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Great Expectations: Studying My Own Community

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"So you say, you would marry anyone, no matter whoever it is?"[1]

Abstract

The literature on methodology in social sciences underlines advantages for the insider researcher in addition to more subtle problems and pitfalls in terms of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. This paper aims to explore my experiences as the insider researcher studying Circassians in Turkey, my own community and discuss their implications for researching Circassians in particular and ethnic groups in general. As the insider researcher position provided "great expectations" on the side of the researched and hence some critical advantages in the field for the researcher, the dual categories of insider and outsider are in reality rather fluid and contested. This article is an attempt to explore space in between: the negotiations, complexities and fluidities of positionality in the field and hence in the processes of academic knowledge production.

Keywords: *Methodology, insider research, positionality, Circassians*

Büyük Beklentiler: Kendi Etnik Grubunu Çalışmak

Özet

Sosyal bilimlerde araştırmacının 'içeriden', araştırılan grubun bir üyesi olması, araştırmacı ve araştırılan arasındaki ilişki ve mesafe açısından çıkabilecek sorunların dışında, araştırmacı için genelde avantajlı bir konum olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bu makale benim 'içeriden' bir araştırmacı olarak Türkiye'deki Çerkesleri çalışma deneyimlerimi ve bu deneyimlerin dar anlamda Çerkesleri, geniş anlamda ise etnik grupları çalışma açısından

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[1] In Turkish, "Ha kim olsa evlenirim diyorsun, öyle mi?" Interview by author, 23 March 2007, İstanbul.

sonuçlarını tartışmayı hedeflemektedir. İçeriden araştırma yapma pozisyonu, araştırılanlar açısından "büyük beklentiler" ile karşılansa ve araştırmacı açısından da önemli avantajlar sağlasa da, 'içeriden' veya 'dışarıdan olmak' verili pozisyonlar değildir, araştırmacının akışkan olarak dahil olduğu veya dışlandığı, müzakere edilen ve mücadeleli alanlardır. Bu makale içeri ile dışarı arasındaki alana, sahada ve dolayısıyla da akademik üretim süreçlerinde konumsallığın getirdiği müzakerelere, karmaşıklıklara ve akışkanlıklara bakmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Metodoloji, içeriden araştırma, konumsallık, Çerkesler*

Introduction

> "My father did not hear Circassian songs in public. Of course he listened on radio and cassettes. We used to listen to the Jordanian radio those days, on Saturday evening at four o'clock. …But apart from that he could not hear them in public space. When Doğan's cassette[2] [the first Circassian music artifact that has been produced for the national market] had been first on the market, I heard it on the street playing from a music store. There was no such thing. I felt… [She cries] I could not just stand there, I could not leave. It is not proper to cry in the middle of the street. It was just playing there as loud as it could be... It was dreadfully beautiful. He [my father] could not see these. I feel sorry for that."[3]

In May 2007, during the interview with Nisa, aged 58, a professional worker of a Circassian organization in İstanbul, as she shed some tears talking about her first encounter with the Circassian music in public space and related that to the memory of her father, I

[2] Nisa refers to Kusha Doğan's Circassian Folk Songs: Wered (1 Çerkes Halk Şarkıları: Wered 1) by Kusha Doğan (2000) which is the second Circassian music cassette, as the first one was Circassian Melodies (Çerkes Ezgileri) by Azmi Toğuzata (1995). The increasing cultural production of the Circassians in the 1990s went hand in hand with the post-Soviet conjuncture, processes of globalization and diasporization. For the processes and mechanisms of diasporization for Circassians in Turkey in the 1990s, see Doğan (2015).

[3] Nisa, interview by author, 18 May 2007, İstanbul. In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, within the text, pseudo-names are used.

also found myself with a couple of unexpected tears in my eyes. Knowing the street corner, the music store and the cassette that she was referring to, having experienced a similar encounter in one of the neighborhoods of İstanbul, having activists in my family just like her father, I couldn't help but (over)empathize with Nisa. Yet rather than asking 'the political science' questions on nation-states, diasporas and nationalisms, I spent some time there crying and sharing handkerchiefs with my interviewee.

As my initial reaction as the researcher after the interview was mostly confusion and desperation, I was later encouraged by an anthropologist in my dissertation committee to reflect on this occasion and critically engage with my Circassian identity and its relationship with the research. Hence I was invited to self-reflexivity to go beyond my comfort zone as a researcher (Hamdan 378), a strategy that many feminist ethnographers have encouraged others to incorporate into the investigative process (Oakley qtd. Bucerius, 706).

A young single Circassian woman at the age of 27, I was born and raised in İstanbul. As the daughter of two Circassians (Kabardians) who migrated from Kayseri, Uzunyayla, a Central Anatolian hub for Circassians to İstanbul in the 1970s and socialized and organized in the Circassian organizations, these organizations and Circassian activists in İstanbul have always been very familiar to me and *vice versa.* Furthermore, between the years 2002 and 2004, I participated in the youth committee of a Circassian organization. Since then, I had distanced myself from activism and studied the Circassians academically.

This paper revised, revisited and rewritten eight years after the dissertation was completed, is an attempt to explore my experiences as the insider researcher in terms of studying Circassians, my own community and discuss their implications for researching Circassians in particular and ethnic groups in general. After briefly exploring the methodological debates on conducting insider research and explaining the research design of my dissertation, I will explore my experiences as an insider researcher. As the insider researcher position provided me some advantages in the field, it did not guarantee a fixed power relationship as the interviews on which this

study is based took place within a series of negotiations between the researcher and the informants in terms of age, gender, class. This article aims to explore these negotiations in line with my complex and fluid role as the insider researcher studying Circassians, an academically underresearched ethnic group in Turkey.

Researching One's Own Community

Several accounts of social scientists, especially anthropologists who "go native" or "play the native card" explore the implications and complexities of the insider position for the social science research (Abu-Loghodi, Rosaldo, Kondo, Narayan). Researchers cite a variety of interrelated advantages to insiderness, which Labaree (103) has categorized into four broad values: the value of shared experiences; the value of greater access; the value of cultural interpretation; and the value of deeper understanding and clarity of thought for the researcher. Hence the studies on insider research underline advantages for the insider in terms of not only access and rapport but also in terms of the ability to understand the group and its culture. Chavez (qtd. in Greene 5) notes that unlike traditional training for outsider researchers that starts with "getting to know the field," insider researchers need to start by getting into their own heads; recognizing the ways in which they are like and unlike their participants; knowing which of their social identities may advantage and/or complicate the process. Furthermore, insider research may be more fruitful since some communities, such as diasporic communities, having already experienced the trauma of forced migration, must see the academic researcher as one they can trust and who is invested in their long-term wellbeing (Collet 2008). Alternatively, Lewis underlines that insider position may be advantageous for the researcher when the community considers researcher a threat of exposure and judgment:

> "There is a growing fear that the information collected by an outsider, someone not constrained by group values and interests, will expose the group to outside manipulation and control… The insider, on the other hand, is accountable; s/he must remain in the community and take responsibility for her/his actions. Thus, s/he is forced through self-interest to exercise discretion." (Lewis qtd. in Altorki 57).

Despite the existence of different levels of insiderness, lack of detachment from the field and the problem of role confusion as a result of dual roles (Asselin qtd. in Dwyer and Buckle) are among the clear disadvantages of the insider research. Given these risks, some researchers propose that achieving status as an outsider trusted with "inside knowledge" may provide the social scientist with a different perspective and different data than that potentially afforded by insider status (Bucerius 690).

Soraya Altorki (49) who conducted fieldwork among members of her own status group in her own society in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia states that despite certain immediate advantages such as the intimate knowledge of the vernacular, the ability to quickly "set up shop" in the field, and familiarity with the people and environment; a number of problems also had to be confronted such as the requirement of abiding by the norms expected of her as a native; overcoming the reluctance of informants to provide her with direct answers to her questions concerning religious practices and intra-family conflicts; and resocializing herself into her own culture. Furthermore, while familiarity with the culture under study may be a bonus, prior knowledge of the people studied provides no guaranteed advantage (Stephenson and Greer 129).

These problems arising from the insider researcher position have led scholars to underline the need to adopt a reflexive approach to different positionalities in the field and to look at particular *moments* of insiderness and outsiderness rather than taking insider and outsider positions as a starting-point for understanding researcher positionality (Baser and Toivanen 3). Furthermore, the methodological debates that are structured along the lines of "insider knowledge" versus "outsider objectivity claims" are problematized for treating ethnicity as a static and singular social category instead of taking it as situational, constructed and plural (Baser and Toivanen 5). Hence the critiques of the insider-outsider debate underline the need for a re-examination of the ways in which we, as researchers, instead of holding to a dichotomous perspective, may seek ways to occupy the space between insider and outsider, as Dwyer and Buckle (54) argue. Griffith (qtd. in Labaree 102) describes the researcher's social location and knowledge as 'always located somewhere', yet continuously moving back and forth between the positional boundaries of insiderness and outsiderness.

Research Design

This study is based on my dissertation on the formations[4] of diaspora nationalism through the case of Circassians in Turkey. Circassians are the indigenous people of the Northwest Caucasus who were *en masse* deported into the Ottoman lands in the nineteenth century. As a result of the Russian expansion into the Caucasus and the support of the Ottoman Empire, large numbers of Circassians immigrated to the Ottoman lands, such as Anatolia, the Syrian province, and the Balkans. Since the largest wave of immigration was to Anatolia, the Circassian community in Turkey today is considered the largest community of its kind, when compared to Syria, Jordan and Palestine/Israel and other diaspora communities formed through secondary migrations to Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States.

I conducted 28 semi-structured interviews in İstanbul and Ankara between February 2007 and June 2008 to understand diasporic and nationalist subjectivities. The interviews were conducted with two groups that were not mutually exclusive; activists in the Circassian decision-making groups (associations, foundations, platforms and youth committees) and intellectuals who, apart from their professional occupations, have books, articles, news, poems, translations and texts on Circassians. The two cities are selected because for the Circassians in Turkey, diaspora nationalism has been basically an urban phenomenon that resulted from the migrations to urban areas throughout the 1960s and 1970s and led to the establishment of Circassian organizations in these cities.[5] Due to such

[4] The concept of 'formations', as Hall and Gieben state, refers to both political, social, economic and cultural processes as the motors of the formation processes; and articulation of these processes into multiple domains such as the polity, the economy, the social structure and the cultural sphere (Hall and Gieben 7).

[5] For a detailed political history of Circassians in Turkey, see Besleney. For a discussion of Circassian diaspora politics in Turkey and its relationships with the Caucasus in terms of return migration see Erciyes.

a background of migration, six of my informants were born in cities as the rest were born in the villages.

Six of the interviewees were female, and 22 interviewees were male. A focus on women in the in-depth interviews might have enabled us to hear the voices of Circassian women, the most silent group in a silenced community (Alankuş 12). Yet at the time of the research, most authors of the magazines published by Circassians in Turkey were male; and discussion e-mail groups which had been the channels of communication for the Circassians in Turkey since the mid 1990s proved to be masculine sites. Furthermore, Caucasian organizations were masculine sites of politics with a couple of activist women.

In terms of age, the interviewees' ages ranged between 34 and 88. The distorted distribution of the interviewees in terms of age and sex was a result of the characteristics of Circassian organizations and groups in Turkey: they were dominated by elders and men.

In terms of ethnic composition, the respondents were Kabardian, Abkhaz, Abzakh, Beslenei, Ubykh, Chechen, Shapsug and Chemguy. Despite the debates and variations of the term in the Caucasus and other diasporic communities, I employed the term Circassian as a historical rubric for peoples originally from North Caucasia that have been settled in Turkey in the nineteenth century. The term Circassian here includes Adyge (including the Kabardian, Shapsug, Hatukuey, Beslenei, Bzedoug, Abzakh from the Northwest Caucasus) and other tribes (Chechens, Abkhaz groups from the Northeast Caucasus). The non-Adyghe interviewees were included in the study to the extent that they were part of the Circassian organizations and groups in Turkey. Hence I had six Abkhazian interviewees and one Chechen as the rest were Adyghe.

As an insider researcher with some years of activism in Circassian organizations in Turkey, my basic concern had been to include Circassians activists and intellectuals from different groups and organizations. As no diasporic group is a monolythical block, Circassians also display a huge amount of heterogeneity in terms of ideology, attitudes towards homeland and diaspora politics. When one of my informants, looking at my list of interviewees, warned me that I had a very difficult task at hand because "each of those people

is an autonomous republic", I took her words as a compliment since capturing that heterogeneity in terms of groups, organizations, perspectives and political affiliations was among the aims of my research. Outsider researchers studying an ethnic group may have harder times to grasp that heterogeneity especially if they employed snowballing techniques that may lead them to study one ideological group and neglect the rival groups. They are easier to be 'monopolized' by rival groups that may tend to ignore each other and therefore claim monopoly as the voice of the community. Activists may prove to be parsimonious in terms of sharing the researcher, the potential producer of academic knowledge with their dissidents.

As my past years of activism enabled me to easily map out the political and social organizations and groups of Circassians in Turkey; they ironically led to my one and only rejection in the field. One of the younger activists with whom we used to happen to have different ideas during my short years of activism did not reply the introductory mail at all. Though I had distanced myself from activism for some years, my activist background impeded my access as a researcher into a youth group of Circassians, most of whom were ironically undergraduate and graduate students. Hence insider identities cannot be equated with automatic access, trust and rapport in the field.

To further ensure the inclusion of diasporic heterogeneity in the research, I preferred to share the list of future interviewees with all of the interviewees; and I asked them for further advice. Hence, 'the list' resulted from a series of collective thinking between the researcher and the researched. My interviewees not only came up with additional names for me to interview but they also sometimes helped me in my contacts with the next interviewees.

Studying My Own

The initial reactions to my research by the informants were always in the form of appreciation: they appreciated me for studying such a topic and a community "which needs to be studied carefully." I was celebrated as the researcher "who will now understand us" *vis-à-vis* other researchers whom they regarded as 'limited' in terms of their understanding of Circassian culture, community and history.

Some of my informants had ties of kinship and friendship to my (extended) family while some of them knew my family name. Shami (129) in her research on Circassians in Jordan states that in a society where family is an all-important institution in structuring social relationships, it stands to reason that the people wish to place the researcher within the context of a family. Similarly the relationships of my family established my *entrée* into the community while some informants knew me personally from the Circassian organizations.

Yet, despite the seemingly unproblematic presence of these relations and expectations that could only be the indicators of my insider position, my position as an insider was not an absolute. These positions of insider and outsider proved to be fragile notions as my participant-informants positioned me as insider and outsider, demonstrating how the rigidity of these boundaries can collapse (Halstead 307). Thus, the shifting positions of outsider and insider were prevalent in my research: while I was continuously celebrated as 'one of us' (with the phrases such as "you know it too," "you know the community well"), I was also sometimes transformed into the outsider position since I was an urban Circassian raised in the cities, not in the villages; since I did not know the Circassian language; since –based on those- there was a possibility that I might not exactly know the traditions, the Circassian etiquette (*xabze*).[6]

Despite these changing positions as an outsider and insider, I was most often regarded as "our researcher who will understand us better." Due to being considered "our researcher who will now understand the Circassian community in Turkey," I was provided with every kind of material that, my interviewees thought, would interest me during and after the interviews: they shared their family trees, books, reports, photographs, magazines and contacts with me. Some

[6] Among the multiple definitions of xabze are "'respect for elders, inviolability of the guest, and friendship treated as a near-sacred institution" and "a set of norms that value respect, generosity, tolerance, hospitality, honesty, decency and honour and one that does not hold material gains of life in higher regard than relations between the members of the society" (Richmond; Berkuk qtd. in Besleney 35).

informants shared their evenings after work and Saturday mornings with me so that we would work better. Hence, they regarded my research very significant and each of them stated this not only verbally but also through their actions, the gifts they gave me, the times they spent with me. Though some of them were authors of books, articles or stories on Circassians, they stated that it was "different that I wrote and studied Circassians." To that extent, I was considered different from them as a researcher "who knows how to do it scientifically" and also from other researchers in terms of my insider position. The expectations from me also had some patriotic and nationalist content: For instance, Nezih, a lawyer in his late 60s with 40 years of activism in Circassian organizations who also happened to be an old friend of my parents, wished that I would be a girl who would hopefully serve the Kabardian culture.

I was told by my informants that I had full trust in the field as the insider. However, my informants trusted me to the extent that they trusted any Circassian. Thus, in some instances, issues of mistrust were a reflection of mistrust and suspect in the community itself and its members. When I was demanding his consent to use a recorder, Gürtuğ, an engineer aged 62 with a long history of activism, for instance, looked at my recorder and stated that "I, too, would use a voice-recorder like that if I were an agent." When he was talking about his past, he mentioned that these already "existed in the files of those people who were after him." I replied that I did not know about these and I did not have access to those kinds of things. After some time, when asking questions about the Turkish state, I provoked Gürtuğ a little to further explore the origins of his thoughts on me, 'the researcher' whom he never met before:

"Setenay: The state… When we started the interview, you told that these [information] existed in the files.

Gürtuğ: You will add these; then, it will get richer. [*Bunları da ilave edersiniz, zenginleşir.]*

Setenay: Will I? …Will I just wander like that if I had such an access?

Gürtuğ: I am joking. Here there are so many people like that. [*Öyleleri çok burada.*]

Setenay: I do not have these [access to those]. I wish I had those so that I would not wander around so much [for the interviews].

Gürtuğ: No, we do not have anything secret. [*Yok, gizli bir şeyimiz yoktur*.]"[7]

What Gürtuğ referred as "here" was the Circassian association in Ankara; and his expectations of me were reflections of his expectations from the Circassians. What shaped his expectations from me whom he never met before was the myth of National Intelligence Organization (*MİT)* that was prevalent in every interview in different forms and levels. As the myth of *MİT* is beyond the scope of this paper,[8] the basic idea included in the myth is that any Circassian can be a member, collaborator, agent or something of *MİT* or other mechanisms of surveillance by the Turkish state. Therefore, without knowing me in person, Gürtuğ started the interview voicing the possibility that I might be something else or more than a Ph.D. student. As a Circassian and as a researcher specialized in "political science," my research was suspect. The myth of *MİT* was so dominant in the interviews in particular and contagious in general that I sometimes caught myself thinking whether or not I interviewed any of these "collaborators."

Another instance of suspicion took place in the interview with Nurhan. Nurhan, a retired lawyer in her early 70s was the only person who did not consent to the use of the voice recorder as some informants preferred to go off-the-record for some questions. Rejecting the use of the recorder, Nurhan stated that as a Circassian in Turkey she was terrified after the assassination of Hrant Dink.[9]

[7] Gürtuğ, interview by author, 3 February 2008, Ankara.

[8] For a detailed discussion of the myth of MİT and the relationships between the Circassians in Turkey and Turkish state, see Doğan (2014).

[9] Hrant Dink was a Turkish Armenian journalist and columnist. He was the editor-in-chief of the weekly bilingual Turkish-Armenian newspaper Agos that was established in 1996 with a circulation of 5000. He was assassinated in Istanbul in January 2007 by a 17-year old Turkish nationalist. As the event led to public protests in Turkey, media covered both the assassination widely. The trials for the Dink case still continue.

Interview with Nurhan took place in March 2007, two months after the assassination of Hrant Dink. Then Nurhan stated that she could not dare to purchase a subscription of the newspaper *Agos* since she was warned by her maid that there was the branch of an ultra nationalist political party nearby. Interestingly, Nurhan was taking care of the elderly people in her family for the last ten years and she had not been active in terms of participating into Circassian events, associations. Yet, as one of the earliest interviews of my research and closest to the assassination of Hrant Dink, she believed that she had to be more cautious in terms of issues of ethnicity. Interview with Nurhan made me concerned about the future interviews since her fears and concerns that had been triggered after Hrant Dink's assassination overcame her fifty years of friendship with many members of my family that went beyond generations. After such an experience of closure, I chose to give a break to the interviews.

During most of the interviews, I was there not only as a researcher but also as a person whose life history and identity was an essential part of the interview. As such a position is to some extent valid for all researchers, I was always personally and deeply included in the accounts of the interviewees: "You bear the name, we have the theme of Seteney Guashe";[10] "In those days, you were not born yet"; "The Kabardian dialect you speak… has the voices of the forest… You are not able to say it but they whistle"; "Especially in Uzunyayla where you, too, belong …maybe you heard about it, there were confrontations among your people [*sizinkilerden*] too." Thus, I was constantly reminded that they knew me personally and my life history was embedded in their personal histories. Furthermore, as acquaintances, my interviewees usually asked and told me about my

[10] Seteney Guashe is a feminine mhytological figure in Nart Sagas, Circassian epic tales. The mother of the Narts, a fertility figure and matriarch (Tsaroïeva 119), she is defined with unrivalled reason, wisdom and the gift of presage, that is to perceive the future in advance (Özbay 116).

relatives as well as their relationships with them. Some older informants knew my family tree better than I had ever known.

Therefore I was received and treated as a "daughter of the community." Seteney Shami, in her study of her own community, Circassians in Jordan, explores her position as the "daughter:"

> "In the Circassian research, I felt that all avenues were open to me. Common ethnicity overrode class and gender differences. Being the daughter and granddaughter of people whom my informants knew or could remember, would immediately establish the atmosphere of trust which is essential for good rapport. In addition, the fact of my being Circassian established in my informants' eyes enough motivation on my part to be involved in such a research project. While other anthropologists may often have to justify their interest, mine was automatically put down to "ethnic patriotism." This allowed me access to information, opinions, and emotions that I have no doubt would have been denied to a non-Circassian. On the other hand, it also laid a heavy responsibility upon me. To a community that was undergoing a great deal of change and anxiety about its ethnic identity, my research seemed to confirm its "specialness" and the reality of its cultural distinctiveness. Often my informants would thank me for my efforts, irrespective of whether they expected to see any results from the fieldwork" (Shami 136).

Another anthropologist studying Circassians, Gönül Ertem in her research in Eskişehir highlights her position as "a researcher from Ankara who is not really Circassian and who just knows that she had a great-grandmother who was known to be Circassian" which happens to be a common demographical narrative in Turkey: "I ask my reader to travel through discourses, places, relations of authenticity, difference and change, as I did as a *misafir kız* (guest girl) among the Cherkess" (54). "In the *Misafir Kız* role, I was at different moments taken into different groups as a guest-daughter, as an elder sister as well as being trusted as an independent 'Cherkess' woman" (Ertem 49).

Sufian Zhemukhov, in his analysis of Circassian nationalism after the end of Cold War based on participant observation, recognizes his insider position and his involvement in the Circassian nationalist movement in many capacities and states that:

> "However, he stays strictly on the academic ground and does not regard himself as a Circassian activist, keeping in mind the well-known argument that 'no serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist' (Hobsbawm 12). The author hopes that his rich experience in the field has enhanced his empirical knowledge without affecting his academic methods for two reasons – first, he never committed himself to any particular strand and earnestly tried to participate in the movement with a vision of it as a whole, and secondly, he developed his research methods long before he entered the nationalist movement. The author hopes that he is able to regard his experiences as academic fieldwork and stay objective in his research" (Zhemukhov 504).

Eiji Miyazawa, an anthropologist who studied memory politics in Uzunyayla, Kayseri, on the other hand, did not elaborate on the subject of reflexivity in doing field research and writing ethnography though he admits his awareness of his bias against a group of Circassian people turned his research into a very self reflexive process (Miyazawa 11-12).

Among these insider and outsider researchers who studied Circassians with a sense of self-reflexivity, my negotiations and position as a researcher were similar to Seteney Shami's experiences in the field. According to Ganguly, though the status as a daughter/son of the community might make it difficult for the researcher to negotiate questions of authority, such a position might also provide an exemption from the hostility and indifference that some researchers face in the field. Being the insider, I was supposed to know and fit into the cultural repertoire indispensible for membership in the community and my educational and/or urban background did not provide any exemption in terms of the expectations from the daughter.

Furthermore, as my position as the daughter was consolidated, 'the power asymmetry' between the researcher and the researched was continuously transcended. For instance, in the interview with Zekeriya, a lawyer aged 86 who spent a life time in Circassian organizations and political parties in Turkey, the so-called hierarchy between us, as the researcher and the researched was toppled from the very beginning. After I informed him about my affiliations, my

research, the principles of anonymity and took his permission to use a recorder, Zekeriya told me to "sit down."[11] I immediately followed the order and sat down. Meanwhile, he was doing some walking exercise as his doctor completed his examination and left the room. Worried that such a distance between us would impede the conversation and - to be honest- also the recording, and also extremely restless to be seated while an elder Circassian was standing; I stood up and I told Zekeriya in a very low voice that "I wish you had sat, too." ["*Siz de otursaydınız*."] He asked me whether he would not sit down if I did not ask him. ["*Sen söylemezsen ben oturmayacak mıyım?"*] Calling me "donkey" without raising his voice, he pretended that he was angry and he slapped in my face very slowly, without hurting. I immediately apologized and sat. As I was very ashamed at that moment, I later realized that that instance was the moment Zekeriya took the control and revised the power relationship between us, as the researcher and the researched. In the filed, the interviewee and the researcher are in a relationship which is not only contextually specific, but continually shifting and inscribed in multi-faceted power relations which had structural dominance and structural subordination in play on both sides' (Bhavnani qtd. in Henry 75). Despite my tension after this event, Zekeriya did not feel any tension or he did not imply anything about that moment: his upperhand was fixed and that symbolic act of fixing the hierarchy was bygone for him. At that instance of our encounter, Zekeriya established that he was the *thamade,* the elder and respected people of the Circassian community who earn wisdom and leadership through experience, age and proper behavior as I was the young Circassian. He enjoyed reiterating the usual and 'traditional' scenario of Circassian social life: *thamade* who leads the young Circassian in a semi-harsh and semi-humorous manner and the young Circassian who just collapses out of shame and yet finally learns his/her lesson.

As I was expected to abide by the norms as the insider, I created "a self, how I want to be known by them" (Riessman qtd. in Hamdan

[11] Zekeriya, interview by author, 28 February 2007, İstanbul.

387): I tried not to ask elders their state of their health directly; I tried not to sit cross-legged; I tried not to turn my back etc. None of these performances as the insider researcher were automatic but devised as a result of the high expectations that are placed on the performance of the researcher to gain the subjects' trust. Chavez (qtd. in Greene 5) cites this as a complication of the insider status; large amounts of impression management may be required to maintain rapport and/or identity.

Yet I believe that abiding these roles as the insider consolidated the interviewees' trust in me since during the interviews, they, frequently, and voluntarily transcended those cultural limitations and norms. They, who were not supposed to use the names of their wives and children according to Circassian traditions and who would be careful about that in daily life, told me very personal details such as how they got married, how they got divorced, what they thought about their children's future marriages. Hence, as the insider researcher who also knew and proved that she knew how to 'go traditional' and abide by the norms and etiquette of the community, I was let to go beyond the traditional boundaries. Hence I argue that the tests that I have to pass as the insider researcher were quite different from the ones that an outsider researcher would face.

My position as the daughter of the community also enabled my interviewees to 'protect' me through warnings. For instance, Nurhan, after she shared her concerns about the assassination of Hrant Dink, warned me about the risks involved in my research: "Are you doing that research on the future of Circassians, diaspora? When your mother told me, I found it a little risky. It is not risky for me of course, but it may be risky for you."[12] She even provoked my mother who happened to be her friend to warn me about the potential risks involved.

Yet the daughter of the community position had unexpected implications for my field research. As the daughter, my experience in the field was surprisingly similar to Schramm's research experience in

[12] Nurhan, interview by author, 23 March 2007, İstanbul.

Ghana: “Yet in none of my interviews with a Pan-African-minded person was I allowed to take up the position of the sole investigator. The dynamics of question-and-answer were rather unpredictable and I myself was often therefore being turned into a subject of research” (182). As Schramm explains her experience as a stranger who was marked in very negative terms such as alien, intruder and enemy; she states that the continuous friction that she experienced in the field forced her to acknowledge that she had a white subject position and that it was not a neutral one (173). Unlike Schramm, my position was an insider position and yet mine was not a neutral one, too.

During the interviews, I was turned into a subject of research on several grounds because for the interviewees I was more than a researcher. Most often after the interviews and sometimes during the interviews, I was tested by my interviewees on whether or not I knew the meaning of my own name; whether and to what extent I could speak Circassian; and whether I knew *xabze* (Circassian etiquette).

The younger male interviewees and female interviewees of all ages asked my future marriage plans as I had some questions on masculinity, femininity, marriage, and the gendered dimensions of Circassian diaspora in Turkey. For instance, in the aftermath of the interview, a female informant suddenly asked me about what I thought about marriage and then advised me to marry a Circassian or at worst an American or Englishman since I, as a Circassian, “would not be able to make it otherwise.” Similarly Nurhan asked me about marriage. When I told her that I did not exactly know about my future decisions, she said “Then you are saying you will marry whoever comes, aren’t you?” [*Ha kim olsa evlenirim diyorsun, öyle mi?*] With my apathetic answers regarding my marital preferences and their relationship to ethnicity, I unfortunately did disappoint some of my informants.

These reactions were related to my position as the insider, as the daughter of the community. On that level, I was more than a researcher; I was associated with the young Circassians, the present situation and the future of the Circassian community in Turkey as Zekeriya concluded the interview with his quite bitter perceptions of me and my research:

> "[With those Caucasian culture organizations] the culture persisted. Without them …Circassian language would have been forgotten to a greater extent. Just like Seteney who is 21 years old and does not know Circassian despite her interest, everybody would be Seteney. [Herkes Seteneyleşirdi.] Well, they would have forgotten Circassianhood, they would have had the idea that they were Circassian and Circassians had a culture. Now Seteney is dealing with that. If you go to the Uzunyayla association, you will learn a thousand words in two or three months. There is also one in Bağlarbaşı [association]. Look for an opportunity to go to one of them."[13]

After our horrible start in the interview, I earned neither the scholar title nor the authentic Circassian identity in the eyes of Zekeriya. He even belittled my age to challenge my credentials as a researcher since I did not speak Circassian though my parents, as he knew, were native speakers of the Kabardian dialects. He even invented a word such as *Seteneyification (Seteneyleşme)*, a process which the activists tried hard to avoid, namely assimilation, loss of language and hence culture and identity. His interview was my first interview due to his age and I found myself as the national failure of Circassians.

Zekeriya was not the only informant who asked about my knowledge of Circassian and yet he, due to his position as the *thamade*, was the boldest one in terms of convincing me to learn Circassian (Adyghe language) as an academic endeavor. The other respondents were kind enough to console me for my lack of Circassian and some even speculated on the possibility and necessity of a more transnational or even cosmopolitan Circassian identity. Despite these consolations, I missed the language element which had a significant role as a mediator of a speaker's cultural identity and cultural "authenticity" in the eyes of discriminating research participants: accounts by various native scholars indicate that the display of communicative competence can sanction one's identity as both a researcher and a community member (Baugh; Zentella qtd. in Jacobs-Huey 794), whereas ignorance can subvert one's research efforts by

[13] Zekeriya, interview by author, 28 February 2007, İstanbul.

marking one as culturally challenged or detached (Foster 1996; Rickford qtd. in Jacobs-Huey 794).

Hence my insiderness was far from being fixed but was related to a number of critical factors that were determined by the circumstances of the moment (Labaree 97). As the dynamics of the relationship between researchers and researched that was initially established on the basis of common ethnicity, religion or language were doomed to change as a result of gender, age and class differences (Ganga and Scott qtd. in Magdalena Nowicka and Anna Cieslik 8), I, like other insider researchers, became increasingly aware of latent assumptions on common culture I presumed to share with researched (Magdalena Nowicka and Anna Cieslik 8).

Concluding Remarks

In July 2009, when I was writing the last pages of my dissertation, I thanked my interviewees whom, during the field for the study, I regarded more than acquaintances, friends or interviewees but co-producers of knowledge:

> "…those activists who provided me not only with their life stories, thoughts and dreams but also with every document, support and excitement. I thank each of them for celebrating and encouraging me as if I was doing the most wonderful thing in the world: I do not think all researchers are as lucky as me."

Yet, looking back in time, my experience of studying my own community cannot only be summarized as thankfulness, celebration of the common shared ethnic identity and hence the mutual cooperation to produce knowledge. My position of the insider researcher, which had been much praised in the literature as opposed to the outsider researcher, was less than automatic, unproblematic, uncontested and comfortable.

My insiderness had been fluid as I was, in some instances and moments, quickly transformed from 'our researcher' to an agent of national security. It was sometimes my lack of Circassian that threw me out of the 'inside' as it was sometimes my urban and/or overeducated background which might have been an impediment in terms of the knowledge in *xabze*.

Furthermore, my position as the researcher 'asking the questions' was challenged with interruptions that transformed me into an object of inquiry. There were moments in which I was quickly and easily transformed 'from being a knowledgeable academician' into someone to be tested with the basic questions, such as the meaning of my own name. As I had some questions regarding marriage, gender, masculinity and femininity, I unexpectedly ended up in a position to talk about my –nonexistent- marriage plans in the aftermath of the interviews. I somehow found myself updating and convincing Meral that I wasn't engaged last year and simultaneously listened to her advise to marry a Circassian or at worst an American or Englishman since I "would not be able to make it otherwise." As I was not in a position to react or reject those questions and comments regarding my 'private life', I was –surprisingly- not prepared for these questions. As a feminist researcher, I was prepared to answer any traditionally political question but not the marital ones.

I was not also expecting an informant, a friend of my mother calling and provoking her to warn me about the potential risks involved. I was not expecting to be a national failure as I had hoped to be the researcher for people who otherwise would have no history (Scheper-Hughes qtd. in Bucerius 698). Yet qualitative researchers and feminist researchers benefit more from the messy examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research" (Pillow qtd. in Hamdan 382). Looking at particular *moments* of insiderness and outsiderness rather than taking insider and outsider positions as a starting-point for understanding researcher positionality (Baser and Toivanen 3), this paper aimed to reflect on these messy examples in my fieldwork. Such an approach that challenges and deconstructs the unitary categories of insider and outsider, the researcher and the researched through the "messy instances" in addition to stories of harmony and rapport may help us to critically engage with the communities that we study and the knowledge we produced on them.

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