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TRANSCULTURATION AND IDENTITARY ALIENATION: POLISH COMMUNITIES IN DOBRUDZHA IN THE FORMER HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

ТРАНСКУЛТУРАЦИЯ И АЛИЕНАЦИЯ НА ИДЕНТИЧНОСТТА: ПОЛСКИ ОБЩНОСТИ В ДОБРУДЖА ПРЕЗ ПЪРВАТА ПОЛОВИНА НА ХХ В.

По принцип, когато някой избере да се интегрира в национално мнозинство или по-голяма етническа група, той едновременно с това избира да напусне своята етническа общност. Подобно решение оказва влияние както върху съзнанието, така и върху цялостната личност на индивида, тъй като поражда не само преимущества, но също така и въпроси от рода на: кой е той самият, към чия общност принадлежи и като какъв се самоопределя. Успешната интеграция в национално мнозинство предполага повече от простата асимилация на националната култура. На практика тя не е от значение. Също така общият характер на културното взаимодействие, активното участие на групи в този процес довежда като резултат до създаването на уникална формация.

Повечето от етническите поляци от Добруджа, които авторът е идентифицирал по техните имена, са дошли от региони със силно етническо смесване като Померания, Познания или Силезия, където поляци и немци живеели в пряк контакт благодарение на католическата религия и образованието. Липсата на образование на майчин език и не-ефективността на малкото традиционни институции ги накарали да изоставят своята етническа принадлежност към края на XIX и началото на XX в. в името на това да запазят католицизма като елемент от своята идентичност срещу асимилацията на ортодоксалното и румънско мнозинство.

Ключови думи: поляци, германци, католицизъм, алиенация, транскултурация, етническа идентичност.

1. Some data concerning the presence of Poles in Dobrudzha

Nothing substantial has ever been written about the Polish communities in Dobrudzha, no one has chronicled their settlement in the province lying between the Danube and the Black Sea. We have not been able to find any clear data concerning the numerical evolution of those who lived here, nor have we identified any conclusive evidence of their ethnic identity: churches, graveyards, schools, or publications. The reasons for the *status quo* is that, on the one hand, the Polish community in Dobrudzha never numbered more than a few hundred souls, mainly scattered in cosmopolitan urban areas (Tulcea, Sulina, Constanța). This only points out that the Pontic area

drew attention only to those ethnic and religious communities that were not so massively present in other regions of the country – Turks, Tartars, Bulgarians, Armenians, Albanians, and Germans.

None of the travellers passing through Dobruđzha in the 19th century mentions the existence of a Polish community there. Our data has come from diverse sources, and we have serious reservations regarding some of them. Even later, in the inter-war period, the Consulate of the Polish Republic in Constanța, set up in 1934, did not show preoccupation for the fate of the Poles in Dobruđzha (Archiwum Akt Nowych: files 1-21), unlike the Polish consulates in Cernăuți, Chișinău, Brăila and Cluj.

Until the end of the 18th century and the early decades of the 19th century no documentary evidence attested the presence of Polish communities in Dobruđzha. The colonization of Bucovina took place about this time (Ungureanu 2003: 261)¹ and, on many occasions, with the direct support of the central administration in Vienna. It is only after the crush of the 1831 revolution in Poland that we can talk about Polish colonization in the Principalities of Moldova and Wallachia. Most of the Poles were political refugees and their families². *The settlement of the Poles in Dobruđzha had no connection with the situation in their territories of origin.* In addition, most of them came to this province directly from Poland, as it happened in other areas, such as Bessarabia occupied by Tsarist Russia.

The exact moment when an ethnic Polish group constituted itself in Dobruđzha was the Crimean War (1853–1856), the end of this military conflict to be more precise. A document in the Cracovian Archives of the Czartoryski family, circulated by the historian Gheorghe Duzinchievici as early as 1935, which continues to be little known today, shows that, in 1860, about 300 Poles lived in the area between the Danube and the Black Sea. Most of them were soldiers, who had taken action with the English Division involved in the Crimean War (Duzinchievici 1935: 28–29).

The number of Poles increased in the spring of 1863, several months after the outbreak of the Polish revolution. In April, during the exploratory mission of Janusz Woronicz, an envoy of the Polish Revolutionary government to Iași, the decision was taken to organize an expeditionary corps that would fight against the Tsarist army. Moldova, given its geographical position, would have been a good base for operations, but the settlement of a Polish military camp there would have inevitably drawn the attention of the Russian authorities. Zygmunt Miłkowski was assigned the difficult task of organizing a *Polish Legion* in Dobruđzha, instead.

Although he might have chosen Tulcea for his headquarters, a port on the Danube where several hundred foreigners could have gathered without drawing too much attention, Miłkowski decided the most of the Legion to be quartered by German colonists in the village of *Franzensthal*, near Tulcea (Duzinchievici 1935: 34–35). On April 12, 1863, the 258 strong Polish expeditionary forces crossed the Danube at Isaccea, near Cahul, and entered Romanian territory. Alexandru Ioan Cuza was afraid that the Poles could be manoeuvred by Sturdza, a pretender to the throne of

the United Principalities and decided to disarm them and stop their march. On July 14–15, 1863, at Constangalia, Regiment 5 led by Colonel Călinescu defeated Miłkowski's small army and forced the Poles to retreat into Dobruzha (Duzinchievici 1935: 78–82; Panaitescu 1962: 78–79).

After the 1864 *coup d'état* in the Principalities, the Ottoman Empire came under unprecedented diplomatic pressure from Russia and Austria to disperse the colony of Polish political refugees in Dobruzha. The Sublime Porte took a quick decision: fearing that the European Powers might intervene north of the Danube, at the end of 1864, the Sultan decided that the Poles leave Tulcea and its environs for more secure places like Constantinople or Alexandria, in Egypt (until now, just near Istanbul there exists a town named *Adampol*, with Poles inhabitants with Polish names). *After 1864, few Poles, most likely no more than 50 individuals, especially those who had managed to achieve some material or professional status, remained in Dobruzha.*

The war of 1877–1878, at the end of which Romania declared its independence and Dobruja was incorporated into the Kingdom, caused material damage as well as important movements of population, as a document issued in 1879 by George M. Ghica, Prefect of Tulcea, shows (Dumitrașcu 1973–1975: 273–288). We know nothing of the fate of the Poles: those who probably lived in towns crossed the border into Romania. In any case, in 1878, two decades after its appearance, the Polish community in Dobruja almost ceased to exist demographically.

At the end of the 19th century, following the remarkable economic, social and demographic development of the province under Romanian administration, of its 260 000 inhabitants, *63 declared themselves to be ethnic Poles*. Most of them lived in three towns – Sulina, Tulcea and Constanța (Cioroiu 2001: 130; Arbore 1929: 219; Ghiapă 1977). One third of them (17) lived at la Sulina, the headquarters of the European Commission of the Danube which in 1900 had 4913 permanent inhabitants (Ionescu 1904: 259–269) of 21 different ethnic groups³.

We possess no accurate data to evaluate the number of Poles at the outbreak of World War I, but their number may have amounted to 150, possibly 200 persons (a statistics regarding the number and the ethnicity of the inhabitants of Dobruzha shows that about 1913, 164 Poles were living there) (Arhivele, fond Casa Regală: file 19/1919, f. 36).

In rural areas Polish communities are first mentioned at the end of the 19th century. We know that in 1916, at *Caramurat* (today *Mihail Kogălniceanu*, Constanța County) 37 Polish farmers lived together with 1265 Romanians, 360 Turks and 746 Germans (Negulescu 1924: 55). In the last decade of the 19th century, in Tulcea county *4 ethnic Poles* owned together 35 hectares of arable land and 5000 square meters of intravillan land (the only Englishman in the same county with businesses in agriculture owned 12 ha; 12 Italians owned together 16 ha and the only French farmer owned 470 ha) (Raportul 1906, in Lascu 1999: 429–430).

For no apparent reason, the rigorous census of December 1930 *does not distinctly mention Poles among the 811 000 inhabitants of Dobrudzha* (Anuarul 1938: 35). We exclude the possibility, that in the inter-war period, under the circumstances of unprecedented economic and social development of Dobrudzha, there were no Poles there. Rather, as we shall show in our study, because they had no schools and churches, no teachers or priests, companies or associations, journals and leaders of opinion, the Poles in Dobrudzha preferred to declare themselves Germans, Jews or Romanians, as needs and interests arose. Since the Polish communities did not have relations with one another, it is difficult to establish whether it was a unilateral decision as it happened with the German Catholics Dobrudzha when forced to concede a number of graves in their cemeteries, or seats in German vocational schools.

In fact, in 1934, one of the reasons for the opening of the Polish Consulate in Constanța was exactly the regulation of the relations between the members of this ethnic group and the local authorities⁴.

2. Some reasons why Poles did not settle in Dobrudzha. Data about their occupations

Why didn't Poles settle in larger numbers in Dobrudzha?

In Bukovina, for example, the administration in Vienna facilitated colonization, both in urban and in rural areas, and those who arrived there, regardless of their ethnic group, easily could give a new meaning to their lives. The economic, social and cultural environment favoured the acceptance of foreigners and the reformation of all structures in the European sense. Clerks, teachers, engineers, industrial workers, miners, and forest rangers: these were only few of the opportunities offered to the newcomers in the Austrian province, starting with the last quarter of the 18th century. The geographical proximity to historical Poland facilitated communication with those that had remained at home, especially after Austria launched its ample program of building railway and road networks (Cernăuți – Lvov, for example, with connections to Iași).

In 1850, however, Dobrudzha was not such an inviting place: ignorant of technical advancements, the province had only a rudimentary economy and administration, and no immediate prospects of progress. The re-structuring of the political, administrative and judicial Ottoman regime looked almost impossible in a scarcely populated region, without an adequate transport network, without schools and a local press, far from the main developments of the 19th century. By the middle of the century, the province had been ravaged by two Russian-Turkish wars, in 1806–1812 and 1828–1829, respectively. They ruined the economy of the province: Babadag, a flourishing town until mid-eighteenth century, with about 15 000 inhabitants, turned into a „pile of ruins” (Conea1928). Camille Allard, a French doctor, associated with the Mission located in Constanța during the Crimean War, an untiring fan of

Dobrudzha's history, geography and economy, described the town in which he was living as follows: "...in wintertime wolves come into town. Constanța has two streets only. Fancy earthen roads with holes and molehills, dust and puddles, with thistles growing on either side and even in the middle of the road, and hungry dogs everywhere. There are no sidewalks, and no lights. Two dirty small cafeterias serve as exchange, parliament, or meeting place and provide entertainment for the local population" (Cioroiu 2001: 35–36).

In 1860, a British company completed the construction of the Cernavodă – Constanța railway. Only workers from the Ottoman Empire were employed. The other Dobrudzha railways were constructed in the 20th century, when the Romanian state no longer employed foreign specialists and companies to carry out the work: Medgidia – Babadag, 104 km, between 1911 and 1925; Babadag – Tulcea, 40 km, in 1940 (Bărbuleanu 1998: 164–165)⁵; Constanța –Mangalia and Medgidia – Bazargic (Dobrich), during the inter-war period. Foreign investments in people, technology and money were no longer needed, unlike in Moldova, where the construction of the railway in the 1870s had prompted many Poles to settle in Romania.

After 1878, the exclusively Romanian rural colonization did not favour the constitution of identitary communities, as it had happened in Bucovina, Bessarabia or Transylvania. The Poles could not, even if they had wished, settle in large numbers in Dobrudzhan villages. The Romanian state showed preference for the Germans instead. Since industry and the tertiary sector – tourism, trade, education, medicine – were lagging behind in the Old Kingdom of Romania, the Poles in Dobrudzha found no incentives, either material or spiritual, to settle in the region.

For all this, some personalities of the Polish community in Dobrudzha stand out. *Artur Paklinski* (Cioroiu 2001: 195), engineer, was a member of the team of Anghel Saligny, who designed and built the port of Constanța (work started in 1896) and the Cernavoda Bridge across the Danube (inaugurated in 1895). In Constanța, *Jan Dracki* (Cioroiu 2001: 183) owned a company called "Albion" that traded scythes, while at the turn of the century, an actor called *Rafal Bulfinski* (Cioroiu 2001: 57) successfully played on the summer stages of the same town, recently caught in the fever of modernity.

Other members of the community left insignificant marks of their presence here. Between 1878 and 1916 we can find many Poles in modest professional and social positions, as port workers, craftsmen, or farmers. We do not possess any documents concerning ship-owners, merchants, doctors or lawyers of Polish origin. The situation changed for the better during the interwar period: the Poles who had settled in Dobrudzha towns and villages thrived materially, but not socially or culturally. In the rural areas of the province, the agrarian reform of 1921 opened new perspectives for the farmers of Polish origin: they could buy land, modern agricultural tools became more accessible, while farms integrated, slowly but surely in the competitive market.

3. Polish Identitary Alienation in the Catholic German Communities in Dobrudzha

Historians have already established that Germans settled in the area between the Danube and the Black Sea in three distinct periods: 1840–1856, 1873–1888 and 1890–1891 (Georgescu 1926: 1–31)⁶. The reasons for these migrations were usually connected with the internal evolution in Tsarist Russia and the geopolitical changes in the area due to the armed conflicts which directly affected Dobrudzha, such as the Crimean War and the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878.

The German colony at Mangea Punar (today Costinești, Constanța county) was established through the direct intervention of Emil Costinescu, landowner, liberal politician and founder of the National Bank of Romania, who, in 1896, bought several hectares of land between Constanța and Mangalia. The property was leased to Germans, who came from Bessarabia, Caramurat and Malcoci. Most of the ethnical Germans came from Rhenania-Palatinate and all of them were Catholic. Sfantul Ioan (Saint John) Church, the first German church in the area was built in 1902, and the German school in 1933 (Miu 2005: 28–29, 36–37). In 1922, the colony numbered 232 Germans (and only 18 Romanians); their number grew to 382 persons in 1936 (Miu 2005: 59).

We are convinced that the Poles distinctly mentioned in documents came here together with Germans, organically integrated into their communities. This is characteristic of the last two colonization episodes, after the integration of Dobrudzha in the Romanian state. The process might have originated in Bugeac, Pontic Ukraine. The Polish-German identity *mélange* had undoubtedly functioned before their leaving for Romania: here the process continued and, in some cases, was completed.

Techirghiol was a typical instantiation of the process. At the end of the 19th century and in the early years of the 20th century, Germans coming from South Bessarabia (some of them) and from the villages of *Malcoci* (Tulcea county) and *Caramurat* (Constanța county), the rest of them, established and consolidated a colony here. Coming from Bugeac, these Germans had settled in the villages of Constanța, a few years earlier, and did not differentiate linguistically or mentally from their fellow nationals who arrived here later. Stone cutters – like most of the Italians established in North Dobrudzha⁷ – but also experienced farmers, the Germans in Techirghiol soon created a model colony, initiated an efficient system of mutual economic and social help, a network of schools, cultural, professional and religious associations and organizations.

At the end of World War I, official data record *16 families*, with *97 German Catholics* at Techirghiol⁸. We believe that, given the increased birth rate in the community, towards 1940 the community numbered about *200 persons*. A perusal of the list of those who declared themselves members of the German ethnic group shows an unusual situation: about 40 persons – parents, children, and married women – belonged to the same family, *Bobolowski*, a Polish name, beyond all doubt. The

*Boganskis, Kossolowskis, Jasiemieckis*⁹ were also Polish. Trying to obtain a good comparison to understand this case, we formulate an appropriate example for the Bulgarian territory, also in the inter-war period: the case of the only Czech village, in Vojvodovo (Pencev 2008: 115–126), where they lived up to the late 1940s, when they left to resettle Czechoslovak border regions after the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. We understand their collective identity as primarily religious: they were strict Protestants with a strong sense for religious asceticism and protestant work ethics (Svoboda 2008: 145–162).

In principle, when someone chooses to integrate himself into the national majority or a larger ethnic group, one simultaneously chooses to leave their community¹⁰. The decision affects the conscience as well as the whole personality of the individual, because it refers not only to the advantages thus gained, but also to such questions as who one is, whom one belongs to, and how one defines oneself. Successful integration into the majority involves more than the mere assimilation of the national culture. In reality, this does not matter. To be accepted in “our” circle, one must participate fully in everyday communication: one should speak the language without a foreign accent, one should use “our” accepted procedures of bodily contacts, one’s relating to objects should be similar to “ours” otherwise the foreigner will immediately be branded (Kis 1996: 48–49).

That is why we can be sure that Romanian authorities exerted no influence upon this transformation. The lack of any data concerning the Poles in Dobrudzha hinders any effort to elucidate the problem, although similarities with other cases may help us make reasonable suppositions. We may infer that the ethnic Poles we have identified by their names, although there could be others as well, came from regions with strong ethnic confluences, such as Pomerania, Poznania or Silesia, where Poles and Germans had come into direct contact through Catholicism and education. In Bugeac, to survive ethnically and religiously at a time when pro-Slav Russification was gaining momentum, the Poles might have sought safe refuge among the German catholic community, more distinct than the Slavs. The lack of education in their maternal language and the inefficiency of the few traditional institutions made them abandon their ethnicity at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in order to preserve Catholicism as an element of identification. It was not the first time this had happened: in North-eastern Europe, until the end of World War I, Lithuanians, Byelorussians or Ukrainians referred exclusively to religion to mark themselves out from the central authority or ethnic majority. In Dobrudzha most Poles preferred integration in the German community to the assimilation into the Romanian Orthodox majority.

This process worked perfectly well at Techirghiol: here, the Catholic Church was consecrated in 1934 and until the forced repatriation of Germans in 1940, service was carried in German. At the same time, the confessional school functioned according to the similar principles, and education was provided by teachers of German origin¹¹.

Credible explanations can be advanced for the ethnic mimesis that the Polish communities in Dobrudzha occasionally adopted: their extremely small number, the lack of instruments for the preservation of ethnic identity and the poor communication with the larger Polish groups from Bucovina, Basarabia, or Bucharest, and with their motherland, Poland, after 1918. It is reasonable to believe that, as in the case of the Techirghiol community, systematic anthropological research in the former German villages in Dobrudzha may provide valuable information.

NOTES

¹ Ungureanu rejects the idea that Poles colonized Solonebul Nou, Pleșa and Poiana Micului. For another opinion see: Willaume 1977 and Pintescu 2002.

² For the evolution of the Polish communities in Romania see: Willaume 1977; Anghel 1996.

³ At the beginning of the 20th century, Sulina had 4913 inhabitants: *Greeks* – 2056, *Romanians* – 803, *Russians* – 594, *Armenians* – 444, *Turks* – 268, *Austrians and Hungarians* – 211, *Jews* – 173, *Albanians* – 117, *Germans* – 49, *Italiens* – 45, *Bulgarians* – 35, *English* – 24, *Montenegreans* – 22, *Tartars* – 22, *Poles* – 17, *French* – 11, *Russian-Lipovenans* – 7, *Danes* – 6, *Găgăuz* – 5, *Persians* – 4. In October 1917, the German Military Occupation of Dobrudzha recensed (excluding the north of the province with Tulcea, Isaccea, Babadag and Macin counties) 192 362 inhabitants: *Romanians* – 95 764; *Bulgarians* – 29 323; *Tartars* – 27 398; *Turks* – 13 372; *Russians* – 7 769; *Gipsies* – 6 396; *Germans* – 6 084; *Greeks* – 3 931; *Jews* – 789; *Armenians* – 261; *Hungarians* – 216; *Italians* – 182; *Albanians* – 135. – See Bilder Aus Der Dobrudscha 2011: 282.

⁴ For the reasons for opening the Polish consulate in Constanța and its activity in the context of the Romanian-Polish relations see Anghel 2005: 131–144.

⁵ About the inter-war road network in Dobrudzha see Ciorbea 2008: 110–114.

⁶ For precious information about the Germans in Dobrudzha see Muscan 2003: 297–298. In the fall of 1918, Netzhammer traveled from Mangalia to Constanța and had a stopover at Techirghiol, but does not mention the German community there. Nor does the translator of the text give any explanation. In 1918, Paul Trager, a German official of the Military Administration (occupation) of Dobrudzha insisted on the number of about 8 500 Germans in the whole province, into 22 villages and 3 cities – Constanța, Tulcea and Cernavoda (Bilder Aus Der Dobrudscha 2011: 150).

⁷ A similar case as that in the Italian stone-carvers, who settled in North Dobrudzha in the latter half of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, due to the excess of raw material and the lack of professionals in the region. – See Petre 2003: 109–114.

⁸ Testimony of Mrs. Marta Koch-Ion, in Lăpușan 1999: 90–91.

⁹ For a list of the German families from Techirghiol see Lăpușan 1999: 91–92. See as similar: Anghel 2006: 193–197 and Anghel 2010: 153–161.

¹⁰ A discussion about the so called transculturation in Klosek 2000: 173–174.

¹¹ Marta Koch-Ion in Lăpușan 1999: 91.

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