# An Exploration into the Formations of a Ghost: Gendered Terrains of Circassian Diaspora Nationalism in Turkey

**Setenay Nil Doğan***

**Abstract**

This paper aims to explore the gendered formations of Circassian diaspora nationalism in Turkey, a ghost of the 19th and 20th centuries. Based on in-depth interviews conducted with diaspora nationalists, it discusses the gendered constructions of diaspora nationalism through which Circassian diaspora nationalism connects itself and the diaspora to the host community and homeland and differentiates itself and the diaspora from both. This article explores the myth of "an almost matriarchal society" and the very gendered and yet apparently gender neutral project of return and discourses on in-between-ness and transnationalism as elements in the toolbox of Circassian diaspora nationalism.

**Keywords:** Circassians, Turkey, diaspora nationalism, diaspora, gender

## Bir Hayaletin Yapıtaşlarının Peşinde: Türkiye'de Çerkes Diaspora Milliyetçiliğinin Toplumsal Cinsiyet Alanları

**Özet**

Bu makale 19. ve 20. yüzyılların bir hayaletinin, Türkiye'deki Çerkes milliyetçiliğinin toplumsal cinsiyet alanının yapıtaşlarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Diaspora milliyetçileriyle yapılmış derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanarak diaspora milliyetçiliğinin toplumsal cinsiyetlendirilmiş boyutlarını tartışmaktadır. Diaspora milliyetçiliği toplumsal cinsiyet kurgularıyla diasporayı ve kendini ev sahibi topluma

* Setenay Nil Doğan, Assoc. Prof., Yıldız Technical University, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. ORCID: 0000-0001-9212-6687. E-mail: setenaynildogan@yildiz.edu.tr

(Received 26.07.2020; Accepted 30.10.2021)

ve anavatana bağlamakta ve bu kurgularla aynı zamanda kendini ve diasporayı onlardan farklılaştırmaktadır. Bu makale "neredeyse anaerkil bir toplum" mitini ve görünüşte toplumsal cinsiyetsiz olan -ama aslında yoğun bir şekilde toplumsal cinsiyetlendirilmiş- dönüş projesini, arada kalmışlık ve ulusötesilik söylemlerini Çerkes diaspora milliyetçiliğinin alet kutusundaki unsurlar olarak incelemektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Çerkesler, Türkiye, diaspora milliyetçiliği, diaspora, toplumsal cinsiyet

**Introduction**

In October 2018, a group of Circassians and their civil society organizations in Turkey protested against a TV series, *Bir Umut Yeter* and demanded apologies on the part of Circassians because they claimed that some derogatory words[1] were used to refer to a Circassian female character, and hence, Circassian women in particular and women in general were severely insulted ("Çerkeslerden"). As the TV channel continued the broadcast of the TV series, the protestors underlined that this was "irresponsible broadcasting" at best and "a conspiracy aimed at provoking an ethnic group by way of humiliating them" at worst ("Nefret Dili"). A twenty-day protest on the social media and several news platforms followed, and even the members of the Turkish assembly gave public declarations on the matter. The protestors finally received an apology from the TV channel as the latter received a penalty from RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) ("Bir Umut").

Irrespective of whether Circassians were right in their perceptions and reactions, the particular event was an instance of the debates on the image of the Circassian beauty that had its roots in the 17th century in the Orientalist European literature, art and knowledge production (Schick). Circassian beauty refers to a historical image of idealized feminine aesthetics that has

[1] In the particular episode, a female character was defined as "ignoble. Her mother was the nephew of the chauffeur and she is very beautiful. She is a full blood Circassian girl. She made out with Mr. Kenan. She got pregnant" ("Çerkeslerden").

been attributed to the women of the Caucasus for centuries and has had its reflections in Turkish popular culture. In the history of the Circassian diaspora, the image proves to be an ambiguous one (Doğan, From National Humiliation).

Going beyond the image of the Circassian beauty and moving away from the idea of 'victim diaspora', this study aims to focus on Circassian diaspora nationalism in Turkey as an actor that is composed of multiple actors participating in several networks of relationships with the homeland, the host community, and international community. It argues that Circassian diaspora nationalism in Turkey has been a gendered discourse on several levels at once.

I have first encountered this link between Circassian diaspora nationalism and gender when I was a child and used to accompany my father going to the conferences, congresses, and events that the Circassian community in Turkey organized. From those days, I remember that it was always the Circassian men doing the political talk. Women – if there were any – used to sit in a respectful and dignified manner. Though Circassians were proud of the ways they treated women: "Circassians do not beat their wives," "Circassian women are freer when compared to other women in [Turkish] society," "They are the most respected group in Circassian society." In fact they seemed to me quite similar to the rest of Turkey in the 1980s where there were no women politicians, administrators, or leaders but only beautiful singers, movie stars, etc. on television and in the newspapers, and dutiful mothers at home.[2]

[2] It is important to mention that in the second half of the 1980s, Turkey was witnessing the rise of a feminist movement that was not state-based. As a child I was unaware that they were a couple of kilometers away from me protesting the Turkish patriarchy at Yoğurtçu Park, Kadıköy but I still managed to sense those harbingers of a new era initially through a couple of popular culture artifacts such as the pop song Leyla (Tuğsuz) and then through novels written by feminist authors such as Duygu Asena, Pınar Kür, Adalet Ağaoğlu, etc. In terms of politics,

Those contradictions of my community, namely the discrepancy between a discourse of difference and the reality of similarity to the Turkish society produced the initial sparks that motivated my dissertation and also this article: Why did a group that was so "proud of the high status of women in society and its respect for women" have no women in their organizations? Why were they so proud of the women`s silence and why did "respect" cover the practices of cooking, cleaning, dancing, being a bride and a mother, but not having an argument, giving speeches and taking the leading positions in the Circassian organizations? In the following years, my acquaintance with the literature on nationalism and diaspora communities made me rethink my previous notions on the group that I observed for years: they were diaspora nationalists and through these gender constructions they were differentiating themselves from and connecting to the host community, homeland and even the international community of Circassians. In the very recent years, I also realized that Circassian (diaspora) nationalism in Turkey was a ghost nationalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, and it emerged, disappeared, reemerged and acted through various seemingly contradictory groups as a result of international, national and diasporic processes. That also explained my – and also anyone else's- inability and difficulty to regard and name those groups as nationalists.

This article aims to explore how the ghost of Circassian diaspora nationalism constructs masculinities and femininities, and what roles these constructions play in creating a diasporic identity. It argues that diaspora nationalism operates from within a gender regime and aims to explore some parts of that regime. As gender regimes have different aspects such as power relations, production and cathexis (Connell 74), this study is an attempt to explore the power relations aspect of the gender regime of diaspora nationalism.

---

İmren Aykut, a female minister of Özal government also became an interesting exception to the women's invisibility in politics in the late 1980s.

**Gendering Diaspora Nationalism Literature**

As the original meaning of the diaspora referring to the traditional victim diasporas has been criticized and gained additional meanings in the 1990s, the theoretical accounts of diaspora have been criticized for their tendency "to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways" and normalize male experiences (Clifford 313) while leaving the gendered domains of diasporic complexity unexamined (Anthias). Highlighting that necessity to gender the diaspora literature, Anthias (572) suggests two different levels of analysis: the first level examines the ways in which men and women of the diaspora are inserted into the social relations of the host community, within their own diaspora communities and within the transnational networks of the diaspora, and the second level aims to understand how gender relations, lying at the very heart of social order, are constitutive of the positionalities of the groups themselves.

These studies that gender the diaspora literature underline that gender relations play a significant role in the reproduction of social capital and reinforcement of the cultural norms of the historic 'homeland' (Evergeti 347) as women play a key role in the staging of diasporic origin through the family (Tsolidis 193). Diasporic identities and belonging are contested, forged, negotiated and reaffirmed through and alongside gender (Siu) since diasporas enhance collective identities that are formed through the patriarchal dominance of male diaspora leaders (Anthias), women's cultural invocation as objects of male gaze (Gopinath), and the formulation of particular roles imposed on and expected from women (Gold). Women in the diasporas are subjected to "a double articulation of discourses of cultural difference and patriarchy" (Ganguly 38). However, some studies also pay attention to how diasporic condition and identities may empower the members of the community underlining the educational and employment achievements for women to renegotiate gender relations (Ramji), and a possibility for a modification of the cult of domesticity (Geschwender 503).

As diaspora studies that focus on women are limited, masculinity in the diasporic contexts remains unexplored.

Helmlich (245) criticizes some diaspora studies for being characterized by the metaphor of the scattering of seeds, referring to a system of kinship reckoned through men, and hence, imagining a community of kinship, normalized heterosexism and patriarchy. Similarly, Siu (520) plays with Benedict's Anderson's idea of the nation as "a horizontal comrade-ship" between men and argues that diaspora is a brotherhood of patrilineages, "a non-hierarchical relationship among men of the same generation and among their respective generations of ancestors and descendants who reach beyond the temporal and territorial space of the nation."

Not only gender but also diaspora nationalism has been an under-researched terrain of diaspora studies. Most of them tend to define diaspora as a challenge to nationalism and the unending celebration of globalization, and hence, ignore diaspora nationalism, "a very distinctive, very conspicuous, important sub-species of nationalism" (Gellner 101) though it has been "an increasingly more likely and more important form of ethno-nationalist expansion" (Skrbis xiii) since the 1990s. Therefore, the already limited studies of diaspora nationalism rarely focus on gender as "a category of analysis" (Scott). Yet, exploration of gender relations, constructs and discourses is crucial to understand the processes through which the collective "we" of the diasporas assumes a singular, unified and homogeneous form within a nationalist frame (Houston and Wright). Furthermore, the complex and dynamic ways in which the nation and the diaspora are interlocked are shaped by particular gender ideologies, constructions and relations: gender ideologies are a fundamental subtext which informs the individual strategies that men and women use to straddle the gap between 'nation' and 'diaspora' (Yeoh and Willis). The larger literature on nationalism and gender helps us to better understand how those gaps are straddled *via* gendered formations of diaspora nationalism.

There is a body of literature that analyzes national projects as simultaneously gender projects (Walby) constructing women as biological reproducers of the nation, as reproducers of the boundaries of the groups, as transmitters and carriers of its

culture, as signifiers of ethnic/national differences, and finally, as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles (Yuval-Davis and Anthias). Multiple images of women are considered to be central elements of the nationalist discourse which constructs women simultaneously as victims of underdevelopment, symbols of modernity of the new nation (Kandiyoti), symbols of national honor, the mothers of the nation (Chatterjee, The Nationalist Resolution), the subjects who will protect the spiritual sphere of the community and its cultural authenticity (Chatterjee, Colonialism), and goddesses and preservers of the past (Fleming). Nationalisms are gendered to the extent that they reproduce different and particular discourses, constructions and images of masculinity and femininity: while a 'national' man is portrayed as "the martyr/protector/soldier/hero" in the nationalist discourse, the female is cast as a "mother/guardian, the carrier of the tradition and cultural mores" (Neluka). This study aims to open a parenthesis in the larger studies on gender and nationalism through exploring the gendered formations of a ghost nationalism, namely, Circassian diaspora nationalism.

**Circassian Diaspora Nationalism in Turkey**

Circassians are the indigenous people of the North-West Caucasus who were deported into the Ottoman lands such as Anatolia, Syria and Balkans in the nineteenth century as a result of the Russian expansion into the Caucasus, support of the Ottoman Empire and unfulfilled promises by the European states. As the largest wave of immigration was to Anatolia, Circassians in Turkey today are considered the largest community when compared to other Circassian communities in the Middle East and in Europe.

The 19$^{th}$ and 20$^{th}$ centuries witnessed three generations of Circassian activism in Turkey: the first generation of Circassian activism which started with the Second Constitutional Period became invisible with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the new Republic. It appeared "under the guise of North Caucasian Turks" in the 1950s and it was characterized

by timidity, anti-communism and “ephemeral and volatile” organizations and magazines (Bezanis 141). The politically turbulent decade of the 1970s led to the emergence of the second generation as two groups: namely, the ‘revolutionaries’ (*devrimci*) suggesting that Circassian rights could only be attained through a socialist revolution, and the ‘returnists’ (*dönüşçü/göççü*) who advocated a return to the Caucasus (Shami, Circassian Encounters 624). The third generation emerged as a result of the post-Soviet conjuncture that challenged all the Circassian activist groups in Turkey and the existing discourses with regard to identity, culture, homeland and ethnicity: no revolutionaries were left and the “utopia of return” was challenged by the changing meanings of 'homeland' (Shami, Circassian Encounters 643). Since the 1990s, with the impacts of the processes of globalization as well as the liberalization and democratization processes in Turkey, Circassian activists have tried to redefine their relationship with the Turkish state and demand multicultural citizenship policies.

Among these different generations of Circassian activism in Turkey, only the returnists of the 1970s from the second generation declared themselves to be solely Circassian nationalists. Yet, some intellectuals and public servants from the first generation such as Mehmet Fetgeri Şoenu, Jabağı Baj, İsmail Berkok etc. considered Circassians a nation of its own and synthesized different currents of their time with Circassian nationalism. Inside the third generation, there have been groups that openly call themselves nationalists. For the other groups inside those different generations, Circassian agendas have been explicit and yet, intertwined with different projects such as Ottomanism, Kemalism, Islamism, Turkish nationalism(s), leftism etc. in varying degrees. As those different constellations of Circassian diaspora nationalism in Turkey require further analysis, I argue that Circassian diaspora nationalism should be studied simultaneously from within and beyond the declarations of the

activists[3]. The interviewees of this study were not unanimous in terms of associating themselves with nationalism either, but, given their agendas and activism, I consider them to be very colorful actors of nationalism that appears as a ghost in line with the developments in Turkey, the Caucasus, and the world.

My definition of Circassian nationalism as a ghost of the 19th and 20th centuries needs refinement and research that delves into Circassian activism and its connections with Ottoman politics, Turkish politics, Caucasian and Russian politics. Such a research is beyond the scope of this article and may eventually become another article for another special issue on Circassian nationalism. Focusing on a limited time period of Circassian nationalism, this article argues that a subtle web of relations with the host community, homeland and other nationalisms shapes diaspora nationalism, and these interconnections are made available to diaspora nationalisms not only via political and technological developments, but also through particular gender constructions and discourses. These gendered interconnections of diaspora nationalism are also significant to understand how diasporic identities are constructed, transformed and (re)claimed.

**Discussion**

This study is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with Circassian[4] activists and intellectuals conducted in Ankara

[3] Similarly, Charles King (18) in his book, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, explores "the search for the elusive concept of freedom –by the peoples of the Caucasus and by the many outsiders who have gone there looking for it themselves" and refers to the old and new ghosts of the Caucasus.

[4] This study uses "Circassian" as a historical category rather than the name of an ethnically homogenous group. The term includes Adyge (including the Kabardian, Shapsug, Hatukuey, Beslenei, Bzedoug, Abzakh and so on) and other tribes (Chechens, Ossetians, Abkhaz groups). Though Chechens and Abkhaz are not considered to be Adyge, these

and İstanbul between February 2007 and June 2008. In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, interviewees are introduced with pseudo-names. I consider the interview "a site of knowledge construction," and the interviewee and interviewer "co-participants in the process" (Mason 227) and the interview responses are treated in this article not as giving direct access to "experience," but as actively constructed "narratives" involving activities which themselves demand analysis, the ultimate of which is *verstehen* in the Weberian sense (Silverman 36).

For most of the Circassian diaspora nationalists interviewed for this study, gender relationships were what made Circassians different from "the Turks", an overgeneralization as far as the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Turkey is concerned. They emphasized an element of civility as several interviewees referred to the Circassian society as "a more modern and advanced social form" than "the Turks" and as a community with lower rates of divorce, crime and physical violence against women and traditions that allowed Circassian women and men to coexist and flirt in the public. Hence, Circassian nationalists identify their society as "almost matriarchal." Gönül Ertem's study (175) points at similar claims by Circassians that their society is "already modern" and "non-segregated" with the elevated position and freedom of Circassian women. Shami (Feminine Identity 148), in her study on the relationships between feminine identity and ethnic identity among the Circassians in Jordan, highlights a similar discourse of difference in the claims that "Circassians (read: men) treat women better, they respect women more, they are never violent with them, women are trusted and hence free and not secluded, polygyny and divorce which are abusive for women are very rare."

In my field, all these claims of difference are based on the comparisons of "the Turks" and the Circassians, an attempt of the diaspora to differentiate itself from the host community. Yet,

groups are seen as historically and spatially inseparable from the Adyges of the Circassian diaspora in Turkey.

ironically, the discourse that aims to differentiate Circassians works for increasing their similarities with "others:" Circassians' claims to a matriarchal society parallel other nationalisms within Turkey, such as Turkish (Fleming) and Kurdish nationalisms (Mojab).

In some accounts of female activists and younger male activists, the difference of the Circassians, namely the high status of women became more ambiguous. Nurhan, for instance, narrated on female silence, a usual attribute of the image of the Circassian beauty and how it sustained the claims on high status through a comparison with "the others:"

> "When compared to a Turkish family, woman is valued, she is respected, but, in a way, she is oppressed through traditions. Avshar women are much freer. Circassian woman is terrified that it is going to be a shame. If her husband swears, then Avshar woman swears too. This is not happening for Circassians. It is not only women who do that but men also do that. …There was no such thing like beating woman among Circassians, I do not know how it is now but it almost did not exist. But why should she be beaten if the poor woman is telling nothing at all?"

Although the claim that physical violence against women is rare in the Circassian society in Turkey has no statistical evidence, it interestingly forms the backbone of the claimed difference from "the Turks." Reiterating the same argument, Meral reread the high status attributed to women among Circassians not as an individual asset, but as a familial matter:

> "For instance, there are not many people who beat their wives among us. It is wrong to say there are none, but it is really just a few because a woman is not a woman on her own; she is the daughter of a family, this is why she is important. Well, there is something between that family and the other family."

Such an account mentioned that it was the communitarian and familial ties that protected women. Therefore, the high

status of women that was claimed by the diaspora nationalists was indeed covering the women acting in accordance with these kinship ties. The female activists also underlined that the high status might come with some expectations from the Circassian women to "voluntarily refrain from the right to inheritance," accept "over-protection," and not to act like "other women," dance as "the Turks" do, make debaucheries, kiss and hold hands in public. They underlined that the image of the Circassian beauty/girl came with a price to be paid by women and some underlined that unless one paid those prices, especially the Circassians could easily ignore her.

Esat, a male activist with a leftist background, one of the few activists who employed the notion of patriarchy, explored female silence and narrated on the patriarchal means of emancipation, "patriarchal bargains" as Kandiyoti uses the term:

> "There is a really patriarchal model. I witnessed that woman is less significant than she is even in the average Turkish families since it is *[kaşer]* shameful that woman speaks too much or intervenes. Well, in this sense, a Kurdish woman may yell at something, she can get angry, she can tell a man something nearby her husband. Though we don't like to say it, this is a space of freedom when you think about it. …For example, I had much age difference with my father. …He used to tell me very old stories. For example, the people he celebrated the most were women who, *quote en quote,* did not betray their families, did not marry, and who drove back from everything and stood by their families. This was the sublime woman for him. Those days, maybe, he did not explain that with these words but that was what he told and celebrated. That was the ideal and best woman. That was seen as the best in that clan system. This was so because women could gain their status only by rejecting their sexual identities but they could not have done that as a bride."

Hence, in some accounts, female silence was seen as female disempowerment, a contradiction with the Circassian discourse on the freedom of Circassian woman, and the claim of "an almost matriarchal society" was transformed into a myth that was

sustained by patriarchal bargains that included desexualization of women, and "self-sacrifice" for the kin by women.

Although those claims of difference discursively are underlining a totally different set of gender relations than "the Turks" and "the others," Circassian women, parallel to the literature on nationalism and gender in Turkey, are regarded as the members responsible for the reproduction of the ethnic community and protection of the ethnic boundaries of the community. The discourse of Circassian diaspora nationalism is gendered to the extent that it provides men and women of the diaspora with different constructions, missions and roles. Especially the male activists portrayed the protection of the cultural heritage as "a particularly feminine national responsibility:"

> "In every family, there were two or three swords and wedges. What else would they bring? They had armors. In Uzunyayla, women had cut them and made [other things out of them.] What make a nation are their women. If they are conscious, human communities are transformed into nations. …If they gave the wealth of the nation to the salesmen *[çerçi]* for plastic bowls, if they threw those saddles to the trash… And this was what it happened."

*Vis-à-vis* the assumed threats of assimilation and "loss of the Circassian culture," the male activists pointed at women's inability to protect and even transform the community. In these accounts, while women formed the group responsible for the cultural reproduction of the community, men were immune from this reproductive mission.

Despite their past inabilities in terms of protecting the saddles in a world that was shaken by the unending wars, revolutions and political affairs of men throughout the early

decades of the 20th century,[5] Circassian women were still defined in an essentialist way as "naturally different from the other women in Turkey:" they were much better housewives; they were somehow automatically chaste, well educated and respectful. Those essentialist claims are rooted in the image of "Circassian girl", a prominent image in Turkey, especially among the non-Circassian groups. Ayşe Güneş-Ayata (79), in her research done in the shanty towns of Ankara, states that their ethnic identity works as an asset for the Circassian women, and they act as the willing reproducers and protectors of the *status-quo* and the traditional patriarchy. Although Circassian nationalists interviewed for this study complained about "being famous for their girls and foods," they indeed highlighted that Circassian women were essentially different in terms of chastity, beauty and manners.

Yet, the image was not always a positive one. In the life histories, gender was an important factor through which diaspora nationalists related with the host and these relations were not always narrated as positive encounters. According to some accounts, the essence of the Circassian women that was apparently accepted by the Circassians and "the Turks" was rejected by "the Turks" in time of wars and revolts of the early 20th century or with some popular culture images that also created some conflicts in the 1970s as a result of the rise of Turkish and Circassian nationalisms.[6] Some conflicts with the host community and state were also narrated as having gendered dimensions. For instance, in the life history of Nezih, the early encounters with the Turkish state were gendered encounters between the Circassians and "the others." Born in Maraş, an

[5] One of my female interviewees told her grandmother's complaints about "a life that was spent in the barn" as a Circassian woman. The latter was referring to the wars of the 1920s.

[6] One of my male interviewees mentioned that such a conflict happened in Düzce in the 1970s and it was about an erotic film, *Babayiğit* including a Circassian female character.

ethnically heterogeneous region of Turkey and having spent his childhood in the 1940s, the silent years of the Circassians in a single party Turkey shaped by the rise of totalitarian tendencies throughout the 1930s, Nezih narrated on the state's oppression on the ethnic community coinciding with a national humiliation as far as the Circassians were concerned:

> "I remember, the head of the district and others used to come. The village girls were commended to gather, and dance gatherings *[düğün]* were organized. Once my father did not send my sister, and they would almost whip my father. Well, it happened. They did not understand the Circassian culture. They made their girls courtesans and that thing of man and woman *[non-segregated dances]*… That is new in Turkish folklore. Otherwise, in Turkish culture, there was no such dancing within which men and women were together. …Now they claim to be the owners of all. *[Şimdi herşeyin sahibi kendileri mübarek.]*"

"The others" played a role not only in the conflicts and "misunderstandings," but also in the criticisms of the current situation by both sexes. Only with reference to "the others" could the myth of "an almost matriarchal society" be unveiled as Nurhan exemplified:

> "This pressure is the social pressure, and it is the pressure of a more backward society. Today in villages, they are giving up *wuig*.[7] Circassians used to be monogamous… This place has been a heaven for men. Polygamy, oppression of women, headscarf… Neglecting women, music, art…"

Although Nurhan criticized Circassian men for being similar to "the other men" of Turkey, it was not common for the activists to blame men for the assimilation and "loss of identity." While the

[7] *Wuig* is a Circassian dance which can be considered a walk of men and women as couples.

claims of differences from the host community are displayed and sustained through the constructions of femininity, it is the men and their masculine affairs (such as war making, politics, diplomacy) hand in hand with militarism that claim to “earn” the citizenship in the host country. The common phrase that “Circassians shed blood for this country” is indeed based on masculine experiences of war making. Both constructions, women protecting and signifying the difference and men connecting with the host state and community and earning the citizenship serve for the 'survival' of the diaspora. Yet, the service is gendered.

Furthermore, starting from the 1990s, Circassian masculinity has been redefined through participation into some of the wars and conflicts of the Caucasus either as voluntary soldiers or as aid donators. From a nationalist framework, such militaristic enterprises have been considered the fulfillment of diasporic duty to the homeland and hence, the affirmation of the survival of the diasporic identity. While the claims to equality and equal rights in the host country are based on the shared military experiences with the people of the Turkish Republic, modern diasporic discourse and diaspora nationalism are connected to the homeland through participation into the wars and politics of the homeland.

Despite those connections with the homeland, the Caucasus that became accessible after the 1990s was different than the diaspora nationalists imagined it. It was regarded as different from the diaspora in terms of traditions, morals, and values. Hence, diaspora nationalists have started to rethink about diaspora as the “real” site of the community that may have protected traditional values and culture much better than the homeland. Cahit narrated on the difference of the status of women in diaspora and homeland: “For instance, here we have developed a culture within which our woman does not work. In the Caucasus, it is the exact opposite, socialist culture imposed that woman should work. And men used this as an advantage.”

Such a discursive move has implied additional and increased emphasis on the significance of women’s roles in terms of

preventing assimilation and protecting the boundaries of the ethnic and cultural group. Since the 1990s, in the discourse of diaspora nationalism, constructions of femininity differentiate Circassian diaspora in Turkey not only from the people of Turkey, but also from the homeland.

While the intensified relations with the homeland strengthened the gendered roles of women as the protectors of "the essence," the 1990s was also the time when the idea of return could be put into practice. Yet, some of the male returnees were unsuccessful in terms of returning to the homeland not only because of economic reasons, but also because their wives and families mostly did not follow them or refused to "stay there" after return. Therefore, some stories of return included instances of unfitting wives who rejected the ideal and/or the practice of return. As a result of these "problems," since the 1990s, the masculine dynamics of the idea of return have become obvious. Şener highlighted the gendered dynamics of the notion of return and repatriation:

> "But women are always more sensitive, picky, they care more about details. For them, the schools of the children, their futures, the moral values of the society within which one settles are very important. Return, until today, has been a system thought dominated by men. What mattered in terms of return have been the ambitions of men, the discourses of men, the passions of men. Women's sensitivities have never been on the agenda."

Yet, Circassian women have also started to return to the Caucasus after 1990. Since they had no such titles in Turkey, they were not received as politicians or soldiers. They could have been perceived as the adventurers of two geographies, but they were welcome as emblems of the project of return and carriers of their nationality. Hence, once again over-protection and surveillance in the name of tradition awaited them as Hicran, who went to the Caucasus for some time "on her own", for instance, told me about the hardships of being a woman from diaspora in Abkhazia:

> "Afterwards when I said that I would be living alone, people invited me to live at their houses and stated that it was unnecessary for me to rent a house. They were afraid that something might have happened and this would be a very bad example. For instance, some people might break into your house, does not that happen in Turkey too? …Well, they told me that Abkhazian girls did not stay alone like that. I told them that I had been living alone in Turkey for the last 20 years, and I could do the same thing there. I told them that it would not be as dangerous as it was in İstanbul. Single and Abkhazian girl."

Erciyes (352), in her study on the Adyge-Abkhaz returnees, underlines the different trajectories of male and female returnees: While there are many men who married local Adyge and Abkhaz women in their homeland, the diaspora women choose not to, and they argue that adjustment to a different family life and everyday life in the homeland is very hard. Different gender regimes of the diaspora and the homeland provide women and men of the diaspora with different opportunities. While men can have easier time in terms of mingling with the homeland and being a transnational actor, women find themselves entrapped in a double difference, and new layers of over-protection and surveillance in the Caucasus. This is also in line with the findings of Kaya's (143) survey on Circassians in Turkey that underlines that Circassian women tend to associate themselves more with their place of birth as men tend to define themselves via global elements, i.e. being a Circassian and/or Caucasian.

Within the nationalist discourse of Circassians in Turkey, 'in-between-ness' is portrayed as a gender-neutral tenet. Yet, while the 'in-between-ness' of the Circassian man locates him as the actor in two geographies, the 'in-between-ness' of the Circassian woman works to locate her as the protector and reproducer of the cultural and ethnic identity between two geographies. Hence, not only diaspora nationalism but also its discourse on 'in-between-ness' has different and gendered implications for men and women of the diaspora.

As Circassian nationalism in Turkey employs a repertoire of gender constructions to connect to the homeland and the host

community and differentiate itself from both, the concepts of return and in-between-ness have proved to be gendered concepts since the 1990s –and even before- providing different life opportunities for men and women of the diaspora.

**Conclusion**

The core question that emerges in the literature on diaspora and gender is whether diaspora means emancipation and deconstruction of the traditional gender roles and patriarchy, or diasporas, especially when coupled with nationalism, produce new patriarchies. As diasporas are subjected to two sets of gender relations, those of the dominant society and those internal to the group (Anthias 573-574), women in the diaspora communities are "subject-ed by a double articulation of discourses of cultural difference and patriarchy" (Ganguly 38) which takes place among the relationships of the diaspora with the homeland, the host community and transnational network.

Similarly, Seteney Shami (Feminine Identity 153), in her analysis of women`s identity and ethnic identity among the Circassians in Jordan, states that gender is the contested domain through which ethnic majority and minority differentiation is maintained. She further argues that patriarchy is maintained through a constant reference to "the other", the Arabs in the Jordanian context, which "serves to control female behavior without directly confronting elements central to Circassian culture including the relative freedom of mobility for married women and the lack of sexual segregation (Feminine Identity 151).

As this study has not been a study on Circassian diaspora but on diaspora nationalism, these broader questions regarding the diaspora and patriarchy remain beyond the scope of this paper. Any further conclusions about a diasporic patriarchy requires a field study that goes beyond the diaspora nationalism and explores other dimensions of the diasporic gender regime such as cathexis and economy (Connell 74) in addition to a theoretical discussion of patriarchy. Furthermore, such an analysis of patriarchy in the diaspora should also include the very recent

developments in the Circassian organizations in Turkey such as the election of Yıldız Şekerci as the first female head of Kaffed, the largest Circassian organization in Turkey.[8] Also whether or not a new generation of women "policy-makers, organizers of protest rallies and columnists in community publications, achieving a level of prominence and influence that could scarcely have been imagined in the preceding seven decades," as Besleney (187) states, will emerge among the Circassians in Turkey, remains to be seen and studied as the number of women seems to be increasing in all Circassian organizations and groups in Turkey.

Hence, new research on the gendered dimensions of Circassian diaspora and diapora nationalism is needed. Several arguments, such as the "almost matriarchal society" that we see in the literature on Circassians, need to be qualitatively and quantitatively explored. Although the quantitative studies on the Circassians in Turkey (Kaya; Aslan) include several survey questions and findings on the Circassian traditions and practices of marriage, flirting etc., the results are also surprisingly gender blind: the question "Do you go to the mosque?" is generalized as pertaining to the religiosity of all Circassians though the numbers mostly refer to the male Circassians (Kaya 159) as most of the events at the mosques are attended by men in Turkey. In these accounts, "Circassian meals are cooked" at home (Kaya 167) and at the weddings (Aslan 84). Yet, the subjects, the cooks, the

[8] Her election triggered very interesting debates, such as whether women can be *thamade*, the elder and respected person who gained wisdom and leadership through experience, age and proper behavior in Circassian culture. Although almost all accounts on Circassian traditions refer to male and female *thamades,* Circassians in Turkey in reality have only male *thamades,* especially when the issue at stake is political, referring to elections, Circassian organizations, political parties, the future of the Circassians, etc. As a result of Şekerci's election, Circassians do and will revise their understanding of *thamade* for the time being. Whether or not this is just one of the many reversals that don't change the gender order (Connell 74) remains to be seen.

Circassian women remain undefined. Similarly a study on Circassians may claim to be a political history of Circassian activism while acknowledging the significance of the gender dimension of Circassian activism and highlighting its absence in the study (Besleney 187) despite the existence of women in all Circassian organizations, publications and groups. “The male hegemony in policy making” that Besleney (187) emphasizes in his very last pages seems to be normalized and reproduced by the knowledges that we produce. This special issue will hopefully help us to rethink about what we, as researchers, take for granted as the gender regime of the diaspora.

With these reservations and hopes in mind, I argue that the myths of the high status and freedom of Circassian women are constantly being reproduced in the diaspora, and diaspora nationalism has had a significant role in its reproduction. Diaspora nationalism, however fragmented or chaotic it is, locates itself in a constant 'state of emergency' that is rooted in the threat of assimilation, a necessity of return, etc. and hence, has the potential to constantly renew and recreate patriarchy in its modern forms. Furthermore, a gender regime that attributes different roles, duties and representations to men and women of the diaspora is one of the crucial formations of diaspora nationalism through which diasporic identity, history and boundaries are maintained and recreated.

Circassian nationalism in Turkey employs a repertoire of gender constructions to connect to the homeland and the host community and also differentiate itself. While differences are displayed and sustained through the constructions of femininity, claims to equality and citizenship rights are formulated through particular masculine experiences of war making, politics and diplomacy. The myth of “an almost matriarchal society,” and the very gendered -and yet apparently gender neutral- project of return and discourses on in-between-ness and transnationalism are the main items in the toolbox to revive and reclaim a ghost nationalism, namely the Circassian diaspora nationalism.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Aslan, Cahit. *Doğu Akdeniz'deki Çerkesler*. Serdar Yayınevi, 2005.

Besleney, Zeynel A. *The Circassian Diaspora in Turkey: A Political History*. Routledge, 2014.

Bezanis, Lowell. "Soviet Muslim Emigrés in the Republic of Turkey". *Central Asian Survey,* vol. 1, no. 1, 1994, pp. 59-180.

"Bir Umut Yeter'deki Ayrımcı İfadeler Sebebiyle Kanal D'ye Ceza". *Birgün*, 11 October 2018, https://www.birgun.net/haber/bir-umut-yeter-deki-ayrimci-ifadeler-sebebiyle-kanal-d-ye-ceza-233264.

Chatterjee, Partha. "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India". *American Ethnologist,* vol.16, no. 4, 1989, pp. 622-633.

---. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question". *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History,* edited by Kumkum Sargari and Sudesh Vaid, Kali for Women, 1989, pp. 233-253.

Clifford, James. "Diasporas". *Cultural Anthropology,* vol. 9, no. 3, 1994, pp. 302- 338.

Connell, Raewyn. *Masculinities.* 2nd ed, University of California Press, 2005.

"Çerkeslerden Kanal D Önünde Protesto". *Gazete Duvar*, 21 October 2018, https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2018/10/21/cerkeslerden-kanal-d-onunde-protesto/.

Doğan, Setenay Nil. "From National Humiliation to Difference: The Image of the Circassian Beauty in the Discourses of Circassian Diaspora Nationalists". *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no.42, 2010, pp. 77-101.

Erciyes, Cemre. "Diaspora of Diaspora: Adyge-Abkaz Returnees in the Ancestral Homeland". *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 17, no.3, 2014, pp. 340-361.

Ertem, Gönül. "Off the Feminist Plaform in Turkey: Cherkess Gender Relations". *Feminist Fields: Ethnographic Insights,* edited by Rae Bridgman, Sally Cole and Heather Howard-Bobiwash, Broadview Press, 1999, pp. 173-195.

Evergeti, Venetia. "Living and Caring between Two Cultures". *Community, Work and Family,* vol. 9, no. 3, 2006, pp. 347-266.

Fleming, K. E. "Women as Preservers of the Past: Ziya Gökalp and Women's Reform". *Deconstructing Images of the Turkish Women,* edited by Zehra Arat*,* St.Martin's Press, 1998, pp. 127-138.

Ganguly, Keya. "Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood". *Cultural Studies,* vol. 6, no. 1, 1992, pp. 27-49.

Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism.* Cornell University Press, 1983.

Geschwender, James. A. "Ethnicity and Social Construction of Gender in the Chinese Diaspora". *Gender and* Society, vol. 6, no. 3, 1992, pp. 480-507.

Gold, Steven. "Gender and Social Capital among Israeli Immigrants in Los Angeles". *Diaspora,* vol. 4, no. 3, 1995, pp. 267-301.

Gopinath, Gayatri. "Bombay, UK, Yuba City: Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora". *Diaspora,* vol. 4, no. 3, 1995, pp. 303-322.

Güneş-Ayata, Ayşe. "Etnik Kimlik ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet: Ankara'da Çerkes Kadınlar". *20. Yüzyılın Sonunda Kadınlar ve Gelecek Konferansı 19-21 Kasım 1997*, edited by Oya Çitçi, TODAİE İnsan Hakları Araştırma ve Derleme Merkezi Yayını, 1998, pp. 71-80.

Helmrich, Stefan. "Kinship, Nation and Paul Gilroy's Concept of Diaspora". *Diaspora,* vol. 2, no. 2, 1991, pp. 243-249.

Houston, Serin, and Richard Wright. "Making and Remaking Tibetan Diasporic Identities". *Social & Cultural Geography,* vol. 4, no. 2, 2003, pp. 217-232.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and Society,* vol. 2, no. 3, 1988, pp. 274-289.

---. *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar: Kimlikler ve Toplumsal Dönüşümler*. Metis Kadın Araştırmaları, 1997.

Kaya, Ayhan. *Türkiye'de Çerkesler: Diasporada Geleneğin Yeniden İcadı.* İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011.

King, Charles. *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Mason, Jennifer. "Qualitative Interviewing: Asking, Listening and Interpreting". *Qualitative Research in Action,* edited by Tim May, Sage, 2002, pp. 225-241.

Mojab, Shahrzad, editor. *Devletsiz Ulusun Kadınları: Kürt Kadını Üzerine Araştırmalar.* Avesta Yayınları, 2005.

"Nefret Dili Kabak Tadı Verdi". Jıneps Gazetesi, November, 2018, https://jinepsgazetesi.com/nefret-dili-kabak-tadi-verdi-14071.html.

Neluka, Silva. "'Mothers, Daughters and 'Whores' of the Nation': Nationalism and Female Stereotypes in Post-Colonial Sri Lankan Drama in English". *Journal of Gender Studies,* vol. 6, no. 3, 1997, pp. 269-277.

Ramji, Hasmita. "Engendering Diasporic Identities". *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*, edited by Nirmal Puwar, Berg Publishers, 2003, pp. 227-242.

Schick, Irvin Cemil. *Çerkes Güzeli: Bir Şarkiyatçı İmgenin Serüveni.* Oğlak Yayıncılık, 2004.

Scott, Joan. *Gender and the Politics of History*. Columbia University Press, 1999.

Shami, Seteney. "Feminine Identity and Ethnic Identity: The Circassians in Jordan". *Who is Afraid of Femininity? Questions of Identity*, edited by Margret Brügmann et al., Rodopi, 1993, pp. 147-155.

---. "Circassian Encounters: The Self as Other and the Production of the Homeland in the

North Caucasus". *Development and Change,* vol. 29, no. 4, 1998, pp. 617- 646.

Silverman, David. *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. Sage Publications, 2000.

Siu, Lok. "Queen of the Chinese Colony: Gender, Nation, and Belonging in Diaspora". *Anthropological Quarterly,* vol. 78, no. 3, 2005, pp. 511-542.

Skrbis, Zlatko. *Long-distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities.* Ashgate Pub., 1999.

Tsolidis, Georgine. "The Role of the Maternal in Diasporic Cultural Reproduction –Australia, Canada and Greece". *Social Semiotics,* vol. 11, no. 2, 2001, pp. 193-208.

Tuğsuz, Olcayto Ahmet. "Leyla". *Leyla*, Seyyal Taner (singer), 1986, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJFdcbXyPwM.

Walby, Sylvia. "Woman and Nation". *Mapping the Nation,* edited by Gopal Balakrishnan, Verso, 1996, pp. 235-254.

Yeoh, Brenda S. A., and Katie Willis, "'Heart' and 'Wing', Nation and Diaspora: Gendered Discourses in Singapore's Regionalization Process". *Gender, Place and Culture,* vol. 6, no. 4, 1999, pp. 355-372.

Yuval-Davis, Nira, and Floya Anthias. "Woman-Nation-State". *Nationalism*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, Routledge, 2000, pp. 1475-1488.