

Public Examinations in Romanian Secondary Schools at the End of the 19th Century and the Beginning of the 20th Century*

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Abstract

The article offers an historical perspective on examination in public secondary schools at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century – a period of maximum expansion of secondary education. The first part of the article focuses on the institutionalization and formalization of examination practices, while the second one discusses the shaping of the examination as a topic, following the discourses produced by different social actors. In the second half of the 19th century, school was perceived as an instrument for social mobility based on the meritocratic ideal and as an element of national and state building, being given the role of inoculating a national identity. Within this socio-educational context, secondary schools represent the recruitment pool of the administrative elite and ensure the acquisition of cultural capital necessary for accessing various positions, all these aspects shaping the social functions of exams. The documentary analysis based on archival sources revealed a nuanced social perspective, in which the teaching staff and the parents give new meanings to the concept of examination and design new functions for exams.

Keywords: secondary schools, examinations, formalization of examination practices, social mobility, meritocracy.

Introduction

The centralisation and bureaucratic regulation operated by the state after the Union of 1859 left their mark on the public education system, determining its homogenisation through legislation and a common curriculum. After a period of time in which the secondary school network was financially supported by the state and the cities, at the end of the 19th century, the state took over this task in full, which brought a tighter control over secondary schools. Despite the centralization, local variations in educational provisions were not infrequent, and a potential research in this direction might reveal a diverse social milieu.

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Secondary education continued the primary course and made the transition to higher education. Graduating from high school opened the way to university, but the percentage of students who completed high school and attended university remained low until the First World War. The lack of a career goal, in a similar way to the normal or technical schools, did not diminish the interest of people for this form of schooling. Gymnasiums and high schools were an outlet for recruiting civil servants, a few secondary courses being for a long time sufficient for getting a job in public administration. This overreliance on state employment overlapped with a political discourse that brought to the fore the interest of people in official positions, and the perceived social and political dangers coming from this situation generated a critique of the educational system from some public figures. The criticism centred on the fact that secondary schools offered a singular professional route of preparing civil servants and encouraging the attraction for state jobs, which would oversize the administrative apparatus¹. The critics emphasised the economic burden generated by the oversized administrative apparatus and the exposure of civil servants to political pressure and control. The overreliance on state jobs was also made responsible for the absence of a national bourgeoisie².

In Romania, a largely agrarian nation, very few children had access to secondary schools, although this form of education grew in popularity at the end of the 19th century.

Most high school and gymnasium students came from the middle class: merchants, small businessmen, state employees, various professionals, and a few prosperous workers and peasants. Despite the economic and social diversity of these categories, all parents, with some exceptions³, were generally able to pay tuition fees and maintenance costs for the students in cases when they did not live in cities with secondary schools.

¹ The dynamics of the relationship between the huge number of aspirants to public positions within the administrative apparatus, intellectual unemployment and political radicalization in interwar Romania was analysed by Dragoş Sdrobiş, *Limitele meritocraţiei într-o societate agrară. Şomaj intelectual şi radicalizare politică a tineretului în România interbelică* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2015).

² Titu Maiorescu, *Discursuri parlamentare cu priviri asupra dezvoltării politice a României sub domnia lui Carol I*, vol. I, (1866-1876) (Bucharest: Albatros, 2001), 245-246 (Speeches 28 and 29. *Asupra reformei legii pentru instrucţiunea publică*). See: Sdrobiş, *Limitele meritocraţiei*, 65-76; Andrei Sorescu, *Visions of Agency: Imagining Individual and Collective Action in Nineteenth-Century Romania*, PhD, University College London, 2019, 184-188.

³ It is the case of students who received scholarships due to scholastic achievements.

The number of high schools, gymnasiums and girls' secondary schools at the end of the 19th century⁴

	1876-77	1882-83	1893-94	1899-99
High schools	7	7	11	17
Gymnasiums	19	18	30	27
Secondary schools for girls*	7	10	12	12
Total	33	35	53	56

* The category includes externate (public secondary schools without a boarding school attached) and normal schools, without technical schools, therefore it does not overlap with the figures in the statistics of the Ministry of Education which also record technical schools.

The number of secondary school students⁵

Year	No. of students		
	Not specified	Enrolled	Graduated
1876-77	4585		
1893-94		13938	8252
1898-99		18457	12354

In recent years, studies in the history of education have highlighted the multi-functional role and standardisation of secondary schools in different countries. If the role of popular education in building modern national identity is well known, recent studies have uncovered the contribution of secondary education to creating homogeneous national feelings and civic loyalties. Training the national elites, which brought together intellectuals, officials, technicians – professions linked with high school education – became a general preoccupation in the 19th century, in connection with the context marked by internal political developments and nation-building⁶. Other studies interested in the social history of education have focused on secondary education as an instrument of social

⁴ *Statistica din Romania. Statistica învețământului pe anul școlar 1876-1877* (Bucharest: Tipografia Statului, 1878), 10, 11, 16; *Statistica din Romania. Învețământul pe anul școlar 1882-83* (Bucharest: Tipografia Statului, 1884), 18, 21, 29, 32; *Statistica învățământului secundar public pe anii școlari 1893-94 și 1894-95 publicată din ordinul D-lui Spiru C. Haret Ministrul Cultelor și al Instrucțiunii Publice* (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl, 1898), 56-61; *Statistica învățământului secundar, profesional și special pe anul școlar 1898-1899* (Bucharest: Tipografia G. A. Lazareanu, 1899), 76, 78, 82-83.

⁵ *Statistica învețământului pe anul școlar 1876-1877*, 10, 12, 16. *Statistica învățământului secundar public pe anii școlari 1893-94*, 56-61; *Statistica învățământului secundar, profesional și special pe anul școlar 1898-1899*, 76-79, 82-83.

⁶ Robert Anderson, „The idea of the secondary school in nineteenth-century Europe”, in *Paedagogica Historica*, (Vol. 40, 1-2/2004), 94-106.



mobility and reproduction, paying a special attention to enrolments, the social origins of students, and elite education⁷. This perspective provides an image of schooling from below, allowing one to uncover and to understand the families' and parents' strategies of educational dynamics and social mobility.

The article offers a historical perspective on the institutionalization of examinations in public secondary schools at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The chosen timespan overlaps with the period of maximum development of secondary schools' network. The first part of the article focuses on the formalization of examination practices, while the second part investigates the assigned social role of examinations, analysing the ways in which this topic has been constructed and produced by different actors.

A historical perspective on exams

Between 1864 and 1914 there is a diverse typology of secondary schools' exams: at the end of term and of the school year (introduced by the law of 1864, abolished in 1904)⁸, at the end of a school course – gymnasium, girls' secondary school or high school (introduced by the law of education in 1864, abolished at an unknown date and reintroduced in 1898)⁹ and the baccalaureate exam¹⁰. In those cases when the number of students enrolled was higher than the number of places available in secondary schools, admission was possible after passing an entrance exam (established by the education law of 1864¹¹). The transfer from a school with a certain profile (e.g., technical school) to a school with a different profile (high school) also required a special examination¹². Students of private schools were subject to public examinations in order to have their

⁷ Anderson, „The idea of the secondary school,” 106; Detlef K. Müller, Fritz Ringer, Brian Simon, *The Rise of the Modern Educational System: Structural Change and Social Reproduction, 1879-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁸ *Lege asupra instrucțiunii a Principatelor-Unite-Române* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1865), 24-26; „Regulament pentru școalele secundare (gimnasil, licee și școli secundare de fete), din 1901, modificat în 1904,” in: C. Lascăr, I. Bibiri, *Colecțiunea legilor, regulamentelor, programelor și diferitelor decisiuni și dispozițiuni generale ale acestui departament de la ianuarie 1901-iulie 1904* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1904). See chapters VII-X, regarding examinations, 901-908.

⁹ *Lege asupra instrucțiunii a Principatelor-Unite-Române*, 25-27; „Lege asupra învățământului secundar și superior” (1898), in: C. Lascăr and I. Bibiri, *Colecțiunea legilor, regulamentelor, programelor și diferitelor decisiuni și dispozițiuni generale ale acestui minister de la 1864-1901* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1901), 80.

¹⁰ „Regulament pentru bacalaureat în litere și științe” (1882), in *Colecțiunea legilor 1864-1901*, 380.

¹¹ *Lege asupra instrucțiunii a Principatelor-Unite-Române*, 22.

¹² „Regulament pentru școalele secundare” (1896), in *Colecțiunea legilor 1864-1901*, 594.

studies recognised¹³. Apart from state or private educational options, there was also the possibility of home schooling, with teachers recruited according to the preferences of the parents, from state or private institutions. This was a legacy of an earlier system practiced during the first half of the 19th century. In order to advance to a higher grade, the home-schooled pupils were examined at the end of the school year along with state schools' students (according to the 1889 regulation)¹⁴. Some forms of examination coexisted throughout the period; others were abandoned after a time or were replaced by new formats. Beyond the formal variations, one can note a general interest in an examination focused on the information acquired during schooling (knowledge) and on the student's behaviour (honesty, discipline during the examination, transgression of rules).

A bureaucratic apparatus composed of inspectors, professors and teachers was enlisted to attend and supervise the examinations. As part of the examination committees, these delegates of the Ministry of Education applied the practical procedures: they formulated the exam items, asked questions, evaluated the written papers, marked them, and "classified" the students. Their mission was not limited to the exam, but they also drafted reports for the ministry with "the results and their observations on both the morale and the methods of study applied"¹⁵, and suggested improvements regarding the school's activity¹⁶. The structure of these committees varied over time. Between the 1860s and the 1880s, the Ministry of Education personnel (inspectors, professors, teachers) were joined by public figures (doctors, military officers, engineers, lawyers) who held political or administrative positions at the time. These officials, viewed as competent for such a task, enjoyed the social prestige necessary to credit and legitimise the examinations. Since the twentieth century, the committees have undergone a certain specialisation, their membership being reduced to secondary teachers or university professors (chairmen of the committees), inspectors, and representatives of the Ministry of Education. The change signalled a new vision on the professionalization of the teaching staff, in the sense of monopolising the issue of public education (schooling) and excluding non-specialists.

In 1881, the Minister of Education V. A. Urechia involved the members of examination committees in a reform project, announcing that the Ministry will use the examinations to undertake a prospective "investigation," likely to revise and

¹³ *Regulament pentru esamenale de promoțiune ale școlărilor cari nu au urmat în școalele publice* (Bucharest: Tipografia Carol Göbl, 1886).

¹⁴ „Regulament penru examenele școlărilor cari nu au urmat în școalele publice” (1888), in *Colecțiunea legilor 1864-1901*, 434.

¹⁵ National Archives of Romania (NAR), fond Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice (MCIP), file 89, year 1864, page 2. (henceforth NAR, MCIP, 89/1864/2).

¹⁶ NAR, MCIP, 41/1865/65.



reconstruct the image of secondary education. The reports of these committees were published the same year in a volume that was to aid the minister as a starting point for a series of reforms¹⁷. Probably due to the need for observations that went beyond the general assessments that dominated many reports, specialised committees for letters, mathematics and the sciences were created. Two decades later, the Ministry of Education, Spiru Haret, also appealed to the examination committees to assess the reception and operation of a new type of recently introduced examination; the reflections and opinions on the new form of evaluation became the subject of a volume¹⁸. It is worth mentioning that Spiru Haret participated in 1881 in the investigation of his predecessor, V. A. Urechia, as a member of one of the examination committees. That experience probably convinced Spiru Haret of the usefulness of a synthetic work that recorded the impressions and proposals of the teachers, paving the way for their integration into school reform projects.

At the risk of oversimplifying my argument, it must be said that the articulation of the public education system involved, *inter alia*, the standardization of the examination system. The uniform regulations reflected in the legislation, the codification introduced under the guise of various rules or bureaucratic control, the mandatory and regular character of examinations were some of the characteristics of the standardization process. In practice, there was certain flexibility on the part of the Ministry of Education, which allowed for waivers and exceptions from the normative provisions and sometimes approved the postponement of exams. Examples of a flexible attitude towards the legislative framework were documented during the years 1864-65. In February 1865, the principal of the Commercial School from Galați asked the Ministry of Education to cancel the winter exam, on the grounds that the school had started late, “only two months ago”, that there were few courses taught at the time, and that the students would have an advantage if they were to be examined on the basis of the syllabus of the entire year¹⁹. He presented his request under the label of patriotism, so that everyone would win: “wishing for this school to respond with dignity to the expectations of the country and the government, which, I think, will be better safeguarded by organising an annual exam”²⁰. A postponement of the exam due to illness was obtained by a certain “Mrs. Sachetti”, a teacher at an unidentified school²¹.

¹⁷ *Starea învățământului public secundar la finele anului școlar 1880-81 după rapoartele comisiunilor cari au asistat la esamene* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1881), 3-4.

¹⁸ *Examenul pentru absolvirea cursului secundar la finele anului școlar 1902-1903* (Bucharest: Tipografia ziarului „Cronica”, Toma Basilescu, 1904).

¹⁹ NAR, MCIP, 7/1864/23.

²⁰ NAR, MCIP, 7/1864/23.

²¹ NAR, MCIP, 7/1864/55.

Formalising examination practices and establishing a standard procedure

The institutionalization of examinations and the formalisation of the examination practices became essential objectives of the school policy after the Union of the two Principalities in 1859. “In order to introduce a certain uniformity in the school examinations across Romania”, the Minister [of Education], following the measures proposed by the High Council of Education (Consiliul Superior al Instrucțiunii Publice), published, “for the general knowledge”, a series of provisions regarding the end-of-semester exams²². The standard examination procedure, established by the High Council²³, was formalized through legislation, circulars and school regulations detailing how the examinations should be conducted. These rules specified the days and times when the tests were to be taken, the duration and place of the examinations, the types of assessment (written and oral). They regulated the distribution of school awards, their number for each school and grade, sometimes even the books and educational aids that accompanied them, and also the organisation of the exams and of the award ceremonies²⁴. Official instructions focusing on rituals, hymns, speeches, medals and the granting of awards were sent to schools before the exams. In practice, this standardised procedure was subject to modifications, but individual interventions and actions were allowed as long as they did not interfere with the examinations. Donations from philanthropists (for awards) and small adjustments to the organization of the events were frequently accepted.

State schools’ examinations produced a significant number of documents. The Ministry of Education archival fond contains a whole array of documents, detailed reports, catalogues, transcripts that recorded the examination procedures in a bureaucratic manner. The information reached the ministry where it was centralized and integrated into “cumulative systems” to recreate a general image²⁵, an overview that would generate normative or other types of endeavours, which would contribute to measuring and characterising the main edu-

²² NAR, MCIP, 89/1864/2.

²³ NAR, MCIP, 169/1864/36-38.

²⁴ *Lege asupra instrucțiunii a Principatelor-Unite-Române*, 24. 26-27; „Regulament pentru școalele secundare” (1896), in *Colecțiunea legilor 1864-1901*, 603. For other laws, circulars and school regulations on this topic, see *Colecțiunea legilor 1864-1901, Colecțiunea legilor 1901-1904, 1904-1906*.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *A supraveghea și a pedepsi. Nașterea închisorii*, 2nd ed. (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2005), 241-242.



cational phenomena, processes and the overall school population²⁶. Moreover, this “apparatus of writing”, as Foucault called it, would turn the student into a “case”, a descriptive and analysable object²⁷. The documents recorded individual achievements, but also the development and evolution of students during the school years. The results of the examinations, recorded in transcripts and statistics, functioned as “databases” for the ministry, which, if necessary, were used to issue certificates allowing for benefits (such as access to upper grades or jobs). The reasoning behind such a system, never explicit, has a double stake. The first one brings to the fore the establishment of a uniform, supervised system of public education, governed by the state. Bureaucratic practices and the systematisation of the public educational system made it possible for the state to administer the educational policy and the increasingly extensive school network towards the end of the 19th century. The formalisation of the examination practices and setting down the examination procedures are features of the manifold process of the public education’s bureaucratization. Furthermore, this effort of carefully recording the exams that verifies the assimilation of knowledge, controls the teaching process, and prevents school fraud, aims to establish a rationalised control mechanism of the effectiveness of public education.

At the end of the 19th century, the examination procedure became the subject of detailed reports that borrowed writing techniques from the administrative practice. Drafted by the examination committees, they described how the assessments proceeded. They also reconstructed the events in the smallest details: the days and times of the assessments, the persons who examined the students, the way in which the supervision was organised. The archival descriptions of the exams were almost identical to this example drawn from the Normal Teachers’ School in Câmpulung: “at the first section for the Romanian Language, we did the following: between 8-9 a.m., we sealed the envelopes with the students’ names on the papers sent by Hon. Ministry, and we wrote on the blackboard the five items drafted by the inspectorate, after we opened the envelope containing them in front of the students. Between 9 and 11 in the morning, the students’ work on the chosen questions followed, without any incident, and at 11 o’clock, the papers were taken and placed in an envelope with the students’ names, which was signed by us”²⁸.

²⁶ The official statistics of the Ministry of Education include information about the examined school population. The documents register the students taking an exam, the ones who passed etc., all these data making possible a comparative systematic evaluation of academic achievement.

²⁷ Foucault, *A supraveghea și a pedepsi*, 243-244.

²⁸ NAR, MCIP, 289/1905/6.

Written according to the above pattern, the reports show a similarity with the normative texts and signal the interest of the members of the committees to send a public message related to the observance of procedures which, in fact, validated the examination. These procedures were constantly re-enacted by the sealing of envelopes, the opening of envelopes with the exam questions in front of the students, taking the papers and their placing in the envelopes provided by the ministry. All these procedures were meant to guarantee the good organisation and outcome of the examinations. Also, the lack of incidents was always mentioned, being a detail that guaranteed, in the eyes of the teachers and the authorities, a correct procedure. The same purpose was served by the constant reminders regarding the observance of the legislation, the organisation of the examinations in accordance with the school regulations (“we proceeded to choose the subjects” [...] “adhering to the provisions of art. 95 of the Regulation”; or, the examination followed standard procedure “in accordance with Articles 96, 97 and 98 of the Rules of Procedure for the internal administration of normal schools”)²⁹. An examiners’ report from Bârlad High School specified that “The manner of organising the exam was entirely in accordance with the procedure stipulated in the Regulation, art. 61 et seq., which can also be seen from the works I submit together with this report”³⁰.

Deviations from the standard procedure seemed to be exceptional, although one cannot rule out a voluntary intention to omit any incidents from the reports addressed to the authorities. An inspection made in February 1887 by the general inspector, Alexandru Vitzu, at the Girls’ Secondary School No. 1 from Bucharest, in order to “see how the semester exams were organised” uncovered “several irregularities” related to procedures. The oral exam took place only in the morning, between 8-12 a.m., regardless of the size of classes, which led to a superficial examination, especially in the case of overcrowded classrooms; at the German Language exam, the students “were found unsupervised and helping each other”; finally, the reports were not signed by all the examining teachers. Following the customary practice, the inspector asked the minister to take the necessary measures to “fix things”. In reality, the case reached the Permanent Board of Education,³¹ which limited its action to reprimanding the principal, who was found responsible for the general disorder, and to formally re-

²⁹ NAR, MCIP, 289/1905/12.

³⁰ NAR, MCIP, 3523/1915/18.

³¹ Institution of the Ministry of Education (including the minister, a president and five members: professors, former professors and professionals with contributions in the area of education), with a significant role in educational policy making. *Lege asupra instrucțiunii a Principatelor-Unite-Române*, 4-6.



questing her to “scrupulously maintain the rules in the school”³², in the future. The authorities avoided the “dangerous” solution of cancelling the exams, as it generated criticism from society and signalled an institutional malfunction³³.

Ritualization as a way to evaluate the success of exams

The exams took place under the public eye. Parents, local residents, public figures, representatives of local authorities (mayors, local councillors) and of the central authorities (prefects, the Minister of Public Education) were allowed to attend. The end-of-year exam that took place in 1864 in the city of Neamț gathered “a significant number of residents”, “respectable people”³⁴, while in Târgoviște, at a similar event, the public included “all the social classes”³⁵. One teacher perceived the exam as “the most favourable opportunity of the year for a face-to-face meeting between the school and the citizens”³⁶, and the examining committees’ reports recorded a large presence of parents, representatives of the authorities and local residents.

The ritualization of the examination, the co-opting of officials and public personalities emphasised the significance of the event, consecrating its social impact. In Giurgiu, besides the mayor of the city, the school committee³⁷, the school inspector, residents and the “parents of the children”, the invitation to attend was also extended to “Mr Ioan Penescu, a retired elderly teacher who is now in town”³⁸. The invitation of the teacher, whose honourable and long career heralded a vast experience, was made in order “to have a more accurate idea about it [the examination]”³⁹, and amounted to a public recognition of the role played by the teaching staff in the examination process⁴⁰.

The public became an audience and interlocutor addressed by the teaching staff, whose approval legitimized the examination. Its reactions were always recorded as positive in the reports of the examination committees. Empha-

³² NAR, MCIP, 186/1887/6, 8.

³³ NAR, MCIP, 3524/1915/3 verso

³⁴ NAR, MCIP, 2 b/1864/128.

³⁵ NAR/ MCIP, 224/887/recto

³⁶ NAR, MCIP, 169/1864/34.

³⁷ The school committee, including city councillors in urban areas, and a priest and 1-2 public figures appointed by the minister in villages, supervised the teacher’s professional conduct, the school properties and students’ attendance. *Lege asupra instrucțiunii a Principatelor-Unite-Române*, 16-17.

³⁸ NAR, MCIP, 25/1865/157 recto.

³⁹ NAR, MCIP, 25/1865/157 recto.

⁴⁰ For this reason, the examination was conducted by the primary schoolmaster and Mr. Penescu.

sis was placed on the reactions of satisfaction and even delight – the answers “were applauded with general satisfaction” from the audience, “the result of the exam was quite satisfactory to the wishes of the audience”, or “the answers of the majority were satisfactory and gratifying for all spectators”⁴¹. The author of one report informed the Minister that, at the end-of-semester exam held at Botoșani Gymnasium (1865), “the parents of the pupils, full of joy, not being able to contain their feelings, in the middle of the exam, asked us to send their thanks to the government for its willingness to spread and establish education, as well as to all the teachers for their zeal and commitment in fulfilling their duties”⁴². The satisfaction and appreciation of the public meant the recognition of the teaching staff’s merits.

Starting with the end of the 19th century, the spectacular character of the manifestations diminished, following the process of bureaucratization of the public education system. This simplification was enhanced also by the expanding school network; the increase of the public events meant a reduction in the attendance of personalities who start taking part only in the most important occasions. Reminiscence of a system of valorisation dating from pre-modernity⁴³ the spectacular character of these events perpetuated in different forms and intensities until the interwar period.

No interventions from the parents or the audience were recorded, in the sense of direct participation in the examination, which seemed to be in line with the rationale of the ministry to restrict the procedure to a small social segment comprising the teachers and the political and administrative elites and authorities. In fact, the number of educated parents who were able to follow the examination, to evaluate the skills and knowledge of their children and to understand the exam format remained low. Despite this, the interest of the authorities and teachers in co-opting the parents remained significant throughout the period. The emphasis on the festive character of the exams had, among other things, the effect of attracting and co-opting the public. In Târgu Jiu, the mayor and the organising committee sought to give a veneer of “the utmost solemnity to these exams, making everything possible for them to be attended by anyone, both by the parents of students, and by outsiders...”⁴⁴.

The public dimension of the exams, their ritualization and their transformation into a performance accessible to parents and laymen alike, allowed the

⁴¹ NAR; MCIP, 2 b/1864/128.

⁴² NAR, MCIP, 41/1865/118 recto.

⁴³ See Michel Foucault, *A supravegheea și a pedepsii. Nașterea închisorii*, 2nd ed. (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2005).

⁴⁴ NAR, MCIP, 42, an 1865/4 recto.



audience to appreciate the success of the exam, to evaluate and pass judgement on the school. For this barely educated audience, a flawless performance indicated the success of the examination. Capable only of superficial assessments of knowledge and science, the participants were satisfied with the “showy accomplishments” and the ability of students to answer all the questions, even if they learned everything mechanically, by rote, in order to pass the examinations⁴⁵.

The public nature of the examination offered parents a purported guarantee of objectivity and fairness; for this reason, suspicions of fraudulent examinations were accompanied by a request to take the exam “publicly”⁴⁶. When the exam ended with poor results, while scholarships, prestige or material resources were at stake, the parents asked the minister that their offspring be allowed to retake the exams. Financial difficulties, the issues faced by families burdened by many children, the minister’s indulgence, or the minister’s interest in spreading public education were part of the rhetoric used by parents to support their petitions. The authors used a sombre tone, alternating between emotional terms, fervent pleas and appeals to forgiveness of the child. They emphasised the consequences that failure would entail for the students: it would discourage, “destroy” them, or make them miserable “for life”, instead of uplifting them⁴⁷; it would “morally kill” the students, making them bad persons and citizens. Failure would be “a lightning bolt” which “tends to kidnap the future” of the children⁴⁸, “crushes the morale of the parents who make enormous sacrifices”⁴⁹. In such unfavourable contexts, questioning the fairness of the evaluation gave parents hope that the authorities would repeat the process and the child would have a better chance⁵⁰. Borrowing the rhetoric of the authorities, according to which the exam reflected the quality of the teachers’ job and performance, the parents turned this rhetoric into an argument for challenging and contesting the poor results obtained by their offspring. The children’s failure and the impossibility of promotion were attributed exclusively to the mistakes of the teaching staff, providing an occasion to question the latter’s ability to educate, to examine and to grade, i.e., to fulfil their professional duties. The

⁴⁵ William J. Reese, *Testing Wars in the Public Schools: A Forgotten History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013), 24.

⁴⁶ NAR, MCIP, 186/1887/87.

⁴⁷ NAR, MCIP, 663/1905/ 87.

⁴⁸ NAR, MCIP, 1556/1906/10 recto.

⁴⁹ NAR, MCIP, 663/1905/36 verso.

⁵⁰ A father questioned the fairness of the examination by saying that his daughter’s mark was for the “concept,” not for the paper, but the Ministry classified the request as “against the regulations”. NAR, MCIP, 186/1887/89.

solution proposed by the parents went beyond the institutional logic, reaching into the emotional realm: increasing the grade, re-examining or exempting the child from studying the problematic course or discipline⁵¹.

Controlling the teachers

The exam placed teachers and students in a similar position: both were subjected to examination. This ambivalent aspect, defining a process destined to evaluate the activity of both students and teachers, was accepted and embraced by the teaching staff⁵². The examining apparatus fulfilled a dual function: first, to assess the assimilation of knowledge and information by students and, second, to check if the teachers had performed their duties to the best of their abilities⁵³. In the case of the latter, the reflections of the ministry's delegates and the examination committees were centred on several points of interest: compliance with the curriculum, the structure of the course, the teaching methods.⁵⁴ These aspects suggest an image of a profession built around the three core issues mentioned above.

Of these three points of interest, compliance with the curriculum⁵⁵, in particular, caught the attention of the educational authorities. This special interest acquires deeper meanings, referring to the state's educational policy, the standardization of knowledge and the homogenisation of education, regulated by the education law of 1864. In the second half of the 1880s, the practice of sending to the ministry the curriculum completed by the teacher during the school year became established. The students were to be examined on the basis of this curriculum. In the view of the decision makers, this would have prevented the situation of students being examined using unstudied material. In addition, the measure allowed for control over how teachers did their job and gave the authorities a tool to assess whether they had covered the whole curriculum, making it easier to hold them accountable in case of non-compliance. The archival documents show that some teachers gave a superficial and biased interpretation of the curriculum, in the sense of specifying only the subject ar-

⁵¹ NAR, MCIP, 668/1905/140.

⁵² *Examenul pentru absolvirea cursului secundar la finele anului școlar 1902-1903* (Bucharest: Tipografia Ziarului „Cronica”, Thoma Basilescu, 1904), 10 Ermina Kaminski „Câteva cuvinte despre examenul de absolvire”, in *Revista generală a învățământului*, (Year VI, no.1, 1 June 1910), 26.

⁵³ The idea of the exam as a form of controlling teachers is often found in sources pertaining to secondary teachers: *Starea învețământului public*, 4; Const. Moisil, „Din practica examenelor de absolvire”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year IV, no.3, 1 October 1908), 186.

⁵⁴ Const. Moisil, „Din practica examenelor”, 186-189.

⁵⁵ NAR, MCIP, 7/1864/230 recto.



eas which were to be tested. They did not view the curriculum in terms of the homonymous school document detailing the didactic units and topics covered during the academic year⁵⁶.

Successful examinations, with their outcomes visible in the students' achievements and correct answers, were a tangible proof of the transfer of learning and the exchange of knowledge from teacher to student, and were also seen as the merit of teachers, being an indicator of their success and professionalism⁵⁷. A report signed by the chairman of the examination committee at Bacău High School explicitly attributed the good results to the zeal and involvement of the teaching staff: "...we were convinced that the students were seriously trained in all the four lower grades of the high school. The students proved to be well versed in the main issues which were touched upon in connection with different educational subjects and on the bases of the curriculum from different grades. In particular, we could see their thorough training in Geography, Romanian, Mathematics, Physics and French..."⁵⁸. The personal and professional aspirations of the teachers, their desire to distinguish themselves and gain the appreciation of the authorities and the public, fuelled their ambition for a successful examination. Those at the beginning of their careers, faced with the need to strengthen their public image, perceived the exam as a difficult test. Elena Meissner wrote in a later confession about the concern caused by the first public examination, at the beginning of her teaching career: "...my worries and concern as a beginner teacher were indescribable. I kept wondering: How will I present myself in front of the students for the examination? What will the principal, the delegates, the school inspector say about me? Day and night, I thought and thought about how to better prepare the students I was responsible for."⁵⁹

The examination was intensely publicised and used by teachers to gain visibility and appreciation⁶⁰, however briefly, from the public and the authorities. Combining the exam with the issue of meritocracy and with the illusion of being offered and managing a merit-based social selection tool, gave the teachers who were dissatisfied with their social status a chance to capitalise on the acquired prestige and symbolically invest the teaching profession and the school institution with a higher standing. Starting from the end of the 19th century, the examination became an incentive of pedagogical reflections for teachers. These reflections found their expression in a substantial literature. The Gen-

⁵⁶ NAR, MCIP, 194/ 1887/5, 13, 16.

⁵⁷ NAR, MCIP, 41/1865/103; 194/1887/35.

⁵⁸ NAR, MCIP, 3522/1915/4 recto-verso.

⁵⁹ NAR, fond Meissner, XI/4/ 89-90.

⁶⁰ NAR, MCIP, 242/1870/82 recto.

eral Journal of Education⁶¹, among others, published articles in which teachers approached the examinations from various pedagogical perspectives and proposed tools that could more accurately measure both teachers' and pupils' competence and performance. Most likely, the appetite for theory was an indicator of the professionalization of the teaching staff, an aspect also discussed in the specialised literature⁶². The desire of the teaching staff to be included in the process of decision-making cannot be ruled out as a potential explanation for this tendency. This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that, together with the reflections on examinations, the teachers sent to the Ministry of Education a number of proposals to reform the educational system.

The examination: glorification of merit and progress

In 1864, the admission to gymnasium or high school was possible on the basis of an examination, without the need for any certificate attesting the attendance of primary school. However, having a certificate confirming the completion of primary school exempted one from the gymnasium admission exam⁶³. In the following decades the certificates shaped the individual educational paths and the public education system. Admission to secondary education⁶⁴, access from one course to another and the completion of studies required or resulted in a certificate that was conditional on passing an exam. The certificate confirmed that a person possessed studies, skills, aptitudes and knowledge; it was an attestation of competence conferred by the authority which granted academic titles⁶⁵. The codification of professional trajectories in the 19th century, the formalization of the norms necessary for professional positions contributed to the

⁶¹ Founded in 1905 with the contribution of the Minister of Education, Spiru Haret, *The General Journal of Education* was designed as a professional publication of the teaching staff, with the purpose of engaging them in theoretical debates and in signalling persistent issues of Romanian schools. For four decades, the journal had been a significant medium of expression of the teaching staff. Summarising numerous theoretical reflections about the educational process, problems encountered by teachers, and professional demands, the journal contributed to building a professional identity.

⁶² See Gillian Sutherland, „Examinations and the Construction of Professional Identity: A Case Study of England, 1800–1950”, in *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, (Vol. 8, 1/2001), 51–64.

⁶³ *Lege asupra instrucțiunii a Principatelor-Unite-Române*, 22.

⁶⁴ In 1889 the certificate of primary school graduation became a mandatory requirement for those wanting to attend secondary education. „Regulament pentru înscrierea în clasa I secundară” (1888), in *Colecțiunea legilor 1864-1901*, 433.

⁶⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility. Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 117.



acceptance of the diploma as a universal standard required by the job market⁶⁶.

The discourses produced by the various groups involved in examinations placed them within the rhetoric of progress. The reports described the unfolding of the examinations, mentioning „the progress” (*progresul*)⁶⁷ made by the students⁶⁸ or, on the contrary, the lack of progress⁶⁹. “Reporting on progress” became synonymous with the description of the examination itself and indicated the dominant perspective from which examination reports were written⁷⁰. This inclusion within the logic of progress had social consequences for the educational institutions and for society as a whole⁷¹. The rhetoric of progress contributed to the status consolidation and justification of the examinations. In that period’s institutional context, progress was perceived as an indicator of students’ perseverance, as a confirmation of the functioning of the institution and of the commitment of the teaching staff⁷². It was indispensable for guiding students to a higher level of education, to another status.

One of the functions of the exams was to “classify” students⁷³. The classification established the position of the student in the school hierarchy according to individual achievements confirmed by transcripts and school registers. “After finishing the exam, a list was made with the students that passed, failed, graduated, those who had to retake the exam and the prize winners,” mentioned a report⁷⁴. The identification of the most accurate measurement and evaluation tools was a major concern for the teaching staff. Around 1864, several teachers proposed to the ministry to replace the old grading system, combining numerical and descriptive grades, with a more comprehensive model, based on numbers from 1 to 10, in order to obtain “a fairer classification and an appropriate

⁶⁶ Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, 117.

⁶⁷ Sources (discourses and reports) define the term “progress” (*progres*) as evolution, advancement, transformation for the better. The term had a double meaning: it signalled both the success of the competition and the good functioning of the school institution.

⁶⁸ NAR, MCIP, 25/1865/40 recto, 157 recto; 26/1865/ 411; 139/1866/5 recto; 169/1899/14, 16.

⁶⁹ *Starea învețimentului public*, 54-56, 182.

⁷⁰ The trope of progress was also a characteristic feature of examinations and the literature concerning this topic in France. See: Pierre Caspard, „Examen de soi-même, examen public, examen d’État. De l’admission à la Sainte-Cène aux certificats de fin d’études, XVIIe-XIXe siècles”, in *Histoire de l’éducation* (No. 94, 2002), Special issue „L’examen”, 18.

⁷¹ Ermina Kaminski „Câteva cuvinte despre examenul de absolvire”, in *Revista generală a învățămîntului* (Year VI, no.1, 1 June 1910), 20.

⁷² NAR, MCIP, 89/1864/3 verso.

⁷³ The purpose of „classifications” was explicitly stated in examinations’ reports. NAR, MCIP, 2b/1864/100.

⁷⁴ NAR, MCIP, 41/1865/64 verso.

comparison of the students”⁷⁵. Other teachers thought that a correct classification should result in an overlap between the grades received during the semester/year and the exam results. This line of reasoning remained only an aspiration, because in practice the exams revealed discrepancies between the marks received during the year and those given by the exam committees⁷⁶. This situation intensified the teachers’ search for identifying tools – to be built into the examination apparatus – that should have ensured an infallible classification.

The specialised literature and the periodical press suggest a consensus of the members of the teaching staff on equating the exam with a meritocratic selection tool⁷⁷. They saw the exam as a way to “choose the best”⁷⁸, to control and limit the access of “mediocre students” – “a hindrance to our education”⁷⁹ – into high school, to prevent the poor students from advancing further “together with the good ones”⁸⁰. Professor George Oprescu thought the exam recruited “the most intellectually gifted [students], those who in four years have been able to acquire the necessary knowledge for further studies and for finishing high school”⁸¹. Oprescu’s vision was based on the image that the teachers and the school authorities had regarding the social function assigned to high schools, of educating the intellectual and professional elite. As a member of an examination committee succinctly put it, secondary education “tends to train lawyers, doctors, teachers, civil servants and scientists”⁸².

Praising the meritocratic system as the key to personal upward mobility and success, the professors and school authorities played a key role in disseminating the discourse of the meritocratic model. Supporting the new social ideal corresponded to this group’s democratic ideas and offered the promise of an

⁷⁵ NAR, MCIP, 1/1864/38.

⁷⁶ NAR, MCIP, 3524/1915/3 verso; *Starea învețimentului public*, 35.

⁷⁷ Const. Moisil, „Din practica examenelor”, 187.

⁷⁸ NAR, MCIP, 3526/1915, p. 87,

⁷⁹ *Starea învețimentului public*, 56.

⁸⁰ Dumitru Baci, „Câteva observațiuni asupra noului regulament al școlilor secundare”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year VIII, no. 1-2, June-July 1912), 33; Eliodor Constantinescu, „Iarăș în chestiunea regulamentului școlar”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year VIII, no 4, November 1912), 203.

⁸¹ G. Oprescu, „Impresii de la examenul de absolvire al cursului inferior”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year VI, no 4, 1 November 1910), 275. The pedagogical journals do not contain articles that addressed the issue of exam failure from an educational perspective, or that proposed educational strategies to prevent it. Although such topics cannot be excluded, they were rather isolated concerns, not shared by the whole group, for which exam failure was to be approached from a social perspective, through controlling the access to secondary schools.

⁸² *Starea învețimentului public*, 93.



upward mobility. Meritocracy was the path to social ascension, and the cultural capital obtained through education played a decisive role in this process. The idea that social and political positions should be earned based on merit, not social origin or rank, was present in speeches at award ceremonies throughout the 1860s. “Never before has the country needed enlightened and knowledgeable people more than today, for merit never had the same prospects of being embraced and encouraged”⁸³. The author of the above-mentioned speech, Vasile Boerescu, was aspiring to a model associated with modernity and trying to escape the remnants of a not very remote period when administrative functions were obtained in a different way. Around the same time, Ion Zalomit, member of the High Council of Education, emphasised the disappearance of privileges and their replacement with the “privilege of knowledge” (*privilegiul sciinței*), in his speech at the award ceremony of 1864. “Knowledge will now replace wealth; from now on, it gives you rights that were before only granted by money”⁸⁴. The same person, in a similar situation, praised education, assigning a series of social advantages to it: “Through education we acquire the competence that is required by various functions of the State”⁸⁵.

The speeches given at school festivities linked the concept of merit to the idea of citizenship, integrating it into the discourse about the “destiny” of the country. “To be deserving” entered the theoretical profile of an ideal citizen. A desirable trait, appreciated and encouraged, individual merit was subsumed, above all, to the image of the homeland and the common good, ensuring a “great future” to the country. This culture of meritocracy in the service of the common good⁸⁶ was in opposition to the vision of most parents, who saw schooling as a way to acquire individual benefits, to change the economic condition and the social status of their children.

Adapted to the educational context, merit was synonymous with the effort made by the student, culminating in good results at school. Viewed from

⁸³ „Cuventu rostit de Directorul Școalelor B. Boerescu, la împărțirea premiilor din anul școlar 1858-1859”, in *Starea Instrucțiunii publice în România de Sus la finitul anului școlar 1861-1862* (Bucharest: Typographia Statului Sf. Sawa și Niphon, 1862), 4.

⁸⁴ *Monitorul. Jurnalul Oficial al Principatelor-Unite -Române*, Wednesday, no. 144, 1/13 July 1864.

⁸⁵ *Starea Instrucțiunii publice în România-de-Sus la finitul anului școlar 1861-1862. Discurs pronunțat cu ocasiunea solemnității de împărțirea premiilor în 29 Iunie 1862 de Directorul școalelor I. Zalomit* (Bucharest: Typographia Statului Sf. Sawa și Niphon, 1862), 3.

⁸⁶ A study about public examinations in Mexico retraces a similar discourse, dominated by the logic of reciprocity. See Eugenia Roldán Vera, “Towards a Logic of Citizenship: Public Examinations in Elementary Schools in Mexico, 1788-1848. State and Education Before and After Independence,” in *Paedagogica Historica* (Vol. 46, Nr. 4, 2010), 511-524.

a political standpoint, a successful examination was not only an aspiration and an expectation of the teachers and the authorities⁸⁷, but also a duty of the students towards their “Fatherland”⁸⁸, their vindication of the material efforts of the authorities⁸⁹, a way of expressing gratitude for “the goodwill of the government”⁹⁰. The relationship between the school and the state was thus based upon a system of moral reciprocity, the state was a “protector” of education, and the children must reciprocate by proving their usefulness to one’s country through diligence.

Teachers built and maintained an ideal model of the high school as a prestigious institution, designed to train the state elites. High schools and gymnasiums were to raise the intellectual level of the population⁹¹, to transmit specialised knowledge and to offer their students a cultural background with a strong classical orientation that should speak to both reason and spirit. All these features were perceived as powerful means of transmitting cultural capital. Maintaining the schools’ prestigious status was ensured, according to teachers, through a strictly controlled access, to be guaranteed by using a rigorous examination system⁹² or even by reducing the number of high school students⁹³. The opening of the institution to all social categories had to be applied “with a lot of foresight, because only in this manner will our high school get rid of many bad elements and will manage to maintain its prestige as an *educational school* [emphasised in text]”⁹⁴. A rigorous selection system was seen as all the more necessary as it was discovered that primary school students, the basic recruitment pool for secondary schools, had a low level of knowledge. The explanation for this situation was linked to the generally low cultural level of the population and to the fact that the student “...learns almost nothing at home or outside of school...”⁹⁵. The model of the elite high school, as conceptualized by some secondary school teachers, intertwined the culture of meritocracy and the as-

⁸⁷ NAR, MCIP, 7/1864/23.

⁸⁸ *Discurs pronunsiat*, 5.

⁸⁹ NAR, MCIP, 241/1870/219 recto. See also: D. A. Sturdza, *Discursuri pedagogice* (Bucharest: Tipografia Curței Regale, F. Göbl Fii, 1887), 58. [Speech delivered at the award ceremony in Buzău High School].

⁹⁰ NAR, MCIP, 241/1870/206 verso.

⁹¹ *Starea înveșimentului public*, 55, 120-121; 192; I. V., „Examenele de absolvire”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year X, no. 1-2, June-July 1914), 36.

⁹² I. V., „Examenele de absolvire”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year X, no. 1-2, June-July 1914), 37.

⁹³ *Starea înveșimentului public*, 50; Dim. Baci, „Din neajunsurile școlii noastre secundare”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year X, no. 1-2, June-July 1914), 17.

⁹⁴ Dim. Baci, „Din neajunsurile școlii noastre”, 17.

⁹⁵ *Starea înveșimentului public*, 56.



pirations of upward social mobility based on merit, with the idea of limiting access to high school based on social background, in order to ensure a rigorous selection of the future students.

Teachers pointed out some limitations of the examination system, which raised a question mark about the school as a vehicle of meritocracy. In an article published in the most important specialised journal for teachers, Constantin Moisil⁹⁶ was drawing attention to the fact that the graduation of students “was influenced in most cases by old customs: we should not destroy the prospects of too many students, or by local interests: we should not depopulate the school, or for countless considerations of friendship or political ties”⁹⁷. Structural transformations, conditioning access to more and more professions by means of a high school diploma, generated an increase in the number of high school graduates which was perceived as decreasing the intellectual level of high school education and thus deviating from a system of meritocracy. Professor George Oprescu pointed out these dysfunctions in an analysis of the examination system. The author discussed the case of schools training technicians (telegraph operators and railway workers), which had raised their level of schooling by receiving only high school graduates with diplomas. The author suggested that employees of state structures, interested in career advancement, took the exam together with high school students, being subjected to less demanding criteria than their younger rivals⁹⁸. The opportunity for students of technical schools to receive a more prestigious graduation certificate following an examination, but without attending high school, weakened the social competition and subverted the hierarchical universe of academic classification.

In 1912, the Ministry of Education introduced additional examinations for students with poor academic results⁹⁹, in an attempt to expel the undeserving students and to ensure a higher educational level. The endeavours to pursue a more rigorous system of examination produced opposite effects because of the vague legislative provisions. The situation generated criticism from a few

⁹⁶ Constantin Moisil (1876-1958), alumnus of the University of Bucharest, History section of the Literature Faculty. After graduation he taught in high schools in Focșani, Tulcea, and Bucharest (Matei Basarab High School). At the beginning of the 20th century, he became an assistant at the Romanian Academy, numismatics section. As a teacher he wrote regular contributions to *The General Journal of Education* on subjects related to the public school system and education.

⁹⁷ Const. Moisil, „Din practica examenelor”, 186.

⁹⁸ G. Oprescu, „Impresii de la examenul de absolvire al cursului inferior”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year VI, no 4, 1 November 1910), 275-276.

⁹⁹ In 1911-12, the students whose average grade was under 6.50 were required to take additional exams.

secondary teachers which drew attention to the issue and argued that the measure, as designed by the legislator and formulated in school regulations, would encourage the easy promotion of very weak students¹⁰⁰.

* * *

At the end of the 19th century, the examinations restricted the advancement within the school hierarchy. The end-of-year exam was essential for the transition to the upper grade or cycle of education (gymnasium, high school); the exam at the end of high school gave the student a diploma that paved the way to enter the university. Through it, access to higher education institutions (superior schools, universities) and professions (the case of aptitude exams for obtaining a teaching position) was increasingly controlled by the state.

The exam was considered an instrument allowing a rigorous selection of students, in accordance with the image of school as a key to individual upward social mobility based on the meritocratic ideal. This image partially overlapped with that of the parents who connected the exam to their children achieving an attractive social or economic status. Still there was not a uniform image of the school and its functions as revealed by the conceptual model of the high school as an elite school, sustained by some teachers. According to this model, high schools were assigned with the role of social selection, connecting the merit with cultural capital and sometimes social background. The examinations follow a similar logic, of selecting the school “elite”, from whose ranks a bureaucratic elite was then recruited.

This article shows that various actors directly or indirectly involved in the examinations (the teaching staff, the school authorities, the family, the public) endowed the exams with multiple meanings. Although there were many points of convergence between these actors, one cannot speak about clear ruptures and overlaps or correlations between certain discourses, meanings and professional groups. Context, temporality, personal projects, professional strategies are some of the variables that should be taken into account when dwelling on the discourses about examinations articulated by various social categories. Last but not least, in the 19th century the public education was a key element of national and state building, being given the role of inoculating an identity construct and forming the bureaucratic elite. Viewed from this perspective, the exams vali-

¹⁰⁰ George Opreșcu, „Regulamentul școalelor secundare”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year VIII, no. 9, April 1912), 517-521; Dumitru Baciș, „Câteva observațiuni asupra noului regulament al școlilor secundare”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year VIII, no. 1-2, June-July 1912), 33; Eliodor Constantinescu, „Iarăș în chestiunea regulamentului școlar”, in *Revista generală a învățământului* (Year VIII, no 4, November 1912), 203.



dated the two functions of education. They were part of the range of methods and techniques through which the student was constructed and governed as a subject. These techniques operate as disciplinary practices, control the educational process, and enable behaviours, actions and expectations, through which students internalized desired norms in connection with the idea of citizenship.

The exam functioned as a regulating and organisational mechanism. It controlled the way training and education worked, assessed and supervised the teachers and their achievements, evaluated the curriculum, and sanctioned those who did not comply with the rules.

Public festivities, including their performative character and ritual aspect, played a key role in the symbolic elevation and establishment of the exam as a social instrument, as a crucial factor and site for the recognition of merit and for legitimizing the teaching profession. These festivities mediated the understanding and the reception of exams, schools and education by the broader public, especially by the parents.

Rezumat

Articolul oferă o perspectivă istorică asupra examenelor din școlile secundare românești la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului următor, perioadă în care rețeaua școlară secundară cunoaște o extindere semnificativă. Prima parte a articolului discută instituționalizarea examenelor și formalizarea practicilor de examinare, iar cea de a doua se oprește asupra modului în care se construiește examinarea ca subiect de reflecție, urmărind discursurile produse de diferiți actori. În a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea, școala a fost percepută ca un vector al mobilității sociale pe bază meritocratică și un element cheie în construirea statului-națiune, atribuindu-i-se rolul educării și inoculării identității naționale. În acest context socio-educational, școlile secundare reprezintă bazinul de recrutare al viitoarei elite administrative și asigură achiziția capitalului cultural necesar accesului în funcții, aspecte care vor determina funcțiile sociale ale examenelor. Analiza documentară bazată pe arhive a scos la iveală o perspectivă socială nuanțată, în cadrul căreia corpul didactic și părinții construiesc noi sensuri noțiunii de examinare și atribuie noi funcții examenelor.

Cuvinte-cheie: școli secundare, examene, formalizarea practicilor de examen, mobilitate socială, meritocrație.

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