Between Ethnic Group and Nation:

Mihail Çakir's Histories of the Gagauz

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Following the 1918 annexation of Bessarabia to Romania, the Gagauz minority remained disconnected from centers of knowledge because of linguistic and institutional barriers. In this context, Mihail Çakir, an Orthodox priest of Gagauz origin, manifested a rare capacity of introducing the Gagauz people to Romanian- and Gagauz-speaking audiences through his multilingual work on the history and the culture of the Gagauz. This article embarks from Anthony Smith's work on ethnicity and nation-building and Benedict Anderson's work on imagined communities to explore Çakir's two main works and their contribution to the crystallization of Gagauz ethnic identity and its eventual transformation to a national one.

Keywords: *Gagauz; Moldova; Bessarabia; Budjak; Russia; nationalism; Romania; identity*

Introduction

In the context of the transition of Bessarabia from Russian sovereignty and temporary independence to the rule of the Romanian Kingdom, it has been argued that the region lacked linguistic cohesion, not only with the old territories of Romania but also between the rural and urban areas of Bessarabia.[1] Within the latter, urban populations mostly spoke Russian and Yiddish, while in rural areas the Romanian, Bulgarian, and Gagauz languages were mostly spoken.[2] Gagauz communities, in particular, lacked the means of knowledge exchange with the Romanian Kingdom, as well as with Western scientific communities, not only due to linguistic differences but also due to the lack of a centralized education system that would connect different regions.

Under these circumstances, an Orthodox priest of Gagauz origin, Mihail Çakir (Figure 1) (also known as Ceachir or Ciachir, according to the spelling of the surname in Romanian) manifested an extraordinary capacity for connecting the Gagauz community with Romanian, Russian, Turkish, and Western knowledge centers, thanks to his linguistic skills, education, and revered clerical position. His command of the Gagauz, Russian, and Romanian languages enabled his access to pre-1918 and post-1918 authorities and the successful dissemination of knowledge about the Gagauz in

those respective public spheres. He was also the first to author a work on the origins of the Gagauz community written in the Gagauz language for a Gagauz audience living in the Budjak region (mostly within present-day Moldova), including both foreign historical accounts and domestic fieldwork conducted in Gagauz villages.

This study engages with the literature on nation-building and argues that by writing about the origins of the Gagauz community in the Romanian and Gagauz languages, Çakir played a crucial role in the emergence of a Gagauz national identity. Although he did not envision the Gagauz as a national but an ethnic community and avoided putting forward self-determination claims against Russian and Romanian rule, his work paved the ground for the emergence of a Gagauz national identity in the late twentieth century and the emergence of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (*Gagauz Eri*) within the Republic of Moldova. His emphasis on Orthodox Christianity and the Gagauz language have raised him to the status of the "Holy Father" (*Ay-Boba*) of the Gagauz nation. He is also hailed as a model of respect for linguistic and cultural diversity.

From *Ethnies* to Nations

To better understand the formation of Gagauz national identity and Mihail Çakir's role in it, one can revisit Anthony D. Smith's and Benedict Anderson's seminal texts on nation-building. Smith defined a nation as

> a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.[3]

In Benedict Anderson's classical definition, a nation is "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[4] Smith defined in turn an *ethnie* (ethnic community) as

> human populations distinguished by both members and outsiders as of possessing the attributes of a. an identifying name or emblem; b. a myth of common ancestry; c. shared historical memories and traditions; d. one or more elements of common culture; e. a link with an historic territory or "homeland" f. a measure of solidarity, at least among the elites.[5]

Both Anderson and Smith highlighted the political element as the key element signaling the transition from an ethnic to a national community. In contrast to *ethnies*, nations (even stateless ones) require a certain degree of political, economic, and legal coherence and independence, as well as an emphasis on the importance of history. Moreover, while some ethnic groups tend to acquire or at least strive for the political, economic, and legal characteristics of nations, other *ethnies* do not aim for

nationhood, persisting as minority ethnic groups within other nations, or even dissolve or get assimilated over time. Smith argued that transition from an *ethnie* to a nation requires "processes of mobilization, territorialization and politicization"[6] while a nation-to-be needs to possess such qualities as "uniqueness," "purification," "vernacular culture," and "chosenness" (referring to some sort of superiority of a community over other communities) and its memories should be territorialized.[7] Such territorialization often relates to the notion of identifying a "homeland," because only in such a place "can ethnic members come to feel their political fraternity and social cohesion" and such is a "precondition of the nation."[8] Smith argued that nation-building may also require a new "imagination" about time and space and "homeland," even if many individuals never see other areas of such a homeland.[9]

In a nutshell, ethnic nationalists appeal "to historic territories and political memories of former independence" supported "by the rediscovery and revitalization of ethnic ties and sentiments" by means of "kinship, chronicles and philology," "popular mobilization," "elevation of vernacular culture" and by a rewriting of history from a "nativist" standpoint (emphasizing the unique collective past and destiny, and the autonomous collective will),"[10] while "mass vernaculars" can be a source of "national uniqueness" and "delineation" of the "nation-to-be."[11] Considering that language is often an important marker of ethnic/national identity, newly forming ethnic and national groups may attempt to "revitalize language and increase usage" of it, in order to reconstruct their identities[12] and to construct "community solidarity and shared meanings out of real or putative common history and ancestry."[13] Anderson highlighted very eloquently the significance of vernacular language mobilization through the proliferation of print media for the success of ethnic and nation-building movements.[14]

Given that most Gagauz live within the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Republic of Moldova, one could argue that they represent a case of an ethnic nation, having won political and territorial autonomy and showing political mobilization since the end of the Cold War. The success of Gagauz political mobilization in the late twentieth century depended, however, on the prior existence of a Gagauz ethnic community. The activity and writings of the Gagauz priest Mihail Çakir in the early twentieth century are often declared as the first steps made to consolidate a Gagauz ethnic identity. These permitted the emergence of a Gagauz nationalist movement in the late twentieth century.

Smith argued that in the modern era, while ethnies tried to acquire some elements of nationhood in order to survive, emerging intelligentsias took the place of the priesthood which had previously been responsible for "transmitting and disseminating the communal memory" and "celebrating the sense of common identity," especially in communities without "formal systems of education."[15] This metaphor showing the importance of priests in societal life before centralization of education and the subsequent rising importance of intelligentsia underlines the unique capacity of Mihail Çakir to influence communal identity on the brink of societal transformations.

Before 1918, when Bessarabia was a province of the Russian Empire, Çakir in his capacity as priest could communicate with peasants and reach them through his translations of biblical texts and parish work. Similarly, when after 1918 the region became a part of the Kingdom of Romania, his position as not only a priest but also a teacher, an official at the ministry of education and a writer allowed him to communicate with larger audiences through the medium of modern education and publications. Thus, he became a part of modern intelligentsia able to use the means of print media (publishing in books and journals) to spread his ideas and knowledge about Gagauz identity and history. While with social transformations "the center of ethnic memory and experience" shifted "from the temple and its priesthood to the university and its scholarly community,"[16] Çakir's becoming a teacher and civil servant demonstrates how within this changing context he preserved his distinctive capacity to reproduce ethnic memories and sense of identity in the community.

In the following study, it will be shown that Çakir presented an externally validated history of the Gagauz with reference to past independence, thus aiming to create a shared historical memory among Gagauz readers. Moreover, he provided "territorialization of memories," presenting a narrative about an independent Gagauz state in Dobruja and presenting in detail Gagauz settlements in Budjak in a manner that could foster "imagination" of a Gagauz territory. His emphasis on religion laid the basis for shared culture, as did his claims of difference from Bulgarians, the nearest neighbors of the Gagauz both in Dobruja and Budjak. Finally, through a comparison of the substantial differences in the Gagauz and the Romanian-language versions of his work on the history of Bessarabian Gagauz, it will be demonstrated how Çakir navigated through the turbulent political waters of the early twentieth century to promote his cause of defining and legitimizing a Gagauz ethnic identity under Russian and Romanian rule.

The Gagauz: Origins and Distribution

The Gagauz are a Turkic-speaking community mostly affiliated with Orthodox Christianity and spread across a number of countries along the western Black Sea coast. Nowadays, their largest community is located in the Budjak[17] region of southern Moldova, while sizeable Gagauz communities also live in Ukraine, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey.[18] In Moldova, the Gagauz population amounts for 126,010 people, 4.6 percent of the total population.[19] While they are distinct from most Turkic groups on account of their religious affiliation, they are distinct from other Balkan Orthodox communities because of their Turkic language and culture. There exist multiple theories about their origins. While some see the Gagauz as a "Turkish community"—though even proponents of Gagauz Turkishness are divided between those linking the community with the Oghuz-Seljuk or with Kipchak-Pecheneg-Kuman groups—others argue that this community is of Greek or Bulgarian origin

that happens to speak a Turkic language.[20] Regarding the Moldovan Gagauz, there is consensus on their settlement in the Budjak region from Dobruja between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, as a result of the Ottoman–Russian wars and concomitant population movements.[21]

There is considerable debate on the origins of the ethnonym Gagauz. Explanations range from Manof's theory that "Ga" or "Gaga" referred to a prefix meaning Christianized Oghuz[22] or Wittek's support for arguments linking the ethnonym to the Seljuk Sultan İzeddin Kaikaus II's name[23] to Radlov and Moshkov's theories that the name "Gagauz" originated from the name of Oghuz Khan or a specific subdivision of the Oghuz tribe, or Bulgarian and Greek arguments that this name was given to Turkified Bulgarians or Greeks, respectively, so that they would not rebel but talk nicely in Turkish (explaining "gaga" as Turkish for "mouth," and "uz" for nice) in order not to be punished.[24] Çakir noted that sometimes Gagauz would identify themselves as Greek or Bulgarian, or Turkish.[25] While referring to Radlov and Moshkov's works, Menz has argued that based on her observations this trend is today reflected in the Bulgarian Gagauz self-perception as Bulgarians and Moldova's Gagauz self-perception as Turks.[26] The Gagauz community in Greece is also reported to perceive themselves as Greeks, with their Turkic language being forgotten in recent years and perceived as imposed upon them by Ottomans.[27] In contrast, Menz cited Moshkov's and Zajączkowski's works showing that in earlier time periods Gagauz folklore included memories of cooperation with Ottoman authorities against the Russian Empire.[28] While an ethnographic study by Kvilinkova found some similarities between folklore songs of different Gagauz groups across the Balkans,[29] she also highlighted that some songs in Greek regions were apparently borrowed directly from neighboring Turkish communities. The use of other songs differed between Moldovan, Bulgarian, and Greek Gagauz communities, something she related to differences in the relations of different Gagauz communities with Greeks and Turks.[30] The latter finding suggests that across time and due to isolation, not only self-perceptions of different Gagauz communities dispersed across different states could vary, but their folklore could also evolve differently.

Outsider Views of the Gagauz

Gagauz communities living within the Ottoman borders were perceived as a part of the "*millet-i Rum*" (Orthodox *millet*).[31] The Gagauz identification with the Greek Orthodox community within the Ottoman territory proved resilient. It was not affected by the Bulgarian schism and the emergence of the Bulgarian Exarchate which attracted sizeable parts of the Greek Orthodox populations in Ottoman Macedonia and Thrace. Following the 1919-1922 Greek-Turkish war and the mandatory population exchange, the Gagauz living in Eastern Thrace joined the other Greek Orthodox of the region in being displaced to Greece.[32] In the 1930s, when

the Turkish ambassador to Romania Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver was organizing the voluntary emigration of Romania's Muslims to Turkey and wished to add the Bessarabian Gagauz to his project, his attempts were countered by the Turkish government due to the Gagauz Orthodox affiliation, as was stressed by Turkish ambassador to Spain Tevfik Kamil, as well as the press of the time.[33] When in 1936 Turkey signed a migration agreement with Romania, only Muslims living there and their properties were included in the agreement, without references to Gagauz.[34] Thus, while during the Ottoman period the Gagauz communities were identified by contemporary authorities as "*Rum*," during the early republican period some endorsed,[35] while others doubted, their Turkishness. Because of the lack of official support for Gagauz emigration, the outbreak of the Second World War, and Soviet rule over the territory, no program for Gagauz emigration to Turkey ever materialized.[36] Meanwhile, Greek diplomats "monitored and tried to prevent" such an emigration, thus considering the Gagauz resettlement to Turkey as influencing their own interests.[37]

In his continuous efforts to support the Gagauz in Romania, the Turkish Ambassador, Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, managed to establish an education exchange program for Gagauz students, several dozens of whom traveled in the late 1930s to acquire higher education in Turkey.[38] Meanwhile, Turkish teachers were sent to Gagauz villages to establish Turkish language schools.[39] However, the students could not return because of the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union in 1940.[40] Following the demise of the USSR, however, Turkey became increasingly active in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia of the Republic of Moldova, although such relations reportedly became cooler following the early 1990s.[41]

In Greece, whose Gagauz population was boosted following the population exchange with Turkey, the Gagauz were mostly seen as Greeks, though the latter identity "was not unquestionable." The interest of Greece in the Gagauz in other countries originated in the 1990s, however, when Moldova's Gagauz were defined as "Turkish-speaking Orthodox Greeks," a number of exchange programs between the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and Greece were initiated and Greek language courses at several education institutions were established.[42] Such activities were supplemented by visits of missionaries, mostly members of Greece's own Gagauz community, funding for the building of Orthodox churches and distribution of religious literature, fellowships, or different medical or university equipment provided by associations or private initiatives. While in the 2000s there were proposals to expand this engagement, the economic crisis in Greece "possibly upset further ambitious plans."[43] While such increasing interest in Moldova's Gagauz could also boost the social status of the Gagauz community in Greece,[44] in general, the renewed interest of Greece in the Gagauz and other communities were linked to a revival of a view of Greek national identity, allowing self-definition as Greek to anyone having at least some of the essential elements of "Greekness," such as "ancient Greek origin" and "affiliation with the Ecumenical Patriarchate," that is, belonging to the *millet-i Rum*.[45]

Figure 1
Holy Father (*Ay-Boba*) Mihail Çakir (1861-1938)

Source: Wikipedia

Similarly, externally motivated accounts of Gagauz origins were voiced in the Soviet Union, as some scholars argued that their language was linked to the Kipchak language group "probably to emphasize a distance between Gagauz and Turkish,"[46] as the latter belongs to the Oghuz language group. Even among recent scholars and politicians, such disagreements have persisted both within external and internal narratives. While some support the Seljuk-Oghuz origins of Gagauz,[47] others link them to the non-Seljuk Oghuz, while yet others attempt to link Gagauz origins to Greeks or Bulgarians, Scythians, or ancient Thracians.[48] As a result, it is argued that the Gagauz in different regions present a rare example of people "selecting their ethnic or . . . even national identity" in accordance with international and domestic contexts.[49]

The Emergence of Gagauz Literature. As the Gagauz did not have their own alphabet during the Ottoman era, the Greek and Cyrillic alphabets were used for the rare printed works in the Gagauz language before 1918. Prime examples are Mihail Çakir's translation of the Old and the New Testament and other clerical literature in 1907–1909 from Russian to the Gagauz language in the Cyrillic alphabet,[50] or a reported attempt to translate a tragedy of Euripides, probably "Iphigenia in Tauris," into the Gagauz

language using the Greek alphabet.[51] Dmitrii Çakir stated that one of the ancestors of the Çakir family, İanchu Chorbadzhioglo, knew only the Greek alphabet, because of the proliferation of Greek language, education, and religious services by the Phanariot *hospodar*s of the Danubian principalities.[52] Greek was also spoken by some of the Orthodox populations that settled in Bessarabia together with the Gagauz in the early nineteenth century.[53] While publications in the Gagauz language using the Greek alphabet were limited, the Gagauz did use Karamanlidika literature, that is, books in Ottoman Turkish language but printed with the Greek alphabet for the Turkish-speaking Greek Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire, particularly religious and canonical texts.[54] The spread of this literature was, however, limited, given the scarce financial abilities of the Gagauz, the low levels of literacy, and the differences between the Ottoman Turkish used in the Karamanlidika literature and the Gagauz vernacular.[55] Thanks to the efforts of Mihail Çakir, publications in the Gagauz language preceded the official introduction of a Gagauz alphabet.[56] These included the first Gagauz-language biblical texts translated by Mihail Çakir and published in Bessarabia[57] at the beginning of the twentieth century under Russian rule, journal and book publications in the 1930s under Romanian rule. In the interwar era and under apparent Romanian influence, the Latin alphabet was also used for publications in the Gagauz language. Featured among Çakir's later works in the Gagauz language were a book on the history of the Bessarabian Gagauz published in 1934 and a dictionary of the Gagauz language printed in 1938, both in the Latin alphabet.[58]

Mihail Çakir and His Turbulent Era

Mihail Çakir was born in 1861 at Çadir-Lunga, Budjak, to a prominent Gagauz family. His father Dmitrii was a priest and author.[59] Following his father's example, Mihail Çakir received clerical education at a local school and later in Chişinău, and then worked as teacher at the Chişinău seminary.[60] Thanks to his education in Chişinău, he commanded both the Romanian and Russian languages. Besides his clerical and teaching work, he authored numerous books in Russian, Romanian, and Gagauz, acquiring for that special permissions from Russian Imperial local governments before the First World War.[61] Mihail Çakir published a newspaper entitled "*Hakikatın Sesi*" (Voice of Truth) in the Gagauz language.[62] The newspaper was founded in 1907 with the permission of the Moscow Patriarchate and was published in the Cyrillic alphabet before 1918 and in the Latin alphabet under Romanian rule.[63] Among the incentives for publishing religious literature in the Gagauz language was resistance by the local clergy against the missionary activities of new religious "sects".[64] The two main aims of Çakir's books written in the 1930s were defending the view that "in Budjak a Gagauz ethnic community has been formed" and introducing the concept of a Gagauz language instead of Turkish.[65] Çakir was successful in communicating

with different administrations and acquiring permissions to publish religious, linguistic, historical/ethnographical, and other works in the Gagauz, Romanian, and Russian languages.

Before 1918, Çakir served as a parish priest holding services in both Romanian and Gagauz languages under the Russian Empire, and his Gagauz translation work was approved by the supervisory religious bodies in Chişinău.[66] As following the annexation of Bessarabia to the Kingdom of Romania, all priests had to hold religious services in Romanian (switching from previously used Slavonic), Çakir, fluent in both languages, was able to continue his clerical work in Romanian. This stood in sharp contrast with the lack of Romanian linguistic skills among the Gagauz clergy and peasantry in Budjak.[67] Çakir proved adept in reconciling the main characteristics of Gagauz identity, Turkic ethnic origins and Orthodox Christianity, with the changing political landscape of Budjak in the early twentieth century.

The end of the First World War, the October Revolution, and concomitant border changes inevitably had a heavy imprint on Çakir's career and the formation of a Gagauz identity. Bessarabia, including the largest part of Budjak, was annexed to Romania. In the context of political turmoil, economic calamity, and displeasure among sections of the local population with Romanian rule, there were underground Soviet–supported communist activities in the region.[68] These peaked with an uprising by Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, and Moldovans and the declaration of a short-lived "Bessarabian Soviet Socialist Republic" in September 1924.[69] Romanian nation-building in Bessarabia and anti-Romanian grassroots mobilization had a profound influence on the formation of Gagauz identity.[70]

Çakir highlighted Orthodox Christianity as the foundation stone of the moral qualities of the Gagauz and as one of the main pillars of Gagauz identity.[71] By claiming an ethnic and not a national identity for the Gagauz,[72] he avoided clashing with Romanian nation-building initiatives.[73] In fact, his emphasis on Orthodox identity even "mirrored" Romanian national discourse.[74] Similarly, as Çakir traced the origins of Gagauz to the Oghuz Turks, referring to pre-Islamic Turkish history, and called the Gagauz language "Old Turkish" (*Eski Türkçä*), he managed to distance his narrative on the origins of the Gagauz from the more contested Ottoman past.[75]

Mihail Çakir's emphasis in his Gagauz history book on Orthodox Christianity as an antithesis to communism not only underlined the significance of religion as a constituent element of Gagauz identity, but also his pro-Romanian and anti-Soviet sentiments.[76] He had to disprove Romanian suspicions about Gagauz affinities with Russia and consequently with the Soviet Union. Çakir's criticism of "godless" communism[77] fitted official Romanian views and alleviated Romanian fears that the Soviets could use the Gagauz and their perceived affinity with Russian culture to challenge Romanian territorial integrity.

The alignment of Mihail Çakir's Gagauz narrative with Romanian foreign policy went beyond his anti-Soviet stance, which could be understood as expected from a priest. While early historical accounts of the Gagauz in the works of Dmitrii Çakir

related them to the Bulgarians, Mihail Çakir's book on the history of the Bessarabian Gagauz pointed at the existence of a medieval Gagauz state in Dobruja, stressed their Turkic Oghuz ancestry, and emphasized Bessarabia as the contemporary center of the Gagauz.[78] By claiming Dobruja as a Gagauz, and not a Bulgarian, region and Bessarabia as the Gagauz homeland, Çakir reinforced the Romanian position in its sovereignty disputes with Bulgaria over Dobruja and with the Soviet Union over Bessarabia.[79] Çakir's rapprochement with republican Turkey was even more remarkable. By signaling his preference to republican Turkey, Romanian authorities could be further reassured about the lack of any pro-Soviet Gagauz sympathies. In the 1930s, he became acquainted with Turkish diplomatic authorities and reportedly met the Turkish ambassador to Romania Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver.[80] Çakir handed a copy of his "History of the Bessarabian Gagauz" as a present to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and received an invitation to Turkey to meet the president, though the visit never took place.[81] These initiatives remained in alignment with Romanian foreign policy wishing to balance the Soviet Union through closer relations with republican Turkey.

Meanwhile, good interwar-era relations between Romania and Turkey emerged as an opportunity: The interest of the Turkish ambassador Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver in the Gagauz community, his close relations with Çakir, as well as the secularist orientation of republican Turkey were perceived as facilitating a closer relationship.[82] In this light, the Gagauz would not identify themselves with Europe or Russia, preferring an ethnocentric (Turkic-related) identity, but distancing themselves from Turkey through Orthodox Christianity.[83] This facilitated the projection of the Gagauz image "between West and East, between Europe and Russia" and influenced their conceptions of the past and the Gagauz "cultural project."[84]

Mihail Çakir's Histories of the Gagauz

Because of his education, knowledge of several languages, revered position of a priest and an intellectual, and his interest in Gagauz origins and identity Çakir possessed a rare capacity not only to disseminate his own views, but also to act as a norm entrepreneur and agent of knowledge exchange between different communities. Moreover, his ability to address different communities in different languages in separate books and not direct translations allowed him to fine-tune messages targeting different audiences while keeping the same general conception of Gagauz identity. While Mihail Çakir authored numerous works, including dictionaries, and translations of biblical texts into the Gagauz and Romanian languages, his most important work for Gagauz identity formation is the one on the history and characteristics of the Gagauz, published in both the Gagauz and Romanian languages. The Gagauz-language version was published as *Basarabyalı Gagauzların Tarihi* (History of Bessarabian Gagauz) in 1934, while a homonymous version in Romanian language, "Besarabieala Gagauzlaran İstorieasa," appeared in several issues of the

journal *Viața Basarabiei* between 1933 and 1934 in Chișinău.[85] There are important differences in the two versions, which shed light both on the objectives of the author and the political circumstances of interwar Romania. A comparison of the two versions shows a stronger normative approach in the Gagauz version and a more descriptive approach in the Romanian one. Positive references to Russia and Gagauz–Russian relations are also watered down or removed in the Romanian version of the work for obvious political reasons. In the preface of his Gagauz-language work, Çakir stated that he authored the book in Gagauz in response to Gagauz "requests," so that they could "know their own history well."[86]

In both versions, Çakir reviewed foreign literature on the origins of Gagauz, aiming to provide external validation for his own work. Çakir presented works by the Czech historian Konstantin Jireček rejecting the idea that the Gagauz were related to the Seljuk Turks and tracing their links to the Uz/Oghuz tribes.[87] He also rejected the views of the Romanian scholar Nistor and the Russian Grigorovich that the Gagauz were of Kuman origins. He then refuted the arguments by Ivanov, Brokhauz, and Efron and Todorov about the Pecheneg origins of the Gagauz and the claim that the Gagauz were Turkified Bulgarians.[88] In contrast, he presented Moshkov's rejection of such hypotheses and endorsed Georgescu's and Moshkov's theories about the Uz/Oghuz origins of the Gagauz.[89] Çakir also shared statistical information about the location and demographics of Gagauz communities in Budjak, thus contributing to the establishment of a Gagauz community perception beyond narrow village borders.

Homeland

In neither version of Çakir's work, was Bessarabia or Budjak defined as a Gagauz "homeland"; The Gagauz settlements in Budjak were described as colonies/communes or villages/towns. While describing the legal system under Russian imperial administration, Çakir argued, however, that the most severe punishment was exile. This raised the fear of leaving "home villages" and life among relatives, while those exiled strove to return to Bessarabia.[90] Such an observation may suggest that ties to Budjak were getting stronger, following the Gagauz settlement in the early nineteenth century. Moreover, Çakir presented in both books a detailed narrative about a medieval Gagauz state in Dobruja, helping construct a shared historical memory of statehood.

Shared Culture: Religion

Çakir presented in both versions of his work descriptions of the moral and religious characteristics and practices of the Gagauz. However, while in the Romanian version he presented longer pieces on traditional practices, in the Gagauz version he shortened such parts and expanded normative texts on proper behavior by narrating such views both personally and via the words of a Gagauz elder, Nikolai Kasım. Çakir aimed to capitalize on the reverence towards local elders among the Gagauz to

support his normative arguments. In such manner, Çakir presented the positive traditional norms of old Gagauz communities and negative traits threatening Gagauz life, such as alcoholism. In general, he portrayed Gagauz as helpful, pious, respectful to elders, patient, and generous[91] and assumed these to be shared traits. Quoting Kasım, he raised an alarm against the trend of abandoning Orthodoxy in favor of Protestant sects or atheism, due to the influence of newly-arrived "Baptists, Adventists, religionless and godless communists" and the lack of religiosity of some Gagauz.[92] He stated that not simply being a Christian but being an Orthodox Christian was an indispensable feature of Gagauz identity and underlined any deviation from Orthodoxy as an existential threat. As religion is a rich repository of cultural practices and symbolic resources, Çakir's emphasis on preserving Orthodox Christianity could reflect not only his personal views, as an Orthodox priest, but also his support for preservation of a shared Gagauz culture based on Orthodox Christianity.[93]

Uniqueness and Chosenness

In the Gagauz version of the work, Çakir claimed that not only language and religion comprise constitutive elements of a people's identity, but also behavioral features. Through a speech by Elder Nikolai Kasım, Çakir devoted several pages to demonstrating differences between the Gagauz and the Bulgarians, which rendered the Gagauz superior. This allowed Çakir to draw the boundaries of the Gagauz community and define "chosenness" and differences from their closest neighbor, as the literature on nation-building suggests.[94] Given the history of Gagauz being reported as Bulgarians, the coexistence of Bulgarians and Gagauz both in Dobruja and Budjak and the respective size of the Bulgarian population, differentiating the Gagauz from them and building a sense of a relative superiority could be seen as instrumental for building a distinct ethnic identity.

Fluid Identities

In discussing the fact that Gagauz respondents rejected being Bulgarian or Greek and traced their origins to Turkic origins (though not to the Ottomans), the two books presented an interesting difference. In both versions (albeit with a much longer description in the Romanian version), Çakir discussed why the Gagauz were motivated to label themselves Bulgarian or Greek under different political contexts: this identification would accrue support or privileges from the Phanariot or Russian authorities. Thus he aimed to explain and rationalize the different self-identifications of the Gagauz, while highlighting their differences from Bulgarians and Greeks, as well as their distinct identity. Hence, rather than supporting the idea of fluid identities, Çakir showed such identifications instead as layered identities, where politically motivated identifications could coexist with a Gagauz identity.[95] Through this emphasis in the Romanian version of the work, Çakir implied that the Gagauz had

no ambition to become a national minority claiming self-determination but could instead adopt a layered Romanian identity, if Romanian authorities embraced the Gagauz community and its culture.

Presentation of Russia

The biggest difference between the Gagauz and the Romanian versions of Çakir's work was political. Discrepancies in the description of religious practices and history of engagement with the Russian administration are indeed remarkable. While the Romanian version rather neutrally presented the role of the Russian administration in the life of Gagauz communities before the First World War, in the Gagauz version, the parts describing that period were put within the chapter named "Who Are the Administrators Who Did Good and Helped the Gagauz in Bessarabia?" Çakir named Russian governors as people who did good for the Gagauz community, thus expressing a positive attitude towards them and the Russian administration.[96] Such contextual or stylistic differences in providing more space to that or another part of the narrative suggest that Çakir was not just writing the same work in two different languages. He aimed to present his history to different (external and internal) audiences, fine-tuning his writings toward possible sensitive contexts, the characteristics of his audiences and his own intentions in forming internal awareness and external familiarity with or even recognition of Gagauz identity.

The Impact of Çakir's Work

While Mihail Çakir aimed through his work to present the Gagauz community, their history, and their shared culture, he also aspired not only to avert a conflict with Romanian authorities but also to establish a basis for a distinct Gagauz identity under Romanian administration. While some discrepancies discussed above indeed could be interpreted as attempts to reconcile the divergent interests of the Gagauz and the Romanian audiences, the very use of the Latin alphabet for the Gagauz language in Çakir's works could be seen as a tool of such integration. Çakir's publications were in line with Romanian policies to remove the Cyrillic alphabet previously used in Bessarabia under the rule of the Russian Empire.[97] While the Latin alphabet Çakir used "mirrored the Romanian orthographical system,"[98] thus demonstrating the wish of the Gagauz community to integrate into Romanian society, such attempts also aimed to "to enlighten the intelligentsia and ruling classes of Romania" about the Gagauz community living within the enlarged borders of the kingdom.[99] Considering these aims and Çakir's attempts to consolidate a Gagauz ethnic community, it is worth exploring how his works influenced his Gagauz and Romanian-speaking audiences.

The Gagauz-Speaking Audience

There is little evidence on how contemporary Gagauz leaders received Mihail Çakir's history book, following its publication in 1934. While Çakir himself republished some of his earlier periodical publications in Romanian and later in the Gagauz language, new publications of his works took place mostly after the end of the Cold War.[100] Following Çakir's death in 1938, his translation of New Testament continued to be used in church and read in private.[101] Nevertheless, Bessarabia's June 1940 annexation by the Soviet Union, and the region's embroilment in the Second World War dramatically shifted the political agenda, rendering any interest in Gagauz identity formation redundant. In the post–Second World War era, considering the clear anti-communist tones of Çakir's arguments, as well as the restoration of the Cyrillic alphabet for the Gagauz language, there is little surprise that Çakir's works fell into relative obscurity.

Interest in Çakir and his work rose only in the late Soviet era. This trend became stronger following the demise of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Republic of Moldova. Çakir's works were rediscovered by Gagauz activists aiming to achieve recognition for their community. Multiple attempts were made to republish Çakir's works on the history of Gagauz, and increasing references to his personality and work by politicians and scholars pointed at the lasting impact of Çakir's work on the Gagauz people.[102] Çakir's status among the Gagauz rose precipitously: He was portrayed as a role model,[103] an "apostle" and "educator" of the Gagauz people[104] and was given the honorific title "*Ay-Boba*" (Holy Father).[105] His clerical position only added to his universal appreciation and raised him to quasi-sainthood. His works "formed the basis upon which later national ideals were built" and contributed to Gagauz religious life to the extent that his works are preceived to "be revered and honored rather than questioned."[106] Moreover, his multilingual teaching, preaching, and publication record raised him to a model of respect for cultural diversity and mutual respect for Gagauz, Moldovans, and Russians. The revival of interest in Çakir's works and influence is similarly evident from the commemoration events held in 2016 for his 155th birthday, such as a meeting in a regional library at which his works were said to have paved the way for the emergence of Gagauz literature,[107] or the discovery of his tomb in the old cemetery of Chișinău in 2000, the erection of his bust in 2011 and its restoration in 2016.[108] Moreover, one of the branches of the Chișinău B.P. Hasdeu Municipal Library aiming to support cultural diversity has been named after Mihail Ciachir (Çakir).[109] In the words of Irina Vlah, Governor (*Başkan*) of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia:

> Mihail Çakir is an outstanding personality in the history of the Gagauz and Moldovan peoples, a man of great talent and will. He is the founder of the written Gagauz language, the creator of textbooks and dictionaries. He was the first to translate the Bible into the Gagauz language in the name of the spiritual enrichment of his people.

Of course, the creative energy, incredible determination, and spiritual resiliency of this person deserve the greatest respect and admiration of his descendants. The time has come for an impartial reflection on the significance of Mihail Çakir's personality. His talent and significance require a deeper analysis in order to explain the significance of his mission.

In the history of relations between the Moldovan and Gagauz peoples, Mihail Çakir is a teacher of tolerant attitude to their languages. He cultivated a spirit of mutual respect for Moldovan, Gagauz, Russian languages. . . . The activities of Mihail Çakir to create the conditions for the study of the Moldovan, Gagauz, Russian languages by the inhabitants of Bessarabia in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries can serve as an example for the current generation.

Father Mihail Çakir saw and solved tasks that were urgent for the spiritual development of the Gagauz people. For him, there was no political and ideological narrowness. Being a Gagauz, he equally cared for the enlightenment of the Moldovan and Gagauz peoples. . . . The active pedagogical activity of Mihail Çakir was combined with scientific research. In 1934, he published a book in the Gagauz language, "The History of Bessarabian Gagauz." This can be regarded as a pedagogical action—the history of the Gagauz, written primarily for the Gagauz themselves. Father Mihail Çakir reflected on what the Gagauz should be and what their ultimate mission is. . . .

Mihail Çakir believed in his people, he knew that the Gagauz people were peaceful, full of strength and energy, and did everything in his power to ensure that their culture developed. Everything that Father Mihail Çakir did is a milestone in the history of the Gagauz people and will remain forever. The spiritual heritage of the enlightener Mihail Çakir is a monument of love for the language, culture, history of his people, as well as an example of the Gagauz tolerance towards surrounding peoples, their languages and cultures.[110]

Mihail Çakir's appeal was not limited to the current governor. Irina Vlah's predecessor, former governor of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia Mihail Formuzal, also stated:

We should learn from Mihail Çakir to love our people, to keep in our minds the origins of our soul, the traditions of our people; let's take him as an example of what should be done, so that the Gagauz community is united.[111]

While most contemporary scholars argue that Gagauz nationalist mobilization emerged in the late twentieth century, and was reflected in "mobilized linguicism,"[112] a careful reading of Çakir's work can trace the seeds of this project fifty years earlier. The emphasis on the word "people" (*halk*) instead of nation, ethnic group, or any other concept referring to a distinct community is particularly interesting, because such a definition is predominantly used in the context of Gagauz politics since the demise of the Soviet Union. The government of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of

Gagauzia has defined Gagauz as "people" and not "ethnic minority," the Budjak as their "homeland"[113] and other Gagauz communities living in other countries, including Bulgaria and Greece, as "Gagauz diaspora."[114] In light of this, it is no surprise that World Gagauz Congresses act to represent Komrat, the capital of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, as the "center of the Gagauz world."[115]

The Romanian-Speaking Audience

Çakir's work on Gagauz history and culture was published in parts in the monthly journal *Viața Basarabiei* (Bessarabian Life) in Chișinău with the aim "to forge spiritual bonds" between those living in Bessarabia.[116] Çakir's publications apparently attracted the attention of the Romanian intelligentsia of the time, as they were often cited by other Romanian periodicals providing reviews of *Viața Basarabiei*. Examples were the 1934 and 1936 reviews in *Revista istorică* published in Bucharest, as well as by the Romanian journals *Arhivele Olteniei* and *Țara Bârsei* published in Craiova and Brasov respectively.[117] In 1935, Çakir's article on Gagauz morality was included in a Romanian yearly bibliographical collection.[118] In view of these, one could argue that Çakir's attempt to introduce the Gagauz people to the Romanian audience was ultimately successful, and the fact of other journals' citing his work might signal both interest in the topics he explored, as well as his success in reaching out to at least some parts of Romanian intelligentsia.

Conclusion

Mihail Çakir's work on the history of the Gagauz could also be seen as the first written attempt to construct a Gagauz ethnic identity within the modern framework of ethnic nations, according to Smith's term. The pedagogical properties and the aim of Çakir's books to teach the Gagauz about their origins as discussed above resemble one of the steps of nation-building aiming to "teach" the general population about its shared history. By presenting a shared and territorialized history for the Gagauz of Budjak, their presumably unique characteristics and shared traits, as well as rejecting some external perceptions about their identities, capitalizing on the power of print media, but also his role as a priest, Çakir constructed a national identity framework that would closely coincide within Smith's conceptual framework of ethnic nation-building. Although in neither versions of the work did Çakir refer to political claims for the Gagauz such as self-determination, autonomy, or independence, his repeated reference to the concept of nation (*halk*) and his attempts to define the history and characteristics of the Gagauz further support the idea of identity formation. Falling short of sovereignty claims, Çakir confirmed that his aim was to define and protect the Gagauz ethnic identity through his extensive publication activities in Gagauz and Romanian. Çakir himself argued that his work was a response to Gagauz demands to know who they are and what their origins were.[119]

By writing on the history of the Gagauz in both the Romanian and Gagauz languages and presenting not only foreign historical accounts and theories about the Gagauz, but also his own original fieldwork results, observations, normative critiques, and recommendations, Çakir established a basis for Gagauz nation building; his work sowed the seeds of Gagauz national identity.[120]

While Mihail Çakir was a pioneer of Gagauz national identity formation, nationalist mobilization occurred much later, still using the common tools of nationalism. Nation-building efforts continued with the development of Gagauz literature, formal language and other initiatives, such as the attempt of the Gagauz poet Dmitrii Karaçoban to collect Gagauz ethnographic materials and found the first ethnological museum of the Gagauz in the late 1970s.[121] More than eighty years after the publication of Çakir's seminal works, debates about Gagauz origins, history, and national identity have continued to attract considerable academic and political interest. The relations of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia with Moldova, Russia, and Turkey manifest the intricacies of the Gagauz nation-building project, as well as the continuing relevance of the work of Mihail Çakir.

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Notes

1. Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 89-90.

2. Ibid., 92–94.

3. Anthony D. Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs [United Kingdom])* 72, no. 3 (1996): 447; Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.

4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 5–6.

5. Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory," 447; Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 13.

6. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1988), 137.

7. Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory," 453.

8. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 163.

9. Ibid., 169.

10. Ibid., 145.

11. Ibid., 138.

12. Joane Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture," *Social Problems* 41, no. 1 (1994), https://doi.org/10.2307/3096847, https://doi.org/10.2307/3096847.

13. Ibid., 164.

14. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 67–82.

15. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 157.

16. Ibid., 160.

17. Most of the Budjak region lies within the borders of Moldova, while the remaining part belongs to Ukraine.

18. Astrid Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness," in *Cultural Changes in the Turkic World*, ed. Barbara Pusch Filiz Kıral, Claus Schönig, and Arus Yumul (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2007).

19. Republic of Moldova, 2014 Population Census Data, Moldovan Statistics Authority (Chişinău, 2014), https://recensamint.statistica.md/; Ana Coretchi, Ana Pascaru, and Cynthia Stevens, "The Republic of Moldova: Dimensions of the Gagauz Socio-Linguistic Model" (Paper Presented at the World Congress on Language Policies, Barcelona, 16–20 April 2002).

20. Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness."

21. Mihail Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi (Basarabiela Gagauzlaran Istorieasa)*, ed. Harun Güngör (Niğde: Tolunay, 1998); Olga Radova, "Ethnic Identification of Transdanubian Migrants and the Gagauz Settling in the Budjak (The Late 18th-Early 19th centuries)," *Eurasian Studies* 13 (1998).

22. Atanas I. Manof, *Gagauzlar (Romanya ve Bulgaristanda oturan Hristiyan Türkler hakkında tarihi ve etnolojik bir etüt)*, trans. Türker Acaroğlu (Ankara: Varlık Neşriyatı, 1939), 35.

23. Paul Wittek, "Yazîjoğhlu 'Alī on the Christian Turks of the Dobruja," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 14, no. 3 (1952): 668, http://www.jstor.org/stable/609124.

24. Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*, 21–23. In his book about the genealogy of the Çakir family, Mihail Çakir's father Dmitrii Çakir also advocated the thesis of the Bulgarian origins of Gagauz who were forced to change language from Bulgarian to Turkish. See Dmitrii Çakir, "Biograficheskii ocherk roda i familii Çakir–1983," in *Stranitsy istorii i literatury Gagauzov. XIX-nachalo XX vv.*, ed. M. Arsen'ieva and Stepan Bulgar (Chişinău, Moldova: Pontos, 2005), 29.

25. Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*.

26. Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness," 124.

27. Elizaveta Nikolaevna Kvilinkova, "On the Linguistic Identity of the Gagauz of Greece and Their Folk Songs," *Journal of Endangered Languages* 2013-2014 (Winter 2013): 33.

28. Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness," 125.

29. Kvilinkova, "On the Linguistic Identity."

30. Ibid.

31. On the Ottoman *millet* system and its legacy, see Karen Barkey and George Gavrilis, "The Ottoman Millet System: Non-territorial Autonomy and Its Contemporary Legacy," *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1 (2016).

32. Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, *Instilling Religion in Greek and Turkish Nationalism: A 'Sacred Synthesis,'* 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 80.

33. Ibid., 82–83.

34. Önder Duman, "Atatürk Döneminde Romanya'dan Türk Göçleri (1923-1938)," Bilig 45 (2008).

35. In 1943, the Council of Ministers of Turkey decided that Gagauz acquiring Turkish citizenship were to be recorded as "Turkish Orthodox." See Nuri Yavuz, "Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver ve Gagavuzlar," *Akademik Bakış* 4, no. 7 (2010): 183.

36. Ibid., 180.

37. Lambros Baltsiotis, "The discovery of new Greeks. The cases of Gagauz in Moldova and 'Pontians' in Turkey," *International Journal of Science Culture and Sport 2*, no. 4 (2014): 10–11, note 20.

38. Güllü Karanfil, "Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöverin Gagauz Milli Kimliin Üüselmesindeki Rolü," in *Hamdullah Suphi ve Gagauzlar*, ed. Mehmet Şahingöz and Alper Alp (Ankara: Türk Yurdu, 2016), 111. For detailed information of the students and their later education, see Stepan Bulgar, "Türkiyada Gagauz Studentleri 30-Cu Yıllarda Xx Asırdä: İstoriya Hem İnsannar," in *Hamdullah Subhi ve Gagauzlar*, ed. Mehmet Şahingöz and Alper Alp (Ankara: Türk Yurdu, 2016).

39. Fahri Temizyürek, "Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver'in Gagavuz Türklerine Hizmetleri," in Şahingöz and Alper, *Hamdullah Subhi ve Gagazlar*, 118.

40. Ibid., 118–19.

41. Michael Erdman, "Neo-Dhimmi in the Age of Neo-Ottomanism: Religious Difference and Gagauz Perceptions of Turkish Foreign Policy Under the AKP" (Popular Geo-Politics in Russia and Post-Soviet Eastern Europe Workshop, UCL SSEES in London, UK, 19–20 February 2015).

42. Baltsiotis, "The Discovery of New Greeks," 11–12.

43. Ibid., 12–14.

44. Ibid., 15–16.

45. Ibid., 33.

46. Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness," 126.

47. Kemal Karpat, "Sel'dzhuko-anatoliĭskoĭe proishojdeniĭe gagauzov," *Etnograficheskoĭe obozreniĭe* 4 (1994).

48. For theories connecting Scythians and Gagauz and presenting Gagauz as an "independent ethnicity," see Olga Radova Karanastas, "Gagauz Türklerinin Folklorunda Evelki Zamanlardan Kalma Devlet Elemanlari Ve Herodot'un Yazilarinda Onlarin Paralel İzlerinin Görüntüleri [State Elements Surviving from Previous Times in the Folklore of Gagauz Turks and Observations of their Parallel Signs in the Writings of Herodotus]" (Paper Presented at the VIII. Uluslararasi Türk Sanati, Tarihi ve Folkloru Kongresi/Sanat Etkinlikleri [VIII. International Turkish Art, History and Folklore Congress/Art Activities], Konya, 2017). For alleged links to Thracian tribes, notably the *Krobyzoi*, see Odysseas Gilis, ed., *Gagaouzia, Gagaouz, Gagaouzides* [Γκαγκαβουζία, Γκαγκαβούζοι, Γκαγκαβούζηδες] (Thessaloniki, Greece: Self-Publication, 2018). For a discussion of competitive current national narratives and identifications, see Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness," 127.

49. Strong nationalist policies in Bulgaria have, e.g., been cited as reason for increasing Gagauz identification with Bulgarians in recent decades. See Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness," 125.

50. These and other pre- and post-1918 works by Çakir and the details on their language and scripture are listed in James A. Kapalo, "The Career of Father Mihail Çakir: The Cyril and Methodius of the Gagauz," *Solanus* 21 (2007): 10–11.

51. Stepan Bulgar, "Gagauzskiie prosvetiteli, pisateli, uchenyie XIX-nachala XXv. i rol' russkogo iazyka v duhovnom razvitii Gagauzov," *Rusin* 2, no. 8 (2007): 145–46; Otto Blau, "Ueber Volksthum und Sprache der Kumanen," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 29, no. 3/4 (1876): 568, www.jstor.org/stable/43366222.

52. Dmitrii Chakir, "Biograficheskii ocherk roda i familii Chakir–1983," in *Stranitsy istorii i literatury Gagauzov. XIX-nachalo XX vv.*, ed. M. Arsen'ieva and Stepan Bulgar (Chişinău, Moldova: Pontos, 2005).

53. Bulgar, "Gagauzskiie prosvetiteli, pisateli, uchenyie XIX-nachala XXv. i rol' russkogo iazyka v duhovnom razvitii Gagauzov."

54. On Karamanlidika, see Evangelia Balta, *Beyond the Language Frontier: Studies on the Karamanlis and the Karamanlidika Printing* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2010), 67-80.

55. James A. Kapalo, "Clerical Agency and the Politics of Scriptural Translation: The 'Canonization' of the Gagauz Language in Southern Bessarabia," in *Re-contextualizing East Central European History: Nation, Culture, and Minority Groups*, ed. Robert Pyrah and Marius Turda (Oxford: Legenda, 2010).

56. The Gagauz had their first official alphabet in 1957 in a form of Cyrillic alphabet and the first individualized Latin alphabet in 1995. See Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness."

57. Bulgar mentioned some earlier versions of Gagauz translations of biblical texts, such as those printed in Varna in 1875. Stepan Bulgar, "Iz istorii literatury Gagauzov XIX-nach. XX vv," in *Stranitsy istorii i literatury Gagauzov. XIX-nachalo XX vv.*, ed. M. Arsen'ieva (Chişinău, Moldova: Pontos, 2005). The lack of reference to these translations in Çakir's works and works cited by him may suggest that these versions were not really known among the Gagauz villages in Budjak.

58. Menz, "The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness."

59. Interestingly Dmitrii Çakir also authored a book on the question of identity of his family and Gagauz, defining the latter as "Bulgarians-Christians" with a Turkic language. See Alla Paptova and Yelena Cuijuclu, "West and East in the Image of the Past of the Gagauz: The Experience of Cultural Project of Boundary" (Paper Presented at the Post-Soviet States between Russia and the EU: Analysing Special Circumstances and Political Tendencies, International Scientific Conference, Chişinău, 2016). His work, while contributing to the relevant field, fell short of producing a framework for a Gagauz ethnie, combining instead the ethnic origins of Gagauz and Bulgarians and considering the Gagauz a Bulgarian subgroup.

60. Ivan F. Grek, "Deĭatelnost' P. Hilendarskogo i M. Çakira: obsheĭe i osobennoĭe [The Activity of Paisius of Hilandar and Mihail Chakir: Common and Specific]," *Rusin* 1, no. 43 (2016): 288.

61. Ibid., with reference to Bulgar 2005 and Moshin and Kopushu 13.

62. Bulgar, "Protoiierei Mihail Chakir," 15.

63. Viktor Kopuşçu, Hakikatın Sesi (2017), https://kopuzsesi.wordpress.com/gazeta/.

64. Grek, "*Deĭatelnost' P. Hilendarskogo i M. Çakira: obsheĭe i osobennoĭe* [The Activity of Paisius of Hilandar and Mihail Chakir: Common and Specific]," 289.

65. It was argued that Gagauz identity self-consciousness started only in the 1860s. Ibid., 292, with references to other authors.

66. Çakir's interest in protecting Romanian alongside the Gagauz language against the official Russification policies of the early twentieth century has been recognized by Romanian authors. See Kapalo, "The Career of Father Mihail Çakir: The Cyril and Methodius of the Gagauz," 7; Ion Şpac, "Un credincios al Basarabiei," *Luminatorul* 5 (2001): 35, note 3.

67. Kapalo, "The Career of Father Mihail Çakir," 7–8.

68. Michael Bruchis, *The Republic of Moldova: From the Collapse of the Soviet Empire to the Restoration of the Russian Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 16–17; ibid.

69. James A. Kapalo, *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 55.

70. Kapalo, *Text, Context and Performance*.

71. Kapalo, "Clerical Agency and the Politics of Scriptural Translation," 6–7; Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*.

72. Çakir insisted, however, on the use of the term "people" (*halk*) for the Gagauz, which was adopted by Gagauz nationalist activists in the late twentieth century.

73. The perception of Orthodox Christianity as "part of Romanian national identity" and its role in the Romanian unification and state-building in the interwar period is discussed in detail in Lucian N. Leustean, "The Political Control of Orthodoxy and Romanian Nationalism, 1859–1944," in *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947–65*, ed. Lucian N. Leustean (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 39–40.

74. James A. Kapalo, "Gagauz 'Orthodoxism' in Interwar Romania: Mihail Cakir and the Gagauz National Movement," *Romanian Academy Historical Yearbook* 8 (2011).

75. Kapalo, "Clerical Agency and the Politics of Scriptural Translation."

76. Ibid., 47–84. Çakir's approach of combining national and religious identity could in part mirror Romanian discourses on national identity which also combined Romanianness with Orthodox Christianity. See ibid., 71.

77. Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*.

78. Paptova and Cuijuclu, "West and East in the Image of the Past of the Gagauz."

79. Alla Paptova, "The Role of the Image of the Past in the Ethnic Mobilization (Case Study)," *Language and Literature—European Landmarks of Identity* 12 (2013): 289.

80. Karanfil, "Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöverin Gagauz Milli Kimliin Üüselmesindeki Rolü," 111.

81. Kapalo, *Text, Context and Performance*, 70.

82. Kapalo, "The Career of Father Mihail Çakir," 15.

83. Paptova and Cuijuclu, "West and East in the Image of the Past of the Gagauz," 474.

84. Paptova and Cuijuclu, "West and East in the Image of the Past of the Gagauz."

85. This study focuses on the whole series of Çakir's articles on Gagauz history and culture published in 1933-1934 and 1935, respectively, and not his 15-page book covering only the first of the articles in Romanian and published in 1933, as described by Ivan Duminika, "O Maloizvestnom Originale Knigi Mihaila Chakira po Istorii Gagauzov Bessarabii/Protoiereul Mihail Ceachir-Un Cărturar Al Bisericii Din Basarabia," *Protoiierei Mihail Chakir-Prosvetitel i Religioznyi Deiatel Bessarabii/Conferinţa Ştiinţifică Naţională Natsionalnaia Nauchnaia* (Chişinău, 10/09/2018), 19-20.

86. Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*, ix.

87. Mihail Ceachir, "Proishozhdeniie Gagauzov. I," in *Protoiereĭ Mihail Çakir. Stat'i po istorii i kul'ture Gagauzov Bessarabii v zhurnale 'Viaţa Basarabiei' (Bessarabskaĭa Zhizn')/Protoiereul Mihail Ceachir. Articole Privind İstoria si Cultura Gagauzilor din Basarabia Publicate in Revista Viaţa Basarabie*, ed. Viktor Tsvirkun, Ivan Duminika, and Vitaliy Syrf (Chişinău, Moldova: Lexon, 2018), 25; Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*.

88. Ceachir, "Proishozhdeniie Gagauzov. I," 27; Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*.

89. Ceachir, "Proishozhdeniie Gagauzov. I," 27; Ceachir, "Proishozhdeniie Gagauzov"; Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*.

90. Ceachir, "Nravstvennost' Gagauzov Bessarabii."

91. Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*, 38–39.

92. Ibid.

93. On the other hand, Çakir failed to foresee that his emphasis on the canonization of the Gagauz language could pose risks to Gagauz loyalty to Orthodox Christianity. These were linked not only to the inevitable rapprochement with Sunni Muslim Turkey that growing interest in the Turkic origins of the Gagauz would bring about. It was also linked to growing Protestant missionary activities in Eastern Europe targeting local Orthodox populations. The proliferation of religious literature in Turkish at a time Orthodox services were officially held in Romanian or Russian gave missionaries an unexpected advantage in proselytizing the Gagauz. See Kapalo, "Clerical Agency and the Politics of Scriptural Translation," 20–25.

94. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 135–40.

95. Ceachir, "Proishozhdeniie Gagauzov," 60.

96. Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*, 41.

97. Kapalo, "Clerical Agency and the Politics of Scriptural Translation," 15. Kapalo also argued that Çakir's attempt to present the Gagauz pilgrimage (*hac*) tradition to Jerusalem as rooted in Turkish and not Russian traditions signaled his will to appease Romanian authorities by disengaging the Gagauz from Russian Orthodox traditions. See Kapalo, "The Career of Father Mihail Çakir: The Cyril and Methodius of the Gagauz," 16–18.

98. Kapalo, "Clerical Agency and the Politics of Scriptural Translation," 15

99. Ibid.; Kapalo, "The Career of Father Mihail Çakir: The Cyril and Methodius of the Gagauz," 16.

100. Viktor Tsvirkun, Ivan Duminika, and Vitaliy Syrf, "Ot Sostaviteley," in Protoiereul Mihail Ceachir. Articole privind istoria şi cultura găgăuzilor din Basarabia publicate în revista *Viaţa Basarabiei / Protoierei Mihail Çalir. Stat'i po istorii i kul'ture Gagauzov Bessarabii v zhurnale Viaţa Basarabiei ("Bessarabskaia Zhizn")*, ed. Viktor Tsvirkun, Ivan Duminika, and Vitaliy Syrf (Chişinău, Moldova: Lexon-Prim, 2017), 14–15. Some of his works were earlier published in Turkey.

101. Nikolai Kostenko, "Apostol Protoiierei Mihail Çakir," in *Stranitsy Istorii i Literatury Gagauzov. XIX-nachalo XX vv.*, ed. M. Arsen'ieva and Stepan Bulgar (Chişinău, Moldova: Pontos, 2007).

102. Kapalo, *Text, Context and Performance*.

103. Çakir's cautious position between Romanian and Soviet interests also served as an example in the early 1990s, when tensions between Moldovans and the Gagauz rose and many feared the outbreak of a conflict similar to that of Transdniestria. See Ivan Katchanovski, "Small Nations but Great Differences: Political Orientations and Cultures of the Crimean Tatars and the Gagauz," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 6 (2005): 887, 91, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130500199483, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130500199483.

104. Bulgar, "Protoiierei Mihail Chakir," 74.

105. Viktor Kopuşçu, *Çakirlär Ay-Boba Mihail Çakir* (Komrat: "Aydınnık" Kultura-Aydınnatmak Cümnä Topluluu, 2015).

106. Kapalo, *Text, Context and Performance*, 63–66.

107. Galina Dimitrievna Kristioglu, "Onun izmetleri gagauz literaturasına yolu açtı," *Ana Sözü* (*Chişinău*) 2016.

108. Ana Sözü, "20 yıl geeri Mihail Çakirin mezarı bulundu," *Ana Sözü* (*Chişinău*), 20 March 2020, http://anasozu.com/20-yil-geeri-mihail-cakirin-mezari-bulundu/; Ana Sözü, "Mihail Çakirä eni byust koyuldu," *Ana Sözü*, 27 April 2016.

109. "Biblioteca "Mihail Ciachir,'" https://ciachirhasdeu.wordpress.com/, accessed 12 March 2020.

110. Irina Vlah, "Protoierey Mihail Çakir - pastyr'-prosvetitel,'" in *Protoiereĭ Mihail Çakir. Stat'i po istorii i kul'ture Gagauzov Bessarabii v zhurnale 'Viaţa Basarabiei' (Bessarabskaĭa Zhizn')/Protoiereul Mihail Ceachir. Articole Privind İstoria si Cultura Gagauzilor din Basarabia Publicate in Revista Viaţa Basarabiei*, ed. Viktor Tsvirkun, Ivan Duminika, and Vitaliy Syrf (Chişinău, Moldova: Lexon, 2018), 8.

111. Viktor Kopuşçu, *Çakirlär. Ay-Boba Mihail Çakir*, ed. Petri Çebotar (Komrat: Aydınnık, 2015), 196.

112. This referred to demands to elevate the Gagauz language to the status of a "state" language. See Mihail N. Guboglo, *Antropologiĭa povsednevnosti* [Anthropology of Daily Life] (Moscow: Yazyki Slavianskoĭ Kul'tury, 2013), 503.

113. "IV Kongress Gagauzov" [IV Congress of Gagauzes]," 2017, http://gagauzkongresi.md/index.php/iii-kongress-gagauzov.

114. Gagauz Kongresi, *Gagauzy v Mire* [Gagauz in the World] (Komrat, 2020), http://gagauzkongresi.md/index.php/gagauzi-v-mire.

115. Paptova and Cuijuclu, "West and East in the Image of the Past of the Gagauz," 477.

116. Tsvirkun, Duminika, and Syrf, "Ot ostaviteley," 12.

117. Ibid., 12–13.

118. Ibid., 13.

119. Ciachir, *Basarabyalı Gagauzların tarihi*.

120. Similar to Çakir's educational endeavors, Ukrainian and Slovak intellectuals influenced by the trends of nationalism and "incipient urbanization and improved communications" tried to "create unified languages and literatures and endow ethnic categories of peasants with a new consciousness of their ethnic community" to create a background for "their struggle for statehood and nationhood." Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 142.

121. Guboglo, *Antropologiĭa Povsednevnosti* [Anthropology of Daily Life], 438.

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