tutea" Library, Ms. Aiserin Nebi and the headmaster of the Kemal Atatürk College, Prof. Dr. Ibram Nuredin; [...] Publishing books on Islam is one of the most important undertakings of the Taiba foundation because they educate the community on matters of Islamic religion and culture as a complete way of life. For this purpose, the foundation translated and published 25 books so far and has seen to it that important topics be covered, such as the uniqueness of Allah, the devotion rituals, the miracles of the Quran in medicine, Geology and Astronomy." Firdevs Veli, "Lansare de carte," *Hakses* 12 (2004): 9.

⁶² "The term *hadith* is explained as being Tradition of the Prophet, what did he do, what the Prophet said, what you are allowed to do and what you are not allowed to do." O. A., born 1978, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Mangalia, August 25, 2014. "Hadis qudsi" is the discourse of the Prophet revealed by the angel

Gabriel with reference to “the word of Allah, its meaning not its form; as opposed to thhe Quran, which is the word of Allah as meaning and text.” “Coranul și hadisul sacru (qudsi),” December 20, 2011, accessed April 4, 2015, http://islamromania.ro/art-547/coranul_si_hadisul_sacru_qudsi.html. Divine knowledge has to guide the actions of the devotees: “They say that if the word of Allah is spoken in a room, a car or elsewhere, it’s like...blessed. I mean, you have to say, wherever you go, when you enter, “Bismillah”, meaning “In the name of Allah.” S. A.

⁶³ Islam Remzi, in Veli, “Interviul lunii,” 19.

⁶⁴ <http://islamromania.ro>, accessed on April 6, 2015

⁶⁵ “Reîncepe ‘Școala online – Să învățăm Islamul,”” http://islamromania.ro/art-615/re_ncepe_coala_online_s_nv_m_islamul.html, accessed April 4, 2015.

⁶⁶ “Romanian citizens, graduates of the Muslim Theology departments of several countries (Jordan/ Turkey/ France) who are convinced that the have a moral and religious duty to spread what they have learnt to those who didn’t have the chance to study Islam in a state school.” “Reîncepe ‘Școala online – Să învățăm Islamul””.

⁶⁷ “Reîncepe ‘Școala online – Să învățăm Islamul””.

⁶⁸ Enghin Cherim, “Ce-i folosește celui decedat după moarte,” http://islamromania.ro/book/bd074b06c45d10020e1437a885307021/ce_i_folosest_e_celui_decedat_dupa_moarte.pdf, accessed 6 April, 2015, 81.

⁶⁹ O. A.

⁷⁰ Cherim, 81.

⁷¹ A. I., born 1977, female, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Techirghiol, August 28, 2014.

⁷² The heads of the families, the elders, the wise and the experienced. Ilie Bădescu, *Sociologie rurală* (București: Mica Valahie, 2007), 125.

⁷³ Cherim, 82.

⁷⁴ “According to the Quran, yes, they [memorial meals, author’s note] don’t exist. They are performed in Dobruja...It was borrowed from Christianity. It’s memorial meal for the dead, performed on the 9th day, after 6 weeks, after 6 months, just like...But it’s not in the Quran. The Quran says remember the dead, pray for them, but not like we do it Dobruja, with meals, with food, with feasts.” O. A.

⁷⁵ A celebration of spring, characteristic of the Muslims in Dobruja, connected lately with a Christian holiday which commemorates the dead, “Paștele Blajinilor” (Easter of the Meek).

⁷⁶ Cherim, 46-47.

⁷⁷ Marin Constantin, *Apartenența etno-culturală din România în contextul globalizării: criterii antropologice ale etnogenezei și etnomorfozei* (București: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române, 2013), 179.

⁷⁸ O. A.

⁷⁹ “Feeding the poor is not an enduring for of almsgiving because it is only useful for the moment.” Cherim, 35.

⁸⁰ Cherim, 36.

⁸¹ Cherim, 37.

⁸² In Bulgaria, for example, there have been reported cases when the religious ceremonial system (practiced by local Muslims) was affected by Arab influence. Angel Mitrev, “Radical and non traditional Islamic structures and their influence over modern Bulgaria,” 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, 2009), 5.

⁸³ The past decades have seen the attempts of Muslim minorities from the Balkans to reinforce their ethnic identity, which is threatened by globalization and consumerism. Fikret Karcic, "Islamic Revival in the Balkans 1970–1992," *Islamic Studies* vol. 36, issue 2/3 (Special issue: Islam in the Balkans) (1997): 565.

⁸⁴ O. A.

⁸⁵ Cherim, 82.

⁸⁶ E. A., born 1946, female, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Murfatlar, August 23, 2014.

⁸⁷ For Romanian Muslims, the Muftiate is the main administrative institution of the denomination. Its headquarters is in Constanța. It is presided over by a "Mufti", who is helped by the "Sura Islam" (a group of 23 imams of which the mufti is also elected).

⁸⁸ I. M.

⁸⁹ On its website

(http://fsir.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=54), The Islamic Service Foundation in Romania claims that "it is registered with the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations – the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations" for its religious assistance. On the website of the Secretariat, under the heading "Asociații religioase" (Religious Organizations, author's note), no Muslim organizations or foundations can be found (<http://www.culte.gov.ro/asociatii-religioase>).

⁹⁰ E. I.

⁹¹ E. I.

⁹² I. M.

⁹³ Nathalie Clayer and Xavier Bougarel, *Les musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est: des empires aux états balkaniques* (Paris: Karthala, 2013), 14.

⁹⁴ Harry T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society Between Europe and the Arab World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 257.

⁹⁵ Lack of religious instruction, shortage of well-trained religious personnel, scarcity of functioning mosques, and anti-religious propaganda combined to create a generation of Tatars and Turks ignorant about the fundamental principle of their religion. This was a genuine threat to the preservation of Islam in Romania. Fredrick De Jong, "The Turks and Tatars in Romania", 180-181, in Elis Bechir, "Assimilation and Dissimilation: Tatars in Romania and Gagauz in Moldova" (MA thesis, CEU Budapest, 2008), 40, accessed December 22, 2014, http://www.etd.ceu.hu/2008/bechir_elis.pdf.

⁹⁶ I. M.

⁹⁷ Jacques Waardenburg, "Migranți și minorități: religia ca factor identitar," in *Particularisme și universalism: problematica identităților* (Timișoara: Institutul Intercultural Timișoara, 1998), 44.

⁹⁸ As is the case in other Balkan states, the Romanian press often makes claims about the growing number of Muslim immigrants to the Western world and about the consequences of fundamentalism, phenomena which propels Islam into obscurity. "Only seldom is there any counterbalancing information on local Muslim communities. The CEE discourse on Islam is therefore in most cases transplanted, that is, it refers to peoples and events from outside the CEE, with no relation to local reality. The views of CEE audience (except for the Balkans) on

Islam are therefore shaped by external factors.” Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, “Muslims in Europe: different communities, one discourse? Adding the Central and Eastern European perspective,” in *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe. Widening the European Discourse on Islam*, ed. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska (Warsaw: Zakład Graficzny Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011), 17-18.

⁹⁹ Abdurrahman Eynall, president of the Islamic Service Foundation from Romania, in Rotaru, “Fundăția de Servicii Islamice”.

¹⁰⁰ “In yurts I assume they learn about religion, about the Quran, but they are somehow different from actions of the [Tatar] Union or of the Muftiate. They’re different, I mean, in terms of organizational structure, as it were, meaning they are separate actions. There are a lot of Muslims there – all of them, of course, but a lot of them come from Arab countries. Their actions are somehow different. I mean, those from Turkey came and organized something; those from Arab countries came separately and organized something else.” C. L., born 1975, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted in Ovidiu, September 25, 2013.

¹⁰¹ Chiriță, “Fundăția Tuna”.

¹⁰² Rotaru, “Fundăția de Servicii Islamice”.

¹⁰³ A. I., born 1968, female, Turk. Interview was conducted in Constanța, September 3, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ I. M.

¹⁰⁵ O. A.

¹⁰⁶ “Scripture is verbally inspired, inerrant and in toto the source of principles and norms applicable to modern-day life.” Jakobus M. Vorster, “Perspectives on the Core Characteristics of Religious Fundamentalism Today,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* vol. 7 issue 21 (2008): 45-46.

¹⁰⁷ Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology* (Columbus: McGraw Hill, 2000), 119.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, the similarity between “Hidirellez” and “Câșâm” holidays with the celebration of St. George and St. Demetrius. I. Dumitrescu, “Sărbătorile la tătari,” *Analele Dobrogei* 3/1921: 372.

¹⁰⁹ E. I.

¹¹⁰ Even without having used these ethnonyms, some of the participants in the holy pilgrimage talked about a superiority of the Muslims in the Arab countries, and about a visible difference between these Muslims and the Muslims in the Balkans, citizens of Christian countries.

¹¹¹ Cherim, 74.

¹¹² “It is evident in the United Arab Emirates” I was told by my “so to speak mentor” in the Islamic religion, who lived there for 2 years working with marble. He said: “The true Quran and life just as in the Quran can really be lived there”. Because there one does not work [during praying, author's note]...Because they all cover themselves and respect the Quran, because the praying hours are respected. Modernism only exists for those people who want it and have a lot of money.” B. A. (born 1967).

¹¹³ For a comprehensive understanding of the “religiosity” and “spirituality” concepts, see Sahaya G. Selvam, “Towards Religious-Spirituality: A Multidimensional Matrix of Religion and Spirituality,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* vol. 12 issue 36 (2013): 129-152.

¹¹⁴ I. M.

¹¹⁵ Even a certain feeling expressing a fear of religious intolerance characterizes several speeches, we believe that in Romania “there are no significant

fundamentalist movements, organized as such and with a structured identity. We may speak rather about *fundamentalist tendencies* than about the actual presence of a form of radicalism.” Sandu Frunză, Mihaela Frunză, “The Role of School for Preventing Radicalism,” 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, 2009), 272.

¹¹⁶ “not just any Islam, the one “true” Islam of the Qur’an, one that had not been corrupted by centuries of contact with Christianity and decades of atheist distortion.” Kristen Ghodsee, *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 131.

¹¹⁷ “Islamic fundamentalists argue that the Qur’an, as God’s literal and eternal word, should be interpreted according to the literal meaning of the words and concepts. They use Islamic scripture as the filter through which all discussion passes.” Peter G. Riddell, *Christians and Muslims. Pressures and Potential in a post-9/11 World*. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press 2004), 19, in Vorster, 47.

¹¹⁸ “Religious fundamentalism opposes cultural pluralism, religious diversity and multiparty politics.” Vorster, 51.

¹¹⁹ E. I.

¹²⁰ Adrian Severin, “Stabilitatea și sfidările multiculturalismului civic în Europa,” in *Interculturalitate. Cercetări și perspective românești*, ed. Rudolf Poledna, Călin Rus, François Ruegg (Cluj Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002), 25.

¹²¹ “Taiba International Foundation,” last updated January 15, 2007, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.islamicfinder.org/getitWorld.php?id=76071&lang>.

¹²² Vorster, 46.

¹²³ E. A.-G.

¹²⁴ For details regarding self-identification process within Tatar and Turkish communities, see Mihaela Luminița Sandu, *Diversitate etnoculturală și interacțiune socială: studiu de caz Dobrogea* (Craiova: Beladi, 2012), 196.

¹²⁵ “For many Dutch Muslims, being Muslim is the single most important identity that powerfully defines their sense of self (Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007). From the viewpoint of social identity, Dutch Muslims who identify more strongly with their religion are more likely to express their religious identity. Accordingly, highly identified Muslims engage in religious practices more often than those who identify less strongly (Maliepaard et al. 2010). We therefore expect that levels of religious practice and assertion will be significantly related to the importance of religious identity for the individual.” Mieke Maliepaard and Karen Phalet, “Social Integration and Religious Identity Expression among Dutch Muslims: The Role of Minority and Majority Group Contact,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 75, 2 (2012): 135.

¹²⁶ Nuredin Ibram, *Islamul pur și simplu* (Constanța: Golden, 2007), 18.

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