

## NATIONAL IDENTITY AND MİLLİ MUCADELE (NATIONAL STRUGGLE) OF THE CRIMEAN TATARS OF DOBRUJA

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*Abstract:* This study aims to provide a comprehensive presentation on *milli mucadele* (national struggle) situation of Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, Romania. This research emphasis the historical, political and social conditions of the Crimean Tatars minority in a general context. The main target is on the national struggle of the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja at the end of the Second World War and communist regime, giving a general framework for understanding the post-communist developments.

The body of this study discusses themes such as historical memory, political life and the impact of culture on ethnic minorities politics with an emphasis on Crimean Tatar ethnic minority of Dobruja based on Anthony Smith's theory about ethno-symbolism.

This study is based on personal documentation acquired from field research based on documents owned by Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale, DJCAN (National Archives County Departments of Constanta). For challenges faced by the refugees Crimean after the Crimean War and Ottoman-Russian War of 1877 I based my research on *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office).

*Keywords:* Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, Crimea, historical minorities, national identity, *milli mucadele* (national struggle).

### 1. Introduction

It is a great pleasure for me to write this study dedicated to *milli mucadele* of the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, as I am a native Crimean Tatar borne in Dobruja, Romania. There are some studies about Crimean Tatars of Dobrodja: Müstecip Ülküsal's work published in 1966 and Mehmet Ali Ekrem's work published in 1997. Both works provide general information about Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, but less information about *milli mucadele* of some people, as Müstecip Ülküsal, who wrote history. Everybody talks about the cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatars minority of Dobruja, but nobody says anything about the historical and cultural memory, destroyed villages, schools and Mosques of this ethnicity.

The purpose of this research is to highlight these needs from Anthony Smith's approach about his theory of ethno-symbolism, which I mostly agree when there is about nation and nationalism theory.

Limiting conditions to research led me to a study based on documents owned by Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale, DJCAN (National Archives County Departments of Constanta) and *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office).

## 2. What do we know about the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja

### 2.1. Short history of the Crimean Tatars

Today's Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, Romania are the fourth or fifth generation of the war refugees from Crimea. Their history is shaped by their experience as war refugees, nationalism, communism regime and by these phenomena's influence in their life.

The most significant consequence of the Ottoman-Russian wars was the enormous influx of the Ottoman subjects, mostly Muslims, who had been living in the area now, subject to the Russian occupation. Hundreds of thousands of Crimeans and Nogays had to flee towards the Ottoman lands under unbearable conditions. The influx of people who had left the Crimean peninsula cannot be explained only by battles and their runaway had many phases (Ismail 66). The Crimean War 1853-1856 caused the second major phase of their flight towards the Ottoman territories (Fisher 179).

Some inhabitants of the Northern Dobruca runaway from the region and followed the only option available to save their lives. They might head towards a close and secure centre for refugee or kept on moving until they reached *Dersaadet*, "mutluluk kapısı" former name for Istanbul: BOA, A.} MKT.MHM, 1281 C 29/29 Kasım1864/ 29 November 1864 "*Tuna vapuruyla gelen muhacirlerin İstanbul civarında yer kalmaması dolayısıyla Sinop'a gönderildiği, bundan sonra gelecek muhacirlerin Dersaadet'e gönderilmeden doğruca Sivas ve Köstence cihetleriyle Trabzon'un doğu taraflarına gönderilmesi*". The above document states about the refugees who came by boat to *Dersadet*, but because there were so many refugees and no available space for them, they were resettled in *Sivas*, Anatolian town, in *Sinop*, *Trabzon* and *Köstence* (Turkish spelling) southern and western Black Sea coastal towns. After the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877 the refugees settled and resettled in Dobruja had to runaway from the approaching Russian army. So, we can imagine a vast group of refugees fleeing before the Russian approaching army. *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office) contains a vast number of documents that reported on various examples alike.

Most of the Crimean refugees settled in Dobruja, founded new households and dedicated themselves to agriculture. Even after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877 that drew the borders and brought a new state, Romania, many of the Crimean refugees remained in the territory of Dobruja. There are communities of Crimean Tatars not only in Romania, but also in Bulgaria, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and United States, and they are united in their emotional understanding of their homeland - the Crimean peninsula.

### 2.2. Anthony Smith for ethnic, nation and nationalism and the social situation of the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja

Most studies have been content to Crimean Tatars in general (see, Uehling, Lynn Greta, 2004, *Beyond Memory The Crimean Tatars Deportation and Return*), but less to Crimean Tatars of Dobruja. The study of Anthony Smith about ethnicities has become an important aspect of the ethnic origins of nations. His research about the national identity, and on the role of myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols stand for the unique culture and fate of an ethnic community. Smith's study focuses on the cultural aspects of nations and nationalism, and less on the political aspects. Smith's theories about historical memory has the material embodiment in a territory, which in general is referred to as the "political landscape", and defines it as a territorization of memory, and he notes that to become a national, common memory it has to be connected to specific places and territory. In this part of my paper, I argue that for today's Crimean Tatars minority's generation, today's territory of Dobrudja might be the political landscape, as the territory of Dobruja is composed of symbols related to their different historical times.

Many recent studies have focused on historical memory, political landscape in connection with nations and nationalism. Following the definition given by Anthony Smith for ethnies, nation and nationalism and the social situation of the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja we found that “...to understand the relationship between politics, ethnicity and nationalism, we need to clarify the concepts of **ethnie** and nation and recognise the importance of a long history of ethnicity for the formation of nations” (Smith, 1998: 4).

Smith states

“... ethnic community (or ethnies) as a named human population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories and elements of common culture with a link to a specific territory and measure of solidarity” (Smith, 1998: 4)

which fits perfectly the definition for today’s Crimean Tatars of Dobruja. They share a common ancestry, memories and culture, a measure of solidarity, and all these linked to a specific territory Crimea. As a result, the ethnic community denomination fits the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja. As regarding the definition for nation, Smith states

“... a nation I regard as a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties...” (Smith, 1998: 4).

Could we talk about a nation in which we include the Tatars of Dobruja, Crimea, the US, Ukraine, Turkey? The answer is not. They share only a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, but they do not share a common economy and legal rights and duties.

But studying the old newspapers owned by Constanta County Library „Ioan Roman” and documents owned by Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale, DJCAN (*National Archives County Departments of Constanta*), where the Ottoman Turks and Crimean Tatars are named after their religion, being named as Muslim Turks or Muslim community of Romania, we find that Smith’s definition is perfect for this ethnic community. However, their commitment to religion, which has a strong influence on their ethnic identity. Following these data, on the territory of Dobruja we find many monuments, which epitomize the Ottoman period, and they represent the memorial space for the Muslim community. There are many examples: Esmahan Mosque built in 1575 by Esmahan, the daughter of the Ottoman sultan, Selim II (Ayverdi, 2000: 42); Hünkâr Mosque built in 1864 during the Ottoman sultan Abdülaziz (Ayverdi, 2000: 39). In short, many different mosques, school buildings and other symbols can be considered as embodiment.

Another way to incorporate the historical memory into the political landscape is the name of places, which plays a key role in creating the phenomenon of “imagined communities” (Biletska, 2014: 52). Browsing the newspapers of time owned by Constanta County Library „Ioan Roman” and documents with DJCAN (*National Archives County Departments of Constanta*) it is possible to demonstrate the willful modification of historical evidence. On December the 9th 1929, Monitorul Oficial (*Romanian Official Gazette*) published Decree 4036, lately 161, from 15 July 1931 announced all the changes in the names of villages and towns of Dobruja. Many names of towns and villages were changed or translated into Romanian language. Some villages changed their name as: *Aziza* was renamed *Saligni*, *Terziköy* renamed in *Runcul*, *Kalaköy* in *Capidava* and many other villages. For some villages and towns they just translated their name into Romanian, as: *Karaomer* translated *Negru Vodă*, *Akbaş* translated *Albești*, *Başpınar* translated *Fântâna Mare* and many others: Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale, DJCAN, fond Prefectura Constanta, dosar 15/1930, pps. 2, 1, 4, (*National Archives County Departments of Constanta, Prefecture fund, File 15/1930, pps. 2, 1, 4*).

With all these evidences, our work does not meant to demonstrate territorialisation in Dobruja, but, on the contrary, we want to emphasize the struggle of some members of the community during the Second World War in their desire to liberate Crimea and to create an independent state.

### **3. Nationalism in the Balkans in the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century**

#### **3.1. National character of the Muslims established in Dobruja, in the newly created Romania**

For Anthony Giddens, nationalism is linked to modern state. He states “Nation-states are associated with the emergence of nationalism, which can be defined as the set of symbols and beliefs that give the feeling of belonging to a certain political community” (Giddens, 2010: 824). Similarly, Giddens states that the feeling of nationalism, the pride that you belong to a nation lead to the achievement of the independence of a state. In the newly created Romanian state, after 1878, nationalism, emerged with the advent of the modern Romanian state in the early 20th century. In Dobruja, after 1878, the achievement of independence and the belonging to a certain political community emerged new feelings such as modern Romania, political discourse of the elites and the process of Romanianization. On the other side the portrayals of the new Romania as a country offering “equal chances”, along with the rhetoric of economic progress and understanding among nations, determined the process of differentiation between the Christian the Muslim inhabitants of Dobruja. They felt different and they understood that were ancestrally related to their relatives in Crimea because of felt kinship ties.

The feeling of oppression with the Crimean Tatars was shaped over time, after the annexation of the Crimean Khanate in 1783 to Tsarist Russia, and it reached its top during the forced refuge after many Ottoman-Russian wars in the 19th century. The sense of oppression faced by the ethnic community of Crimean Tatars and the strong nationalist discourse of political alliances in Romania emerges from the newspapers of Constanta County Library, as: “Aurora” (1894-1895), “Farul Constanței” (1880-1938), “Constanța” (1891-1904), “Gazeta Dobrogei” (1888-1894) issued after 1880 and in the interwar Romania. All these destroyed their hopes and crumbled the sense of nationalism.

#### **3.2. Ethnic community, historical minority**

This part of my study addresses these issues by bridging two fields of research: historical minority and ethnic community with a strong cultural identity. Studying the definition of “historical minority” and “ethnic community” is a challenging task since these topics are studied in isolation from one other. I use the term historical minority instead of national minority used in the domain literature as the definition given by Roberta Medda-Windischer is the most eloquent

“The terms *historical*, *traditional*, and *autochthonous minorities* -the ‘old minorities’ - refer to communities whose members have a distinct language, culture, or religion as compared to the rest of the population and who have become minorities through the redrawing of international borders, having seen the sovereignty of their territories shift from one country to another. These are ethnic groups that have not achieved statehood on their own for various reasons and that have now become part of a larger country (or several countries): they are the so-called *old minorities* or *sub-statenations*” (Medda-Windischer, 2017: 27).

Over time, the combination of objective and subjective elements such as ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic features, new residence and legal abode, numerical minority, non-dominant political position, a sense of solidarity to survive, and the desire to be treated as a distinct group helped the ethnic community of Crimean Tatars of Dobruja to preserve their cultural identity.

As it can be seen, today the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja are an ethnic community that preserved their cultural identity, and history helped them to become a historical minority.

### 3.3. Political situation in Romania in the interwar and its political consequences

In 1940, with the onset of the Second World War, Romania's King Carol II, was forced to abandon Bessarabia and the southern Bukovina in favor of the Soviet Union, Transylvania ceded to Hungary and gave up southern Dobruja in favor of Bulgaria. The southern Dobruja included the provinces Silistra (Durostor) and Kaliakra (Bazargic). On September the 5th, 1940 General Antonescu forced King Carol II to abdicate in favour of his son Michael, and to leave the country. During the political crisis of 1940, General Antonescu rose to political prominence and established the National Legionary State in partnership with the Iron Guard. Romania joined the alliance with Nazi Germany, ensured itself from Adolf Hitler's confidence, and in 1941 during the Legionary Rebellion General Antonescu eliminated the Iron Guard. (Livezeanu, 1995: 246).

### 3.4. Crimean Tatars of Dobruja and *milli mucadele* (national struggle) for Crimea

On June 21st, 1941 Romanian army joined the Nazi German army, and started the defensive against the Red Army. During this period, the Crimean Tatars of Dobruja lived with the hope of the Soviet Union's disintegration, and regaining the independence of Crimea. Unfortunately, Nazi Germany had other purposes, and these did not include the recover of the Crimean independence (Fisher, 1987: 161).

Anthony Smith says

"... *nationalism* as an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem to constitute an actual or potential *nation*" (Smith, 1998: 4).

Led by such idealism some leaders of the Crimean Tatar community of Dobruja have been convinced that using the political moment they will resume fulfilling their dream of releasing Crimea and creating an independent state.

Keeping in mind Anthony Smith's the essential propositions about ideology of nationalism "a. the world is naturally divided into nations, each of which has its peculiar character and destiny; b. the nation is the source of all political power, and loyalty to it overrides all other loyalties; c. if they wish to be free, and to realize themselves, men must identify with and belong to a nation; d. global freedom and peace are functions of the liberation and security of all nations; e. nations can only be liberated and fulfilled in their own sovereign states" (Smith, 1995: 187) is understandable why some of the members of Crimean Tatars of Dobruja, in December 1941 had long negotiations with Nazi Germany, but unfortunately they faced the limitations of Nazi's foreign policy.

Among the committee's members was the lawyer, Musetcip Haci Fazil Ülküsal. At the end of these half-romantic and half-positivist approaches they understood that Nazi Germany's intention to support the reunion opportunity between Dobruja's Crimean Tatars and their brothers and relatives from the peninsula was at the end of the war only when they had gained the war against pernicious Red Army (Ülküsal, 1966: 228). They had dreams, they would make the Crimean peninsula lands more powerful and in near future independent. At the end of the Second World War, political situation in Romania and Germany changed, causing to Crimean Tatars a very unpleasant situation, they being considered traitors. And here comes one's sacrifice willing to give up everything, including his life, in order to come back to their historic homeland: Crimea. That is why people such as Nacıp Hacı Fazil and Müstecip Ünküsal wrote history. These people have experienced a profound and different identification with the Crimean Tatar community living on the peninsula. They were animated by the sincere desire to establish a self-governing Crimean state, to lead itself. It is hard to understand how could some members of a community imagine their own ideal and consider it over their own lives.

Smith states “How do we get from knowing and imagining the nation to feeling it and loving it? Is it because we think the nation is interestless? Anderson rightly points to the way in which the nation is likened to a family, and the family is treated in most of human history as a domain of disinterested love, purity and solidarity”. (Smith, 1995: 140)

Indeed, how could people become willing to die for the national collectivity is something that is still poorly understood.

Lynn Greta Uelhing in her study “Beyond Memory” talks about Crimean Tatars’ desire to repatriate. She says that it was sustained by practices of collectively remembering the homeland “The collectively experienced trauma gave rise to special sensitivity toward the territorial issue among repressed groups, and put a special halo around the idea of a *homeland*” (Uelhing, 2004: 41).

### **3.5. Nacip Hagı Fazıl, Müstecip Ünküsal and their sacrifice for Crimea.**

Even though, the Crimean Tatars of peninsula and Crimean Tatars of Dobruja after Crimean War, 1853-1856 and Ottoman-Russian War of 1877 faced different historical experiences and evolved under different geographical and political conditions, the desire of repatriation supported by the nationalist political orientation of the early 20th century did not change the memory of motherland. People as Nacip Hagı Fazıl and Müstecip Ünküsal sacrificed their lives and families for Crimea.

Suddenly, in the first years of the communist regime they realized that they had served and sacrificed for a cause, but they were deprived from the homeland, for which they had fought so hard. The unbalanced political situation of Romania led to turbulent emotions. Repressions started in 1948 with the persecution of Crimean Tatars of Dobruja who were involved in hosting refugees from Crimea.

The campaign of repression culminated with the arrest on the night of April 19, 1952 of a group of 39 Crimean Tatars - priests, doctors, lawyers and landowners. They were considered guilty of setting the counter revolutionary organization “Crimean Tatar National Movement” and propaganda for “Crimea Liberation Movement”, for an independent Crimean State. To these charges there were added charges of espionage for the Turkish Intelligence Service. The founders of the organization, Nacip Hagı Fazıl and Müstecip Ünküsal sought to distinguish the new nation-state as completely as possible from the past. In the new communist world, with its new police system named *Securitate*, built on the pattern of the Soviet NKGB, power was strictly secular and history or tradition were the last things to take into consideration.

Among the first victims of collaborations with the *Securitate* were Fazıl Negip (Romanian spelling) and his wife Sultana. Nacip Hagı Fazıl was born in 1906, in the village of Tătaru (Romanian spelling), Constanta county, working as clerk at the “People’s Bank of Constanta”, and an important figure of social-cultural life of the Crimean Tartars in Constanta. He wrote poems and plays about the historical tradition of the Crimean Tartars. After 1948, Nacip Hagı Fazıl, his wife Sultana and other Crimean Tartars were accused of organizing the shelter for 10,000 Crimean Tatar refugees in Romania. On October 14, 1948 he was arrested on the street, detained by Securitate (The secret police agency of the Socialist Republic of Romania) of Constanta, for hiding and helping the Crimean Tartars fleeing from Crimea and supporting them to get to Turkey. After 6 days, on October 21, 1948 during investigations led by Nicolae Doicaru, he was murdered and his mutilated body was given to his family with the specification “Suicide”. Sultana, his wife, was arrested in 1952, tortured during investigations and sentenced for 8 years of hard labour, because together with her husband hid and helped the Crimean Tartars fleeing from the Crimea because of Stalinist oppression. She was imprisoned in

Constanta, Jilava, Miercurea Ciuc and Mislea, and then released in 1960<sup>1</sup>. Due to political situation in Romania and Crimea, between 1938 and 1942 many Crimean Tatars fled from Romania to Turkey, as happened with Müstecip Ünküsal, who lived the rest of his life in Istanbul, Turkey.

#### **4. Communism and the communist legacy**

##### **4.1. Ethnic community's political and social situation during the communist regime**

During the communist era, the use of a preferential socio-economic system and cultural benefits contributed to strengthening the perception of inequality among nations. The efforts of the communist regime to promote equality between people have further increased the perception of socio-economic and political inequality among nations. It is now acknowledged that during the communist regime the totalitarian government incorporated a new conception of nationality among Romanians and minority inhabitants, developing a sense of pride of belonging to the status of Romanian Communist Party. These new identifications, belonging to the Romanian nation and to Communist state based on a conscious repudiation of the nationalism meaning among minorities and the de-politicization of the ethnic identities were the main points on political agenda of the regime.

##### **4.2. Historical memory during the communist regime**

During the communist regime many members of the Crimean Tatar ethnic minority had a very challenging political situation. They were forbidden of advancing in their jobs, or being elected to office. They also suffered from the constant surveillance of the *Securitate* (Romanian version of KGB) apparatus. They were caught in a state-constructed political structure, which became more convoluted with every level: they were Crimean Tatars, practically only for being Crimean Tatars they were out of the Romanian political puzzle. With some exceptions - only people supported by the *Securitate* were inside the political puzzle because they were members of the Communist Party. They had political privileges and even collaborated with the *Securitate*. In communist Romania were recognized only two minorities: Hungarians and Germans and all the other minorities were mentioned as "etc." or "other minorities" as: Turks, Tatars, Ukrainians, Serbs, Bulgarians and Slovaks.

After 1990, when I showed my interest in understanding the new kind of nationalism, I enquired myself: "Could we, as members of Crimean Tatars, a small ethnic community, reduced to a historical minority, in our "new homeland" Dobruja, just like many other minorities living in Dobruja, with our language and culture marginalized, could we ever develop a sense of nationalism?"

#### **5. Instead of conclusions**

There is much to commend about social and political approach in the study of nations and nationalism.

Recent works on the issues of ethnic communities, national minorities, and historical minorities has led to view the historical and communist heritage as ideological remains that can be replaced by new forms of institutional organization and produced various interpretations of historical and communist legacy. Together with the modified territory, the citizenship went with the bordered, and the ideology of nationalism, which mobilized community's members disappeared with the changed borders and the forgotten historical moments.

By reviving our culture and mother tongue we can offer a chance and equal importance to the regeneration of the ethnic community. The revival of culture does not just mean dances and folk

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.procesulcomunismului.com/marturii/fonduri/cdandara/probatoriu/29\\_alte\\_minoritati.htm](http://www.procesulcomunismului.com/marturii/fonduri/cdandara/probatoriu/29_alte_minoritati.htm), accessed on 13, April, 2018

music. In the 21st century, we also talk about the role of the media in promoting culture and cultural identity. Language revival is closely linked to schools, teachers and textbooks edited in mother tongue. Finally, the political elites of the community can indicate the tools for protecting the community and its culture.

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