Histoire moderne et contemporaine

"SPEAKING NATIONAL" IN DOBRUCA: MUSLIM ADAPTATION TO ROMANIAN POLICIES BETWEEN 1878 AND 1914

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This article focuses on the adaptation of the Muslim population of Dobruca to Romanian policies instituted between 1878, when Dobruca was annexed to Romania by the Treaty of Berlin, and 1914, the advent of World War I. The Muslim population that remained in Dobruca, rather than emigrating to the Ottoman Empire after 1878, transitioned from being subjects of the Ottoman sultan to citizens of the nation-state of Romania. Instead of opposing state policies that at times were disadvantageous, these Muslims invoked loyalty for the state and the monarchy in order to integrate but still improve their situation within Romania. Muslim elites, who led the community, successfully navigated Romanian society by using claims of commonality or difference to define themselves in a manner that best suited both personal and community interests. In this context, invoking the nation (or "speaking national") constituted a salient tool of social integration for Muslim elites seeking state benefits in order to secure a better standard living for themselves and their coreligionists. The use of national rhetoric helped them to obtain financial and moral support in two of the main areas of Muslim life, the mosque and the school. National appeals allowed both Muslim elites and commoners to adapt more smoothly to the policies that Romanian officials had implemented in Dobruca since 1878. The manner in which Muslims adapted to Romanian policies was indicative of the difficult path of nation-building, citizenship formation, and nationality formation in the aftermath of the military conflicts, border shifting, and population movement that occurred after 1878. This article includes Dobrucan Muslims in the broader process of world reconstruction and emerging identities during and in the aftermath of imperial collapse.

Keywords: Dobrucan Muslims; "speaking national"; loyalty; mosque; school; Ottoman Empire; Romania.

A group of Dobrucan Muslims requested permission to apply for Ottoman citizenship, from their home location in Romanian Dobruca (Dobrogea), in a collective petition addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Istanbul in November 1883[1]. During the same month, Romanian officials from the Ottoman

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capital informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest about this matter in a confidential letter which explained that only the desire to escape national military service could have caused the Muslims to wish to switch from Romanian to Ottoman citizenship. The letter concluded that the Sublime Porte had not responded yet to the petitioners and would probably abstain from doing so since granting Ottoman citizenship to a group of individuals applying from a foreign state was against both Ottoman and international law[2].

Collective petitions of Dobrucan Muslims for Ottoman citizenship were atypical in the period, but individual cases were a common occurrence. Soon after the Romanian state extended the military draft to Dobrucan men aged twenty-one or over in 1883, numerous Muslims moved to Ottoman territories and opted for Ottoman citizenship[3]. Concurrently, there were Muslims in Romania who retained their Ottoman citizenship, declaring loyalty to both the Ottoman sultan and the king of Romania, under whose "paternal protection" they chose to live[4]. Other Muslims, who opted exclusively for Romanian citizenship, considered themselves

[2] Arhivele Ministerului Român de Afaceri Externe (AMRAE) (Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Fond Constantinopol (Constantinople Collection), vol. 110: Dobrogea (Dobruca) (1878–1920).

[3] French historian and honorary member of the Romanian Academy, Jean Henri Abdolonyme Ubicini, who authored studies on the late Ottoman Empire, estimated that approximately 90,000 Dobrucan Turks and Tatars sought permanent refuge in the empire after 1878 (Jean Henri Abdolonyme Ubicini, «La Roumélie Orientale depuis le traité de Berlin», *Revue de Géographie*, tome VI (Paris, 1880); information used by Alexandre Toumarkine, *Les migrations des populations musulmanes balkaniques en Anatolie (1876–1913)* (Istanbul : Les Éditions Isis, 1995), 33, and Alexandre Popovic, *L'Islam balkanique: Les musulmans du sud-est Européen dans la période post-ottomane* (Istanbul : Les Éditions Isis), 197. These emigrants accounted for two-fifths of the entire regional population and almost a half of the total Muslim population of this particular territory (Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 199). In my own research in Ottoman and Romanian archives and libraries I have identified several thousand Muslim emigrants from Dobruca to the Ottoman Empire, but I am unable to provide a specific count for the entire Muslim emigration to Ottoman lands (in Turkey, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA) (Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archives), Hariciye Nezâreti Ministry of Foreign Affairs): Romanya Muhâcirin Komisyonu Evrâkı (HR.MHC (02) (Documents of the Romanian Emigration Committee), Hukuk Kısmı Evrakı (HR.H) (Documents of the Legal Section); Hukuk Müşavirliği Istişare Evrakı (HR.HMŞ.IŞO) (Documents of the Legal Advisory Section), Siyâsi Kısım (HR.SYS) (Political Section), and Tercüme Odası Evrakı (HR.TO) (Documents of the Translation Bureau). Other documents on immigration are included in such BOA collections as Bâb-i Âli Evrâk Odası (BEO and BEO.AYN.d), Dahiliye Nezareti Mektûbi Kalemi (DH.MKT), Yıldız Sadâret Resmi Mâruzat Evrakı (Y.MTZ.d), Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat Evrakı (Y.MTV), and Yıldız Perakende: Askeri (Y.PRK.ASK), Elçilik ve Şehbenderlikler Tahrîrâtı (Y.PRK.EŞA), and Komisyonlar Mâruzatı (Y.PRK.KOM). In Romania: Arhivele Ministerului Român al Afacerilor Externe (Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMRAE), Collection Constantinople, Vols. 417–418 (Muslim Properties in Dobruca, 1879–1912); 419–420 (Muslim Emigration from Dobruca, 1880–1914); 434 (Repatriation of Muslim Immigrants, 1879–1882); Romanian National Archives in Bucharest and Constanța (Collections of the Royal House, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Parliament, Prime Ministry, Brătianu and Sturdza Families); Library of the Romanian Academy of Sciences (D.A. Sturdza Archive); County Library "I.N. Roman" of Constanța (local newspapers: *Dobrogea Jună, Farul*, *Steaua Dobrogei*, *Constanța*).

[4] BOA, Hariciye Nezareti Hukuk Kısmı Evrakı (HR.H), 83/6 (January 21, 1902).

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fully immersed in the Romanian national body despite wearing different dress and professing a distinct religion from that of the majority of Romanian nationals. During the opening session of the Romanian Teachers' Congress in Constanța in the summer of 1910, one Muslim teacher greeted participants with a passionate speech reinforcing the idea that the thirty-three years of Romanian administration in Dobruca had turned the region's diverse population into a "uniform dough of Romanian consistency"[5]. He used the occasion to present himself as an equal to all other Romanian nationals, insisting that apart from his attire and faith, nothing distinguished him from his Romanian peers. "Like you," he underlined, "I look with endless trust at the future of Romania, our beloved country. My heart throbs like yours with the same love for the soldiers of the country and its courageous captain, His Majesty King Carol I"[6]. In conclusion, the teacher maintained that similar to other Romanian youth, "all sons of Dobruca were ready to sacrifice their lives on the altar of the country that fed them and warmed them at her gentle breast"[7]. In taking such a stance, the teacher probably wished to open the congress on an equal footing with the other participants, who were Romanian nationals. His appeal to national allegiance was meant in this case to erase religious and ethnic boundaries in a society dominated and ruled by a Christian majority.

These examples illustrate the existence of a variety of responses to identical state policies, reinforcing the complex nature of internal dynamics within border societies transitioning from provinces of empires to nation-states after 1878. The frequency of such cases in the territorial split between the successor states to the Ottoman Empire in Europe demonstrates that, in the extraordinary circumstance of sudden incorporation into a state for which the "nation" was in the making, the people's claim to national belonging corresponded to specific needs and interests. And in the act of claiming, individuals unwittingly became part and parcel of the complex process of nation-making.

In this article I examine how the Muslim population of Dobruca, who remained in the region rather than emigrating to Ottoman lands after 1878, coped with the complicated issue of belonging to the Romanian "nation" during 1878–1914[8]. For this population it was rather challenging to "imagine" its place in a

[5] *Ovidiu*, July 1–30, 53.

[6] *Ibid*.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] In 1878, the Treaty of Berlin changed the regional *status quo* when the European Powers decided to divide the former Ottoman province of Dobruca, whose surface was of approximately 22,272 square kilometers, between Romania (whose independence was acknowledged on this occasion) and Bulgaria (whose status of Autonomous Principality found under Ottoman suzerainty was also recognized in Berlin). This arrangement added 15,536 square kilometers to the Romanian territory and 6,736 square kilometers to the Bulgarian. The new territorial changes were plainly explained in two distinctive articles included in the treaty. Article two established the border between the two states on a continuous line connecting Silistra in the west with a point situated to the south of Mangalia in the east. Article forty-six listed the territories granted to Romania: the islands of the Danube Delta, the Serpent Isle of the Black Sea, and the *kaza*s of the *sancak* (district) of Tulça (formerly part of Tuna Vilâyeti or the Danubian Province), namely Kili (Kilia), Sünne (Sulina), Mahmudiye (Mahmudia), Isakçı (Isaccea), Boğazköy (Cernavoda), Tulça (Tulcea), Maçin

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completely new society undergoing major transformations in the postwar era. Up to 1918, when Greater Romania emerged as a result of the unification of several provinces, including Dobruca, Romania found itself caught in the nation-building process. Romania's annexation of Dobruca in 1878 complicated this process due to the existence in the new territory of diverse populations and economic underdevelopment[9]. Political changes to correct the situation created a rift within the local Muslim community, whose elites and commoners were left to examine anew both their personal lives and their existence as a community different in religion and ethnicity from the dominant, ruling community of Romanian Christians.

Muslims invoked a certain national allegiance in an effort to negotiate their own place in the society that emerged after the establishment of the Romanian administration in Dobruca. The negotiation drew them closer to both the Ottoman Empire and Romania, states looking to start their mutual relations afresh following the acknowledgment of Romanian independence in 1878. But these salutary attempts were complicated by endless talks about the fate of Muslims whose national belonging, legal rights, and responsibilities constituted the subject of heated debates during face-to-face negotiations and via correspondence between the foreign ministries of the two states. While Romanian officials wished to turn Muslims into Romanian citizens through legislation aiming to homogenize society from a national viewpoint, Ottoman officials advocated fair treatment for the entire Muslim community, and in particular for the émigrés settling in Ottoman lands during and following the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman war[10]. This "in-betweenness"

(Măcin), Babadağı (Babadag), Hırsova (Hîrşova),Köstence (Constanța), and Mecidiye (Medgidia). Romania also received a small part of Southern Dobruca "as far as a line starting from the east of Silistra and terminating on the Black Sea, south of Mangalia" (Sir Augustus Oakes and R.B. Mowat, eds., *The Great European Treaties of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1918), 332). Romanian officials divided this territory into two counties, Constanța and Tulcea. The entire territory of Southern Dobruca (also called the *Cadrilater* in Romanian) with a population of 280,000 individuals, the majority of whom were Turkish, entered into the possession of Romania at the end of the Second Balkan War by a decision of the Treaty of Bucharest (August 1913). The new frontier between the two states rested on the line connecting Turtucaia (in the west) with Balçik (in the east) until September 1940, when Romania complied with the Treaty of Craiova by returning Southern Dobruca to Bulgaria.

[9] According to statistics compiled prior to the annexation of the province, 225,692 individuals lived in Northern Dobruca, north of the Köstence (Constanța) – Boğazköy (Cernavoda) railroad line which divided the region into two unequal parts. These statistics contained no information about the population living in the area situated at the south of the railroad line, although presumably almost all of it was Muslim. They indicated, however, the existence of both a Muslim majority and a heterogeneous population. Tatars (71,146), Turks (48,783), Romanians (46,504), Bulgarians (30,177), Russians (12,748), Circassians (6,994), Germans (1,134), and other less populous groups such as Italians, Greeks, and Armenians inhabited the northern part of Romanian Dobruca. Reflecting this ethnic heterogeneity, there was a wide variety of religious faiths, including Sunni and Kızılbaş (Shi'ite) Muslims, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians, Jews, and others. Sixty percent of the population (126,923) was Muslim, including Turks, Tatars, and Circassians (Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population,* 199).

[10] The two states remained stubbornly locked in conflict regarding the situation of Dobrucan Muslim émigrés. Romanian and Ottoman diplomats were unable to agree on the financial compensation due to the Muslims whose lands were forcefully or unjustly confiscated in Dobruca. Negotiations halted as

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forced Muslim elites and commoners alike to identify swift strategies of adaptation to the new circumstances and to find an answer to the pressing question of remaining Ottoman or becoming Romanian. However, taking sides proved to be a complicated affair. In the process, Muslims often displayed extraordinary ability in successfully navigating the two states, particularly when using claims of commonality and difference to define themselves in a manner that best suited personal needs and interests. In this context, invoking the nation (or “speaking and acting national”, to use an already known expression in the field of nationality studies) constituted a salient tool of social integration for Muslims seeking state benefits in order to secure a better standard living for themselves and their coreligionists[11].

This article therefore examines how Muslims “spoke and acted nationally” in Romanian Dobruca. The findings point out that elites and commoners alike found innovative ways to claim national belonging, as they wished to carve out a special place in Romanian society. Such efforts helped to preserve a certain degree of autonomy in religious affairs, education, and the cultural realm. In practice, speaking and acting nationally in Dobruca equated with the Muslims’ public expression of loyalty for the state and the monarchy. Often Muslim religious and secular elites used the Romanian language in letters addressed to Romanian officials, spoke Romanian in public, wrote effusive newspaper articles in favor of the administration, delivered public speeches with national undertones in the presence of state officials, and established cultural associations. The article is divided into three sections that show how the use of loyalty and exemplary citizenship was particularly emphasized in situations when individuals made specific demands for financial and moral support, particularly for mosques and schools, which constituted two of the main foci of Muslim activity in the period under examination.

From the point of view of Romanian officials, Muslims constituted one of the many “fragments of the nation” that had to be identified first and then dealt with at both local and national levels[12]. In accordance with Romanian legislation, Muslims were considered Romanian citizens by “annexation,” enjoying all rights and responsibilities deriving from this particular status[13]. They were also identified as

soon as sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909) was deposed in 1909. The change in political regime did not bring about a change in talks related to the subject of compensation. Negotiations lasted for several decades, but the two Balkan Wars (1912–13) and World War I (1914–18) took their toll and this particular matter remained unresolved, with attempts to reopen the subject ending in failure (BOA, HR.HMȘ.IȘO, 221/38 (December 31, 1918).

[11] See for example Theodora Dragostinova, “Speaking National: Nationalizing the Greeks of Bulgaria, 1900–1939,” *Slavic Review* 67, 1 (2008): 154–181.

[12] I have borrowed the expression “fragments of the nation” from Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[13] Constantin Iordachi, “The Unyielding Boundaries of Citizenship: The Emancipation of ‘Non-Citizens’ in Romania, 1866–1918,” *European Review of History – Revue Européenne d’Histoire* 8, 2 (2001): 172–173. Romanian policies aimed at integrating Dobrucan Muslims administratively, socially, and culturally as a result of the implementation of the Treaty of Berlin, but also verged on assimilation and ultimately nationalization. The colonization of Northern Dobruca with Romanian nationals, in conjunction with citizenship and property legislation, may be seen as measures to achieve complete nationalization.

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members of a cohesive religious community. Yet for reasons of simplification, legislators ignored the Muslims' distinctive (but not always discernible) ethnic identifications as Turks, Tatars, Circassians, or Roma (Gypsies), in addition to their dissimilar religious practice as Sunni and Shi'a. A more nuanced identification of these individuals emerged from various censuses that listed them according to gender, age, residence, and profession, in addition to citizenship and religion.

In their turn, Muslims identified themselves in religious terms, as members of the Muslim community of Romania (*cemaat-i Islâmiyye*) and the wider world Muslim community (*ümmet*). Only the Tatars occasionally specified their ethnic origins. In certain contexts, Muslims presented themselves in relation to their professions, genders, ages, residences, citizenship, and national allegiances. Given that the province of Dobruca had been located along the paths of military campaigns and migrations since ancient times, the population living there constituted a mosaic of people. The Muslim community itself was diverse and far from being unified. As will soon become apparent, different Muslim factions fell easily under the influence of either state officials or their own elite members when important state and community interests were at stake.

It is fundamental for the case under examination to understand that the ways in which the state identified individuals and the ways in which individuals identified themselves were highly contingent on context. As Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker make clear in their work on identities, "self- and other-identification is fundamentally situational and contextual"[14]. Furthermore, relational and categorical modes of identification played a significant role in how individuals presented themselves. In certain contexts, self-identification was closely related to the position of people in specific networks, including a web of kinship and patron-client ties, and student-teacher relations (relational identification). In other contexts, self-identification depended on people's membership in specific communities based on citizenship, nationality, religion, language, ethnicity, and other identifiers (categorical identification).

Complete political integration was left aside for decades after the annexation, however, which resulted in the exclusion of minorities in the policy-making process and their withdrawal from the cultural sphere. Nevertheless, the laws formulated between 1878 and 1914 that granted the Muslims citizenship, freedom of religion, free education, and land ownership showed certain benevolence towards them (although, they did still allow for abuses, occurring mainly at the local level). In order to avoid social fragmentation and assure national cohesion, the Romanian government invested efforts aimed at preservating of the Muslim's cultural life. In addition, it allowed for the establishment of schools, newspapers, and cultural associations in their native languages. To a certain extent, the government allowed for the involvement of the Young Turk activists from the Balkan area in the cultural progress of Dobruca's Muslim population. However, the support of the Romanian government and Muslim elites for ethno-cultural transformation did not prevent large numbers of Turks and Tatars from departing to the Ottoman Empire during and after the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877–78. The Muslim population decreased from 60 percent in 1878 to 11 percent in 1913 (Catalina Hunt, *Changing Identity at the Fringes of the Ottoman Empire: the Turks and Tatars of Dobruca, 1878–1914*, Ph. D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, in progress, chapters 3–4).

[14] Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker, "Identity," in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, ed. Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 71.

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Frequently, there was considerable overlap between relational and categorical identifications since individuals chose to self-identify with specific networks and communities at different moments. For instance, a Muslim school director, petitioning state officials for financial assistance to cover the employment of additional staff in his institution, would introduce himself to authorities as a member of the Muslim community, a school teacher, and a Romanian citizen. To increase his chances of obtaining funding, the school director would not shy away from making patriotic statements and further assurances of loyalty to the state and the monarchy.

Like the teacher, numerous other Muslims seeking financial help for individual or collective projects would take a similar approach during interactions with state authorities. Therefore, taking Romanian citizenship and manifesting loyalty to the regime were means Muslims employed to achieve a peaceful existence under the new administration. These individuals represented the portion of the Muslim population who chose to stay in Romania because they lacked funds or connections in the Ottoman Empire but also because they refused to leave behind family and property. Elites played an extremely significant role in the community as leaders and guides for the remaining Muslims. Demonstration of loyalty in writing and in public resulted in financial assistance from different Romanian institutions. In providing such assistance, elites helped maintain a degree of autonomy for the entire community in matters of religion, jurisprudence, education, and culture. Taking an active role in shaping the culture and political views of the Muslims, elites engaged in a savvy interaction with state officials, whose financial and moral support they constantly sought during the time under discussion. This further suggests that like other eastern European and Balkan populations of the day, Dobrucan Muslims “were not simply objects of state-sponsored national policies but were active agents that shaped the national discourse and practice to serve their needs and priorities”[15].

This sort of agency constituted an essential part of social life, a sign of peoples’ adaptation to changing (and challenging) conditions, and an indicator of social integration; it represented an integral part of the intriguing “story” of empire-to-state transition. During unstable times such as these, when everything was in doubt, individuals were rather flexible in self-identifying and self-associating with a particular “nation.” Frequently, if not always, interests and needs motivated an individual’s choice to claim one national allegiance or another.

Drawing mainly on both archival and non-archival primary sources, as well as on secondary literature outside the history of Dobruca, this article aims to explain an essential stage in the formation of nationality among the members of the Muslim community of Dobruca. Taken together, these sources reveal the voices of the Muslim community of Dobruca and provide new dimensions to the study of national identity during the empire-to-state transition. The manner in which

[15] Theodora Dragostinova, *Between Two Motherlands: Nationality and Emigration among the Greeks of Bulgaria, 1900–1949* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 13.

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Muslims embraced certain national affiliations in Romanian Dobruca was indicative of the difficult path of nation-building, citizenship formation, and nationality formation in the aftermath of the military conflicts, border shifting, and population movement that occurred after 1878.

Similarly to the Greeks of Bulgaria, Dobruca's Muslims were able to adopt the citizenship of their choice and embrace a certain national allegiance under the new political regime in spite of inconveniences associated with the choice. As shown elsewhere, Muslims preserving Ottoman citizenship jeopardized their properties, since Romanian law allowed only Romanian citizens to possess movable or immovable property in the province[16]. Muslims taking Romanian citizenship lost the official protection of the Ottoman Empire and had to comply with the military draft, tax regulations, and various other obligations associated with the new status. A somewhat better position was held by Muslims who switched between the two citizenships, although the switches resulted from the difficult situations in which individuals found themselves at that moment in time. As in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Dobruca "nationality remained an individual choice made relatively free of state influence"[17]. But since Romanian officials tied citizenship to property and political rights, Dobrucan Muslims were in a better position to claim state assistance if they became Romanian citizens. In this context, invoking the nation constituted a viable tool of social integration for Muslims seeking state benefits in order to secure a better standard of living for themselves. There was thus a striking resemblance between the Muslims of Dobruca and the Greeks of Bulgaria in terms of their use of national rhetoric in interactions with state officials at the local level, for by acting in this manner both groups hoped "to improve their situations within the aggressively nationalizing states"[18]. Furthermore, in certain contexts appeals along national lines allowed individuals to adapt more smoothly to nationalizing policies.

THE MUSLIM VOICE: "SPEAKING AND ACTING NATIONALLY" IN DOBRUCA

June 24, 1910, was a day of celebration for the Muslim community of Köstence (Constanța), where the cornerstone for the most important religious establishment was laid in the presence of a mixed audience of Romanian and Ottoman officials from ministries and consulates in Bucharest, as well as the Muslim elites and the common people of the city. The event marked the opening of the famous Melike Mosque (also known as Carol I), which served local Muslims to such a degree that over time it came to be the most important Islamic landmark of

[16] Catalina Hunt, *Changing Identity*, chapter 4.

[17] Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

[18] Dragostinova, *Between Two Motherlands*, 14.

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modern Dobruca. That morning, the Romanian Minister of Public Instruction, Spiru Haret, and the Ottoman ambassador in Bucharest, Safa Bey, received a warm welcome from the local elites and a group of Muslim students and soldiers, who stunned the audience with their handsome appearance and impeccable skills in reciting patriotic poems in Romanian. When Romanian officials took their turn to speak, they readily emphasized the obedience and devotion of Dobrucan Muslims to Romania. In their view, what led to the foundation of the mosque was without doubt the Muslims' “love for the *patrie* (motherland), their devotion to Romanian institutions, and the blind faith with which they served and still serve the country that shelters them”[19].

Muslim elites, represented at the highest level by the county *müfti*, Hafız Rifat Efendi, also used the occasion to define the community as a unified body whose unquestionable loyalty to the king and the country and exemplary citizenship made them valuable members of the Romanian “nation.” After readings from the Qur'an in Arabic and prayers in Turkish, the *müfti* spoke in perfect Romanian about the historical importance of the event, which helped cement “forevermore a strong brotherhood and affection between Dobruca's Romanians and Muslims, [who were] the sons of the same *patrie*”[20]. He underlined that the government's financial assistance for the construction of the mosque constituted yet another proof that Romanian officials understood and respected the variety of languages, traditions, and faiths found in Dobruca. Rifat Efendi also praised the government's distribution of equal justice to all individuals irrespective of ethnicity and religion. “We, the Muslims of Dobruca,” the *müfti* said, “lovers of our motherland Romania, respectful followers of the holy Qur'an that teaches us endless work and enlightenment through learning and honesty, must demonstrate through deeds that we deserve the sacrifices the country makes for us.” Before concluding, he emphasized once more that Muslims should appreciate living under the “high protection of our beloved sovereign” and the patronage of the Romanian authorities[21].

The public display of Muslim loyalty to everything Romanian went back to the establishment of Romanian administration in the province. Eager to fulfill the expectations of the new political regime, Muslim elites and commoners alike had joined their Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Russian, Armenian, and Jewish compatriots in celebrating the arrival of Romanian officials in Dobruca during the second half of November 1878. In a telegram addressed to Prince Carol I (1866–1914) on November 18, about fifty elites and five hundred commoners representing the aforementioned nationalities residing in Tulça (Tulcea) pledged loyalty to the prince and the Romanian nation while expressing hopes for a better life under the new regime[22]. In both Constanța and Tulcea, the days following the dispatch of the telegram were dedicated to the public celebration of the arrival of Romanian troops

[19] *Drapelul*, June 27, 1910, 2.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Pressa*, November 23, 1878, 2.

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in the region. People prayed in churches, mosques, and synagogues, gave public speeches, performed traditional songs and dances in festive clothing, shared food and drink, and threw flowers to the marching soldiers from balconies heavily decorated with carpets and garlands[23]. Romanian journalists provided plenty of detail about these sudden demonstrations of local enthusiasm even as they cautioned officials to avoid "wasting days and years with unimportant matters" rather than working hard to solve the complex issues confronting the province[24]. Several days prior to these celebrations, the prince assured the same population that the new regime would take upon itself the important task of incorporating them and the province into the "nation" through peaceful and effective means[25].

The narrative that both Romanian officials and Muslim elites used in the years after the annexation became an integral part of the national rhetoric, which served to conceal the real objectives of these people. Officials appropriated this discourse to consolidate control over citizens and resources in their attempt to homogenize the local society. At the same time, by accepting (as well as crafting) the image of obedient and devoted citizens of Romania, Muslim elites and commoners sought to earn a particular place within Romanian society[26]. As long as they preserved their religion, traditions, and jurisprudence, the responsibilities associated with being loyal Romanian citizens were not a burden impossible to bear. Thus, the role of the state in the periphery was strongly accentuated by its relationship with such local elites. As Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel explain, "when borderland elites were well integrated into networks of state power, they could become important allies of the state in its efforts to control borderland society. This was the case with the border *zamindars* (superior landholders and tax collectors) of northeastern British India and the *caudillos* of Latin American border regions: their local power depended largely on the state, and they were used by the state not only to extract tribute but also to discipline the border regions"[27].

During the same period, in imperial Russia and the Ottoman Empire, Muslim elites made use of similar strategies to carve a special place for themselves and

[23] *Ibid*., November 23, 1878, 1–2; November 24, 1878, 1.

[24] *Ibid*., November 24, 1878, 1.

[25] See Carol's proclamation for the population of Dobruca in G.D. Petrescu, "Răsboiul pentru independență și anexarea Dobrogei" (The War for Independence and the Annexation of Dobrogea), in *Dobrogea. Cincizeci de ani de viață românească* (Dobrogea. Fifty Years of Romanian life) (Constanța: Ex Ponto, 2003), 345–46) and *Voința Dobrogei*, October 28, 1928, 3.

[26] Some Romanians went so far as to argue that this constructed image privileged Muslims in many respects. One army veteran who supported the Romanianization of the province was shocked when meeting peasants who knew little or no Romanian during his visit to rural Dobruca in the early 1910s. In the remote village of Başpınar in Constanța County, none of the villagers knew Romanian. By the veteran's account, the village felt Asian, and there was no sign of progress (or Romanian administration), no shops, and no tavern, except for two "primitive coffee houses located in *bordeie* (earth houses)." "To be in Anatolia or in Syria or in Dobruca's Başpınar, it was all the same," he maintained (For more detail, see *Dobrogea Jună*, December 10, 1913, 2).

[27] Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel, "Towards a Comparative History of Borderlands", *Journal of World History* 2 (1997): 217.

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their coreligionists in society. Robert Crews has shown how Russian Muslim elites used official occasions to “demonstrate their loyalty to the monarchy and patriotism for Russia but also to assert their rights as ‘citizens’”[28]. Prior to World War I, they used Qur’anic verses and Prophetic hadiths demanding obedience to authorities to underline that love for the motherland (in this case Russia) strengthened rather than weakened the Islamic faith[29]. In this fashion, the Muslims of imperial Russia made efforts to fit into the larger imperial picture by defining themselves as loyal citizens of the state just as the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire did. According to Julia Phillips Cohen, Jewish elites provided support for the Islamic ideology propagated throughout imperial domains during the reign of sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909). They came to tell “each other stories about the caliphate and of the glory of Islamic martyrs because these were formal elements of the Islamic Ottomanism of their day”[30].

This type of relationship between the rulers and the ruled was considered mutually beneficial. In the case examined here, the involvement of the Romanian administration in Islamic affairs, according to the official discourse, allowed for a better integration of Muslim elites and commoners into Romanian society. At the same time, the Muslims’ display of obedience and loyalty to Romanian administration permitted the preservation of the Islamic character of the Muslim community. Underneath the neat façade of harmony between the Romanian administration and Dobrucan Muslims, however, there was a certain degree of tension that allowed both Muslim elites and commoners to play an active part in the decision-making process regarding their communal affairs. On the religious and cultural fronts, for instance, they would make their voices heard in the election of their own religious heads (the *müftis*) and the organization of their schools. The intrusiveness of Romanian officials in Islamic affairs yielded to the assertiveness of local Muslims, who took the liberty to express their wishes in petitions meant to give them some agency in communal affairs. The examination of two of the main domains of Muslim life in Dobruca, namely the mosque and the school, demonstrates the agency of the Muslims, particularly the elites, who took their intermediary role between the state and the local community very seriously in this period.

THE MOSQUE

Soon after the establishment of the Romanian administration in Dobruca, the prefect of Constanța County, Remus Opreanu, met with the heads of the Muslim community of Constanța in their main mosque. The visit occurred at the request of the prefect and was meant to have symbolic significance for both parties. At the

[28] Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 350.

[29] *Ibid*., 351.

[30] Julia Phillips Cohen, “Between Civic and Islamic Ottomanism: Jewish Imperial Citizenship in the Hamidian Era”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44 (2012): 249.

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time of the visit, Muslims were celebrating Kurban Bayramı, the feast of the sacrifice during the fasting month of Ramadan. Therefore, the prefect desired to reassure community leaders about his, and implicitly the administration's, respect for the Muslim faith and, by extension, for all faiths practiced in the county. Notables offered in return a letter in Ottoman affirming complete satisfaction with the Romanian authorities and assurance of devotion and obedience to the laws of Romania[31].

Officials like Opreanu, supporting free expression of religion not only at the county level but throughout Dobruca, knew little of the difficulties the community had been battling in recent years. Even so, Opreanu and his peers did encounter cases suggesting the precarious condition of Muslims, either through personal assessments of the situation or via collective and individual petitions that Muslims dispatched to them regularly. It was immediately obvious to these officials that despite the considerable number of urban and rural mosques in the province, the community entrusted with the financing of both mosques and schools was not well-off. In fact, there were few funds available for the upkeep, renovation, or construction of mosques and for the payment of the staff associated with them. The viable property endowed to the *vakıf* (pious foundation) of Constanța, for instance, comprised only one shop and seven buildings that failed to provide sufficient revenue for the maintenance of the city's mosques despite their being rented throughout the year. The remaining *vakıf* properties, including one Muslim school, one house for religious personnel, and one barren plot of land where a mill had once stood, were in ruins[32]. Worse still, some other shop revenues destined for two different mosques (Hünkâr and the so-called Tatar Mosque) went instead to City Hall. In Tulcea County, the *vakıf* that an Ottoman officer, Gazi Ali Paşa, had established in 1610 in Babadağı (Babadag) to support a mosque and the medrese attached to it was confiscated by the government after 1878[33]. Invoking obedience to the authorities, the heads of the mosques requested the restitution of these revenues, albeit unsuccessfully[34].

By the time major legislation was put in place in the province in the early 1880s, Muslim petitions, though thick with patriotic appeals and calls for justice, had recorded limited success. Professions of obedience and devotion to the state

[31] Arhivele Naționale din România (Romanian National Archives), Bucharest Branch, Ministerul de Afaceri Interne (Ministry of Internal Affairs), Fond Direcția Administrativă (Administrative Division Collection) (1878–79), File 226/1878, November 30, 1878.

[32] Arhivele Naționale din România, Constanța Branch, Fond Primăria Constanța (Constanța City Hall Collection), File 5/1879, August 11, 1879.

[33] This *vakıf* was the oldest Islamic pious foundation established in the territory of Romania. Other such foundations were established by Sultan Bayezid II in Babadağ in 1484 and by Esmahân Sultan, daughter of sultan Selim II and wife of grand vizier Sokollu Mehmed Paşa, in Mangalia in the 1560s. For details, see Tahsin Gemil, "Vakîfuri otomane fondate pe teritoriul României (sec. XV–XVIII)," in *Fațetele istoriei, existențe, identități, dinamici* (București: Editura Universității din București, 2000), 193–197.

[34] For the *vakıf* in Constanța, see Arhivele Naționale din România, Constanța Branch, Constanța City Hall Collection, File 5/1879, January 3, 1879.

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elicited some financial support from the government solely for several mosques in the county of Constanța[35]. One mosque in Tulcea benefitted from funds from the Ministry of Public Instruction to carry out various repairs in 1879[36]. Some additional financial assistance came from private sources, such as the purse of Prince Carol and those of high-ranking Romanian officials visiting the province on a regular basis[37]. In spite of their narrow scope, such actions received a warm welcome in Istanbul and Dobruca. In August 1879, for instance, the Ottoman newspaper *Vakit* praised the prince for granting funds to the less fortunate among the Dobrucan Muslims[38]. Similar feelings found their way into a letter signed by a certain Süleyman on behalf of the Muslims of Sünne (Sulina), grateful to have received financial support from the prince for their mosques and communal needs[39].

Sustained assistance for the Muslim community began in the 1880s, once the state had sanctioned its involvement in communal affairs through legislation placing Islam under government control. Already in November 1878, the functioning of Islamic courts and the confirmation of *müfti*s had been placed under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Ministry of Justice. In March 1880, under the guise of granting religious freedom to all Dobrucans, the Law Concerning Dobruca's Administrative Organization turned Muslim clergy into state employees. The state initially undertook the payment of salaries for the religious and administrative personnel attached to the six main mosques of the province and, beginning in 1904, extended the same compensation to the employees of the remaining mosques in the province. The Prefect's Office in Constanța included in its annual budget over 1,000 lei (equivalent to 1,000 francs) for the Islamic court and the *müfti*'s office that covered expenses related to rent, repairs, and heating[40].

Arguably, the most important financial contribution the government undertook in the years following the annexation was the construction of the Melike Mosque in Constanța in the early years of the twentieth century. The government invested in this project an impressive amount of resources, human as well as

[35] According to the report of the prefect of Constanța County, governmental assistance was provided to mosques in Hırsova (Hîrșova), Köstence (Constanța), Mecidiye (Megidia), Boğazköy (Cernavoda), and Mankalya (Mangalia) in 1881 (*Farul Constanței*, February 1, 1881, 4).

[36] AMRAE, Problema 16 (Issue 16): Școli și biserici în România (Schools and Churches in Romania) (1875–1950), vol. 8: Moschei (Mosques) (1879–1937).

[37] For instance, on the occasion of his visit in Dobruca in November 1879, Carol I offered money to "the Turks and Tatars whose mosques I have visited; they received me with much pleasure and addressed me as Sultan Carol, a greeting which I found to be less enchanting" (Arhivele Naționale din România, Fond Casa Regală (Royal House Collection), Documente private (Private Documents), File V.B.438).

[38] *Vakit*, August 31, 1879, 2.

[39] AMRAE, Problema 16 (Issue 16): Școli și biserici în România (Schools and Churches in Romania) (1875–1950), Vol. 8: Moschei (Mosques) (1879–1937).

[40] Due to destruction during World War II and relocation between 1944 and 1946, the Romanian National Archives, Constanța Branch, include only budgets from 1905–1919. I was able to consult budget files from 1905–06, 1906–07, 1907–08, and 1912–13 (Arhivele Naționale din România, Constanța Branch, Fond Prefectură (Prefectura Collection) (1897–1950), File 1/1905–1920).

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material. The famous Romanian architect Victor Ştefănescu was hired to design the mosque and supervise its construction. Benefiting from substantial governmental funding, the architect undertook several visits to Istanbul to study other religious establishments and seek advice from religious authorities regarding mosque interiors and exteriors. He had the mosque's inscriptions executed in Istanbul, with the blessing of the Romanian authorities, who were eager to show the Ottoman government "the concern the Romanian government had for its Muslim subjects"[41]. The inauguration of the mosque took place on May 31, 1913, in the presence of the royal family, as well as Romanian and Ottoman officials, and was positively received in the Ottoman Empire. In a telegram from May 17, 1913, Sultan Mehmed V expressed his gratitude to Carol I for contributing to the well-being and prosperity of Romanian Muslims[42]. The Young Turk newspaper *Kurşun*, published in Monastir, described in glowing terms the efforts of the Romanian government in financing the project. Given that governments of neighboring nations had destroyed Muslim buildings, the newspaper characterized the construction of the Melike Mosque as a "humanitarian act," an expression of tolerance that should serve as a model for all governments dealing with Muslim subjects[43].

This positive experience sponsoring the construction of mosques and other community-related projects in Dobruca encouraged Romanian officials to expand their control over the Muslim community even further. They often tried to influence the appointment of *müfti*s in Dobruca by undermining the role of the *Bâb-ı Meşihat* (seat of the *şeyhülislâm* in Istanbul) in conferring legality and legitimacy on the office. In 1892, aiming to change regulations affecting this office, Romanian officials sought to secure the right of the Ministry of Public Instruction to remove unsuitable *müfti*s from their posts, which was the prerogative of the *şeyhülislâm* in Istanbul[44]. They further wished to make the appointment of *müfti*s contingent on proof not only of solid religious education and moral probity but also of Romanian citizenship and Dobrucan origin. There had been several occasions in the past, officials argued, when Istanbul had appointed *müfti*s who not only demonstrated unfamiliarity with the Romanian language but also created tensions between local Muslims due to their lack of solid Islamic knowledge and dubious moral behavior. In addition, Romanians wished to eliminate the intermediary role Ottoman officials in Bucharest and the two administrative centers of Dobruca had in mediating the appointment of *müfti*s.

To these sustained efforts the *şeyhülislâm* responded by invoking Article 44 of the Treaty of Berlin, which stipulated that "the freedom and outward exercise of

[41] This opinion was stated by the Romanian Minister of Public Instruction in a letter sent to the Romanian Legation in Istanbul on January 10, 1912 (AMRAE, Fond Constantinopol (Constantinople Collection), Vol. 110: Dobrogea (Dobruca) (1878–1920), f. 240.

[42] AMRAE, Problema 16 (Issue 16): Şcoli şi biserici în România (Schools and Churches in Romania) (1875–1950), Vol. 8: Moschei (Mosques) (1879–1937).

[43] *Kurşun*, May 2, 1911, 1.

[44] AMRAE, Fond Constantinopol (Constantinople Collection), Vol. 110: Dobrogea (Dobruca) (1878–1920), f. 117–18.

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all forms of worship shall be assured to all persons belonging to the Romanian state, as well as to foreigners, and no hindrance shall be offered either to the hierarchical organization of the different religious communions, or to their relations with their spiritual chiefs"[45]. He pointed out that the *müfti*s of Dobruca functioned (and should continue to function) according to the rules stipulated in the document that regulated the religious affairs of Muslim communities from Greece, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria, issued back in 1886. These asserted that the *şeyhülislâm* had the exclusive right to confirm *müfti*s through diplomas (*menşur*) issued at *Bâb-ı Meşihat*, particularly because *müfti*s and the *şeyhülislâm* played the intermediary role between the local Islamic community and the caliph (the Ottoman sultan). The procedure originated in the Ottoman period when *müfti*s, entrusted with the conduct of religious services as well as the interpretation and preaching of the *şeriat* (Islamic law), were nominated and deposed by the *şeyhülislâm*. For the time being Romanians had to comply with these regulations, and it was not until the 1920s that the appointment of Dobruca's *müfti*s came under the complete control of the state.

Local Muslims were torn between the roles Istanbul and Bucharest had in determining their religious leaders. In 1891 conflict arose within the community in regard to the appointment of the Tulcea *müfti*. According to the report of the county prefect addressed to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction in October 1891, Hussein Ali, the judge (kadı) of the Tulcea Islamic court, wished to replace the *müfti* of Tulcea County, Reșit Efendi. To reach this goal, he persuaded one Muslim faction and the Ottoman Vice-Consul in the city to support his efforts at having the current *müfti* Reșit Efendi deposed in Istanbul. Having been informed of Hussein Ali's maneuvering, four different groups of Muslims representing the cities of Tulça (Tulcea), Isakçı (Isaccea), Maçin (Măcin), and Babadağı (Babadag) dispatched letters of protest to the *şeyhülislâm* in Istanbul on behalf of Reșit Efendi. In these petitions, the Muslims presented themselves as members of the larger Islamic community that enjoyed the protection of the "padişah" Abdülhamid and the Romanian government. They appealed to the highest Islamic religious authority to protest accusations made by "people with evil intentions" against the current *müfti* and hoped that, given his success in leading the Muslim community "to progress," the *müfti* would be reinstated in the post that was rightly his[46].

In this context, the local prefect took the side of Reșit Efendi, who "presented more guarantees of Romanian nationalism than his antagonist, the judge Hussein Ali, who did not even know Romanian"[47]. In his view, Hussein Ali was but a

[45] Sir Augustus Oakes and R.B. Mowat, *The Great European Treaties of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), 354.

[46] AMRAE, Problema 16 (Issue 16), Vol. 15: Muslims (Musulmani) (1880–1940), f. 1 (the Ottoman petitions are separate, no page).

[47] *Ibid*. In 1887, the Romanian government appointed Reșit Efendi as *müfti* of Tulça (Tulcea) despite the fact that the șeyhülislâm had confirmed in the post a certain Mehmed Rüșdü Efendi, the former müfti of Sarayköy. Reșit Efendi was known for his amiable relations with the Romanian authorities (BOA,

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"fanatical Turk," an individual whose behavior was completely inappropriate, and furthermore, a person who had attempted "to occupy a Romanian post without the knowledge of our government but through impositions from outside"[48]. The prefect also condemned the Ottoman Vice-Consul in Tulcea, a certain Kadri Bey, for going beyond his authority by "meddling in business that, although of religious, private nature, was a matter of national and public security"[49]. When asked about Kadri Bey, whose wealthy family lived in a village in Constanța County, the prefect of this county attributed Kadri Bey's schemes against Reșit Efendi to accusations the latter had made about the non-Islamic lifestyle of the former. In response, Kadri Bey criticized the *müfti* for being "insufficiently Muslim and pro-Christian," always eager to offer a warm welcome and effusively nationalistic speeches to Romanian ministers and King Carol whenever they visited the province[50]. The dispute concluded with the clear victory of the *șeyhülislâm* and the appointment of Hussein Ali as *müfti* of Tulcea in 1892. Until the beginning of World War I, various other *müfti*s, who were favored either by local Muslims or by the Romanian government, were found unsuitable for the task by the authorities in Istanbul.

Occasionally, the election of religious leaders was a highly politicized event. In 1908, the Muslims of Constanța County elected a new *müfti* in the person of Hafız Rifat Efendi (former imam of a Mecidiye mosque) following the death of Hussein Ali, who had occupied the post since 1900, when the two county *müfti* positions merged into one post at the request of Romanian authorities[51]. But Ottoman officials in Bucharest urged the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to disregard the election because the result did not represent the choice of the entire Muslim community but only that of a few members active in the religious council of the county. The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs attributed the reaction of the Ottoman officials to the Porte's efforts to "preserve control over the opinions and actions of Romanian subjects living in the territory of our country"[52]. Aware of

Hariciye Nezareti Tercüme Odası (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Translation Office) (HR.TO) 41/13, October 4, 1887.

[48] *Ibid*.

[49] *Ibid*.

[50] *Ibid*., report dated December 17, 1891.

[51] Hafiz Rifat Efendi lobbied hard for this position both locally and nationally. On June 15, 1908, he dispatched from Mecidiye a letter to the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs requesting that he be appointed *müfti*. It is interesting that he employed nationalist rhetoric to convince the minister that he was the right candidate. "It is necessary for the *müfti* of the county (who is a religious head)," he wrote, "to be an industrious individual, younger, intelligent, and able to work; to know his duties well; to inspect the communes very often in order to improve religious establishments and to advise the Muslim population; to not emigrate; and to live in harmony and love with his peers from other religious groups. In addition, the *müfti* should be of Dobrucan origin because only in this case would he work wholeheartedly for the inhabitants and the country where he was born and where he resides. It is well known that the child never has a sincere love for the stepmother." (AMRAE, Fond Constantinopol (Constantinople Collection), Vol. 110: Dobrogea (Dobruca) (1878–1920), f. 141–153.

[52] Report of Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs to Romanian Minister in Istanbul, dated June 1908 (AMRAE, Problema 16 (Issue 16): Școli și biserici în Romania (Schools and Churches in Romania) (1875–1950). Vol.18: Muftis (1900–1919), no page.

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the presence of Young Turks like Ibrahim Temo and Ali Riza, who favored Rifat Efendi in the religious council, the Porte was utterly concerned about the eventual influence of the Young Turk movement, its chief nemesis at the time, over local Muslims whose spiritual leader was the *müfti*[53]. At the insistence of local Muslims, Rifat Efendi ultimately received the official blessing of Istanbul and ended up by serving in the post from 1909 to 1914.

This particular event afforded Romanian officials the opportunity to reopen the issue of the influence that the *şeyhülislâm*, and by extension the Porte, had in Romanian internal affairs. They looked, albeit unsuccessfully, into concluding with the Porte an agreement similar to those that Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria (1907) had concluded previously in regard to their Muslim subjects. Despite such efforts, occasionally the Istanbul religious authorities continued to appoint *müfti*s of their liking, regardless of the wishes of the local community. In 1913, for example, the request of the Muslims of Dobrici in Southern Dobruca to appoint as *müfti* of Silistra a certain Hassan Mustafa, a graduate of a theological school in Istanbul, received no consideration in Istanbul. Under the pretext that Hasan Mustafa was not knowledgeable enough to occupy the post, the *şeyhülislâm* appointed Haci Sadık Efendi to be *müfti* of Silistra in his place.

The seriousness of these transgressions led many Muslims to seek mediation by the Romanian state. But state intervention was subservient to national interests and did not always support the demands of various factions of Muslims. However, officials made an effort to understand the arguments that reached their desks. Despite occasional adversity, Muslims continued to plead their cases to both Romanian and Ottoman authorities, and occasionally succeeded in getting religious leaders of their liking appointed to local posts.

THE SCHOOL

In addition to the mosque, the school constituted a major concern for the Muslim community, particularly because the new administration decided to place education under the control of Romanian Ministry of Public Instruction. Beginning in 1880, the Romanian language became obligatory in Dobruca and schools had to incorporate it into their curricula. From that moment onward, Muslim students had to study in both Romanian and their native languages. Public instruction constituted a permanent preoccupation for the Romanian government, especially during the period when Spiru Haret occupied the post of Minister of Public Instruction between 1897 and 1910. Since illiteracy prevailed throughout the country in 1899 (78 percent overall, 85 percent in the countryside), Haret launched the "peasant enlightenment" program to decrease illiteracy in villages[54]. At the

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 30–34.

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national level, the implementation of the program resulted in the creation of 1,700 teaching jobs and 3,000 elementary schools enrolling students of all religious and ethnic backgrounds. Following this sustained effort, literacy increased from 22 percent in 1899 to 39 percent in 1911.

Yet instruction in Dobruca was problematic because of lack of funding for public education. Following the annexation, private education was left in the hands of local communities, as had been the case during the Ottoman administration of the province. Local statistics from 1879 indicated thirty-seven rural elementary schools and 270 urban elementary schools in the County of Constanța, most of which were funded by the community and only a few by the state. In rural areas only five schools were Tatar (Mecidiye, Kahraman, Topeka Ipsora, Osmanfacı, and Büyük Ingles) while one was Turkish (Esenköy). The situation of education was even poorer in the County of Tulcea, where only forty-four elementary schools functioned, including one school for Muslim boys and another for Muslim girls[55]. During the period 1879–1919, the number of elementary schools at the provincial level decreased to about one hundred rural and eighteen urban due to lack of funding[56]. Most of the schools the government established after 1878 in mixed areas inhabited by Turks, Tatars, and Romanians, especially in the southern part of Dobruca, disappeared after several months of activity because of financial difficulties and scarcity of students[57]. According to Müstecib Ülküsal, Muslim parents could not understand the benefits of education in Romanian schools and in consequence refused to register children in state institutions[58]. In January 1881, the Prefect of Constanța maintained in a detailed report to the county council that Muslim parents were indeed reluctant to send children to state schools out of fear that Romanians would persuade students to change their religion. “When I requested the appointment of *hoca*s, teachers of Islamic religion, for Muslim students enrolled in Romanian schools”, he stated in the report, “what doubt could there remain about the humanitarian and patriotic purpose of our schools? What the *patria* (motherland) wants most of all is enlightened, honest people, and respectable citizens”[59]. Passionate declarations such as this did not change the state of things, however. For reasons ranging from fear of having children converted to the state religion (which was Christian Orthodoxy) to unwillingness to study the official language (which was Romanian), parents continued to avoid enrolling children in Romanian schools.

The large majority of Muslim children attended privately funded confessional schools that the community had established either during the Ottoman period or under the Romanian regime. In spite of the fact that these schools were fully

[55] *Steaua Dobrogei*, August 1879, 2.

[56] Vasile Helgiu, “Școala primară din Dobrogea în curs de 40 ani (1879–1919),” *Analele Dobrogei* (1937): 236.

[57] *Ibid*., 236–38.

[58] Müstecib Ülküsal, *Dobruca ve Türkler* (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1966), 151.

[59] *Farul Constanței*, February 8, 1881, 3.

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managed by community members without the involvement of the government, lack of resources occasionally pushed the schools to request financial assistance from state officials. In doing so, the leadership of the school requesting assistance and sometimes even the religious heads of the community would repeatedly invoke in official petitions the role of the state in forming loyal citizens through education. In a letter written in February 1905 on behalf of the Muslim community of Constanța, the county *müfti*, Hussein Ali, urged the mayor to provide funding for four teachers, two Muslim and two Romanian, at the school the community had established in the city in 1897. In the beginning of the letter, the *müfti* explained that "because Muslim inhabitants have no other *patrie* (motherland) besides our Romanian country and because they do not wish to have connections with any other country, we believe that it is our duty to have children raised in our traditional law as Muslims but also as Romanian citizens"[60]. Towards the end of the letter, he worried that Muslim students might remain behind their peers educated in state schools if help were not immediately provided to them. Similar petitions requesting financial assistance for the employment or payment of teachers, as well as for acquisition of fuel and furniture, for this particular school had reached the desks of city authorities in previous years[61]. By arguing that financial help would turn students into "better and prouder citizens" of Romania, Muslim notables enjoyed considerable success in obtaining the desired funding.[62] Muslim students enrolled in Romanian educational institutions also benefited from the support of the Prefect's Office in the form of generous scholarships meant to cover purchases of books, clothing, and school supplies[63].

This type of assistance was more prevalent in cities than in villages due to the higher level of income generated by a variety of sources but also because in rural areas Muslim education and funding constituted the exclusive preoccupation of local communities. The schools attached to mosques (*mekâtib-i sıbyân)*, providing children under the age of ten with basic instruction in literacy and Qur'an, received financial assistance only from the community. The *imam*s, put in charge of the management of such schools and the instruction of students, were paid in crops or livestock in most cases[64]. During the Ottoman period, these institutions were deemed to be essential in preparing students for the secondary level of education[65]. Secondary schools (*rüșdiye*) instructed children over ten years of age for a period of three years in a variety of disciplines, including the Qur'an, Arabic, Persian,

[60] Arhivele Naționale din România, Constanța Branch, Fond Primăria (City Hall Collection), 23/1905, f. 20.

[61] Muslim notables dispatched petitions to the mayor of Constanța in 1900, 1901, and 1902 (*Ibid*., files 25/1900, 24/1901, and 22/1902).

[62] *Ibid*., 24/1901.

[63] Arhivele Naționale din România, Filiala Constanța (Constanța Branch), Fond Prefectură (Prefectura Collection) (1897–1950), File 1/1905–1920.

[64] Mehmed Ali Ekrem, *Din istoria turcilor dobrogeni* (București: Editura Kriteryon, 1994), 145.

[65] Selçuk Akșin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839–1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 74.

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ethics, orthography, geometry, algebra, Ottoman history, Islamic history, geography, pedagogy, music, drawing, writing, and physical education[66]. The Ottomans had established these institutions in Dobruca's major cities, including Köstence (Constanța), Tulça (Tulcea), and Mecidiye (Medgidia), and ranked them as the highest state schools of the day in the province. After 1878, *rüşdiye* schools came under the control of the Romanian Ministry of Public Instruction, which approved school curricula and paid teachers' salaries. With few exceptions most teachers in these schools came from indigenous Muslim elites. When exiled Young Turks came to occupy teaching posts here after 1895, the schools became centers for the spread of their modernist ideas, meant to influence both Muslim youth and the community at large[67].

The institution that contributed most to the formation of Dobruca's Muslim intellectual elite was the Muslim medrese (seminary) of Babadag, which was relocated in 1910 to Medgidia[68]. Established by the Law for the Organization of Dobruca in 1880, the medrese began to function in 1889 as an institution that prepared the future *hoca*s and *imam*s of the local community. Prior to 1878, the medrese was attached to the ensemble of institutions financially supported by the *vakıf* of Gazi Ali Paşa, established in Babadag in 1610. After the Romanian state confiscated the *vakıf* and its 8,000 hectares of land in 1878, the government took over the management of the school and remunerated the person in charge with the former possessions of the pious foundation. After its relocation to Medgidia, the medrese preserved its religious curriculum and even augmented it. In 1904 the Ministry of Public Instruction added the study of Islamic religious law to the already compulsory study of Arabic language and interpretation of the Qur'an. The disciplines included in the curriculum were taught in a mix of Romanian, Arabic, and Turkish[69]. In 1928, the Romanian Ministry of Instruction included the medrese in the category of state secondary schools[70].

This institution fulfilled different roles for the Muslim community and for the Romanian state. As a source of manpower for local schools and mosques, the

[66] These disciplines correspond to those that existed in 1904 in Ottoman *rüşdiye* schools (*Ibid*., appendix 5).

[67] Mehmed Ali Ekrem, *Din istoria turcilor dobrogeni*, 146–147.

[68] For details regarding the medrese, see Alexandru Alecu, "Istoricul Seminarului Musulman din Megidia," *Analele Dobrogei*, II (1928): 181–87; Idem, *Anuarul Seminarului Musulman din Megidia pe anul şcolar 1930–1931* (Constanța: Tipografia "Aurora" Ilie M. Grigoriu, 1931); *Dobrogea Jună*, March 16, 1914, 1; March 23, 1914, 2.

[69] Courses of general culture such as the Romanian language, history of Romania, world history, geography, natural sciences, physics, chemistry, mathematics, administrative and constitutional law, hygiene, folk medicine, agriculture (the cultivation of trees and vegetables), pedagogy, and music were taught in Romanian. The Quran, the interpretation of the Quran, Arabic language, and Islamic jurisprudence were taught in Arabic, while the Ottoman language and literature, and the history of Islam were taught in Turkish (Alexandru Alecu, "Istoricul Seminarului Musulman," 184).

[70] Arhivele Naționale din România, Filiala Constanța (Constanța Branch), Fond Prefectură (Prefectura Collection), file 1/1928, 2–3.

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medrese fulfilled the needs of Muslims seeking cultural advancement and good social positions in a predominantly Christian society that was engaged in nation-building. As a source of Muslim elites, the same institution provided the nationalizing state with educated loyal citizens. From this point of view, the goals of the Romanian authorities were no different from those of the founders of the nineteenth-century Ottoman civil schools, who "expected a feeling of solidarity to emerge among those who had gone through that educational system"[71]. As Benjamin Fortna points out, during this period "throughout the world universal education and literacy were the vehicles through which the state was to pursue its aim of both creating and then shaping national identity and loyalty"[72]. The expectations of Haret, the Minister of Public Instruction, were made clear in a letter addressed to the medrese director, Alexandru Alecu: "Moral education and the adaptation of students to state needs would be the object, of course, of the [educational] committee's most lively preoccupations. I put all my hope in your enterprise and patriotism that you will finish well the work that I expect from you"[73].

Some of the medrese students delivered on the expectations that Haret outlined in the aforementioned letter. In his final examination paper, one of the students recounted with effusive words the impression King Carol made upon him during a student visit to the summer royal residence in Sinaia: "A beautiful face, a noble head, a great appearance, an elegant figure, a majestic air that penetrates you, and above all, a sweet and attractive voice which wins you over from its first sound – this is the very impression His Majesty King Carol made on me when I had the fortune to be welcomed at the Peleş Castle in Sinaia. I entered the palace with a trembling heart, and when I walked out of it I felt as if I could have raced myself even against the fastest train… this was how much thrill I had inside of me"[74]. The organization of regular visits of Muslim students to the grandiose royal palace in Sinaia, located in the Carpathian Mountains at about 80 miles distance from Bucharest and a little over 200 miles from Constanța, constituted yet another way the administration found to appeal to the heart of the Muslim community. As the influence of students over the community was deemed considerable, officials believed that students could play an important role in the decision of parents to enroll their children in state schools, and ultimately hoped that positive student experiences in state schools could change the parents' plans to migrate to the Ottoman Empire.

In spite of state efforts to improve the condition of the local Muslim community, some Dobrucan Muslims criticized the government for not doing

[71] Randi Deguilhem, "Reflections on the Secularization of Education in the 19th Century Ottoman Empire: The Syrian Provinces," in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, vol. 2: *Economy and Society*, Kemal Çiçek ed. (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Publications, 2000), 663.

[72] Benjamin C. Fortna, *Learning to Read in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 15.

[73] Alexandru Alecu, "Istoricul Seminarului Musulman," 183.

[74] *Ibid*., 186.

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enough in this direction. In a letter published in the Ottoman newspaper *Ikdâm* on January 12, 1909, one of them remarked that instruction was poor in Dobruca, and "a nation without education was like a body without a soul"[75]. He opposed the government's imposition of the Romanian language in schools, which he interpreted as a sign of discrimination, and further complained that Muslim teachers and religious preachers in villages with a Muslim majority failed to receive state compensation, while those in cities had insignificant salaries. "Romanians argue that they respect the national and religious feelings of the Muslim population by allowing the wearing of the fez (felt hat) during military service", the author of the article wrote. "Instead, by taking discriminatory measures, they destroy the Muslim population in such a way that we do not shy away from naming this state of things as despotism within a constitutional regime"[76]. The poor situation of Muslims in Dobruca, he finally argued, should be attributed not to ignorance and religious fanaticism, as some of the local Muslim notables had stated in the past, but to the "administrative despotism" of the Romanian government[77].

The author of the letter, who preserved his anonymity, was probably alluding to the explanation that Ismail Sabri Bey had given for the backwardness of Dobruca's Muslims in a letter published in the same newspaper on December 29, 1908. Attempting to explain the worrisome proportion of Muslim emigration to the Ottoman Empire, Sabri Bey, an officer in the Romanian army, found that ignorance and fanaticism constituted the main reasons for which his coreligionists left Dobruca in spite of the advantageous conditions Romanian authorities had created for them in the province. Muslims benefited from having their own schools, houses, religious institutions, freedom of expression, and privileged conditions in the national army, yet they continued to emigrate, hoping that the Ottoman government would provide them with a better situation. Even worse, Muslim parents refused to enroll their children in state schools, which they found to be contrary to religious law (*şeriat*) and preferred to keep them in ignorance. And Muslim youth preferred to mutilate themselves rather than serving in the national army. "I have seen with my own eyes", Sabri Bey stated, "how several young men cut with an ax their own fingers from their right hands to escape military service". "We are like the savages of Africa", he concluded, "unable to make any progress and unwilling to enjoy the benefits the state created for us"[78].

The letters mentioned above constitute two extreme and obviously biased positions taken by local Muslims disgruntled with what had happened within the community after Romanian authorities took over the province in 1878. Rejecting the new political regime that imposed instruction in the national language and entrusted rural instruction to local communities, the anonymous writer regarded

[75] *Ikdâm*, January 12, 1909, 2.
[76] *Ibid*.
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] *Ikdâm*, December 24, 1908, 2.

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state regulations as markers of social discrimination. From his point of view, the excessive control of the state over the education of youth, in addition to other restrictive measures, turned local governance into a despotic regime. In contrast, Sabri Bey, an officer in the Romanian national army and part of the new provincial administrative structure, interpreted the same policies as a form of toleration that allowed the state to intervene in the affairs of the community in a positive manner. Listing the different kinds of benefits community members had acquired under the new regime, Sabri Bey could not comprehend the reasons for which his coreligionists continued to seek refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Like other Muslims, he was certainly aware of the administrative abuses of petty functionaries in the application of Romanian legislation at the provincial level but maintained that the government punished the wrong-doers in spite of their position and role in local administration. Sabri Bey's leniency toward the regime, and especially toward the abuses that affected the local population following the skewed application of laws on the ground, was meant to change the minds and hearts of Muslims preparing to leave the province.

Other Muslim notables enjoying high-ranking posts in the new administration manifested similar leniency for state policies out of a desire to help the cultural progress of the community to which they belonged. In 1911, Mahmud Çelebi, a member of the city council of Constanța, wrote in a local Muslim newspaper that "the justice shown by the state in the administration of Dobruca could not be contested. Some abuses of a few small functionaries could not constitute a reason to find the state responsible for this situation because the state, while being still young … was unable to train bureaucrats sufficiently to know their rights and duties"[79]. In this case Mahmud Çelebi praised the Romanian state merely to draw attention to the important matter of education in Muslim schools. He took the occasion to lament that confessional schools were being closed or were unable to function due to lack of funding from community members. To help with the overall progress of the community, students had to receive proper instruction. Otherwise, there would be a danger of a generation of illiterate Muslim youth in the province.

From the point of view of the Romanian central and local administration, what led to the closing of confessional schools was the students' failure to reach proper academic standards. Officials paid the salaries of some teachers (particularly language teachers), and the expectation was that Muslim students would acquire not only fluency in the Romanian language but also proficiency in various disciplines that would qualify them to move on to a superior level of instruction. Inspectors from Bucharest would be sent on a monthly basis to evaluate both teachers and students and to suggest further improvements regarding the quality of instruction and the hygiene of the school. But the reports the inspectors wrote were not at all positive. For instance, the evaluation of the Muslim

[79] *Teşvik*, March 16, 1911, 1.

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school in Constanța mentioned in the opening of this section, which was founded in 1897 and for which *müfti* Hussein Ali requested financial help in 1905, was mostly negative. According to the inspectors, the quality of instruction was poor. In 1903, only fifty-three students, out of a total of 147 enrolled at the elementary level, studied Romanian for a total of four hours per week[80]. Given the very limited time assigned for the study of the official language, students spoke Romanian with great difficulty and often used inappropriate diction when reading from textbooks[81]. In most cases, teachers were behind with the curriculum because they had to translate from Romanian into Turkish to enhance the students' understanding of the material[82]. Some students were older than appropriate for their grades because parents enrolled them in school late or because they had failed to pass the exams that would have allowed them to advance. None of the students spoke Romanian when they started school, and even after several years of instruction they still could not speak it fluently[83].

The poor quality of instruction in this particular institution resulted in low rates of final exam attendance and even lower rates of graduation[84]. Following more than a decade of frustrating visits to the school, one inspector recorded in his report that "the Romanian government was wasting money on instruction that had no positive outcome"[85]. He was puzzled that students manifested no real interest in education or instruction in the official language in spite of their being "Romanian subjects who needed to know perfectly the language of the surrounding population"[86].

When confessional schools ceased to function in the 1910s, Muslim youth from Constanța County went to Bucharest to persuade officials in the Ministry of Instruction to reopen them. They hoped to sway authorities to cease to force Muslim children to attend Romanian schools. In addition, this intervention intended to convince the minister that instruction in confessional schools, if reopened, should be carried out solely in Turkish[87]. Disgruntled with such initiatives, some voices in the local media argued that confessional schools should stay closed due to their overall poor quality. Confessional schools reopened after all for Turkish and Tatar students, and the government continued to pay the salaries of Romanian language teachers serving in those institutions. The Muslim community did find an ally in state authorities in the end, even if this meant that its youth had to learn Romanian in order to become part of the new establishment.

[80] Arhivele Naționale din România, Constanța Branch, Fond Comunitatea musulmană și școli turco-tătare (Muslim Community and Turkish-Tatar School Collection), file 3/1902–16, Report dated March 13, 1903.

[81] *Ibid*., Report dated February 5, 1908, and June 16, 1908.

[82] *Ibid*., Report dated December 17, 1907.

[83] *Ibid*., Report dated December 14, 1913

[84] *Ibid*., Report dated June 16, 1908.

[85] *Ibid*., Report dated June 16, 1908.

[86] *Ibid*., Report dated March 18, 1913.

[87] *Dobrogea Jună*, January 29, 1912, 1.

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CONCLUSION

Following the annexation of Dobruca to Romania and the implementation of state legislation in the province in 1878, the members of the local Muslim community reacted in two fundamentally different ways to these changes. Rejecting the new status quo, a considerable number of Muslims found it appropriate to migrate to the Ottoman Empire in subsequent years in search of a better situation in a state with a Muslim majority that functioned according to Islamic principles. The remaining Muslims, however, opted to adapt to the new regime and comply with state policies. This strategy at least afforded the community a certain degree of autonomy and agency in matters of religion, education, and culture.

Elite members in particular understood the potential benefits of living under Romanian administration. Despite nationalization measures that hit the entire community hard, they perceived governmental policies as avenues for the preservation of their religious identity, as well as for cultural advancement. Being aware that Romania would invest resources in the process of nation-building to make itself "complete" and therefore advance the condition of minority communities, the elite preferred to cooperate with state officials rather than criticize the establishment for the inequitable application of state policies on the ground. The avenue chosen in this context was the employment of nationalist rhetoric that portrayed the entire community as a unified body of obedient citizens devoted to both the state and the monarchy. In this context Muslim elites played an important role as intermediaries between the state and their coreligionists, thus expediting the formation of a civic consciousness among their Turkish and Tatar compatriots.

Display of loyalty for the state and monarchy was part of a well-thought-out strategy aiming to attract the benevolence and assistance of state officials in community and individual projects. Appeals along national lines also allowed for a smoother adaptation of Muslims to state policies meant to homogenize local society. Muslim elites and commoners alike decided to "speak and act nationally" in order to obtain state benefits. They made use of the Romanian language in petitions dispatched to Romanian officials, spoke Romanian in public, wrote positive articles in favor of the administration, delivered public speeches with nationalist undertones whenever state officials attended communal events, and kept good relations with the Romanian regime. As a reward for doing so, Muslims obtained financial support, particularly for mosques and schools, which secured their positions in society.

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