

# The Cultural and Nationalising Mission of Kindergarten Teachers in Southern Dobruja, 1914-1940

Camelia ZAVARACHE

## *Abstract*

Public Education was an essential feature of nation-building throughout Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nationalising states designed school policies to transform peasants into nationals and citizens. However, kindergartens were primarily urban institutions. One of their goals was to teach young children modern languages. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Romanian elites started to create and adjust them to nationalise Dobruja and Cadrilater, the two provinces integrated into the Old Kingdom. Both regions were ethnically diverse. In localities primarily inhabited by a minority population, the purpose of kindergartens was to spread the Romanian language and national culture. This article focuses on the national integration of South Dobruja through public kindergartens. It also examines the professional path of teachers serving in these regions until the end of the 1940s. Finally, the paper follows teachers' interaction with the locals and their efforts to mediate between the pedagogical and national aims of Greater Romania and the local interests that sometimes collided with the state school policies.

**Keywords:** Southern Dobruja, kindergartens, 20<sup>th</sup>-century Romania, ethnic minorities.

This paper analyses how school policies regarding kindergarten teaching were designed to contribute to the nation-building process in Romania during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, it closely follows the concept of “normative isomorphism of language, nation and state” put forward by Tomasz Kamusella. Central European countries, such as Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, legitimised the national state by overlapping language, nation and statehood. Kamusella's findings identify a particular type of nationalism. Following Peter F. Sugar's definition of nationalism for Eastern European countries, having an ethnic dimension, Kamusella added the linguistic component.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, he labelled such an

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter F. Sugar, *Naționalismul est-european în secolul al XX-lea* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2002), 345-349.

<sup>2</sup> For the connection between the emergence of nationalism and industrialised societies see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 35-58. On the dichotomy between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism, see Constantin Iordachi, “From Disentanglement to Interdependence: State Citizenship in Romania and Hungary, 1945-2012,” in *Hungary and Romania Beyond National Narratives. Comparisons and Entanglements*, eds. Anders E.B. Blomqvist, Constantin Iordachi, Balázs Trencsényi (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 711-733.



evolution as ethnolinguistic nationalism since consolidating statehood became synonymous with making the official language mandatory for all citizens.<sup>3</sup> We consider Kamusella's findings relevant to how Romanian political elites have conceptualised and used the public school system of all degrees to nationalise its population. This new concept of the public school is evident in the provinces annexed to the Kingdom of Romania before and after the First World War, as was the case with the Southern Dobruja.

Such evolution became evident during the long liberal governance from 1922 to 1928 (with some interludes), when the Ministry of Public Instruction (hereafter, the Ministry) extended the entire public school network to an unimaginable length a few years back, before the war.<sup>4</sup> It marked the debut of school massification and democratisation in Romania, with visible effects during the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> Using elementary school to build a national community out of the Romanian peasantry had been a long-exercised policy. Still, for school representatives of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it always seemed to fall short of expectations.<sup>6</sup> Using kindergartens to spread the Romanian language and national culture among minority communities was a new direction. Much like the cultural transformation of ethnic Romanian peasants into patriots and citizens, their integration into the Romanian national body was a long and challenging process.<sup>7</sup>

This article draws on the documents of the National Archives, the Fund of Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction and the Archives of the Municipality of Bucharest, School Inspectorate Fund to examine pre-school institutions and the professional paths and contributions of the teaching personnel. In doing so, we will analyse the complex interaction between state authorities, the nationalising school policies they designed and the local communities targeted by these.

<sup>3</sup> Tomasz Kamusella, *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 24-35.

<sup>4</sup> Since 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1936, the official title of the Ministry of Public Instruction became the Ministry of National Education. See Stelian Negoe, *Istoria guvernelor României de la începuturi – 1859 până în zilele noastre – 2012* (Bucharest: Machiavelli, 2013), 136.

<sup>5</sup> Petru Negură and Andrei Cușco, "Public Education in Romania and Moldova, 19-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Modernization, Political Mobilization, and Nation-Building. An Introduction," *Plural. History, Culture, Society* 9, no. 1 (2021): 5-8.

<sup>6</sup> Mirela-Luminița Murgescu, *Între „bunul creștin” și „bravul român”. Rolul școlii primare în construirea identității naționale românești (1831-1878)* (Iași: Editura A '92, 1999), 9-15.

<sup>7</sup> For the French case, see Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 303-338.

## Preschool Education Before the First World War: the Public Kindergartens

Kindergarten teaching developed in the Old Kingdom throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was represented mainly by urban, private institutions destined for middle-class pupils, often organised by minority communities and churches and employing foreign personnel.<sup>8</sup> They worked without any assistance from the state. Even later, when the Romanian female elite followed their lead, there was a clear tendency to avoid asking the Ministry to get involved financially.<sup>9</sup>

The situation in Dobruja changed during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After being attached to Romania, in 1880, the province got a provisional status, which meant it needed a period before its political integration into the kingdom. Documents show that during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, school policies designed by the governments in Bucharest were challenged and even disregarded by the Bulgarian communities in the two counties, Tulcea and Constanța. In a volume edited to celebrate the former minister Spiru Haret's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, a teacher in Tulcea wrote an article regarding kindergarten teaching in Romania. This article explains an incident in Tulcea in 1897, where Bulgarian schools refused to teach the Romanian language. In contrast, Dobruja was presented as part of Bulgaria in Geography and History classes.<sup>10</sup> Spiru Haret himself mentioned the incident in a speech published under the title *Școala naționalistă*, in 1907, where he complained that "not too long ago" Bulgarian schools in Dobruja used maps that presented the province as part of Bulgaria.<sup>11</sup>

Spiru Haret perceived most seemingly Bulgaria's declaration of independence in the fall of 1908 and the final year of Dobruja's provisional status in 1909 as

<sup>8</sup> On kindergarten teaching in Romania throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Cătălina Mihalache, *Copilarie, familie, școală: politici educaționale și receptări sociale* (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> In 1907, the leader of the Association of Kindergarten Teachers in Romania, Luisa I. Neamțu spoke about creating a new such institution in Bucharest' outskirts. She clearly stated that the comity avoided asking the Ministry for financial assistance. Luisa I. Neamțu, „O veste bună,” *Grădina de copii. Revistă pentru educatoare și familii*, first year, no. 10 (15<sup>th</sup> of January 1907): 307-308.

<sup>10</sup> T. G. Gheorghiu, „Școalele de copii mici (grădinile de copii),” in *Lui Spiru Haret „Ale tale dintru ale tale” La împlinirea celor șesezeci ani* (Bucharest: Inst. De Arte Grafice „Carol Göbl”, 1911), 97-103.

<sup>11</sup> Spiru Haret, „Școala naționalistă,” *Revista Generală a Învățământului*, second year, no. 6 (1907): 7.



aggravating factors in a situation that was already worrying.<sup>12</sup> The passing of the first Law on kindergarten teaching by the Ministry, precisely in 1909, was not a coincidence. It was a decision to culturally integrate a province that was by far the most ethnically diverse in the Romanian Kingdom until that moment; a neighbouring state also claimed a part. This experience would serve as a model for all the other new provinces to be united with Romania, as the Liberal Party adopted Spuru Haret's vision of the schools' national mission and extended it after the war. From this perspective, Dobruja was a genuine laboratory for the Romanian state, where the state first implemented this pattern of nationalising foreign minority communities through school.

Throughout the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called Cadrilater region (i.e., Southern Dobruja) had a distinct political evolution. After 1878, when the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria was established, its political rulers claimed the Southern part of Dobruja. However, they received a small territory, much less than they had aspired. Therefore, they heavily colonised the region with ethnic Bulgarians attempting to change its demographic structure since the inhabitants were Muslims who did not follow the withdrawing Ottoman army and administrative staff.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, a distinctive political mobilisation originated in this type of nationalism that would cause tensions between the Romanian administration, teaching personnel and the local population.

When, in 1913, the Southern Dobruja, with its two counties Durostor and Caliacra, was attached to the Kingdom of Romania, there was already a strategy in place that, a year later, the Liberal Party followed. The Law on the organisation of the New Dobruja, adopted on the 1<sup>st</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> of April 1914, was similar to the one regarding Dobruja in 1880. It stated that the local population could not vote for its representatives in the Parliament in Bucharest since they were not Romanian citizens, thus forbidding any political activity in the province (until 1921, when it was changed and republished).<sup>14</sup> Also, by 1914 the Law regarding the organisation of schools for small children passed by the Minister of Cults and Public Instruction, Spuru Haret had been in place for almost five years.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Enache Tuşa, *Imaginar politic și identități colective în Dobrogea* (Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale, 2011), 369.

<sup>13</sup> Tuşa, *Imaginar politic*, 469.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Cain, "Caliacra," in *România Mare votează. Alegerile parlamentare din 1919 „la firul ierbii”*, ed. Bogdan Murgescu, Andrei Florin Sora (Iași: Polirom, 2019), 236-237. The 1914 law was kept in place until 1921, when it was republished after being updated.

<sup>15</sup> "Lege pentru școalele de copii mici (grădini de copii)," *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 58 (12<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> of June 1909): 2410.

The first group of teachers were selected at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the graduates of secondary schools in the most important cities of the Old Kingdom, being allowed to pass a special pedagogy exam to work in kindergartens.<sup>16</sup> Many of these women served in Dobruja and, since 1914, also in Cadrilater.

However, one must distinguish them from other teachers working with small children. Kindergartens were not new institutions in Romania. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the political elite saw the potential of these institutions to extend the Romanian language among minority communities since, in urban areas, one of the most important goals of private kindergartens was teaching children modern languages.

The women who were part of the first generation of kindergarten teachers employed by the Ministry are to be differentiated from other teachers working with small children by their commitment to serve in public schools created and financed by the state to spread the Romanian language and the national culture. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of such institutions were created in rural areas, especially those inhabited by minority groups, making teachers accept relocating there, where they were obliged to serve for at least six years. Furthermore, the Primary Education Law distinguished urban and rural teachers at that time. The second had to pass a special exam after completing the minimum teaching stage in rural areas required by the Law. These female educators fell strictly under this provision.

Looking at their home towns, one can notice that many teachers were born in Bucharest, Brăila, Galați, Focșani, Craiova, Pitești or Ploiești and were usually graduates of secondary schools for girls. When Southern Dobruja was annexed to Romania, they had to recruit new teachers. At that time, the teaching personnel they relied on was insufficient to fill the positions even in the Romanian Dobruja. Therefore, in 1913 and 1914, a large part of the girls recently graduating from secondary schools in Tulcea and the surrounding Danube region were recruited, being allowed to pass the pedagogical exam for kindergarten teachers. They were selected precisely to find it easier to work in the new counties that might have been perceived as remote by teachers born elsewhere. Also, they came from ethnically mixed regions. Furthermore, the Ministry issued certificates available only in the New Dobruja to ensure the kindergarten teachers would remain there.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Istoria învățământului din România vol. II (1821-1918)*, ed. Anghel Manolache, Gheorghe Pârnuță (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R.A., 1993), 353-354.

<sup>17</sup> Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (from here onwards ANIC), Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice (from here onwards MCIP Fund), file 167/1930, pages 166-180.



Among those who went to the new province was Maria T. Schibartș.<sup>18</sup> She started working in Ghelengic village, Caliacra County, in January 1914: “I was among the first kindergarten teachers who responded to the call of spreading the Romanian language in Cadrilater. Shortly I could pride myself on having attracted 200 children of all ages since even those old enough for primary school had to start with me, the Romanian language being completely unknown.”<sup>19</sup> According to her professional memoir written in 1941, her class was part of the committee that welcomed King Carol I and his wife Elisabeta, during their visit to the region, in April 1914.

Constanța Teodorescu had a similar experience. She was a kindergarten teacher who started working in Turtucaia in January 1914. In her professional memoir, she wrote right before her retirement, Teodorescu referred to the years she served in Durostor County: “I have worked to nationalise the population of that region, through many festivities and national songs through which I tried to achieve a national education. Through meetings with all the teachers and choirs, I tried to convey the love for our people in the hearts of those who did not look kindly on us.”<sup>20</sup> Such comments referred to the efforts made to culturally integrate a population that must have been hostile or disinterested.

Both women talked about the shortcomings they had to overcome because they came to a new region having no reliable school infrastructure during the years that predated Romania’s war entry. Also, they had no educational supplies. These were essential for making such institutions appealing to small children. The only support was the regional reviser’s limited funds for rewarding diligent kindergarten teachers. However, such rewards were merely moral support rather than proper financial assistance as they consisted of small amounts of money.

The cultural integration of the New Dobruja was a two-way process. Kindergarten teachers in Southern Dobruja tried to expand the Romanian language and national culture into the new region. At the same time, the state made an effort to make the new province familiar to children and the public in the Old Kingdom. One could trace back such endeavours as early as 1916, when the National Society of Orthodox Women, which had created and funded

---

<sup>18</sup> Serviciul Municipiului București al Arhivelor Naționale (from here onwards SMBAN), Fond Inspectoratul Școlar al Municipiului București (from here onwards ISMB Fund), file 23/1941, Kindergartens.

<sup>19</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 31/1947, retirement file of Maria T. Schibartș, unnumbered.

<sup>20</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 103/1938, retirement file of Constanța Teodorescu, unnumbered.



a network of kindergartens in Bucharest, celebrated the end of the school year with a national festivity, including *Hora Cadrilaterului*.<sup>21</sup>

### The Difficult Years After the War

After the Romanian administration had evacuated the province during the First World War, the end of the conflict brought most of these teachers back to Cadrilater since the Ministry of Public Instruction expected them to do so. However, those who did not respect the terms of the agreement and chose to work elsewhere were running the risk of becoming substitute teachers, especially those with pedagogical diplomas that would allow them to work as provisional teachers only in the two counties of Southern Dobruja.<sup>22,23</sup> This constraining mechanism that the Ministry had in place was designed to discourage such attitudes. However, not complying with its requirements meant that the kindergarten teacher would lose the chance of staying on track with the proper teaching *cursus honorum*, which started with being appointed a provisional teacher and working her way up to getting tenure. It also brought the possibility of a full teacher's salary.

Even more so, Maria T. Schibart, the same teacher who took pride in being part of the delegation that welcomed King Carol I and Elisabeta in Cadrilater, even mentioned a seven-year contract that some of her colleagues had agreed to before the war.<sup>24</sup> Her comment explains why so many teachers returned to their positions. Despite their hardships, they resumed their lives where they had left them in the summer of 1916.

<sup>21</sup> Anemari Monica Negru, "Un model de educație privată: școlile Societății Ortodoxe Naționale a Femeilor Române," in *Copilării trecute prin război. Povești de viață, politici sociale și reprezentări culturale în România anilor 1913-1923*, eds. Cătălina Mihalache, Nicoleta Roman (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2020), 215.

<sup>22</sup> Being appointed a provisional teacher was the first step in a teacher's career since, after several years, they had the opportunity to pass the exam to get tenure. After that, they benefited from all the rights any experienced teacher had. Substitute teachers were placed at the bottom of the public school hierarchy.

<sup>23</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, 167/1930 file, pages 166-180. The case of kindergarten teacher Maria Banciu Vernescu is indicative of this constraining mechanism that the Ministry of Public Instruction had in place to make teachers work in the Cadrilater. Even though she got her pedagogical diploma in September 1914 to teach in Cadrilater, she did not have the chance to do so because of the war. After the conflict, she conveniently asked to work as a kindergarten teacher in Southern Bessarabia, in Chilia Nouă since it was closer to her home town, Tulcea. In 1930, the regional reviser's office pointed out that according to the pedagogical certificate she possessed, she could get tenure only in Cadrilater. Outside of the province, she could only work as a substitute teacher.

<sup>24</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 248/1922, page 61.



Therefore, some of the inspection reports inside the teachers' retirement files date back from May 1919, as is the case with Eliza Şendrea's file.<sup>25</sup> Southern Dobruja was under Allied control then, and the interactions between the Romanian administration and the Italian troops appointed in the two counties were quite tense. However, things got better once French troops replaced these over the summer of 1919.<sup>26</sup>

That may be why, when he visited the school and the kindergarten in Babuc village, Durostor County, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1919, he did not include any observations regarding the Romanian language, even though reviser Petrescu wrote extensive notes on the way classes were organised. Nevertheless, school authorities praised the teachers for their work, and both the school and kindergarten were considered worthy of serving as a model to others.

Three years later, however, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1922, when inspector V. Negulescu visited the kindergarten accompanied by reviser Petrescu, the language mainly was all he wrote about: "I have examined the children on speaking exercises. Even though they started kindergarten only three months ago, the children have already learned the language quite well. Seeing that they speak Romanian in conversations among themselves is even more gratifying. We hope that by the end of the year, the children will know the language well enough to understand all explanations and that language would have become not a purpose but a way to gain all consciousness."<sup>27</sup> He said that learning the Romanian language was not the final objective of these classes but merely the way for the national discourse to reach these foreign children and make them part of the political body. Language led the way in turning different ethnicities into Romanian citizens. It was the strategy employed by various Central and Eastern European countries when dealing with compact minority communities to modernise society and consolidate statehood.<sup>28</sup>

A brief comment must be made regarding the school inspection reports. One can notice that, much like the sanitary reports, the school inspection reports constituted a genre of administrative documents written to meet the criteria the Ministry envisioned, therefore being repetitive and stereotypical.

---

<sup>25</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 60/1943, retirement file of Eliza Macri (formerly Şendrea), unnumbered.

<sup>26</sup> Cain, "Caliacra", 239-240.

<sup>27</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 60/1943, retirement file of Eliza Macri (formerly Şendrea), unnumbered; copy of the Report on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1922.

<sup>28</sup> Andreea Dăncilă Ineoan, Marius Eppel, Ovidiu-Emil Iudean, *Voices of the Churches, Voices of the Nationalities. Competing Loyalties in the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament (1867-1918)* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 182-186.



However, for kindergartens, they seem heterogeneously written; the wooden language is not always present, even though we notice similar points of interest. After the war, male sub-revisers, revisers and inspectors who had to evaluate such institutions did not have experience working inside them since they were teaching slightly older elementary school students. Consequently, many reports on kindergartens are brief. Others suggest an emotional reaction of the male author, who was impressed by the children's young age and their interactions with the teacher. It is never the exact text written repeatedly, as was the case with the reports regarding elementary schools with a typical structure. We believe that underneath the national and cultural agenda, the reports on kindergarten teaching contain relevant information on the actual activity in the class. They are necessary instruments that help us evaluate the progress of pre-school education.

### **A New Decade, New Practices:**

#### **1920s and the Changes for Elementary School Teachers**

After the First World War, Southern Dobruja remained on the Ministry of Public Instruction's cultural agenda. As a result, at an unprecedented level, teaching personnel working in elementary schools came from the Old Kingdom. It settled in the Bulgarian and Turkish villages hoping to benefit from the financial support the Law included.

In 1924 the new Law on Primary Education encouraged experienced teachers to work in the new provinces, with the promise of receiving critical financial benefits and land. Article 159 listed the counties with minority communities for which the Ministry would accept work commitments. The Ministry included Durostor and Caliacra, among other regions in Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia. Also, it promised teachers a bonus of two or three times their regular payment to help them move to the villages they chose. Therefore, for the two counties in Cadrilater, in 1925, there was a massive influx of experienced, mostly male teachers who decided to relocate, hoping for better pay and a better life.

Even though there seem to have been fewer women than men, we are inclined to explain this gender disbalance by a disposition issued by the Ministry regarding assigning positions to Normal Schools graduates. In the fall of 1925, the inspector of the 8<sup>th</sup> School Region Bucharest (Regiunea VIII-a Școlară București) reported that, as the Ministry itself instructed him, female graduates had the right to choose positions in the counties of the Old Kingdom, such as Ilfov, Vlașca and Prahova, while male graduates had to



search exclusively in Durostor County.<sup>29</sup> The same logic could also be applied to experienced teachers, as the Ministry preferred male rather than female teachers for the positions available in elementary schools in Durostor County.

Teachers' requests were declined when they started writing to the Ministry asking for the settling bonus. The Ministry's response was either that during the year 1924, for Southern Dobruja, such an amount was not granted, or simply that for the two counties, the amount was not available at all, leaving the teachers and the reviser who agreed to such bonuses baffled.<sup>30</sup> This correspondence shows that the Cadrilater had an ambiguous status among the new provinces attached to the Kingdom of Romania. Even though article 159 regarding work commitments due to consistent minority communities concerned the two counties, it was not considered as sensitive as other regions because the Romanian administration and teaching personnel had already worked there starting in 1914. Consequently, the Ministry seemed more inclined to change the rules and reinterpret parts of the Primary Education Law articles to its benefit, especially since 1924 and 1925 had been very difficult financially. In 1924, for instance, many teachers in Bessarabia got their salaries with significant delays.

There were deputies in the Parliament in Bucharest who reacted against the insufficient pay of elementary school teachers, writing petitions regarding such a concerning topic. It had become common knowledge that teachers were severely underpaid. Some voices accused Minister Constantin Angelescu of being more interested in school buildings than caring for the human resources on whom education relied.<sup>31</sup>

Another source for teaching personnel for elementary schools in the province was the fresh Normal School graduates. Starting in 1924, the Ministry made them choose positions in the new provinces, where they were expected to serve for at least three years. In the case of Cadrilater, most of these young men were coming from the Southern counties of Romania, such as Romanați, Teleorman, Ialomița, Buzău, Prahova, Tutova or Constanța. Nevertheless, they were the ones who, during the second half of the 1920s, accessed work commitments and settled in the region, marrying their teaching colleagues and thus gaining financial stability and reaching professional success.

<sup>29</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 216/1925, page 174 front and back.

<sup>30</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 74/1925, page 200.

<sup>31</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 263/1925, p. 36-37 front and back. C.I. Ștefănescu was among the most radical deputies, taking a stand against budgetary cuts that forced many teachers, especially young graduates working in the new provinces, to live in misery.

However, working in the Southern Dobruja was not easy or safe. In 1922 the reviser P. Petrescu complained about the numerous difficulties he encountered in crossing Durostor County to evaluate teachers in schools and kindergartens. He reported the dangers of daily attacks by bands of outlaws and the challenges in getting a carriage because of Bulgarian and Turkish peasants' mistrust or their legitimate fear of being robbed of their horses since robbers were attacking in broad daylight.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Bulgarian bandits (*comitagii*) were attacking the road and households in the most exposed areas, such as the border. This happened to teacher I. Belu's family living in the Turkish village Salihler, in Durostor County. Bandits attacked his house in November 1925. Besides the clothes and possessions, the attackers stole, Belu's wife, a kindergarten teacher in the same village, was so terrified that they had to leave the province. In the document in which the reviser reported the incident, he also mentioned that the Turkish population was reluctant to send their children to public school, even though the Ministry was paying someone to teach Turkish and Coran studies. By his tone, it seems he saw a connection between the lack of attachment the villagers displayed towards the school and the teacher's house being attacked by bandits. Therefore, he recommended moving the position of the teacher who taught Turkish and Coran studies to Masutlar, a neighbouring village, as a punishment for the locals' reluctance.<sup>33</sup>

Things got even more complicated when ethnic Romanians from the Balkans settled in the two counties.<sup>34</sup> From the second half of the 1920s, their arrival generated tensions and incidents with the Bulgarian population, also regarded as uninspired by some Romanian officials occupying different positions in the administrative establishment.<sup>35</sup> Complaining about the presence of the Macedonians in the administration due to Taşcu Pucerea, the administrative leader of Durostor County, a handful of Romanian professionals coming from the Old Kingdom argued that continuing to colonise them in

<sup>32</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 56/1922, page 33.

<sup>33</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 100/1925, page 305 front and back.

<sup>34</sup> See „*Transhumanță*” interbelică în Balcani. *Studii și articole despre aromâni în publicațiile școlii gustiene*, anthology by Zoltán Rostás, Martin Ladislau Salamon (Bucharest: Eikon, 2017). The volume includes detailed reports on the Balkan Romanians settled in Cadrilater. Additional information on the settlers see also Ion Gabriel Andrei, “Coloniștii români timoceni din Cadrilater,” *Magazin Istoric*, year XL, no. 11 (476) (November 2006): 51-54.

<sup>35</sup> Tuşa, *Imaginar politic*, 458. Starting in 1925, the government led by Ion I.C. Brătianu allowed the colonisation on a large scale of ethnic Romanians coming from the Balkans. By 1933, 35.000 people were settled in the Southern Dobruja. See also Constantin Tudor, *Administrația românească din Cadrilater 1913-1940* (PhD diss., University of Bucharest, 1999), 104-114.



the region was counter-productive because they did not contribute to the expansion of the Romanian language since they could speak Bulgarian. Also, because of their trade skills, they would have been better suited in Moldova. We can see the tensions and the political battle for the distribution of public positions between the two sides.<sup>36</sup>

Maybe that was why the Ministry preferred male teachers to teach in elementary schools created throughout the two counties of the province, Durostor and Caliacra. They were better suited to adapt to such tensions and cope with this hostile environment.

### Kindergarten Teaching in Cadrilater

Despite this turmoil, the public kindergarten network in the region continued to develop in the years following the war's end. A report on the evolution of primary education in the two neighbouring Counties Vlaşca and Durostor, at that time part of the 8<sup>th</sup> School Region Bucharest, was sent to the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1928.<sup>37</sup> It is a valuable analysis since it includes data on the number of kindergartens in Durostor County for the school year of 1926-1927 and observations and recommendations the reviser felt the need to have. Regarding the number of kindergartens in Durostor, the report shows 67 schools in rural areas and ten in urban centres. However, five of the 67 rural kindergartens and three of ten urban ones had two positions, bringing the number of teachers working there to 84. The information regarding Vlaşca

<sup>36</sup> *Colonizarea în Cadrilater Memoriu adresat guvernului și tuturor factorilor răspunzători* (Siliștra: Tip. Ion P. Davidescu, 1925).

<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, the Statistical Yearbooks of Romania from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not collect data on public kindergartens, as those were included exclusively under the private education category. However, there is information available regarding the number of elementary public schools in rural and urban regions for both Vlaşca and Durostor County. So, during the school year of 1920-1921, in Durostor County there were 90 schools in rural regions and ten in urban ones, while in Vlaşca there were 167 schools in rural regions and seven in urban ones. See *Anuarul statistic al României 1923 Annuaire statistique de la Roumanie* (Bucharest: Tipografia Curții Regale F. Göbl Fii, 1924), 236-237. According to the report in 1928, regarding the school year of 1926-1927, at that time in Durostor County, there were 177 elementary rural schools and 14 urban ones, while in Vlaşca there were 225 rural schools and ten urban ones (ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 7/1928, page 58). We can therefore notice the consistent enlargement of the rural school network, in both counties, in Durostor from only 90 schools in 1920-1921 to 177 schools in 1926-1927, while in Vlaşca from 167 in 1920-1921 to 225 in 1926-1927. The reviser's claims make us assume that a similar process was going on in Durostor County also regarding the number of kindergartens, but unfortunately, the annual yearbooks did not include those, too, to see exactly by how much their number has increased.

County provides a compelling comparative framework. At that time, there were only nine rural kindergartens and three urban ones with 13 teachers since one institution out of the three ones in towns had two positions. Although the number of children aged 5 to 7 was significantly higher in the case of Durostor, a total of 19,786 compared to the 12,520 in Vlaşca, the staggering difference in the number of kindergartens resulted from the presence of foreign communities who did not know the Romanian language. This is how the reviser explained the discrepancy between the two counties: "(...) in the first County (Durostor) recently annexed to our country, the majority population does not speak Romanian, and the state had to create as many kindergartens as possible, even though there weren't enough prepared teachers. In Vlaşca, where this situation did not exist, the needs of primary schools were the first ones to attend."<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, the reviser made some interesting observations and proposals regarding the public' reaction towards such institutions. As expected, urban kindergartens were more attractive, and attendance was satisfactory. However, for rural regions, things were different for financial reasons and because mothers were away from home all day to work in the field and did not have the time to pick up the children from school at noon. Therefore, the reviser recommended the creation of day-care centres in villages, arguing that they suited better the work conditions and time frame of agricultural activities. "Women would bring their children to the day-care centre early in the morning to free their hands, and in the evening, when work stops, they would gratefully pick their children up, knowing that they had been monitored and were well taken care of."<sup>39</sup> His comments synthesise the tensions inherent to kindergartens during interwar decades, the school authorities' desire to have classes throughout the day, and the lack of funds and infrastructure to provide lunch and bedrooms for the children to rest during noon. Unless the second criterion was met, teachers could not ask the children to come in the morning, go home for lunch, and then return for classes again. Also, such a schedule meant that there had to be someone available to pick up the child at noon, especially in towns and cities, with numerous dangers. During the 1920s and the 1930s, this problem was still not solved. The obvious solution, especially for teachers working in the new provinces, where they did not want to antagonise the parents by asking too much from the children, was working with half a day schedules.

---

<sup>38</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 7/1928, page 58.

<sup>39</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 7/1928, pages 57-78 front and back.



## The Old Generation

As we have already noticed, during the 1920s, many kindergarten teachers belonged to the first generation, that of women who had secondary degrees and got their pedagogical diploma during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and who had worked in Southern Dobruja before the war came back. This was the case with Florica Răzvănescu. Having taught in Cadrilater since 1915, she was appointed teacher at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kindergarten in Silistra, Durostor County and remained there until the late 1930s. In her case, we could document her professional path based on the inspection reports included in the file she sent to the Ministry when she asked to be appointed for the special inspection that would allow her to become a senior teacher in October 1930. Such files constitute the perfect source to learn about teachers' professional trajectory precisely because teachers had to send all the inspection reports during their last five years of activity. Also, they were expected to have only grades of *Good* and *Very good* and not to have any punishments. Attached to the file was a memoir in which they presented their work and results thus far. According to this document, Răzvănescu was appointed in Cadrilater in 1915 and, during the 1920s, benefited from the work commitment the 1924 Primary Education Law allowed. As it was an evaluation moment, she highlighted the good results she had when mainly working with Turkish children in teaching them the Romanian language while also educating them in the spirit of properness, order and discipline, much to their parents' content. Her perception of her professional value was supported by the five inspection reports that followed the memoir, written between December 1925 and March 1931. Different revisers and inspectors issued all these documents, and they all painted the picture of a perfect pedagogue and a true educator.

The structure of the reports shows the different elements school representatives were paying attention to when evaluating the classes. First, there was the language aspect since Turkish children needed to learn Romanian to be able to attend primary school in the following years. "I was pleased to see that all [students], even though of Muslim origin (*sic*), respond in short sentences, and they speak so that it is almost difficult to tell them apart from the Romanian children. They have a rich vocabulary, and I could get along well with them," wrote inspector Sandu Carp in the report dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1930.<sup>40</sup>

Expanding students' vocabulary was essential for all pupils, regardless of ethnic origin. It involved learning basic Romanian terminology and national songs and folk dances since they contributed to creating a Romanian national identity. Poems and different jingles were perceived as essential to integrate

<sup>40</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 107/1931, page 377.



these children into the Romanian national body culturally, and language led the way for this process.

Second, the manual activities were included in the curriculum and highly appreciated by the children as they were attractive and engaged them more than any other exercise, especially since kindergarten was devoted to older children, between 5 and 7 years, with better motor skills. These work activities were invested with moral values. The teacher was expected to encourage her children to obey the rules, keep their bodies clean and collaborate.

The third aspect was the relationship between teacher and children since school representatives always insisted on the teacher providing a mother figure to them. This recommendation was the cornerstone of the entire teaching process; a calm and loving teacher guaranteed that small students would come to classes on their own, out of interest and would get involved in any activity she would prepare for them. Therefore, it was evident to all revisers that the closer the relationship between the two, the better the results the kindergarten teacher had.

The tendency to present kindergarten teachers as having a similar role as mothers at school must be linked to the general direction of the pedagogical literature of that time. Papers published during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century encouraged parents to connect emotionally with their children while educating them. Affection was presented as playing a key role in family dynamics, as adults were instructed to prepare themselves for parenthood.<sup>41</sup> However, the public school would complement their educational mission. Therefore, the kindergarten teacher had to guide the transition from family life to public school, much like a mother was expected to educate, care for, and love her students. Such a recommendation is not surprising given children's young age and the pioneering work carried out in schools with orphans by the notorious pedagogues J. H. Pestalozzi and Friedrich Fröbel.<sup>42,43</sup> A similar view on the

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Legouvé, *Părinți și copii în al XIX-lea secol. Copilăria și adolescența* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Socec, 1898), 21-22.

<sup>42</sup> Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827) was a Swiss educational reformer. His works have been translated and critically commented on and adapted by the Transylvanian teacher Vasile Grigore Borgovanu, and have circulated in the Romanian space from the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. J. H. Pestalozzi, *Cum își învață Gertruda copiii*, translated by E. Bălțeanu, reprinted from „*Lumina pentru toți*” journal, revised and extended, with a preface and a biographical note on Pestalozzi by V. Gr. Borgovanu (Bucharest: Tipografia Mod. Gr. Luis, 1898).

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Fröbel (1782 – 1852) German educator, the founder of kindergartens. The Pedagogical Association of teachers working in schools for small children in Romania highly publicised his contributions and legacy in its journal. Victoria Georgescu-Tistu, “Fröbel, întemeietorul grădinilor de copii,” *Copilul. Revista Asociației Pedagogice a învățătoarelor de la școlile de copii mici din România*, year seven, no. 9-10 (May-June 1940): 1-3.



mission and moral profile of the kindergarten teacher was also present in the papers<sup>44</sup> that provided daily guidelines prepared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Romanian professionals such as Iulia Lt. Lascaraki and Emilia Cordoneanu.<sup>45</sup> Both women defined their work by their commitment to the school and their love for their children.

In the case of Florica Răzvănescu's files, comments such as "she works with the same love for her children" or "she has not only the skills and the experience, but she devotes her entire love for the career she has chosen to the school" reflect the emotional side of kindergarten teaching.<sup>46</sup>

As documents show, working in counties with minority communities was challenging and sometimes offered kindergarten teachers additional opportunities. Such professionals often organised sewing and tailoring workshops for students in primary and complementary classes. This position was made possible by how some kindergarten teachers were trained. According to the 1909 law Spiru Haret had elaborated to organise pre-school institutions, teachers were called masters because they had the training to conduct all sorts of manual activities.<sup>47</sup> This term was replaced by "conducătoare de grădini de copii" in the following two laws passed by the same Haret, in 1910<sup>48</sup>, since it was better known at that time and would be used exclusively from that moment onward.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Iulia C. Gheorghiu, *Metoda rațională pentru educația copiilor mici de la 2-6 ani. Lecțiuni dezvoltate zilnic în grădina de copii conducător practic* (Piatra Neamț: Tiparul Institutului „Gheorghiu”, s.a.), 48.

<sup>45</sup> Emilia Cordoneanu, *Școala Fröbeliană Mică pedagogie pentru educația copiilor Călăuza profesoarelor și a familiilor pentru Grădina de copii* (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice „Eminescu”, 1904), 9. „Precum o mamă bună îmbrățișează și unește cu o deopotrivă (sic) iubire pe toți copiii, tot așa și conducătoarea grădinii de copii trebuie să adune și să unească pe toți copiii, cu aceeași iubire, cu același devotament”.

<sup>46</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 107/1931, pages 370-379.

<sup>47</sup> The terminology varied as the Law on Kindergarten teaching in 1909 ("Lege pentru școalele de copii mici (grădini de copii)," *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 58, (12<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> of June 1909) used the title *masters for schools for small children* („maestre de școli de copii mici”), while the two laws in 1910 regarding the organisation of kindergartens and the curriculum passed by the same Spiru Haret used the term „conducătoare de grădini de copii”. However, even though the last version was eventually preferred, in practice, for instance on the documents used for assigning positions for kindergarten personnel in 1909, I found the title „maestră conducătoare cu titlu provizoriu”. See SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 107/1938, retirement file of Elena Dragomirescu, unnumbered, file 61/1943 of Zoe Boerescu, unnumbered, file 58/1941 of Matilda Livianu, unnumbered.

<sup>48</sup> "Programa de învățământ pentru școalele de copii mici (grădinile de copii)," *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 260, (20<sup>th</sup> of February/5<sup>th</sup> of March 1910). "Regulamentul pentru administrarea interioară a școalelor de copii mici (grădini de copii)," *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 173, (5<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> of November 1910).

<sup>49</sup> During the 1930s, the title of such personnel would become a *teacher for small children's schools*. For instance, in 1933 it was established the *Pedagogical Association of teachers working*

Even though, according to the Law, female personnel working in kindergartens was supposed to graduate from normal and secondary schools, in practice, there were cases of teachers who had professional training. Out of the 46 retirement files we have seen in the Archives of the Municipality of Bucharest, School Inspectorate Fund, ten belonged to kindergarten teachers who had graduated from professional schools.<sup>50</sup> The women with professional training tended to be recruited from the Danube region, being born in towns like Galați, Brăila and Tulcea, or other places from those counties. The Ministry tended to bend the rules to get teaching personnel who originated in the area, as this was considered a plus in the process of nationalising the two counties in Dobrogea and then the Cadrilater. Proof of such practice is the two cases of sisters who became kindergarten teachers that we came across while reading the documents. Sisters Nedioglu, from Zebil, Tulcea County and sisters Peteu in Stăncuța, Brăila County, have been orientated by their families to become kindergarten teachers.<sup>51</sup> The recommendation from the family shows that people living in the region were aware of the opportunities that arose from this school policy and that they benefited from it.

Elena Hieroiu was one of those teachers who graduated from the “Penetis Zumal” Professional School in Galați. She got her teaching diploma in 1908 and started working the same year. In 1925 she transferred with her husband, priest V. Hieroiu to Caliacra County to work as a kindergarten teacher at the Osmanfacâ-Sredus Ceamurli school for small children.<sup>52</sup> Three years later, they were living in Suiuciu (sometimes spelt Suiutciuc) village, part of Ezibei larger settlement, same county. While her husband was teaching elementary school children, she led the girls’ sewing workshop since the institution had a mixed school population. School authorities praised the teacher for her ability to work as a master for such manual labour, considered useful by her students for developing the abilities most valuable for girls and women as the primary household carers. Unsurprisingly, the reviser observed how Elena Hieroiu

---

*in schools for small children in Romania* („Asociația pedagogică a învățătoarelor de la școalele de copii mici din România”), which started editing a journal called at the beginning *Copilul Revista mamelor și educatoarelor. Îngrijirea, educația și protecția copiilor de 3-7 ani*, first year, no. 2, (20th of May 1933).

<sup>50</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, files 110/1938, 29/1944, 58/1946, 193/1947 and others.

<sup>51</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, 100/1938 retirement file of Maria Roznovanu and file 101/1938 of Eugenia Dumitrescu; 131/1947 retirement file of Gherghina Pașolescu and file 275/1947 of her sister Elena Hieroiu, unnumbered.

<sup>52</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 275/1947, retirement file of Elena Hieroiu, unnumbered. She had already worked in Caliacra County from 1915 until 1919, without the years of war and occupation. ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 49/1925, page 243.



attracted older women to participate in the activities, especially since the girls also worked with a sewing machine and manual craftsmanship.<sup>53</sup> Her case illustrates not only the involvement of kindergarten teachers in other parts of elementary training but also that marriage between colleagues was quite common and contributed to the teaching staff's financial stability and professional development. Therefore, in 1940, after the two counties were reattached to Bulgaria, couples represented the majority of teaching personnel leaving the province.

Along with such manual labour, kindergarten teachers were known to get involved in teaching the Romanian language to older students when the opportunity arose. For instance, after the war, Eliza Şendrea, the kindergarten teacher who worked in Babuc village, Durostor County, was appointed at the Muslim elementary private school in Silistra to teach Romanian to Turkish students in second grade. By 1924, when she started collaborating with the private school, she had already been transferred to the 5<sup>th</sup> Kindergarten in Silistra. As the inspector noted, the children were learning the state language for the first time. Therefore, school authorities found it suited to ask a kindergarten teacher to work with them.<sup>54</sup> Their option precisely reflected the teachers' key role in developing their students' vocabulary, whether they were Romanians or foreigners. Eliza Şendrea's case was by no means an exception. Well-prepared kindergarten teachers were often assigned such tasks at their request or the reviser's proposal. These cases reflect kindergarten personnel's importance, especially in the new provinces, during the 1920s. Even though a minority, these women were present wherever complex teaching contexts arose, as they had to mediate between the state's pedagogical objectives and students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### **The New Generation of Kindergarten Teachers**

A new generation of kindergarten teachers was trained after the war in special institutions. Born during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these young students graduated from the normal schools for kindergarten teachers created in Bucharest, Iaşi, Braşov, Chişinău and Deva during the 1920s.

In this new context, a typical practice initiated by the Liberal Party was setting aside several scholarships to be granted to diligent students from the new provinces. They were exempted from paying taxes and were even allowed

---

<sup>53</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 20/1928, page 206.

<sup>54</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 60/1943, retirement file of Eliza Macri (formerly Şendrea), unnumbered; copy of the Report on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1924.

to pass exams in the fall without losing their scholarships since such a policy was to prepare them to become agents of the national school. After the years spent in the boarding school, they would have learnt the language and the national rhetoric to act as the so-called “missionaries” of the Romanian culture, even though some were not ethnic Romanians. This was the case with Atanasa Atanasoff, born in 1908 in Turtucaia, Durostor County, who graduated from the “Domnița Anca” Normal School for Kindergarten Teachers in Bucharest in 1925.<sup>55</sup> After passing the final exam to get her teaching diploma, she was appointed teacher at the kindergarten in the village Denizler, in Durostor County.<sup>56</sup> At that time, she was a fresh graduate, only 17 years old. However, she went back home, which was convenient for her but most importantly for school authorities who saw their pedagogical objectives met.

Almost eight years later, according to the Primary Education Yearbook, in 1933, Atanasa, who had married and changed her name to Cehlarof was still working in the same village, being paid the minimum wage, 2250 lei.<sup>57</sup> Even though she was not an ethnic Romanian, she was part of the teaching personnel and the national body, serving both purposes. Her situation illustrates the complex relationship between ethnicity, national school policies and regional evolutions. During the 1920s, the state tended to recruit such students from the new provinces subjected to nationalisation, integrating them into the public education system, which would define their professional trajectory. They were expected to become allies of the central power against the particularities of their native province. Together with their colleagues from the Old Kingdom, they were encouraged to embrace the centralist perspective on statehood and education promoted by the Ministry.

However, Atanasa Cehlarof represented a minority since most kindergarten teachers working in Cadrilater were ethnic Romanians and came from the Old Kingdom.

The Law on Elementary education and normal schools in 1924 stated that young students had to serve in the new provinces during their first three years after graduation. Consequently, many young graduates in Bucharest, where there were three such schools (“Domnița Anca” Normal School for Kindergarten teachers, the Normal School for Kindergarten teachers attached to the “Principesa Elisabeta” Orphanage and “Pia Brătianu” School

<sup>55</sup> *Anuarul Școalei Normale de Conducătoare de grădini de copii „Domnița Anca” din București*, alcătuit de Stella Burnea Directoarea Școalei 1919-1930 (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Bucovina I.E. Torouțiu, 1930), 26.

<sup>56</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 216/1925, page 210.

<sup>57</sup> *Anuarul Învățământului Primar* (Bucharest: s.e., 1933), 264.



for Kindergarten teachers and Puericulture), tended to choose positions in Dobruja and Cadrilater. Likewise, their colleagues in Braşov asked for positions in counties placed in the South-East corner of Transylvania (Ciuc, Odorhei). Such a measure was deemed necessary since the number of kindergartens in the two counties was impressive, and the positions had to be filled. For example, in 1932-1933, according to the Primary Education Yearbook in Romania, in Caliacra, there were 11 urban kindergartens in Bazargic (housed by the 11 primary schools in town), four in Balcic (at the four primary schools in town) and one in Cavarna (at School nr. 1). Kindergartens were more numerous in rural areas, where 53 positions were available in 27 institutions.<sup>58</sup>

In Durostor County, urban kindergartens were attached to the five elementary schools in Silistra, and four more in Turtucaia, while in rural regions, there were 68 institutions. However, if we take a closer look at the age of the teachers in this last county, the year when they started teaching, and their salary, it becomes that most of these positions were assigned to fresh graduates. They had yet to complete the minimum stage of three years until they could pass the exam to get tenure. Therefore, these women in their twenties and thirties were placed inside the provisional teacher category. Things were different with the personnel in towns, where the average age of the teachers was over 40, so they were more experienced and had better salaries. This situation can be explained by the Ministry's request that the young graduates serve in rural areas during these three years, precisely because these positions were significantly more numerous.

Based on the detailed report and the data analysis the Yearbook provided, one can assume that such a situation fostered permanent mobility of the teaching personnel. As documents in the Ministry archive show, the graduates' presence in the province was a choice they had to make. This meant that once they had passed the exam to get tenure, most of them would have asked to be transferred elsewhere.

Such a reaction did not necessarily mean the failure of their mission since settling in the region depended on many more factors than their careers; personal aspirations, the presence of a support network or the possibility of marriage were equally important. However, school authorities were aware of such a tendency. Therefore, they made graduates stay there during those three years before the exam to get tenure when they had to work hard to get the highest grades during the inspections. According to the authorities' logic, this control mechanism motivated them to do their best. They also started classes

<sup>58</sup> *Anuarul Învăţământului Primar* (Bucharest: s.e., 1933), 264-265.



with a series of children who would have graduated by the time they had ended their provisional teaching stage, being prepared for primary school.

Still, not all the graduates choosing positions in such places worked there. Some young women would make different arrangements to stay in the neighbouring counties of Bucharest. In their case, the Ministry followed the same rule applied to the teaching personnel who were issued special diplomas for Cadrilater but never got to work there.<sup>59</sup> Since it was no longer possible to issue diplomas exclusively for a specific region, given the national relevance of the normal schools, those who avoided the so-called “heteroglot” or the multi-lingual counties and worked elsewhere could do so only as substitute teachers. This derailed them from the usual professional evolution and made them equal to other unqualified personnel when they were graduates of normal schools for kindergarten teachers and had been specially trained for such institutions. Therefore, giving all that up to avoid such regions was not a sound decision. This continuity in the Ministry’s procedures proves that they were effective and that these constraints had effects, especially since the graduates had a different social background after the war. Most students came from rural areas, and impoverished urban categories, but most importantly were war orphans. At that time, normal schools served as educational institutions and social assistance. Consequently, when entering such schools, they were asked to sign a commitment to work in the public school network for ten years after graduation. Not complying with the request allowed the Ministry to take legal action against them and ask for the full reimbursement of all the expenses made with their education. Therefore, they had to obey the rules and follow the instructions.

Mobility was common among teaching personnel inside the regions of the Old Kingdom too. However, with Dobrogea being annexed to Romania and then the Cadrilater, it became clear that the Ministry needed more personnel willing to relocate to such regions. Unfortunately, we do not have access to data showing this back-and-forth movement of kindergarten teachers and normal school graduates during the interwar decades. We can only evaluate such a tendency based on the retirement files of the teachers who belonged to older generations. They all show women born during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who worked in Dobrogea and the Cadrilater and who tended to retire from Bucharest at the end of the 1930s and throughout the 1940s, even though only a minority originated from the city.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> See reference 21.

<sup>60</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 23/1941.



## Work Commitments

The Primary Education law in 1924 (renewed in 1934) allowed experienced teachers to settle in the new provinces for four or ten years, rewarding them with substantial financial benefits.<sup>61</sup> According to article 159, a teacher committed to working in a minority community benefited from a 50% raise in the base salary. At that time, a teacher's salary had two distinct components: the base that was always the same and a variable part that increased every five years by 25%. In the case of a teacher who had an accepted commitment, the basis of the salary would get a 50% raise each month while the stages for periodical rise would shorten from 5 to 3 years.

In 1937, an amendment to this Law referred to the type of villages for which the Ministry would allow teachers working in both elementary and pre-school institutions to get such commitments.<sup>62</sup> Each file would also have to include a document issued by the mare of the village stating the percentage of foreigners living there; a minimum of 70% minority inhabitants became the limit for which the Ministry accepted such documents.<sup>63</sup> This change was made during the Liberal government while Doctor Constantin Angelescu still coordinated the Ministry. The same minister initiated such practices during the 1920s. This change is proof that authorities wanted to limit excesses that might have happened. In the eyes of the central school authorities, rewarding teachers with significant financial benefits was only paying off if they were working inside villages with consistent minority groups.

In this situation, we find Suzana Făcăianu, a kindergarten teacher who started her career in Ceair, Caliacra County, in 1930. When she moved there, she was only 21, a fresh graduate. However, in 1933, according to the Primary Education Yearbook, she was listed as a provisory teacher, paid with 2250 lei, not having passed the exam yet to get tenure.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, she still served the mandatory stage the Ministry required from all normal school graduates.

<sup>61</sup> *Legea învățământului primar al statului (Școalele de copii mici, școalele primare, școalele și cursurile de adulți, școalele și clasele speciale pentru copii debili și anormali educabili) și Învățământul normal primar, Promulgată prin înaltul decret regal nr. 1956 din 4 iulie 1934 și publicată în Monitorul Oficial nr. 152 din 5 iulie 1934* (Bucharest: s.e., 1934) 46. According to this law, work commitments were only granted for ten years, not also for four (article 158).

<sup>62</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 548/1939, pages 251-252 front and back.

<sup>63</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 28/1932, pages 26-36. Undoubtedly, Caliacra fell under this category. In October 1931 throughout the entire County a total of 304 primary school teachers and kindergarten teachers were listed to receive the additional pay or the cultural financial benefits for teaching in that region.

<sup>64</sup> *Anuarul Învățământului Primar*, 138.

In 1937, after getting tenure, Suzana Făcăianu was still teaching in Cear, the same county, and asked the Ministry to approve her commitment to work for ten more years in the region. Asked about her work and attitude as a teacher and the percentage of minority individuals in the village, the local reviser praised her for her activity, confirming the 72% limit requested by the Law. The Ministry agreed with the commitment only in 1939, even though the documents were issued two years prior. Only then the reviser's office in Caliacra County budgeted the amount needed for each month as the 50% added to the base salary of Suzana Făcăianu.<sup>65</sup>

Postponing such a decision was not a new strategy for the Ministry of Public Instruction. For example, in 1930, after the economic crisis started affecting Romania, the Ministry in Bucharest refused all commitments sent through the local school authorities by all teaching staff working in minority communities, beginning in 1928. The pretext was that the local revisers did not submit such requests to the Ministry's approval, even though some revisers would argue that the Ministry did not let them know about the change. However, the actual reason was the change of government. In the autumn of 1928, the Liberal Party was replaced by the Peasant Party, which had a different vision about paying extra for these mobility stages and wanted to stop such practices.

In the end, teachers were the ones losing since they would work obeying the provisions of the Law, but without any additional pay. The same thing happened with the new Education Law in 1934. Even though school authorities kept such commitments in place, they were not motivated to regulate the process of acquiring them. Even though Suzana Făcăianu sent her file in 1937, the authorities evaluated it two years later and decided. In her case, as with other colleagues, she only benefited from this financial increase for just one year, even though she worked there for ten years because, in 1940, Southern Dobruja was reintegrated into Bulgaria.

In the case of Făcăianu, not only the possibility of additional pay motivated her to remain in the province. Another reason for her settling in Caliacra County would be the relatives working there. According to the list with bonuses for teaching in minority communities in Caliacra in 1939, there were two other couples with the same surname working in the primary school in Ciobancuius (Horia and Ana Făcăianu) and Caralez (Dumitru and Aurelia Făcăianu).<sup>66</sup> This case shows the importance of the network of relatives a teacher could rely on in such places. The Ministry encouraged couples to settle together and prioritised

<sup>65</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 548/1939, pages 161, 251-252 front and back.

<sup>66</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 548/1939, page 144.



teachers when they wanted to transfer to reunite with their spouses. School representatives envisioned the ideal situation of couples settling together since building a house and raising a family contributed to the integration of the Romanian teachers inside the foreign communities. In doing so, they would become part of the rural elite, serving as local leaders and, most notably, as nationalising agents.

Looking at the list in the archives of the Ministry and at the Primary Education Yearbook in 1933 for counties like Durostor and Caliacra, one can notice two different aspects: the young age of the teachers and kindergarten teachers and couples working together. Marriage provided great emotional support, while two salaries allowed professional stability and better living standards.

### **A New Perspective on Kindergarten Teaching: Female Evaluators**

Still, this school policy failed to show the results that some control teams expected. In December 1936, school inspector Zoe Boerescu visited Silistra's four kindergartens, expressing her utmost dissatisfaction with how teachers were working. The division of the work day in half due to the lack of space was considered the cause for which the Bulgarian children barely spoke Romanian. On top of that, what triggered her discontent was that the school for small children number 2 in town had three teachers; the third position was created for a primary school teacher who could not find another job in Silistra. Even worse, at that time, the teacher was on leave, being replaced by a person who was not part of the teaching staff and who, according to the inspector, did not speak the Romanian language correctly. "The majority of the children are Bulgarian; they talk among themselves in Bulgarian. Even more so, it is unacceptable for a person who cannot speak the language of the state to replace a teacher. For instance, she said "bulgi de zăpadă" instead of "bulgări de zăpadă" and "copii, stați cu mâinile în piept."<sup>67</sup> Consequently, she recommended cutting the third position and transferring the children to the classes of two other teachers who were properly trained and spoke the language.

Her final observations refer to the need for the teachers to work full days with the children. However, considering the lack of infrastructure, since the schools did not have enough space for the children to have lunch or rest, it was unreasonable for the inspector to insist on a full-day working schedule. Besides, the accommodation was out of the teacher's control, depending entirely on the funds the school committees possessed. At the same time,

---

<sup>67</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 9/1936, page 223.

the only positive Boerescu's comments referred to an experienced teacher's class, that of Florica Răzvănescu. The fact that the results of such pre-school institutions were modest was perceived as particularly disturbing, especially in a town where the presence of the Romanian administration and the overall multi-ethnic urban community should have contributed to a better knowledge of the Romanian language.

Most importantly, inspector Boerescu noticed the lack of pedagogical materials.<sup>68</sup> This lack was a serious cause for the poor results of kindergartens since manual activities represented a major attraction point for the children who attended classes: cutting, sewing, working with clay, and building with small twigs and rocks were beloved activities for children. The lack of pedagogical material was a huge setback for a kindergarten teacher since it was its most appreciated ally in bonding with her students and motivating them to learn.

Comparing Zoe Boerescu's evaluation with the one made by inspector Petrescu immediately after the war, it appears that the significant differences in perspective displayed by the two were caused by their different expectations. While in 1919, each little progress was worth celebrating, in 1936, the financial investments the Ministry had made in promoting such school policies were expected to produce remarkable results.

Also, the gender and professional orientation of Zoe Boerescu, who was a kindergarten teacher, played a role in shaping her negative perspective. As someone who has worked with small children her entire career, Boerescu's professional standards proved more difficult to meet than male reviser's expectations. Therefore, her comments were more elaborated while her recommendations had a broader perspective, aiming to be better appreciated since female inspectors had been recently reappointed after 1934. As documents dating from before the war show, kindergartens had been initially placed under women's control. Names like Adela Dimitriu, Zoe Vasiliu, Smara Gheorghiu, Semiramis Dimitriu, Maria Beiu Paladi or Caterina Pangrati are common among the control teams the Ministry relied on between 1912 and 1920. After the war, they started disappearing, and male revisers took their place. When they were employed again, during the second part of the 1930s, they were fully integrated into the structure of the control teams with professionals such as Alexandrina Demetrescu and Constanța Atanasiu, appointed full inspectors for kindergarten teaching in Romania. In the case of the inspection reports written by Zoe Boerescu and colleagues during the same period, for other provinces, one can detect their need to prove that they were better suited for

---

<sup>68</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 9/1936, pages 224-225.



evaluating such institutions. Setting higher standards for kindergarten teachers to meet and writing more detailed and integrative reports was a way to display their judging abilities and use their experience to improve such institutions significantly.

### **The Locals' Response to Central School Policies**

One of the most challenging aspects when writing about school is the difficulty in evaluating the perspective of the local population who should have benefited from such policies. Regardless of the ethnic origin and the different degrees of marginality as regards the distance separating a province from the political centre, peasants did not readily accept kindergartens. Among the documents written by kindergarten teachers who were at the forefront of this school policy before and immediately after the First World War, a significant part showed their struggles to implement them. Perceived as urban affairs, as even historian Nicolae Iorga was defining them during the debates at the Deputies Chamber regarding the Primary School Law in 1924, kindergartens were difficult for peasants to grasp.<sup>69</sup> As the teacher working in Militari village, now a neighbourhood in Bucharest, put it: the parents did not fully understand the need for primary school, let alone education, before age 7. Also, they were easy to offend when she would bring to their attention the need to keep the children clean.<sup>70</sup>

Still, when considering the ethnic factor, we expect the results to be significantly worse, as in Cadrilater. This province was the field of ethnic tensions, which often escalated into violence. There is no doubt that, especially for primary education, there were numerous times when the minority population would refuse the educational offer of the Ministry of Public Instruction. Consequently, in such communities, one can notice the positions reserved for Turkish teachers and Coran studies to make the Romanian public school more appealing to this population. Also, different petitions written by Bulgarians asked for the Ministry to approve for their children to study in private schools among peers of similar ethnic origins. In 1931, the correspondence between the reviser in Caliacra County, P. Papazissu and his superior, inspector Ahile Constantinescu reflected the tensions the Romanian national school faced. The Bulgarian “intellectuals and irredentists” in Bazargic

---

<sup>69</sup> “Dezbaterile Adunării Naționale Constituante a Deputaților Ședința de vineri 27 iunie 1924,” *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 118, (27<sup>th</sup> of August 1924): 3493.

<sup>70</sup> SMBAN, ISMB Fund, file 23/1941, unnumbered; Cleopatra Tălăngescu's professional memoir.



were challenging the Romanian public school, asking for the right to establish their schools. In doing so, they ended up addressing the League of Nations. Authorities analysed the situation in Bucharest. One month later, in April 1931, inspector Constantinescu recommended sessions of cultural conferences in the county for the locals to see that the Romanian national school and culture were “superior”. He added, “We should let the locals know that the Romanian school only intends to prepare good citizens, loyal to the country they live in, without endangering their ethnic origin.”<sup>71</sup> The comment seems remarkably similar to Spiru Haret’s arguments at the beginning of the century in his article “Nationalist School,” showing a perfect continuity of political thought.<sup>72</sup> In 1907, Haret referred to the “strangers” living in the Old Kingdom, writing: “Instead of leaving school to become a means for action against our statehood and an obstacle against the closeness and getting together of our citizens of any language, on the contrary, let’s turn it into a way of preparing and allowing the fusion of all in the same love for the country, irrespective of origin”.

Coming back to 1931, we notice similar tendencies and the efforts made by minority representatives in other regions, such as the South of Bessarabia, Ismail County, to ask for separate schools. We believe that these reactions are connected to the fact that on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1931, Nicolae Iorga’s cabinet started its governance. Since Iorga had supported the right of different minorities to primary education in their mother tongue, the foreign intelligentsia found a good moment to voice its objectives and actively pursue them.

Even before that moment, the control team in Cadrilater seems to have had a more cautious attitude towards the shortcomings they found in the schools they evaluated. In December 1930, for instance, the sub-reviser in Durostor County, seeing that the rural population had not yet been able to buy books simply because they did not afford them, recommended teachers to be “understanding, tactful and correct in raising the money for the manuals.”<sup>73</sup> These instructions show that school representatives were expected not to antagonise the rural population by adding new tensions to an already severely deteriorated financial situation.

<sup>71</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 11/1931, pages 150-151.

<sup>72</sup> Spiru Haret, “Școala naționalistă,” 3-10. In the article, Haret argues that “the idea was not for them [strangers in the Old Kingdom] to forget their own language, they could have kept it; but it was our duty not to tolerate that a handful of people to live for hundreds of years among ourselves and to stubbornly refuse this modest token of appreciation and friendship for the hospitality that we have shown them on our land, to agree to understand our language”.

<sup>73</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 14/1931, page 217.



Not even one of these problems is visible when looking at kindergarten teaching. On the contrary, most of the inspection reports from the 1920s and 1930s show that the number of students was sufficient, the children's presence not being an issue. Insufficient work-space or pedagogical material always caused problems. Even so, the reports' overall impression was positive. Therefore it isn't easy to accurately evaluate the community's perception of the role of kindergartens.

To shift perspectives and analyse school policies through the lens of someone who lived there but was not a member of the teaching personnel, we must include their memories. In the case of Cadrilater, we only had access to the memory book written by the daughter of a couple of teachers from Buzău. Camelia Cristescu (born in 1927) was the daughter of priest Constantin Cristescu and Elena, both teachers trained in the Old Kingdom, who in 1924 moved to Bazaurtul de Mijloc village, Caliacra County (now Teanovo, Bulgaria). They established themselves as part of the rural community elite. More significantly, they were perceived like this by the Bulgarians themselves. Without actually detailing their contribution to the development of the village, we will only notice the locals' reaction towards the family after 1940. The teachers could never return to Bazaurt, their home for almost 20 years, but their daughter could do that on two different occasions. In 1963, on a motorcycle with her husband, and again in 2001, by herself, the villagers welcomed her each time. Among them, she could find old friends, neighbours and school colleagues. What mainly triggered Camelia Cristescu's desire to write her memoirs was another volume, a monography of the village whose author was Bulgarian. In that book, the comments referring to her parents' work in Bazaurtul de Mijloc are positive and constitute genuine praise for all their dedication and ability to identify with a community and contribute to its evolution.<sup>74</sup> Suppose we could suspect that the warm welcome Camelia Cristescu received during her two meetings with the villagers could partly be attributed to nostalgia. In that case, we cannot make the same assumption in the case of the author Atanas Peev.<sup>75</sup> He had to research and go beyond memory and representations to write the book, analysing the facts. It is, therefore, safe

<sup>74</sup> Camelia Cristescu Săvescu, *Amintiri din Cadrilater Un cântec închinat timpului nemuritor* (București: s.e., 2006), 3-108.

<sup>75</sup> The author was Atanas Peev and the book's title was *Lumină de la Izvor* (the Romanian translation) written in Bulgarian. See pages 13-20, 91-108. Camelia Cristescu opened her book with excerpts from Peev's book, referring to her parents' work. We find the comments even more relevant if we consider that a consistent Macedonian community closely related to the Cristescu family in the village. Even after her father died in 1947, Camelia Cristescu stayed in touch with them as, after 1940, they moved to Constanța County.

to conclude that the teachers were praised for the work the Primary Education Law dictated, reflecting the national school policies implemented before the Second World War. Keeping in mind that the author was the daughter of two teachers from the Old Kingdom, we cannot present such an example relevant to the variety of cultural contexts in the entire Southern Dobruja. Still, it is important to highlight such experiences because they bring forward a personal recollection that was not written to meet the school representatives' criteria. As biased as it may be, it provides a narrative regarding the everyday life of the rural community outside the national propaganda optic. This individual perspective is what is missing from the archive documents.

At this point in our research, we cannot conclude before discussing the interaction between the teaching personnel as agents of the national school policies and the Bulgarian and Turkish minority communities in Cadrilater. For elementary schools, documents clearly show that in Durostor County, even though the Bulgarian and Turkish children were four times more numerous than the Romanian ones, the Ministry did not recruit Bulgarian teachers at all, only Romanian.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, it did assign positions for Muslim specialists to teach Coran studies. The reason for such a measure was not the ethnic origin but religious affiliation. In both cases, we see this investment exclusively in public schools as an attempt to minimise competing educational offers since such schools did not exist in every village, even though Bulgarians and the Turkish community had private institutions. Therefore, all children had to attend classes in Romanian public schools.

As for kindergartens, we noticed that the Ministry employed Romanian-trained professionals exclusively. Although they might have had a different ethnic origin, they had graduated from schools in the Old Kingdom and spoke the Romanian language. The documents did not indicate tensions between local community' institutions and public ones. However, there were other regions where the educational offer available in private kindergartens was far more attractive than that of public institutions. For example, in Banat, German kindergartens or those financed by the Catholic Church were also of interest to Hungarian and Romanian parents.<sup>77</sup> Having a better infrastructure and

---

<sup>76</sup> ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 7/1928, page 58.

<sup>77</sup> In October 1936, an inspector appointed to check the list of children attending classes visited the confessional kindergarten organised by the Catholic Church for German children in Lipova, Timiș County, to find pupils of other ethnicities. After finding one Hungarian boy and a Romanian one, he reported to the Ministry that he had made the principal aware that they needed to attend classes at the public kindergarten, as the law on private education stated. Undoubtedly, his visit and inquiry were caused by a denouncement. ANIC, MCIP Fund, file 20/1936, page 87.



being culturally more appealing, such institutions were closely monitored by inspectors to remove children who were not ethnic Germans from under their cultural influence. We can therefore conclude that, even with competition between the public kindergartens and private ones in Cadrilater, school authorities had the upper hand as they were the ones who designed the laws and then made the private institutions follow their provisions.<sup>78</sup>

### Conclusion

Kindergarten teaching was directly linked to nation-building, an essential feature of the political and institutional evolution of the modern Romanian state. Such school policies aimed at consolidating the national community through a centralising process that relied heavily on the Romanian language and national culture.

All-female teaching personnel served in these institutions since they were associated with mother figures educating small children while also helping them transition from the domestic environment to the public elementary school. However, documents show that the Ministry of Public Instruction struggled to manage such a reality. Before the Second World War, the state created public kindergartens in minority regions especially. Apart from those in towns and cities that were hardly available for young teachers, school authorities met the dilemma of keeping teachers in those regions to achieve the objectives included on the national and cultural agenda. Cultural and social differences between teachers and rural communities alone were difficult to overcome by any urban professional, regardless of their gender. However, in the case of kindergarten teachers, such relations were even more complex, considering the language barrier and ethnic differences.

Such school policies have targeted the new provinces as the Cadrilater from the very moment they were integrated into the Kingdom of Romania. To make kindergarten teachers work there, the Ministry used the elementary school legislation that obliged them to settle in “heteroglot” rural regions during their provisional teaching years. Also, school authorities used the financial factor to motivate teachers. The latter might have constituted a significant reason to settle in the new regions. However, the inconsistencies and the differences in opinion between the Liberal Party and the Peasant Party regarding the utility

---

<sup>78</sup> The Law on Private Education voted in 1925 stated that private schools, confessional or community, had the right to teach only the children who belonged to the ethnic or confessional community they served. All the others had to attend classes at the nearest public school available. ANIC, Senate Fund, file 14,576, vol. I: The Law on Private Education 1924-1925, page 60.

of work commitments, along with the global depression, made teachers realise that the Ministry might re-interpret, postpone, suspend or bluntly ignore the Law provisions, according to its interests and financial shortages. Therefore, teachers shared a high mistrust and uncertainty about the additional payment.

Also, the decision to settle in different regions had to do more with personal reasons rather than professional ones. Of course, payment and the possibility of a career were necessary, but equally important were the teacher's family, the husband's working place, or even cultural and social aspirations. School authorities were aware of such a reality, so they tended to favour couples from the Old Kingdom willing to relocate to the new provinces. As the documents show, elementary school teachers usually formed these couples.

Of the two means that the Ministry of Public Instruction used to make graduates of normal schools for kindergarten teachers to serve in these regions, the constraint proved to be long-lasting. It did not involve any commitment from school authorities and was neither motivating nor culturally appealing.

## Rezumat

În secolul al XIX-lea, educația publică a fost un element esențial al construcției naționale în întreaga Europă. Statele naționalizatoare au conceput politici școlare pentru a transforma țărani în cetățeni. Cu toate acestea, grădinițele erau în primul rând instituții urbane. Unul dintre obiectivele lor era de a-i învăța pe copiii mici limbi moderne. La începutul secolului al XX-lea, elitele românești au început să le creeze și să le adapteze pentru a naționaliza Dobrogea și Cadrilaterul, cele două provincii integrate în Vechiul Regat. Ambele regiuni erau diverse din punct de vedere etnic. În localitățile locuite în principal de o populație minoritară, scopul grădinițelor era de a răspândi limba română și cultura națională. Acest articol se concentrează asupra integrării naționale a Dobrogei de Sud prin intermediul grădinițelor publice. De asemenea, articolul examinează parcursul profesional al cadrelor didactice care au slujit în aceste regiuni până la sfârșitul anilor 1940. În cele din urmă, articolul urmărește interacțiunea cadrelor didactice cu localnicii și eforturile lor de a media între obiectivele pedagogice și naționale ale României Mari și interesele locale care uneori intrau în coliziune cu politicile școlare ale statului.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Dobrogea de Sud, grădinițe, România, minorități etnice.

**Camelia Zavarache**, the Institute of History "Nicolae Iorga," Bucharest.

Email: [mariacamelipopescu@yahoo.com](mailto:mariacamelipopescu@yahoo.com)