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Submitted: 13/01/2015 - Accepted: 13/02/2015 - Published: 24/04/2015

Dobrujan Interculturality – German versus Turkish Culture

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DOI: 10.26417/ejser.v2i1.p188-192

Abstract

The first cultural influences come out in Dobruja together with the appearance of the first German colonists, beginning from 1840 till 1891. The colonization process develops itself in three stages and colonies in places like Tulcea, Malcoci, Almagea, Ciucurova, Cogealac, Tariverde, M. Kogălniceanu and others set up as a result. The German population has created an original culture, an ethnic and spiritual communication being deeply set up, but at the same time a communication struck by the specific conditions imposed by the history of this south-eastern European area. On the other side, the Turkish invasion of Dobruja started earlier, in 1388, when it was actually defeated by Mircea cel Bătrân. In 1393 the Turks succeeded in taking Dobruja and Silistra, but in 1404 Micea cel Bătrân re-conquered the greatest part of these regions. Many Turkish and Tartars moved into Dobruja during the long period of Ottoman rule. The 19th century ethnographic maps show a mainly Turkish population in the area of modern day Dobruja, Tartars and Turks in the southern part of Dobruja and Romanians dominating the north of Dobruja. The paper aims at presenting aspects regarding these two different identities and cultures which are to be found in Dobruja, as well as their integration process within the Romanian Dobrujan modern society.

Keywords: colonization, influence, interculturality, Germans, Turks

Introduction

Dobruja, or sometimes Dobrudja (Dobrogea in Romanian, Dobruca in Turkish, Dobrudscha in German), is the territory between the Danube river and the Black Sea, including the Danube Delta, Romanian coast and the northernmost part of the Bulgarian coast. Along the history, since Middle and Upper Paleolithic, the territory of Dobruja has been inhabited and ruled by different nation: in 681 AD Dobruja became part of the First Bulgarian Empire; in 1241 the first Tatar groups, under Kadan, invaded Dobruja starting a century long history of turmoil in the region (most of these Turks returned to Anatolia in 1307, while those who remained became Christianized and adopted the name Gagauz); in 1419 Mehmed I conquered all of Dobruja; the Russian Empire occupied Dobruja several times during the Russo-Turkish Wars. Later on, between 1926 and 1938, about 30,000 Aromanians from Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece were settled in Southern Dobruja, as well as Lipovans, Italians and Germans. [1]

Around the year 1700, many Germans were fleeing their homeland to find an easier life in other European countries, the Western Hemisphere, and Australia due to extremely violent conditions. Unlike most immigrants, German immigrants mostly did not immigrate for political reasons. In fact, the country was repeatedly being attacked by armies of various nationalities. Inhabitants of the south-western part, especially, were constantly robbed and tortured. Entire villages were often burnt down and their inhabitants killed. During the flood of emigrants from Germany, its rulers tried to stop the flow, but to little effect. [2]

Another reason of immigration was the overpopulated area from the region of Rhine River and the economical crisis which appeared because of the economical and social situation in Germany (taxes to the state, the desire to become free from slavery). [3]

Therefore, the process of colonization of the Saxons living in Transylvania took place in several stages. The first contacts with the Germanic peoples were in the 2nd century AD when they were trying to settle down for a while on the territory of our country. The Germanic peoples coming to Dobruja were the Swabians and they appeared here in three distinct stages starting with 1840 till 1891. In the first stage (1840–1856) the Swabians founded the colonies from Tulcea, Mălcoci, Atmagea, Cataloi and Ciucurova in the North part of Dobruja. In the second stage, the Swabians settled down in the South part of Cogealac, Tariverde, Făclia, M. Kogălniceanu, Constanța and Lumina. In the third stage, between 1890 and 1891, the Swabians founded the compact colonies from Cobadin and Sarighiol and formed communities in Mangalia, Osmancea, Bărăganul and Viile Noi (near Constanța).

Once settled, the Dobruja Germans (in German: Dobrudscha-deutsche) dealt with breeding, butter production and trade, handicraft, building in this way rural communities. This process took place in a rather short period of time because of their discipline and deftness. The villages where the Germans used to live had a nice

structure. One could find there school, church, dispensary, stores and very nice houses with high, sculpted gates.

These colonists built their houses, even from their early times on the Dobrujan territory, using occidental architecture elements, later introducing gothic architecture elements. The houses were painted in colours such as green, blue, orange and they were made of pressed ground. One could admire the red Pelargonium at the windows. The yards around the houses were surrounded by thick walls, similar to the ones used for fortresses and they were paved with brick and not with cement, in order to permit the ground to take air.

Their houses were set in ordered positions, built in a very simple manner, but though elegant, covered with straws, iron plate, tile, reed, the streets were wide. Nothing special was observed inside their houses. The role of the housewife was not important because everything the family needed was bought from the fair. The animals were very good taken care of, the Swabians being considered the best horse breeder in Dobruja.

The regions where the Germans came from were rainy, this being the reason why the window roofs were very large. The houses which had also a porch, in order to protect the rooms from the hotness of summer, is one of the architectural elements taken over from the Romanians. The oriental elements when building their houses were the ceramics slates and the special windows from Anina (a town in south-western Romania in Caraş-Severin County). From their culture they preserved the rectangular streets lined with houses, the structure of the rooms and writing down the name of the house owner and the year of its building on the house wall closer to the street. [4] The high gates and the houses situated near the street had the role to protect the family against the curious people: "the yard is an intimate space for the Germans. On the other hand, Gipsies like everybody to see them, their life being similar to a show. Gipsies like being seen, Germans don't." [5]

In their villages one could find very beautiful and imposing churches, where the entire community was gathered. The churches were built according to the German architectural style. The priest was considered as a spiritual and intellectual leader of the community, their cultural, social and even political life being very much influenced by him. The sermon was heard in German language and when it was over, the people were leaving the church; the women first and then the men.

It is well known that the Germans have always been united through tradition. This is how the preservation of customs can be explained. Weekly the Germans used to throw parties and balls where all sorts of specialties were served and good music was played. Each village had its own fanfare as all inhabitants could play a musical instrument.

The Germans were hospitable people. When they used to have people over, they would immediately offer them beer. There was also a saying: "give the Germans beer

and they will no longer ask for wine.” They were an example of civilization through the keeping of the religious holidays: “on Crops Day, they would decorate the mirrors with red tinsel and would throw with wheat and corn grains on the floor. The German women accompanied them to the ale house. The Romanian stood aside laughing at them.”[6]

The first cultural influences made their presence felt once with the arrival of the first German colonists. At the basis of their spiritual life were the religious beliefs and the Bible represented for them their spiritual food and an important inspirational source for the literary creation. [7] Besides *der Hiller*, which was of great importance to the evangelical colonists, *Grosse Himmelsschlüssel* was also a book of prayers for the catholic colonists. [8] Among these religious books an important role was played by the calendars spread mainly in Ciucurova, Cogealac, Tariverde, Cobadin, and in other places (*St. Maria- und St. Josef-Kalender, Die Jahreszeiten, Prochaskas Familien-Kalender*).

A central role within culture is played by education, school representing one of the priorities of the German community from Romania. H.O. Roth said in 1925 that “the most important things that our institutions can offer us are included in the confessional school, which grew from the history of our people. The confessional school is seen as a source of culture and moral, qualities which are to be found in the centre of our developing as a people”. [9]

Representative for the German school is the fact that it tried to adapt itself to the new development level of the Romanian society, to preserve the tradition, and at the same time to assimilate several elements from the new pedagogical trends. Between the years 1918–1944 the German school confronted itself with the tribulations from the political and national sphere, but it remained the main element in the development of the German culture. [10]

The development of the German literature in Romania, between the 17th and 18th centuries, was influenced by the development of the Romanian literature, numerous Romanian authors being as well influenced by the German language literature. The press, newspapers and magazines, gave a remarkable support in this sense, promoting in this way the culture and implicitly introducing the literary creations of the German language authors to the public. [11]

A particular interest in the folk creation was shown by the Germans from Dobruja who considered it “to spring from the German people’s soul and to last as long as this soul carries on”. [12] As proof to the presence and interest in the German folk creation in Dobruja stands Arthur Byhan’s (1915) collection, containing 39 old folk songs, of which 19 were taken from a song booklet found in Cogealac (1899–1901) written by Robert Radke. 12 songs belonged to a songs’ collection which were sung in Malcoci during 1898–1901, while the rest came from Caramurat. These songs have known great spreading, even if many of them were written in dialect (*A Rondreis durch d*

Dobruja – Alida Schielke-Brenner, Wie ich zum erschte Mol nach Siebenbirga gfabren – Anna Pfeifer – Tariverde).

The folk songs from this period of time do not stand out from an artistic point of view. In what the content is concerned, themes like love and its avatars, happiness, separation, death, infidelity, temptation, disgrace are approached. These folk songs represent the ancient folk song with its origins in different parts of Germany. The folk creation also includes several songs whose subjects are the love stories of some knights, riders and hunters. Other examples are the songs which appeared at the end of the 16th century – *Es waren drei gefangen*, *Es ging ein Jäger aus frischem Mut* – the song about a count and a nun (*Ich stand auf hohem Berge*), attested by A. Byhan in Cogealac for the first time. This song was also mentioned by Goethe in Alsace in 1771, which appeared later in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.

From a literary point of view, the work of the Romanian writers creates an image specific to the Romanian, be that of a peasant, worker, writer or intellectual, an image which differs from that of the character created by the German language writers in attitude, behaviour, social relationships. If we were to discriminate between these two literary patterns we could mention differentiating characteristics of the two nationalities. While the Germans have a rigid and well-balanced structure, the Romanians are more flexible. Hard-working, skilful, forgiving, though history had a great impact on them, the Germans always had the belief that they can cope with anything. Honesty, balance, decency, ethics, self-discipline are only few of the specific traits that characterize the Germans from Romania.

Living mostly side by side with the Romanians and the Turks, the German language writers, some of them unknown, described in their works the way in which they saw their cohabitants, their lifestyle and customs. [13]

A very good example is the short story *Die Tatarin* (Tatar Woman). The story is placed in the country side, in the middle of nature. As opposed to the bleak atmosphere and to the resigned nature of the people in this place, the young Tatar woman becomes the heroine of a dumb rebellion against her status as an abandoned and vulnerable woman: “Driven by anger, the woman would have humiliated herself in order to be independent and to no longer ask anything from Seifedin.” [14] To a certain extent, the success of the story is based on the way the main character is drawn. Muhibe, an ordinary woman and a courageous, hard-working mother, has as sole purpose offering her daughter a good life, all on her own. From the description of the Tatar woman, one can create the portrait of the Tatar people: hard-working, courageous, able to fight for social independence, carrying, but also vulnerable or angry when being humiliated.

The Turkish people tried to make their presence felt among other nations in Dobruja even from the early times on the Dobrujan territory. The Turks of Romania / Dobruja are often referred to as the Osmanlis, the Rumelian Turk, and the Balkan Turk,

(Rumelia means “land of the Romans” and refers to the Balkan Mountains). They are the descendants of the Ottoman Turks who migrated from their central Asian homeland, conquered Anatolia (modern day Turkey), and eventually established the Ottoman Empire.

At its peak, the Ottoman Empire encompassed the Balkan Mountains, Arabia, and North Africa. At one time, the empire also threatened to take over Vienna. Romania was part of the Ottoman Empire for more than 300 years, until the country gained its independence in the 1860's.

During the long Ottoman Empire reign, the Turkish people often settled in Balkan towns and served as military personnel or administrators, or worked as craftsmen. During the late eighteenth century, many Crimean Tatars and Circassians from the Caucasus migrated to the Dobruja region, where they were given land by the Ottoman government. The immigrants formed farming villages, adopted the Turkish language and religion, and intermingled with the Rumelian Turk. These Rumelian Turks are still a distinctive cultural entity. However, religious, linguistic, and social differences prevented Rumelian Turks from intermarrying with the local populations in large numbers. When they did intermarry, Turkish men usually married Muslim, non-Turkish women. Under Communist rule, the Muslim minority was governed by a Mufti (Muslim leader), whose seat was at Constanta, the capital of the Dobruja region. [15]

The Rumelian Turks are descended from Turks who settled in the Balkans when, from the 15th to the 19th centuries, that region of southern Europe was part of the Ottoman Empire. They were stranded when imperial territories began acquiring national independence in the 19th century. Most of the Rumelian Turks resettled in Turkey between 1878 and 1924. In rural areas, Rumelian Turks tended to become farmers or artisans in the coastal villages evacuated by Greeks during the 1920s population exchanges. Their most common preoccupation was trade. They used to have small shops, which were used as workshops where coppersmiths, silversmiths and bronzesmiths worked metals into beautiful artefacts. There were also carpenters' and shoemakers' shops.

Similar to the German people, the Turkish people were very religious. Religious freedom was guaranteed to all citizens under the Communist Romanian Constitution, but in practice, religion was not encouraged and clergy were restricted and often hindered in their duties. Religious education was discouraged and, in some cases, totally banned. But the Muslim religion was very much respected by its people. More, it forbade drinking alcoholic beverages. Even if most of the nations cohabiting in Dobruja weren't Muslims, very few of the Rumelian Turks are known to have become Christians.

In the areas where they used to build their houses, the streets were narrow and were lined with houses and garden walls on both sides. Their houses were built in an interesting way. The ground floor was faced with flat stones. Stables, sheds, store-

rooms, and pantries were usually on the ground floor. This made their homes look special.

One of the best examples of interculturality is having three different cultures cohabitating – the Romanian, the German and the Turkish one –: “What we are calling culture is the set of features which typify a people, group, society, (...) which can be recognized by habits, feelings, and a material world of objects both utilitarian and aesthetic. And, even more specifically, a certain way of unifying these different elements.” [16]

As a result, interculturality might be defined as a set of processes through which relations between different cultures are constructed. The aim is to enable groups and individuals who belong to such cultures within a single society or geopolitical entity to forge links based on equity and mutual respect. Interculturality must not be seen as something general but rather as a phenomenon of many facets that together form a unit, although the facets may be considered separately from certain angles and in certain lights. The various facets of interculturality should thus not be considered as fragmenting the concept into disparate elements but as each embodying some of its characteristics and reflecting a predominant focus, without excluding others. In considering the situation of migrants or of the new “minorities” in south-eastern Europe the dominant facet of interculturality is the concern to address differences, in order to identify the misunderstandings and conflicts they may engender from each culture and to find solutions. In exploring linguistic diversity or seeking to understand the importance of the media, the relevant facet of interculturality is centred on communication issues.

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