Ethno-nationalism of the Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks: A diaspora perspective of their response to change in multiple locations, with a particular emphasis on Turkey.

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ABSTRACT

The stateless Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks, deported from their homeland in 1944, have until today been unable to return to 'Ahiska', located in southern Georgia. This thesis addresses their current situation with particular emphasis on their relationship with Turkey and draws on Anthony D. Smith's cultural approach to nationalism (Smith 2010) to help understand how the Ahiska Turks' 'Turkish nationalist' expression is displayed and fits in the wider study of nationalism. This study applies an ethno-symbolist approach to nationalism with its emphasis on the *ethnie's* reliance on symbols, memories, and values particularly highlighted while being in diaspora. As the Ahiska Turks live scattered across ten nations, literature from diaspora studies is drawn upon to analyse different communities as they adjust transnationally and (re)connect with Turkey, which is one of their 'homelands'.

Applying an ethnographic approach, this qualitative research examines the Ahiska Turks through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The primary fieldwork was conducted in Turkey, extending to supplemental locations in Central Asia, the United States, and Georgia. Utilizing a multi-site approach is advantageous to understanding the complexity of the Ahiska Turks' lives and experiences to reflect on their views of Turkishness and growing sense of affinity with Turkey. The conclusions reveal how their oral ethno-history emphasises an ethno-nationalism which both maintains their Turkishness held and protected in the Soviet period, while also beginning to integrate itself into official Turkish nationalist narratives. Secondly, the view towards their 'homeland', 'Ahiska', continues to be central to group solidarity, but the group also stresses Ahiska's Ottoman (Turkish) roots in order to integrate with the 'imagined' homeland of Turkey. Finally, ethnoreligious nationalism, largely suppressed under the Soviet Union, is leaned on to further connect to Turkey in the diaspora and to maintain their sense of Turkishness and religious identity in the present day.

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by

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ______________________ (Candidate)

Date 30.8.22

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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DEDICATION

To Judith, your encouragement, support, and love carry me daily and were instrumental in the finishing of this academic journey. Your sacrifice has been immeasurable, and I appreciate you very much. Te amo!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP)
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
PKK	Kurdish Nationalist Kurdistan Workers Party (TR: *Partiya Karkeran Kürdistan*—PKK)
TOKI	Government backed housing community (TR: *Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı*)
RU	Russian language
TR	Turkish language
UZB	Uzbek language
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

GLOSSARY

Ahiska Turks' dialect[1]

Ahiska	(TR: Ahıska) Term used for the geographical region and five districts in Meskheti-Javakheti where the Ahiska Turks' villages lay. A term used to distinguish themselves and where from. It is also the name for Akhaltsikhe, Georgia as designated by the Ahiska Turks.
Ahıskalı	Someone from Ahiska
Bibi	Paternal aunt.
Bizim sennik,	'Our people'; that is, other Ahiska Turks.
Emi	Paternal uncle (or used for older man).
Gelinin hinkali	Bride's families last meal with her after wedding ceremonies.
Hala	Maternal aunt.[2]
Komindant altinda	Description of time the Ahiska Turks were in 'special settlements between 1944-1956.
Mantı	Ahiska/Central Asian/Turkish dumpling.
Madjid (Arabic)	Mosque, or community centre and place of worship for Muslims. *(*TR: *mescit)*
Nene (nine)	*P*aternal & maternal grandmother (or used for an older woman).
Pilav	Traditional meal of Rice, vegetables, and meat (called Osh in Uzbek).
Toy (UZB)	Wedding ceremony
Sünnet toy (UZB)	Circumcision party.
Temel etmek	Ahiska Turks use in reference to the brides giving/showing respect.

Turkish

Abla	Older sister
Anavatan	motherland
Babavatan	Fatherland

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[1] There are some clear overlaps between Ahiska Turkish and the Turkish language. Where this happens, I place it in the Turkish section unless uniquely used for the Ahiska Turks, like 'Ahiska'.

[2] *Hala* is paternal aunt in Turkish but is used for maternal aunt.

Bayram	Holiday, (religious holiday)
Bayram namaz	Prayer during the Muslim Holiday
Cami	Mosque, place of worship for Muslims
Cemaat	Community or religious congregation
Cuma namaz	Friday prayer
Dede	Grandfather (or Ahiska Turks used for older man)
Dernek	Association or Cultural Centre
Din	Religion
Dini	Religious
Diyanet	*(TR: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı)* Short for Directorate of Religious Affairs, held under Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs
Dolmuş	Shared taxi
Düğün	Wedding ceremony (Turkish) (pronounced *dugun* with a hard 'g' in Ahiska Turkish).
Ezan	Muslim call to prayer
Faciası	Disaster
Gelin	*Bride also used for d*aughter in law
Hala	Paternal aunt
Heykel	Statue
Hoca	Religious teacher
Iftar	The evening meal to break the fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.
Koca	Husband
Kurban bayram	*Eid al-adha* Muslim celebration of Sacrifice
Madrasa	School or college of Islamic teaching
Mevlüt (Mevlit)	Memorial ceremony and part of the death ritual
Millet	Nation
Mullah	Muslim teacher or leader educated in Islamic theology and sacred law.
Namaz	*(Salat)* five times a day mandatory prayer for Muslims
Nerelisin	Where are you from?
Nikah	Wedding nuptials
Olay	Event or incident
Osmancı/Osmanlı	Ottoman
Papas	Christian Priest
Pazar	Market (often open air)
Sünnet	Circumcision
Sürgün	Deportation or exile
Teleferik	cable car (also neighbourhood locally known in Bursa, Turkey)
Temiz adam	A clean or pure person
Teyze	Maternal aunt (or used for an older woman)
Vatan	Motherland/homeland
Vatandaş	Citizenship
Yerli	Local/native

<u>Russian</u>

Kolkhoz	A Soviet collective farm
Korrespondent	Reporter
Korenizatsiya	A policy of indigenization
Sovkhoz	A Soviet state-owned farm

Chapter One: Introduction & Historical Background

1. Introduction

The primary site for this research was Bursa, Turkey.[1] As the fieldwork transpired (2014-2018), the Justice and Development Party (AKP[2]) government in Turkey was experiencing continued political progress. At the same time, the country was also dealing with many tensions. Protests like in 'Gezi Park' in May and June of 2013 were still fresh, and the short-lived peace talks with the Kurdish Nationalist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)[3] led to protests, riots, arrests, and bombings across the country (Cagaptay 2017). Particularly the bombings in the Ankara train stations on 10 October 2015 (Melvin 2015) and Istanbul airport on 28 June 2016 (bbcnews.com 29.6.16), climaxing with the attempted coup on 15 July 2016 (Al Jazeera 15.7.17) would completely alter Turkey. All happening inside the country, but there were also the pressures south of the border with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)[4], and the continued impacts of the Syrian War were driving hundreds of thousands of Syrians into and through Turkey (http://www.unrefugees.org 5.2.21). In this period, the Ahiska Turks would continue to migrate into Turkey as they had increasingly been doing since the early 1990's after the fall of the Soviet Union. In the years of this study, the Ahiska Turks would accentuate their ethno-Turkish nationalism both in Turkey as well as in the Turkish diaspora.

1.1 Chapter One Overview

I will begin by briefly giving an overview of this chapter, followed by a section outlining the thesis chapters. After that, the chapter will set the foundational historical context to understand the background of the Ahiska Turks,[5] first looking at geography and history

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[1] Further discussions on the primary and supplementary sites will be discussed in Chapter Three.
[2] TR: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP).
[3] TR: *Partiye Karkaran Kürdistan* (PKK).
[4] Also called *Daesh*, Arabic for *al-dawla al-'islāmiyya fī 'l-'irāq wa 'l-šām*, ISIL meaning Islamic State in Iraq and the Lavent, and IS for Islamic State.
[5] The identifying designation of 'Ahiska Turk' will be used in this paper because the people in the fieldwork conducted have consistently used this term. Meskhetian Turk was rarely used. I will spell Ahiska, unless quoting others, with the English spelling.

and then glancing at their language. This will be followed by a discussion of ethnic roots and labelling which arises when researching the Ahiska Turks. From there, I will consider their general historical positioning prior to 1944 which will include the post-World War One context and Soviet context leading up to the Second World War. This historical background is significant to better understand the deportations that were occurring and how the Ahiska Turks' story fits into that.

Next, I will describe the historical events of the 1944 *sürgün*[6] *(*deportation or exile) and their move to Central Asia, including their subsequent attempts to return to Meskheti, and finally discussing the critical event occurring in Ferghana, Uzbekistan, which led to continued scattering of the Ahiska Turks. This spreading out will point to another pivotal event occurring in Krasnodar Krai, Russia, leading to the move of around 15,000 (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Koriouchkina & Swerdlow 2007) Ahiska Turks to the United States. The chapter will conclude with the initial movements of the Ahiska Turks towards Turkey. However, prior to getting into all this background, the overall thesis chapter overview will be laid out as well as the thesis questions.

1.2 Thesis Chapter Overview

This primary chapter lays out the introduction of the research by giving an overview of each chapter, followed by the research question and follow-up questions. The historical background and context of the Ahiska Turks is critical to understand the dynamics affecting them as a people. This background will be general, yet comprehensive enough to establish the complexities of being stateless, scattered in ten countries, and the responses to this. I will also touch on the influences of their Ottoman past, the impact of

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[6] For this thesis I will use the term '*sürgün*' for the deportation of the Ahiska Turks from Meskheti in November, 1944 as that is how it is referred to by the Ahiska Turks. Literature written by the Ahiska Turks and about them often use '*sürgün*' (TR) or 'exile' to reference the event of 1944. Though other '*sürgünler*' (deportations) occurred it was more common to call the 1944 event *sürgün* and the others as an '*olay*' (event). For example, the '*Fargana olayı*' in 1989 'or the Fergana event'.

falling under Soviet Union rule, their efforts to return to their homeland and post-Soviet experiences.

Chapter Two reviews the literature concentrating on three specific areas. The first area of focus is on the Ahiska Turks and the relevant literature relating to them over the past years. Much of this has focused on their ethnic identity and who they are as a people. With that foundation, the aim is to take the conversation beyond ethnic identity and towards their Turkish ethno-nationalism. The second area of focus is on the foundations of this nationalism, and then emphasizing A.D. Smith's (1986; 2006) ethno-symbolic approach. Finally, a discussion on the development and usage of diaspora as presented by Robin Cohen (2008) establishes a framework to understand current experiences of the Ahiska Turks.

Chapter Three discusses the qualitative research methodology applied. It begins with a discussion of my personal background and academic influences, followed by how I met people, built rapport, and overcame the limitations that were present. After that, a section addresses my biases and certain ethical considerations. The chapter then turns to the locations chosen and the utilization of a multi-site approach, with one primary site and multiple supplementary sites. Finally, the use of interviews, participant observation, and social media is discussed as the emphasis shifts from methodology to the empirical fieldwork.

Chapter Four looks at the ethno-narrative of the Ahiska Turks and the various emphases they place in their stories and how that relates to their ethno-nationalism. This section emphasizes the deportation and how it is still a core part of their own group consciousness. This experience is what they look back to as a group. In diaspora, such a traumatic event normally is seen through the lens of a victim, and with the Ahiska Turks this is truly the case and highlighted. However, the Ahiska Turks often allude to their pride of 'not losing' who they were in an ethno-nationalistic way: they did not lose their

language or religion. That pride is also evident in the values they hold, like displaying their honours and medals to protect their homeland 'Ahiska'. Similarly, their tie to Turkey is told through their religious leaders suffering and their joining Turkey in World War One. Finally, this chapter concludes with the intentionally shared ties between Ahiska and Turkey.

Chapter Five follows up by exploring the theme of home and homeland for the Ahiska Turks, particularly looking at Brah's (1996) theory and how their being deterritorialized impacts their perspectives of home and where they are 'homing' towards. The chapter examines how their 'homing' towards each other continues in the diaspora while simultaneously leaning (or homing) towards Turkey. This influence is seen in the basic way they answer the question of where they are from (*nerelisin*). The second section of the chapter highlights the migration to Turkey. This reveals the struggles they faced while arriving to their 'imagined homeland' and how they are using relevant ethno-symbolism to connect with Turkey: by using and emphasizing 'Ahiska' and their Ottoman tie, relating to earlier migrants from Ahiska, and finally by valuing community events.

Chapter Six shifts from their historical narrative and perspective of the homeland to examining how their ethno-religious practice has been a critical way to displaying their ethno-nationalism and Turkishness. The chapter begins by discussing ethno-religious influences on Turkish national formation. This is followed by the ethno-religious nationalism related to the Soviet borderlands. Due to being in the Soviet Union, the Ahiska Turks ethno-religious practices went underground until openness came with the end of the Soviet Union. The chapter then shifts to the Turkish setting and their growing religious ties to Turkey today highlighted by their conservative lifestyles, ethno-religious practices, and group solidarity.

Chapter Seven summarizes and concludes this multi-site study of the Ahiska Turks with its primary focus on Turkey. The chapter includes the thesis' main contributions and finding and then suggestions possible for further research.

1.3 Research Questions and Follow-up Questions

The formal research question is:

- How and why have the de-territorialized Ahiska Turks responded to living in diverse locations? This question will be addressed employing an ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism and deliberations from diaspora studies.

To determine this, an open-ended question was given:

- Tell me your family's story.

Sub-questions would sometimes follow the open-ended question:[7]

- Where have you lived?
- When and how have you come here. How do you feel being here?
- What do you see as your homeland (*vatan)*?
    - Do you want to go to Georgia or to Turkey?
- Can you tell me about Ahiska Turkish culture and traditions?
- How have you remained united as a people?

1.4 Core Argument

The core argument in this thesis is to show a further shift of the Ahiska Turks' desire to identify with Turkey. Though their ethnic identity as Turks has been discussed in previous research and their kinship ties to Turkey shown, I argue that their ethno-nationalism has been essential not just to show their 'Turkishness' but also to merge themselves to Turkey (Levin 2021). Turkey, I contend, is an 'imagined homeland' for the demographic

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[7] These questions were back up questions and not always asked. They depended on how the conversation was going.

researched, 'imagined' since none of them were born in Turkey.[8] All have been influenced by being in the diaspora and immigrating after 1991. Thus, their tightly held bonds as a group remain, adjusting from being Turks in the Soviet/post-Soviet context to their merging with the Turks of Turkey. This is demonstrated by fieldwork in Turkey and laying it alongside the diverse supplementary sites.

1.5 Setting the Historical Context

The first half of the twentieth century was a period of great transitions, tension, and border changes. Two World Wars riveted the globe and left empires and nation states forming and disappearing in their wake. During this, populations had little choice but to adjust to the new conditions. By decision or by force, millions would be uprooted from their land and homes, facing great challenges and transitions ahead of them. Within the Soviet Union alone from the 1920's until Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, up to six million people representing twenty ethnic groups were involuntarily removed and deported to Central Asia and Siberia (Bougaï 1996; Conquest 1972; Pohl 1999; Polian 2004; Trier & Khanzhin 2007). It is in this context that the peoples of southern Georgia would also face deportation. One of those groups, the Ahiska Turks, are still facing the repercussions of that upheaval.

1.5.1 Language

The Language of the Ahiska Turks is like that of dialects of the Black Sea and Northeast of Turkey today (Aydıngün, et al. 2006:23; Demiray 2011; Nouchkina 2011:35). Though Turkish is their main language, they are linguistically opulent. At the risk of generalising, their linguistic richness represents a people having regular and long-term contact with many people's and languages. The influence of Russian and other Central Asian

[8] 'Imagined homeland' is drawn from Anderson's (1983) term of 'imagined community'. Dişbudak & Purkis 2014 similarly described Turkey as the 'imagined motherland' of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria, considering Bulgaria as their 'homeland'.

languages such as Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh are common, as well as languages such as Azeri and English for those having moved to the United States. It is not uncommon for the Ahiska Turks to speak or understand multiple languages (Aydıngün, et al. 2006:23; Koriouchkina 2011:35).

1.5.2 Ethnic Roots and Labelling.

Ethno-national orientations over the years has led this group being studied to be identified, labelled, and changed (Baydar Aydıngün[9] 2001; Aydingün 2002b; Trier & Khanzhin 2007:xx). This in part is due to the various ethnic groups converging, moving in and out and affecting each other through the region to be described. While some of these groups assimilated, others became more segregated (Trier et al. 2011:5). The Ahiska Turks' identity today is an example of this. This thesis will not address the question of the Ahiska Turks' genetic makeup, but it is relevant to note what is being contested.

There are generally two camps[10] that argue different ethnic and historical roots (Aydıngün, et al. 2006:2-3; Chervonnaya 1998; Swerdlow 2004:9; 2006; Trier & Khanzhin 2007). Georgian scholars and government, as well as most Russian and Soviet scholarship argue that the Ahiska Turks are ethnic Georgians who were converted to Islam and 'Turkified' under the Ottoman Empire (Baratashvili 1998; Diamond 1998; Khazanov 1992; Pohl 1999:129; Polian 2004:155; Sheehy 1980; Trier & Khanzhin 2007:xx; Trier et al. 2011:7-8). In the literature *Meskhetians, Meskhetian Turks, Meskhs', Georgian Muslims* are all generally used to describe them (Pirtskhalava 2015; Trier & Khanzhin 2007). Meskhetian Turks is generally the term used in English, including some Turkish scholars, or mixing it Meskhetian (Ahiska) Turks or vice versa.

[9] There are three different citations for Aydıngün (2006; 2007; 2013; 2014; 2016), Aydingün (2002a; 2002b), and Baydar Aydıngün (1998; 2001). I will use the Turkish spelling, Aydıngün, unless citing the original source.

[10] Aydıngün & Aydıngün (2014:1, 35-36) breaks this into three groups.

The use of *Ahiska Turks* is generally used in Turkey and Azerbaijan, but a growing number of Western scholars are including this labelling. This perspective usually refers to the group being ethnic Turks living in the Meskheti region. Using 'Ahiska Turks' can assume the perspective they are a Turkish sub-group within the larger Turkish family living in the Meskheti region and related to the Turkish populations in Eastern Anatolian bordering this region (Aydıngün 2007:340; Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Trier et al. 2011:8; Trier & Khanzhin 2007:xx; Zeyrek 2001). This view also states that the community would prefer not to use 'Meskhetian' as it presumes their Georgian ancestry (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:6).

Recognising the realities of borderland populations of great empires, conquests, and intermarriage, with many other dynamics issues like this are not uncommon (see Swerdlow 2004:7; Khazanov 1992). Alongside the aspect of geographic terms being used to identity people, it is significant to note that in this region in the early 20th c. and prior, religion was often more important to distinguishing oneself from others than ethnicity. Khazanov tells that ''Although the Muslims there [in Meskheti] maintained a degree of ethnic and cultural isolation from their neighbours, their separate ethnic self-identification at that time was rather vague and uncertain. Even their ethnic name was not yet fixed' (1992:2). However, they 'still knew who they were: Turkish, Kurdish, Georgian convert, or a Muslim Armenian (Hemshin)' (Aydıngün, May 2015 personal conversation). Modebadze, takes a more middle ground stating: 'The formation of the [Ahiska] Turkish community was a result of both migration of nomadic Turkish tribes to Meskheti and gradual assimilation of local Meskhetian population and their conversion to Islam' (2009:114). In this he recognizes the presence of Turks having migrated into the region, but also the presence of other communities, Georgian Meskhetians in this instance, that were living in proximity. With Ottoman rule and Turkish neighbours, some assimilation and intermarriage could have occurred. In this regard, we can say it is not an either or, all

or nothing (they are Turk, or they are Georgian) situation on a shifting borderland. Moving beyond the local situation, Aydingün (2002b:187), also puts an emphasis on the external factors or state policies which played a major role in the Ahiska identity. She highlights a period she labels the 'transition period' which, aside from the 1944 deportation, was a key historical event for Ahiska group and ethnic formation. Interestingly, ethnicity becomes blurred here as other Muslim groups also forced to move with them often associate themselves as Ahiska Turks too[11] (see Trier & Khanzhin 2007; Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Aydingün 2002b; Wimbush & Wixman 1975:321[12]).

Yunusov also highlights the development of ethnic identity of the Ahiska Turks through these years and how they distinguished themselves in the different contexts they lived. 'It should be noted here...' he writes '... that almost all the deported Meskhetian Turks were rural dwellers, with only a vague sense of ethnic identity. At the same time, the specific living conditions in exile in Central Asia prompted many Meskhetian Turks to perceive themselves as a separate, distinctive people' (2007:187). He goes on to mention how the Ahiska Turks distinguished themselves from others, like in Azerbaijan or Central Asia. Their distinctiveness and difference were one that stood out as their history unfolded in a very traumatic and challenging way.

Ahiska Turk and Meskhetian/Meskhetian Turk are terms used today based on the geographical region which they come. They also carry with them political connotations (Diamond 1998). The terms are new following the 1944 *sürgün* (deportation or exile) in Turkish. Ronald Wixman (1984) stated in the Ethnographic Handbook of the Peoples of the USSR the term 'Meskhetian' arose in the 1950's and 1960's to describe 'the Turkified

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[11] Aydingün (2002b) mentions the Ahiska Turks being made up of: Turks, Kurds, and Karapapakhs; Pohl (1999) Turks, Kurds, Khemshins; Modebadze (2009:114); Trier & Khanzhin focus on the region regarding naming the Meskhetians, pointing to the Turks being the largest group, but smaller groups like the Hemshins, Batumi Kurds, and Terekeme. Polian (2004) distinguishes them as Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, and Khemshins. Swerdlow (2004) discusses Hemshins & Meskhetians, and Enders Wimbush & Wixman (1975:321) define 'Meskhetians' (parentheses theirs) to include the whole group: Meskhi Turks, Karapapakh, Kurds, Turkmen, and Khemshin.

[12] They label them 'Meskhi Turks'.

peoples [Meskhi (Georgians), Khemshil (Armenians), Kurds, and Karapapakh] …' who became '…known as Meskhetians only after their deportation in 1944' (Wixman 1984:134). 'Ahiska Turk' only began to be widely used in the 1980's and especially following the Ferghana pogrom which solidified them even more and would begin to be used in writing (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:1).[13] Before this they often labelled themselves as 'Turks' or 'Kafkas Türkleri' or 'Caucasus Turks' (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014).

The Soviet Union labelled them differently through the years, being called in the census 'Turks' in 1926, then switching to 'Azeri' in 1939, then back to 'Turk' in 1944 and Azeri in the 1950's (see Conquest 1972; Sheehy 1980:24; Khazanov 1992:3; Enders Wimbush & Wixman 1975:321; Wixman 1984:134). An early description from 1975 is very helpful. The term at that time, Meskhetians, refers 'to the national movement of the exiled ethnic groups [note the plural] who originally lived in southern Georgia and Armenia. This movement is comprised of Meskhi Turks, Karapapakh, Kurds, Turkmen, and Khemshin.' They go on '"Meskhetian" should not be confused with Meskhi Turk … who are listed in the 1926 Soviet census as *Tiurki'* (Wimbush & Wixman 1975:321). In 1975 they pointed to the merging of these groups into 'one' new ethnic group. Aydingün (2002b) also noted a reversal to this phenomenon happening with the return to Turkey of some of the group who affiliated themselves as Turks.

Thus, in looking at the Meskheti region, a simplified division of how the people have been labelled at the time of the *sürgün* would be:

1. Historical Meskhetian (Meskhi) Georgians who had for centuries lived in this region.
2. Turks (Kipchak, Oguz, Ottoman) and other smaller groups (Kurds, Hemshin, Karakalpak) who were living there prior to, or moved into Meskheti during the

[13] Ahiska began being common in the 1990's (Aydıngün personal conversation). In her research she stated that as a group, they were not using the term 'Meskhetian'.

Ottoman period. This also included a tiny percent who married to Turks, converted to Islam and 'Turkified' and were lumped into the census as Turks and/or Muslims. These would all be deported together (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:34).

3. Catholic Christian Georgians, Sunni Muslim Georgians (Ajarians) (Aydıngün 2013:813,824), and Armenians who would remain after the deportation.

While the majority of Ahiska Turks seem to overwhelmingly represent number '2', there is a small number who represent the other groups. Trier & Khanzhin noted in the nine countries researched, that they chose to label them 'Meskhetian Turk' and based that on 'the population globally consider themselves to be "Meskhetian Turk," "Ahiska Turks," or simply "Turks."' (2007:xxi). In this multisite study, 'Ahiska Turk' or 'Turk' was the common term used amongst the people across the different locations. How widespread 'Meskhetian' or 'Meskhetian Turk' is used is hard to determine based on fieldwork and interviews. One observation, however, is that this terminology could arguably be affected by the language spoken. I spoke mostly in Turkish, and informants knew I was living and researching from Bursa, Turkey. This could draw out the 'Ahiska' term more, even in the supplemental locations. Using that term, I always felt it resonated quickly with the group, as if I were speaking like them. When I spoke in English, however, or sometimes heard them in Russian, the term Meskhetian was occasionally heard. Once 'Ahiska' was used, 'Meskhetian' was rarely used again. Thus, if previous research was conducted primarily in Russian, or being amongst those who knew the usage of 'Meskhetian' in literature, that could have influenced the use of 'Meskhetian' by the population.[14] Moving forward from the terminology used, we will see the population and its distribution before looking to the geographical context where the terms had come from.

[14] Previous research using Meskhetian also note that the population uses others terms than Meskhetian, like 'Ahiska' or just Turk (Bilge 2012; Diamond 1998; Koriouchkina 2002; Tomlinson 2002; Trier & Khanzhin 2007.

1.5.3 Population and Distribution

Regional distribution of the Ahiska Turks cannot be given with certainty today (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Bayraktar 2013 ; Trier & Khanzhin 2007; Üren 2016). This is due to the changing of last names, passport countries, migration patterns, and their global distribution (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Khazanov 1992). There is also a discrepancy between official numbers and the numbers given by the cultural centres and associations (*derneks*). To understand their current situation, a brief overview will follow.

In the 1897 Russian census there were 208,000 Turks listed in Meskheti-Javakheti but this dropped by 1917 in the Soviet Census to 108,000 (Aydıngün2007:240-41). The 1926 Georgian census listed the Turkish population as 137,921[15] and one change in the numbers Aydıngün mentioned was due to those secretly fleeing to Turkey (2007:240-41). By 1944, the official State Committee of Defense Resolution No. 6279cc listed 84,000 Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins to be deported. Over the Soviet years, some migration occurred, but the biggest shift or change would occur in Uzbekistan in 1989 where the Ahiska Turkish population was listed as 160,000 Turks (Chikadze 2007) and then would then be scattered to Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and some to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.[16]

Since the mid 2000's, the official numbers listed are often based on the compilation of research pulled together in Trier and Khanzhin's (2007) study giving an estimated 450,000 Ahiska Turks globally. Following that, Trier et al. (2011), Aydıngün & Aydıngün (2014:4-7) and Üren (2016:166-67) give some perspective and shifts to this distribution with the population globally between 430,000-500,000. In 2014 Aydıngün & Aydıngün (4) stated 70-90,0000 living in Russia, 50,000 in Turkey, 130,000 in Azerbaijan, 7,500-10,000 in Ukraine, 150,000 in Kazakhstan, 50,000 in Kyrgyzstan,

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[15] These listings did not include the Kurds, Terekeme, or Hemshin which would be included in the groups listed to be deported together in 1944 (Aydıngün2007:240-41).

[16] For further details and estimates on populations in various countries see Trier and Khanzhin (2007).

1,500 in Georgia, 10,000 in the United States, 500 in Northern Cyprus and finally 15,000 in Uzbekistan.[17]

These last years have continued to officially shift. First, the numbers in Ukraine decreased due to the war and Turkey's reception of over 3000 in 2015-16 and more in 2022 (Anadolu Agency 2016; Dogan 2020; Yeni Haber 2022). The population listed for the USA are higher, being closer to 16,000 (ATUS02; Bilge 2012; Swerdlow 2006; Koriouchkina & Swerdlow 2007). The population in Central Asia, Russia and Azerbaijan also do not appear to give an accurate representation of those living there as exact numbers are still a challenge to prove. While some demographic shifts in the community show movement toward Turkey in the past 10 to 15 years, these are numbers that continue to rise.[18] For example, the population in Bursa, Turkey during this study showed a significant increase in unofficial population (see footnote 32, page 95). Many in Turkey still hold their passports from the country they migrated from, have dual citizenship, or are living in Turkey with (or without) residence permits while waiting for citizenship (Aydıngün 2007; Dogan 2020). For this reason, the perceptions of the Ahiska Turks' based on their official distribution country to country may be difficult to gage. Turkey, I sensed, looking at unofficial numbers in the later years of the study and following up through the supplementary sites arguably gives a good representation for a significant part of their community.

1.5.4 Turk and Turkishness

Throughout this thesis 'Turk' and 'Turkish' is regularly used and an explanation of that is needed. Chapter Two (2.4) will give further description and context to understand the role Turkish national formation influenced this. In essence, the founding of the Turkic

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[17] Compared to Trier et al. (2011:56) that gave a population distribution of: 75,000 in Russia, 35,000 in Turkey, 100,000 in Azerbaijan, 10,000 in Ukraine, 137,000 in Kazakhstan, 33,000 in Kyrgyzstan,1000 in Georgia, 11,500 in the United States, and 22,500 in Uzbekistan (Northern Cyprus was not listed).

[18] Dogan (2020) stated officially the number in Turkey is now at 40,000.

republic shaped what it meant to be Turk, who the Turks were, and who was considered a part of Turkey and who was not (Cagaptay 2006; Dressler 2013; Lewis 2002; Mango 2006; Zürcher 2017). In Turkey, or the Turkic world, there is no separation in understanding for those saying they are Turkish or Turk. True citizens speak Turkish, have Turkish culture, and are Muslims (Sunni). This assumption is one that has brought great tension and struggles for many years, for those that do not fit those requirements, like the Kurds, Alevis, and non-Muslims (Dressler 2013; Lord 2017; Sökefeld 2008). I want to clearly note that Turkishness in Turkey does not necessarily mean the same to everybody. To be Kurdish, Alevi, etc. will carry with it the 'Turkishness' taught officially or lived socially, however they will likely have a distinct culture, language, and religious practice that differs from the 'Turkish' majority around them that they take pride in[19].

In this thesis, when I speak of Turkish, I am writing in the context of the generalized and often assumed Turkishness in Turkey and am referring to those core elements of what it meant to be Turk as seen and referred to by the Ahiska Turks. That being shared language, culture, religion, and ethnicity.

In the text, I attempt to differentiate as best I can for the reader who is being talked about. Ahiska Turks, Turks from Turkey, or Turks from Turkey living in the diaspora to whom I refer to as the Turkish diaspora. When I speak of Turkic, it can mean that Turkishness mentioned above, but can also relate to the 'Turkic world' or pan-Turkism which can include the many Turkic groups (included in this thesis, but not limited to, Azeri, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tatar, Turkmen, etc.) that looked to unite at the end of the Ottoman Empire (see 2.4).

1.5.5 History Along the Turkish-Georgian Border

The geographical land for which the Ahiska Turks are associated is located on the border of Turkey and Georgia and has exchanged hands multiple times through its rich history.

[19] See Tee (2010) for an example of this within the Alevi community.

Today most of it lies in today's Georgia. The region was called Meskheti[20] and today it is called Samtskhe in Georgia but is also often referred to as Meskheti-Javakheti (Trier & Khanzhin 2007:xxi) or Samtskhe-Javkheti. It straddles the Turkish border province of Ardahan going north-eastward toward Armenia (Trier & Khanzhin 2007:xxii). Along this border area are five key districts: Adigeni, Akhaltsikhe, Aspindza, Akhalkajaki and Ninotsminda/Bogdanovka[21] which contained over 200 villages[22] at the time of the *sürgün* (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:37; Khazanov 1992; Paşaoğlu 2012; Trier 2007:xxv; Zeyrek 2001). Meskheti-Dzhavakheti/Javakheti is where 'Meskhetian' is derived; Akhaltsikhe, a key regional Ottoman city in Meskheti is where the word 'Ahiska' derives (Mirkhanova, 2006; Erten 2014:47).

Figure 1.1 Map of Turkish Georgian border [23]

The Georgian history for Meskheti points back to the ancient tribes Moschi or Mosiniks (Mossynoeci) dating back to the second century BC (Baratashvili 1998). Being part of

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[20] In this thesis, I will use the term 'Meskheti' to describe the general region at the time of the deportation that is the historical land of the Ahiska Turks (see Trier & Khanzhin 2007:xxii).

[21] See Figure 1.1. Other names used are: Abastuban, Adigön, Aspınza, Ahılkelek, Azgur, and Hırtız (Paşaoğlu 2012:17); also included in some lists is Borjomi.

[22] See Figure 5.1; Go to http://www.ahiskalilar.org/portal/modules.php?name=koylerimiz for a full village list (last accessed May, 2015).

[23] Map from Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014, Circle is mine. Accessed from publisher. http://www.ayu.edu.tr/static/kitaplar/Ahiska_turkleri.pdf. For an interactive map of the Ahiska region, go to http://www.Ahiskalilar.org/portal/modules.php?name=Harita (last accessed May, 2015).

the Kingdom of Iberia from the fourth century BC to sixth century AD it then fell under a Muslim Emirate from the eighth century. It remained under the Emirate until King David II broke it away in 1122 (Aydıngün 2013:812-13; Baratashvili 1998). Meskheti then fell within the Georgian Kingdom from the tenth to fifteenth century. In this period, however, tensions began to arise upon the region from the Persian Shi'ite Safavid dynasty (1501–1732) (Suny 1994; Broers & Yemelianova 2020). From the south, the Sunni Ottoman Empire continued to expand outward and tensions with the Safavids would continue until the treaty in Amasya in 1555 where Batumi would be annexed and a strong garrison was established in today's Adjara (Broers and Yemelianova 2020:96-97). The Meskheti-Javakheti region would finally be taken control of under the rule of Serdar Lala Mustufa Paşa on 10 August 1578 (Aydıngün 2013:813; Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:38; Bekadze 2014; Sumbadze 2007, Suny 1994; Yemelianova & Broers 2020).

Despite the significance to this victory, it was not until 1639 that the land was secured when tension with the Persian Empire ended. The territory of Meskheti-Javakheti would remain under Ottoman rule for another 250 years. This southern Georgia region would be a part of the Childir State (*eyelet*) and be under the administration and tax systems of the Ottomans and Ahiska (Akhaltsikhe) would be the centre for this administration (Balcı & Küçük 2015; Broers and Yemelianova 2020:97; Buntürk 2007:25). That would change, however, on 28 August 1828, when the region was taken by the Russians (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:38; Pelkmans 2006; Sumbadze 2007; Suny 1994, 1999; Zeyrek 2001). This period was the start of what Aydıngün labelled the 'transition years.' Meskheti would be claimed by both Russia and Turkey and included the Turkish-Russian Wars (1828-29 & 1853–1854), the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and finally two World Wars (Aydingün 2002b:187; Lewis 2002; Kinross 2002; Suny 1994). The direct effect of this

was the continued boundary changes[24] governance shifts for that region, as well as the movement of different ethnie into these regions like the Armenians (Suny 1994). An example of the boundary shifting is how Akhaltsikhe (Ahiska) and Ahilkelek were officially signed over to the Russians at the treaty of Adrionople[25] on 14 September 1829 (see Howard 2001:65; Izzetgil 2012:3; Avşar and Tunçalp 1994:4; Shaw 1976:31-32), while Ardahan and Kars remained in Turkish hands (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:38; Trier et al. 2011:8; Bayram Paşaoğlu 2012:23).

In 1878, further pressure and fighting from the Russians' pushed into Ottoman territory and resulted in the cessation of much territory at the peace treaty of San Stefano (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Buntürk 2007; Howard 2017:271; Zürcher 2017). With impacts seen in the Balkans and Bulgaria, the Caucasus region would also be affected as the Russians gained territory in the south to Batumi (in modern Georgia) and Kars and Ardahan in modern Turkey. The Turkish-Russian battle of 1877-78 referred to as the '*93 Harbi*' in Turkey is still highlighted in Turkey today. It would also be referenced by the Ahiska Turks moving to Turkey as a battle they fought in and significant because it left Ahiska far from the Turkish border (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Levin 2021). This would shift again after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. The peace negotiations in Brest-Litovsk (1918) resulted in a reversal of the agreements of 1878 and the Russians withdrew from eastern Anatolia (Howard 2017; Zürcher 2017). Kars would again fall into Soviet hands but be signed over to Turkey on 2 December, 1920 (Buntürk 2007). Though signed over, the region predominately remained in Ottoman control until the official agreement to 'sign over' the land to the Russians in the Treaty of Moscow on 16 March 1921 and then the Treaty of Kars on 13 October 1921 (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:40; Buntürk 2007; Çerniçenkina 2014; Reynolds 2011:257; Shaw 357-358; The Great Soviet

[24] See Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:38-39 for a brief description of these exchanges.
[25] Adrionople was renamed Edirne, thus the Treaty is also known as the Treaty of Edirne.

Encyclopedia 1970). These treaties were significant because they divided up communities and separated them by new nation-state boundaries with the subsequent law changes and required allegiances. One major impact was that migration to Turkey would begin from the Ahiska region, particularly to Ağrı, Muş, Çorum, Hatay and Bursa (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:39; Bayram 2012:23). Family, friends, and neighbours with similar language, culture, history, and religion now found themselves divided by a border. Being under new governance, both sides of the border were living in new emerging environments and would greatly impact both Georgia and the Ahiska Turks to this day (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:39).

Those south of the border were witnessing the formation of the newly founded Turkish Republic in 1923 (Howard 2001; Lewis 2002; Mango 1999; Zürcher 2017). Those north of the border would continue to experience the tensions of the recently conquered Georgia (Allen & Muratoff 2011:499-500; Goff 2020; Pelkmans 2006; Suny et al. 1996;) and how Soviet nationalization (Conquest 2017[26]; Hirsch 2005; Suny 1994, 2011; Suny & Martin 2001) would influence them. The region would be under the rule of the Russians from 1829-1917, then fall under the Democratic Republic of Georgia from 1918-1921 and then the Soviets and the Georgian SSR from 1921-1990 (Suny 1994, 1999).

One impact in these years was that the Russians worked to remove the Muslims living in this area (Polian 2004). Trier et al. wrote: 'After 1828, the Russian administration pursued policies aimed at expelling the Muslim population across the border to the Ottoman Empire, rather than assimilating them and converting them to Christianity.' (2011:8). Continuing, they stated this began separating the community along religious lines (Trier et al. 2011:8). The census of 1897 displayed that 31-35% of the population in

[26] Particularly significant here are the chapters written by Bennigsen 1986; Dunlop 1986; Wimbush 1986; Rakowska-Harmstone 1986.

the Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki region spoke Turkish[27] (Trier et al. 2011:8). Despite this, focus on ethnicity (i.e., being Turk) was not as significant as their language and religion.

1.5.6 World War One (1914-1918)

The early decades of the twentieth century did not end the traumatic experiences of the past century in the region. The Ottoman Empire, which had predominantly stood for six centuries had waned and finally concluded with the end of World War One. The Empire suddenly found itself being carved up resulting in new nations being formed (Lewis 2002; Howard 2001; Kinross 1995; Zürcher 2017). As the Allies took up a presence within Anatolia itself, the Turkish National Movement mustered up an army of experienced young military men from the war and held onto Anatolia, creating what is today Turkey (Howard 2001; Lewis 2002; Mango 2004; Zürcher 2017). They were led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, an Ottoman officer of World War One, who along with his men impassioned his fellow countrymen who gathered up strength to hold and win back what was theirs as the Allied armies advanced (Kinross 1995; Lewis 2002; Mango 2004; Zürcher 2017). On 29 October 1923, Turkey was officially proclaimed a republic and would begin to go through great changes from its Ottoman past.[28] The treaties of Kars and Moscow were signed between Soviet Russia and Turkey at this time which would establish the boundaries and directly impact the Meskheti region which in turn sets up a near century of regional tensions. While Turkey quickly made shifts from its Ottoman past into a new Republic, the Georgian SSR would be greatly influenced by the changing Soviet ideology following the War.

[27] Compared to other languages of the Armenians (48%), Christian Georgians (12%), Russians (2%) and Kurds (no percentage given), Trier et al. 2011:8.

[28] See Kinross 'Ataturk' 1964; Lewis 1968; Mango 2000. A helpful bibliographic overview can be found in Howard 2001.

1.5.6.1 Pre-1944 Exile & People Movements in the Early Russian and Soviet Context

Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 Russia developed under the influence of Lenin (1870-1924) (Suny & Martin 2001; Martin 2001; Suny 2011). Dominance, control, and empire building continued after World War One and the USSR began to increase in power and in territory. The Soviet Union was growing through industrialization and encouraging minority nationals to be a part of this. (Martin 2001a; 2001b; Liber 1991; Suny 2011; Towster 1951). During the early years of the USSR, the Soviets strongly promoted ethnicity and allowed separate schools for education and learning of one's own language (Martin 1998; 2001; Suny 2011).[29] The policy of *Korenizatsiya*, or indigenization was coined to refer to all the national groups within the union and encouraged national consciousness and homeland amongst the different nations within the Soviet Union (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:88; Goff 2020; Martin 2001a:74; Ubiria 2016). One aim in this, according to Martin, was that the life of kinsmen across the border would lure and display the greatness and benefits of the Union (1998:842).[30] This, he pointed was strategically planned with the desire to expand geographically and include these areas as part of the Union. He gives Ukraine as an example, as it at first was successful. However, Martin then showed how the plan would begin to backfire. Rather than luring those on the other side of the border to join with the Union, many living along the borders (within the Union) began to hear and see the arising democratic ideas and philosophies which their families and friends had on the other side (Martin 1998:844, 847). Not being the effect desired, a counter response was needed to stop the tension beginning to arise both internally and externally. In the 1920's and 1930's internal displacement became more regular as the USSR began moving large groups of people to collective farms in the

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[29] See Baydar Aydıngün (2001). One of the aims of her dissertation was to see the role of the state in the formation of ethnic identity and ethnicity. She spends a chapter looking at Soviet nationalism and post-Soviet nationalism and relates it to the Ahiska Turks.
[30] Martin referred to this as the Piedmont Principle, which was 'the attempt to exploit cross-border ethnic ties to project influence abroad' (2001:342; see also Martin 1998:832).

less developed region's (Martin 1998; 2001; Polian 2004:63;[31] Statiev 2005:978). These first forced migrations were more class and labour-based movements (Martin 1998; Polian 2004). By the time Lenin died in 1924, Stalin was already gaining power and with his rule, shifts in the nationalist policies would be seen that shifted to focusing on a nation based forced migration (Suny 2011:161).

Changes were underway and tensions along the Soviet border did not remain peaceful which added to these shifts in the Soviet policy opposing the ethnic policies of the Union a few years prior. Whereas most ethnic groups were being encouraged to educate themselves and teach their national language, they were now suddenly discouraged from doing so (Martin 1998, 2001). For example, the Ahiska Turks lost the opportunity to educate in Turkish in 1926, being forced to then teach in Azeri from 1935-36 (Aydingün 2002b; Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014). These changes also impacted their written language. Aliyeva (2015) noted from 1917-1944 the Ahiska Turks were educated in 'Azerbaycan Turkish' (439) and in that time writing was in Arab, then Latin, and then later in Cyrillic. From 1944-1956 there was no permission to write or educate in their mother tongue (Turkish), but rather were educated and wrote as all those in the republic they were living in (i.e. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan), as well as education in Russian (Aliyeva 2015:436). Despite that, Aliyeva conveyed some would secretly begin writing themselves in Latin or Cyrillic. (2015:440). Since 1989, the educational influences of the Soviet system may continue, but many realized areas of difference across the diaspora. She wrote the need to learn Turkey's Turkish was necessary because some of the issues they had was they did not have the same alphabet, literary language, oral way of speech, and lack of common spelling (2015:441). Returning to the shifts in Soviet national policy, many ethnic groups would lose their right to educate or teach in

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[31] See Martin (1998:815, footnote 9) for a list of standard works on Soviet ethnic cleansing.

their national language This, however, was also the beginning of an uncertain and dramatic future. Under Stalin, movements of Soviet citizens began to be based on ethnic selection (Statiev 2009).

Ubiria, (2016) focusing on Central Asia, stated there was a specific goal in mind for those not Russian. That goal was to show non-Russians that the USSR was not imposing itself on them, nor was an 'alien' regime. Rather it was an 'indigenous one, serving their national interests equally with those of others, including the Russians' (Ubiria 2016:148). She goes on to state three main policy actions of emphasis: administrative, educational, and linguistic focus in the native languages, and finally encouraging and institutionalizing the titular cultures within the jurisdictions and regions (Ubiria 2016:149). These, she added were possible if they went along with the purposes and ideologies of their communism (Ubiria 2016:149).

Wholesale ethnic group deportation or cleansing in the USSR would begin in the mid 1930's (Martin 2002). Deportations to ethnic groups like the Koreans[32] on the eastern borders in 1937 initiated what would become a regular response in other parts of the Union, particularly the western front (Statiev 2005:979).[33] The western border was highly populated with many cultural, linguistic, and ideological differences which went (or could go) contrary to the Soviet ideology. Statiev pointed that prior to 1939 there were less 'anti-communist' and 'nationalists' in the Soviet territory that could resist 'the Soviet regime, actively or passively' (2009:244). However, that was changing and the best way to deal with them was to send them away from the borders. After deportations began in

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[32] An early example of this came along the eastern border of the Soviet Union after the Japanese took control of Korea. Many Koreans went north into the Russian frontier and ethnic tension arose between the Koreans and Russians settlers and the USSR shifted to an ethnically based Korean migration in 1937 (Statiev 2009:244; Martin 1998; 2002; Oh 2006). The vast and spacious Central Asian Steppe needed labourers and development. The Koreans were promised land, their own schools, and opportunities of work if they moved to Central Asia. Many of them did (see Martin 1998). This Korean move was because of ethnic issues but was a less forced migration than the others that were to follow.

[33] Ethnic migration was not just done by the Soviets at this time. For example, the twentieth century would see extensive ethnic movements into and out of Turkey and Greece, the United States acts upon the Japanese, the French movement of Algerians, etc. (see Statiev 2009:257).

the west, he says, they 'were always discriminate' (Statiev 2005:998; Tournon 2009), and this would increase with the Second World War.

1.5.7 World War Two (1939-1945)

The Soviets responded quickly when World War Two began to be waged on the Western borders. The attention given to countering ideologies and thoughts, as well as fears of espionage, significantly increased for the Soviet Union's leadership (Statiev 2005). Joseph Stalin along with Lavrentiy Beria[34] used the war to deal with these internal 'threats' in a proactive manner compared to before the war and would remove any real or potential threats (Conquest 1970; Pohl 1999:4; Polian 2004:156). At the time of the German invasion in 1941, the 'ethnic factor finally replaced class affiliation as the primary blacklisting criterion …' and would reach its peak between October 1943-November 1944 (Statiev 2009:246). Germans within the Soviet Union, for example, were one of the first immediate 'threats' and were assumed to be helping the German army. Over a million would be sent away from the border (Statiev 2009:246; Pohl 1999; Polian 2004).

Diaspora nationalities who had ethnic ties across the Soviet border were seen as a greater threat and 'impediment to nation building' (Martin 2001:342).[35] Along with the Germans, other groups are often mentioned to be threats like the Finns, Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, Chechens and Ingush, Balkars, Ahiska Turks and others (Conquest 1970; Pohl 1999; Polian 2004; Statiev 2005; 2009).[36] All of these groups were accused of aiding the German's (except the Ahiska Turks, which will be looked at later) and shared quite similar fates. Their expulsions were conducted in much the same way, but the army, as

[34] Beria was chief of the secret police in Georgia before moving to Moscow in 1938 to be the head of the Soviet secret police (De Waal 2010:84; Suny 2011). He was Stalin's right-hand man for devising policies and implementing governmental plan.

[35] It is important to note that in the 1930's soviet xenophobia was not ethnic based, but ideological. It became ethnicized according to Martin only with the piedmont principle focus on cross border ties (2001:342).

[36] Polian (2004) has a useful table with a detailed list of which government order was given, for whom, the date and where the deportees would be sent.

Statiev noted, would execute the deportation with greater precision and skill as time passed (2009:249).[37]

One way the government 'secured' the border was to create a large 'no man's land' by vacating the border region from 7 km up to 45 km deep which stretched the whole border (De Waal 2010:85; Martin 1998). According to Martin, those living within that region in the earlier years were just moved inland further, but as the secure zone widened unwanted ethnic groups were completely sent out of the region (Martin 1998:848). Once the land was cleared, it would be replaced with retired Russian soldiers and other 'trusted' peoples (Martin 1998:815). Having secured the western front, the Caucasus region would be targeted. The Georgian-Turkish border would be one of the last to be cleared during World War Two. Turkey, being located on the southern shores of the Black Sea and strategically controlling the straights from the Aegean and Mediterranean seas would remain neutral for most of the war. They finally joined the allies on 23 February 1945 against Germany and Japan at the end of the war (Mango 2004; Zürcher2017). This is significant as will be seen as we look to the unexpected and tragic deportation of the peoples of Meskheti.[38]

1.5.8 Ahiska Turks' Experience

1.5.8.1 Exile/Deportation: Sürgün

From the start of World War Two, the Ahiska Turkish men were active serving on the front lines alongside their Soviet comrades on the Western borders of the USSR against the Germans. Bougai mentions 40,000 men were fighting (1996:132).[39] In March of 1949, five years after the exile, there was 4,079 veterans who had fought in the Red army

[37] See Bougai 1996; Polian 2004.

[38] Smith (1999:188) emphasizes the great impact World War One had on nationalism and refugees. He states: 'it can be shown that many of the largest tides of refuge-seeking, … have been the direct outcome of nationalist conflict…'. And 'Ethnic nationalisms, in particular, have helped to create the climate of fear, suspicion and resentment that make it so much easier to erect barriers.'

[39] Trier 2011:12 mentions up to 10,000.

amongst those who were exiled, including 459 sergeants, 57 officers (Pohl 1999:132). Pohl also highlighted the number of communist members amongst the Ahiska Turkish exiles, listing '534 Communist Party officials and 607 Komsomol members' (1999:132). While they fought, however, decisions were made regarding their homeland and families residing there (Trier et al. 2011:11-12). They were not charged like the other deportee nations for potentially siding with Germany. Rather, Beria 'routinely' encouraged the clearing out of 'suspect nationalities from strategic areas of the USSR …' and that there was fear of the Turkish government supporting 'saboteurs among the Muslims on the Georgian side of the border as a counter to Soviet military and diplomatic pressure' (Pohl 1999:130). This was followed up in May of 1944 as Beria would write to Stalin with the allegation that the Turks, Kurds and Khemshins had operated and organised 'cross-border smuggling' (Statiev 2009:246). Trier stated there remained historical sensitivity from the small group of Ahiska Turks who had sided with the Ottoman Empire in World War One and stood against Georgia when they became independent. He writes: '…several Muslim communities allied with the Ottoman Empire … established a Provisional National Government of the Southwestern Caucasus from December 1918 to April 1919 and even declared independence, although this was merely a nominal act' (Trier et al. 2011:9). Others, like Sheehy (1980), Pohl (1999), and Pelkmans (2006) state the reason for the deportations was the Soviets still aspired for taking parts of northeast Turkey. This, it appears, justified the accusation that the Ahiska Turks were spies for Turks across the border and even assumed to be ready to join them (even if Turkey had not yet entered the war).[40] Whatever the true motivation, the State Committee of Defence Resolution No. 6279cc[41] was drawn up on 31 July 1944 which stated:

> In order to improve the situation at the state border of the Georgian SSR, the State Committee has decided: 1. To deport from … Akhaltsikhe, Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhalkalaki and Bogdanovka

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[40] See Polian 2004; Pohl 2009 describe the context, history and how the deportation was conducted.
[41] The Decree 6279cc can be found in English in Trier & Khanzhin's annex (2007:645-649). See also Polian Supplement 2 (2004:352).

> regions and the Ajaran Autonomous Republic —16,700 households with a population of 86,000 Turks, Kurds and Hemshins to Kazakh SSR: 40,000, Uzbek SSR: 30,000, Kyrgyz SSR: 16,000. (Trier & Khanzhin 2007:645).

The decree continued describing what each receiving SSR was to prepare, what the sending SSR was to do, and what was supposed to be reimbursed to the deported when carried out in November of that year by Comrade Beria (Trier & Khanzhin 2007:645).

Many of these preparatory plans were not carried through. On 15 November, the army came in and told the people they were being evacuated because the Germans would be attacking the region and that they would be allowed to return later (Sheehy 1980:24). They were gathered in the town centres and loaded onto cattle train cars and sent to Central Asia. Those deported were the Muslims in Meskheti and Javakheti whom included the Turks, Batumi Kurds, Hemshins, and Terekeme (Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Buntürk 2007; Polian 2004:155; Sheehy 1980; Statiev 2009:250; Trier & Khanzhin 2007:2). Squeezing around 90 people per car, they were on the railway from 18-22 days and around 3,000 died from disease/illness, cold and hunger (Trier et al. 2011:13).[42] Many others would die in the following years due to the extreme conditions they were forced to live through including the land and homes given to settle upon (Polian 2004:156; Trier & Khanzhin 2007). Officially, not including the soldiers, 92,307 were deported on 15 November and the soldiers fighting in the Soviet army were detained and sent to Central Asia (Buntürk 2007; Conquest 1970; Pohl 1999; Polian 2004; Trier & Khanzhin 2007:2).[43] The deported groups were not to be separated from their families, but this was

[42] Pohl writes 457 died 'en route' from disease and exposure but also highlights that '…between 1945 and 1950 the NKVD and MVD recorded 19,047 deaths (20% of the deported population among the Turks, Kurds, and Khemshils in special settlements' (1999:132, 134). Sheehy writes one report of 50,000 dying alone in Uzbekistan but later account was 30,000 people (1980:24) and Statiev mentions that cattle cars were also used by Soviet soldiers and not just the deported peoples, but their attrition rate was much lower (2009:256).

[43] Other records, however, show that 99,307 people were deported, with 53,163 to Uzbekistan, 28,598 to Kazakhstan, and 10,546 to Kyrgyzstan (Pohl 1999, Trier et al. 2011:14).

far from the case in practice. With each train stop, families were split up and most still are in different countries.

With the Meskheti region now vacated, the Soviets filled the region, as they had elsewhere, with former Russian soldiers and other 'trusted' populations. In Meskheti, Pohl states that GKO resolution 6279 called for '…7000 ethnic Georgian households [to move in] on the land of deported Muslims…' to help fortify the Soviet border with Turkey (1999:131). Trier and Khanzhin give higher numbers: 'In 1945, some 30,000 Georgian Christians were forcibly resettled from other parts of Georgia to the homes of the now deported Muslims of Meskheti' (Trier & Khanzhin 2007:294–296; Trier et al. 2011:12-13).[44]

Life in Central Asia would not be easy for the new arrivals. Statiev mentions there were three factors that the deportees would depend on for their survival: 'the circumstances of their deportation, the availability of accommodation at their new places of residence and the reimbursement of assets they had left behind' (2009:249).[45] The sending SSR's responsibility was to reimburse the deported for their loses, and the receiving SSR responsibility to prepare a place for them; neither fulfilled their duty. The November arrival to the Central Asian steppe would be challenging as they entered a foreign land, and often with dirty water and typhoid epidemics (Polian 2004:156). Old, dilapidated, and abandoned homes awaited them on the 'kolkhoz' (RU: колхóз), the Soviet collective farm or the 'sovkhoz' (RU: совхóз), the Soviet state-owned farm. These new 'homes' were also considered 'special settlements,'[46] which were in designated areas for those forced to move. Residing on the 'special settlements' meant movement and travel was severely limited, and Pohl mentioned they were tightly disciplined and under surveillance in 'miserable conditions … [which] lacked sufficient food and shelter….

[44] See Diamond 1998; Kaiser 2019.
[45] See Pohl 1999; Polian 2004.
[46] The Ahiska Turks usually labelled their time in the 'special settlements' as *'komindant altinda'*.

[and m]ost special settlers lived in unheated, overcrowded, and unhygienic buildings (Pohl 1999:133). For the first years there was only minimal contact locally with other deportees.

Things would change when Joseph Stalin died on 5 March 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev took over in 1956. In a famous speech given by Khrushchev that year, those acts of the Soviet state against the ethnic groups were acknowledged and most of them (Chechens, Ingush, Kalmyks, Germans, Finns, etc.) were granted permission for repatriation to their homelands (Polian 2004; Pohl 2004). The Ahiska Turks, however, were not given permission to return to Meskheti. In 1957 the restriction on travel outside of the 'special settlements' was finally lifted[47] and they were given permission to move to Tbilisi, Georgia, Moscow, or Azerbaijan (Polian 2004:184, 196-97, 216). A few decided to try moving to Georgia, but the majority remained in Central Asia and began seeking a way to return home.

1.5.8.2 Efforts at Return to Ahiska

Frustrated in not being allowed to return to Meskheti, the deported community began to come together to call upon Moscow to grant permission to return (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Buntürk 2007; Osipov & Pepinov 2003; Panesh & Ermolov 1993; Reddaway 2015; Sheehy 1980). This initiative would begin forging them together as a group, particularly through several conventions in the coming years. In 1964 a campaign was started amongst them called 'Turkish Society for the Defence of the National Rights of the Turkish People in Exile' and had a 'Provisional Organizing Committee for the Return of the People to the Homeland' under the chairmanship of Enver Odabashev (Sheehy 1980:25).[48] One of the responses by the authorities in these years regarding their permission was that those

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[47] See the decree in Polian 2004:219.

[48] For more on Enver Odabashev, see Buntürk 2007; Chervonnaya 1998; Osipov & Pepinov 2003; Sheehy 1980.

with Azerbaijani 'identity' were granted a right to return to Azerbaijan. Sheehy states that: 'Azerbaydzhanis …could 'return' to Azerbaydzhan … [and] were recruited to develop the inhospitable Mugan steppe in Azerbaydzhan.' She continued '… many [Ahiska Turks] went in order to be nearer Georgia' (1980:25). Here is a first obvious example of how their 'ethnic identity' being changed by the State over these years would come to impact them. First being Turks, then Georgian, then to Azerbaijan, the day of their deportation called Turk again. Each time, some did and could switch their official identity, others could not. This might also be noted on the census as Sheehy mentions because the high growth in 'Turks' counted, accounting this to the probability that they were changing their registrations from Azeri to Turks (Sheehy 1980:26).

By 1968 the Ahiska Turks were beginning to look to Turkey for help and would approach the Turkish embassy (Buntürk 2007; Wimbush & Wixman 1975:335-36). Their motivation being that if the Georgian SSR or Soviet Union does not grant them permission to return to the Meskheti region, then they wanted to leave the USSR and go to Turkey. According to Sheehy (1980:26) on 6 April 1970 they went to the Embassy in Moscow and the next month at the sixth 'nationality-wide' meeting on 1-2 May 1970, they came up with a resolution with several demands (Keskin & Yilmaz 2016; Osipov & Pepinov 2003). First, they wanted the perpetrators of the deportation to be brought to justice. Second, that they could return to Meskheti. Thirdly, that they could have their own autonomous province or republic and finally '…permit those who like to depart for Turkey … if our demands are not satisfied' (paragraph 10)' (Osipov & Pepinov 2003).[49] With no response from the Soviets, they appealed to Turkey and later to the UN. Up until this point, the authorities rarely had reacted aggressively against their meetings or appeals. This act of 'betrayal' to the Union, however, led some of their leaders to

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[49] See Polian 2004:218; Sheehy 1980.

imprisonment and further state actions against them (Buntürk 2007; Osipov & Pepinov 2003; Sheehy 1980).

Appeals continued, and after multiple attempts at repatriation, frustrations and desperations, a split in the group occurred (Buntürk 2007; Panesh & Ermolov 1993; Polian 2004:217-18). In 1971 at the eighth convention while designing another plan for repatriation. Georgian academics and sympathisers encouraged the group to agree to an offer by Georgia. Unofficially, they would agree to the Ahiska Turks repatriation, but required them to take on Georgian names and accept Georgian decent, thus rejecting their Turkishness (Osipov & Pepinov 2003; Polian 2004:218). Tired of finding no way back to their homeland, some within the community conceded to this; the majority did not (Panesh & Ermolov 1993:595).

According to Polian's account, in 1988 the first of those who had not conceded to Georgian's terms began attempts to make moves into Georgia (2004:220). In May of 1990, the Union-wide [Meskhetian] Turks Society *Vatan* commenced, and its sole goal was to return to Meskheti (Aydingün 2002a:51; Osipov & Pepinov 2003). This, however, would also be met by nation formation in Georgia making it harder to return (Aydıngün 2013; Chinchaladze 2018; Pelkmans 2006; Sumbadze 2007). The few that arrived between 1989-1991 were forced to leave again between 1989-1991 when an anti-Meskhetian campaign occurred (Modebadze 2009:118). Two hundred other families living in Georgia were also suddenly expelled (2009:119), Modebadze tells. Part of the problem, he states, is that there was a fear for more ethnic tensions that might arise in the region. This issue also relates to the expectations on returnees. Pohl (1999:136) wrote the Ahiska Turks could return to Georgia if they '… change their names to Georgian names,' and to 'renounce their Turkish national identity in favour of Georgian'. He continued saying the consensus for the Ahiska Turks was to reject this because it '… would amount

to agreeing to the disappearance of the [Ahiska] Turks as a distinct ethnic group through assimilation … The [Ahiska] Turks remain a people in diaspora.' (Pohl 1999:136).

Return to Ahiska was continually withheld by Georgia and the Soviets. Memory of their defending the region against the Russians, and siding with the Ottoman Empire against the Georgian State in 1918-21 kept them as a marginalized population (Sumbadze 2007:290). Sumbadze also points that Georgian collective memory continues to recall atrocities done by the Ottoman army and the local (Muslim) populations against Georgian Christians and Armenians (2007:290). Tensions already existed in the region between Georgians, some of whom had received land and moved there, and the Armenians who had migrated in mass in the early twentieth century (Suny 1994:198-99, 202). The repatriation or return of the Ahiska Turks would add to these tensions. Return to their villages was also deterred by the USSR. Some restrictions were lifted in 1956[50] but they still could not return to their villages. The following year on 31 October 1957 those deported from Georgia who were labelled as Azeri could resettle in Azerbaijan (Sumbadze 2007; Yunusov 2007:175) and some would migrate there in hopes to move to their villages.

As restrictions were being lifted, there remained a desire by the USSR to limit certain groups that could spark national sentiment in forming mass return to their previous homeland (Sumbadze 2007). This resulted in a persistent withholding of their return. This could be seen on 9 January 1974 when all movement limitations were lifted,[51] but actual return to the Meskheti-Javakheti borders between the USSR and Turkish (NATO) land was not permitted (Sumbadze 2007:293).

The situation in post-Soviet Georgia did not change very much. Official action began in 1999 by President Shevardnadze (Tarkhan-Mouravi 2007) but resistance to the Muslim

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[50] This was on 28 April 1956 with the USSR Supreme Soviet Decree No. 135/142. See Buntürk 2007:227; Sumbadze 2007:292.

[51] USSR No. 5333 – y111 (Buntürk 2007:242).

Meskhetian's[52] repatriation has remained despite the many efforts made.[53] These decisions were often due to concerns with further regional ethnic and religious differences as well as presumed economic strains (Diamond 1998; Sumbadze 2007; Tarkhan-Mouravi 2007; Trier and Khanzhin 2007a).

The concerns for regional ethnic and religious strains over the past century has included the Ahiska Turks. Their close relation to the Ottoman Empire and then Turkey has resulted in tensions and struggles with Armenians. The influx of Armenians moving into Ahiska and tensions that arose from that are remembered (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:39-40; Sumbadze 2007:290; Suny 1994:180; 198) as well as their villages and homes seen to be re-occupied by Armenians. These relations or tensions with Armenians, however, were very rarely made, except in relation with Turkey's position towards Armenians and whether it was a genocide or not.[54] Ahiska Turks also speak of the Nagorno-Karabakh (Khocali) war between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the many Ahiska Turks who had settled there and died at the hands of the Armenians (Alstadt 2020:163-164; Buntürk 2007:413; Yunusov 2007:190). Even calling it a genocide (NativeAhiska.ucoz.org 2015).

These continual preventions or limitations to return to Ahiska by the Soviets and Georgians as well as the emphasis on taking Georgian names has left few willing to move there (Aydingün 2002b:189; Modebadze 2009:117-18). In those years migration was limited to Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. While the struggle continued, another traumatic event would scatter them again.

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[52] One of the Georgian terms given them (Tarkhan-Mouravi 2007).
[53] For example, the efforts by the NGO Toleranti in Akhaltsikshe, Georgia and by the European Centre of Minority Issues (https://www.ecmi.de/). See Diamond 1998; Trier and Khanzhin 2007.
[54] This relates to Turkey's position there was no genocide while Armenia and many other nations regard the massacre and deportation of the Armenians as genocide. See

1.5.8.3 Second Sürgün: Ferghana, Uzbekistan

As the 1980's was ending in the USSR, nationalism was on the rise. The Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) were experiencing growing tensions amongst the diverse populations and the titular groups became more nationalistic (Khazanov 1992; Suny 2011). In Uzbekistan the Uzbeks were positioning themselves amongst the Russians, Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Kazaks, and other minorities within its boundaries. One of the tension points was the Ferghana valley, located in eastern Uzbekistan and crunched between the borders of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It has the highest population density in Uzbekistan and is a rich fertile area. It is also known for its religious fervour. The pogrom occurred in the Fergana province within its larger cities of Margilan, Kokand, and Ferghana. The 1989 census stated 13,600 Ahiska Turks were living in the province, but it may have been closer to 17,000 (Osipov & Cherepova 1996:8; Polian 2004). In June of 1989, 856 Ahiska Turk homes were ransacked and burned, people attacked, and when help finally came, there were around 100 dead as well as over a 1000 wounded (Chikadze 2007:119; Modebadze 2009:117; Pentikäinen & Trier 2004:12; Aydıngün et al. 2006:8). With troops and police surrounding the people, the Soviet Union finally began protecting them and sent 16,282 of them to Russia (Chikadze 2007:118-19; Kuznetsov 2007:198) and Azerbaijan (Yunusov 2007:176).[55] The Soviet army evacuated them to the Russia regions of Belgorod, Voronezh, Kursk, Orel, and Smolensk (Osipov & Cherepova 1996:7). This would be considered their second *sürgün.*

What sparked this is still debated. Some emphasized the Uzbeks were to blame and their rising nationalism. Others emphasized political dynamics and how the USSR played a role in instigating it. This was to bring agricultural labourers to the southern regions of Russia because of the ageing population and the young men having moved to the bigger

[55] See also Polian 2004:220 and Osipov & Cherepova which stated the Soviet Decree no.503 of the USSR Council of Ministers of 26.06.89 and Decree no.220 of the RFSFR Council of Ministers of 13.07.89 which tells of their evacuation (1996:8).

cities for work (Modebadze 2009:118). The other reason could be to draw the new nationalistic passion away from the Slavic populations and to the Turkish community (Modebadze 2009:118; Suny 2011:494). The truth may not ever be known, but the impact would be dramatic. In the subsequent months, another 50,000 Ahiska Turks left the region on their own while another near repeat of the Ferghana crisis in 1990 in the Buka region (Tashkent oblast or region) sent 2,000 more out of Uzbekistan (Chikadze 2007:118-19). Subsequently, this pushed 90,000 Ahiska Turks, or nearly all the population, to leave due to fear and/or social pressure (Baydar Aydıngün 1998; Chikadze 2007:119; Pentikäinen & Trier 2004:12; Polian 2004; Swerdlow 2006:1836). Those taken out of Ferghana by the Soviets, according to Mirkhanova (2006:41), were granted citizenship by the 'On Citizenship' law newly passed in 1991 (Article 13.1) within a few years. This was supposed to enable an easier adjustment in Russia for those settling there. The rest of the population, however, would face another difficulty. Homes and land were often quickly sold and the Ahiska Turks would initially scatter to Azerbaijan and Russia, and less so to Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Once again being separated from their relatives and community. The Soviet Union was still standing, so movement within the Union allowed an easier mobility across borders. That would change when the USSR came to an end on 25 December 1991.

1.5.8.4 Krasnodar Krai, Russia and Move to the United States

A whole new situation awaited those who arrived in Russia. The 'on citizenship' law in Russia helped many, but it would not be applied in all provinces. Some began moving to Rostov and Krasnodar Krai, because there was already a small Ahiska Turkish community present who had moved in the 1970-80's (Pilkington 2002:93). Krasnodar Krai is located on the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea in southern Russia and bordering Georgia. In Krasnodar Krai, the local community and regional governing officials however had not received them well as they faced discrimination and propaganda

against them (Dogan 2016; Swerdlow 2006; Tomlinson 2002:26).[56] Migration there from Central Asia already occurred previously so was a logical location for those seeking to flee Uzbekistan on their own (Mirkhanova 2006:39). It did not prove to be a safer or better place for those avoiding conflict in Uzbekistan as many fled without proper documentation; leaving stateless when the Soviet Union collapsed (Modebadze 2009:118). Citizenship rights as well as legal rights were not granted, impacting the opportunities to start a new life there. The most important document needed is the *propiska* (RU: прописка), which is the residence permit as well used for internal migration. It was granted in other regions, but Krasnodar Krai was not granting it. One significant challenge without it was limiting the education for the children and youth were not granted a diploma.

Discrimination and further ethnic tensions continued but they had no voice to speak out (Mirkhanova 2006; Swerdlow 2006). It finally culminated when the United States granted refugee status to the Ahiska Turks in 2004 (Dogan 2016; Koriouchkina 2011; Swerdlow 2004, 2006; Tomlinson 2002). To some this would be their third '*sürgün*' or forced migration they would be living through. Roughly 15,000 were moved to the USA as groups of 'special humanitarian concern' with Priority Two or P-2 processing (Osipov 2007). With the help of the United States, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Krasnodar officials, most Ahiska Turks in Krasnodar could leave, but some were not granted permission (Osipov 2007).

Arriving to the United States, the Krasnodar community was scattered to more than 30 states (Dogan 2016; Osipov 2007; Pirtskhalava 2015). This was the furthest geographical move from their homeland and other fellow Ahiska Turks. Internal migration within the

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[56] See Tomlinson, Chapter One, that discusses more on this.

United States has been occurring since their arrival and as they begin to form community centres, draw close to other Turks, and adjust to life there.[57]

1.5.8.5 Migration Toward Turkey

For some who had moved to Russia, the challenge of assimilation struggles, differing religious context, or discrimination and desire to be closer to family, as well as economic issues, led some to move on to Azerbaijan or to Turkey (Aydıngün 2007; Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Dogan 2016; Koriouchkina 2011). Likewise, some who were in Azerbaijan or in Central Asia have also moved on to Turkey as the economic opportunities have risen.

The legalities of moving to Turkey, as with other countries has not been easy. The Ahiska Turks would approach Turkey at the end of the Soviet period and continue to this day to promote and encourage their rights to live and be in Turkey. The first few years after the Soviet Union ended, the Ahiska Turks received little attention, in the most part due to the large influx of Bulgarian Turks arriving (Aydıngün 2007:341; Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:89) however on 11 July 1992, under President Turgut Özal, Law 3835 was passed which permitted the settlement of 500 Ahiska Turkish families in Turkey (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:89; Buntürk 2007:427). The number of migrants permitted, however, would be regulated by the Council of Ministers and they would also determine who was of Turkish descent to be accepted by the Law of Settlement (No. 2510) (Aydıngün 2007:344).[58] The first families settled were granted rights to citizenship and work permits, however, this period of granting the right to settle was limited (Aydıngün 2007).

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[57] See Bilge 2012; Cetinkaya & Kodan 2012; Dogan 2016; Koriouchkina & Swerdlow 2007; Swerdlow 2006; Yavuz Alptekin 2014.

[58] For example, in 1992 150 family were settled and 350 in 193 (Aydıngün 2007:342).

Aside from this more formal settling, President Özal also made a change to the general policy that encouraged Turks residing outside Turkey to stay there and informally accepted the Ahiska Turks that came with tourist visas. These tourists would then need to apply individually for residence and work permits as any other foreigners would need to. This, with time, resulted in many being illegal immigrants informally welcomed as '"national refugees"' in Turkey (Aydıngün 2007:342).

From 2002 Turkey was changing its perspectives that would encourage the Ahiska Turks to immigrate to Turkey. Since WWII, Turkey had its gaze to the West and to integrate with the EU (Zürcher 2017:362; Cagaptay 2014). Davutoğlu, a professor at the time, would become a key adviser to implement a vision seeing Turkey as global power.[59] His plan was to encourage Turkey to see its location and history and become a global leader, and especially those who shared an Ottoman past (Zürcher 2017:362; Çağaptay 2020). There was a dream of a 'Pax Ottomanica' and using 'soft power' and relation with these former Ottoman nations and other Muslim nations to grow in influence (Zürcher 2017:363; Çağaptay 2020). A key to this was having no conflict with the neighbours around them (Zürcher 2017:363). This period, thus, opened the door for Ahiska Turks to receive residence permits and work permits with ease (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:95).

In the years since 1992 the Ahiska Turks would both be seen as Turks and welcomed, but also face the question of being insufficiently Turk (Levin 2021:151). The informal welcome has entailed many changes in their status and limitations to those only holding a residence permit and for getting work permits. It also meant waiting for potential citizenship which would minimally take five years due to the change in Citizenship law in 2009 that no longer granted citizenship to those with Turkish descent after two years (Levin 2021). In 2014 more changes greatly affected the Ahiska Turks negatively as they

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[59] His book, Stratejik Derinlik (Strategic Depth) was a significant part in this shift and debates within Turkey (Zürcher 2017:363)

were seen again as other foreigners without special privilege (Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014:92).Their possibilities of citizenship and acceptance continually shifted and needed to work within Turkey's changing context.

It is to this situation that this thesis joins in the conversations of others (see Aydingün 2007; Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Bilge 2012; Dogan 2016; 2020; Koriouchkina 2011; Levin 2021; Oh 2006) as the deterritorialized Ahiska Turks adjust and relate to both Turkey.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by discussing the chapter layout of the thesis as well as the research questions and follow-up questions. After that, the historical context which describes the Ahiska Turks' situation today was given. Despite the discrimination and grave trials faced while living in diaspora, the Ahiska Turks have remained tight as a community in their diverse host cultures and appear to have increased their awareness and knowledge of who they are as Turks in diverse diaspora settings. Considering that, we will now turn to the literature review to align this research within the initiated academic conversations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2 Introduction

The introductory chapter gave the background and context for this study. This chapter turns to the relevant academic literature. Research on the Ahiska Turks has primarily emphasized 'who' the Ahiska Turks are, particularly regarding ethnic identity or legal difficulties they have faced.[1] Their situation, as seen in Chapter One, has arisen out of their 'stateless' deterritorialized situation in the post-Soviet context where nation formation centred much on ethnicity. Thirty years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, research on the Ahiska Turks has continued to reflect their adjustments in the post-Soviet context.

This literature review begins by looking chronologically at related research conducted on the Ahiska Turks to show the development within this discourse. Specifically, the Turkish ties of their ethnic identity (real or imagined) will be noted from this previous research and to show the developments over the years. Following this, the next sections will focus on two areas within the broader literature that help to theoretically frame this research. Firstly, nationalism, will be defined and briefly discussed using Anthony D. Smith's overview (2010) as a guide. This will include a conversation on Turkish nationalism, and nationalism within the post-Soviet sphere.[2] Secondly the study of diaspora will be framed drawing from Robin Cohen's (2008) ideal types and discussing diaspora's development and different usages to apply to the Ahiska Turks' situation.

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[1] The legal dynamics, which relate to their legal rights for return to Georgia, as well as their treatment in Krasnodar Krai, and subsequent reception to the United States as refugees in 2004-05 go beyond the scope of this research and will not be highlighted here in this review.
[2] The impact of Soviet nationalism is also touched on in the history section of Chapter One.

2.1 Review of Ahiska Turk literature

This section will give an overview of the Ahiska Turkish literature thus far. It will be divided into two sections, first what was written in the Soviet period and then secondly all that has developed since then.

2.1.1 Literature During the Soviet Period

Prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, very little research was conducted focusing on the Ahiska Turks[3] themselves. I will address this section chronologically to follow the development in the research. Ethnicity and identity have been the major themes on the Ahiska Turks. One of the earliest mentions came in the 1970's by Robert Conquest (1970). Using ethnographic pre-war maps and censuses that showed the many switches in 'ethnicity', seen in the identities listed, as well as language of education in schools.[4] Conquest emphasizes the groups 'ethnic' descriptions and relationship to Turkishness and says those having been deported, (the Meskhetians) '… are in fact best described as Turkish…' (1970:47) and that after the war the ethnographic maps still showed Meskhetia as 'Turkic' despite the people being removed (1970:48).[5]

Following Conquest, Ann Sheehy (1980) first published in 1973, shows the Meskhetians' experiences faced during the Soviet Union and their brief history, particularly focusing after the 1944 deportation. The deportation, she writes, occurred because Stalin wanted to 'remove potentially pro-Turkish peoples from the frontier area at a time when he had ambitions in north-eastern Turkey' (1980:24). After relentless attempts at return and thirty-eight delegations (Sheehy 1980:27) and petitions sent to Moscow (1980:25-26), return to southern Georgia was denied, but 'return' to Azerbaijan (because of their 'identity' change) was permitted to develop an inhospitable Steppe

[3] In this section non-Turkish research labelled them 'Meskhetian Turks' and I will keep the term used by the authors themselves. Thus, in this chapter the term Meskhetian Turk, Meskhetians, and Ahiska Turk all refer to the same group.
[4] Which shifted from Turkish to Azeri languages.
[5] He does, however, say that in the seventeenth century it was a Georgian population in the census.

region (1980:25). Significantly Sheehy also gives relevance to the development and start of the 'Turkish Society for the Defence of the National Rights of the Turkish People in Exile.' If denied permission to return to Georgia, requests to emigrate to Turkey were sent, with some even calling for the annexation of Meskhetia to Turkey (Sheehy 1980:26), an important note in the Soviet context of their attempted connection to Turkey at that time. She also noted the ethnicity perspective, claiming all 'Meskhetians', or the indigenous population of Meskhetia, were Georgian originally, and under 16th c. Turkish rule, Turkicization occurred which adopted Islam and the Turkish language (Sheehy 1980:24). Sheehy also claimed, however, that all those described as 'Meskhetians' are an ethnically heterogeneous group, either Turkic or Turkicized.[6] She displays three important things at that time. First, a continued desire to return to their geographical homeland. Secondly, if denied, a request to Turkey to receive them, and finally a group identity that was heterogeneous, as Turks or Turkified with relations to Turkey in wartime that potentially led to their removal along the border.

Shortly after this, S. Enders Wimbush and Ronald Wixman (1975) looked at the Soviet nationalities policy (Chapter One) and focused on 'connections' to address questions and decisions made relating to the Meskhetian Turks. They state the Meskhetian Turks are a group of 'different peoples' formed into a new 'ethnicity' and 'nation' (Wimbush & Wixman 1975:322). This, they argue, is through their shared experience, despite having little connection together prior to 1944.[7] In their study, 'Meskhetians' are designated as a national movement of ethnic groups that were exiled from Southern Georgia and Armenia, comprised of Meskhi Turks, Kurds, Khemshin, Karapapakh, and Turkmen who

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[6] Sheehy also pointed to the changes in identity and school language (Turkish to Azeri) from being Turks in the censuses of (1926 and 1935).

[7] See also 'Turk' or 'Meskhetian' in Wixman (1984) as he describes these differing groups further at that time. He does not label them 'Meskhetian Turks' here, but signifyingly notes that in 1944 they were labelled as 'Turks' by the Soviet Union but changed to Azeri after petitioning to emigrate to Turkey in the 1950's (134).

were then '…"welded"[8] into one nation at some stage in their exile' (Wimbush & Wixman 1975:321). They further specify that the largest group in the ethnic Meskhetian national movement were Meskhi Turk, but state there should be no confusion between the two, Meskhetian and Meskhi Turk. Meskhi Turks '…have no particular ethnic or linguistic character — nothing, that is, which differentiates them from the Turks of Eastern Anatolia. They are simply Turks who happen to live in the area called Meskhetia' (Wimbush & Wixman 1975:321-22). In their argument, it is these other groups who joined the larger Turkish group, that were then 'Islamicized' and displayed a strong sense of '*Türklük'* (Wimbush & Wixman 1975:327) as they labelled it. Out of these a 'nation' developed.[9] The authors agree with Conquest and Sheehy that the deportation was to strategically clear the border of Turkish sympathisers to further Soviet ideas of operations in north-eastern Turkey. They, however, go beyond this, due to their being 'earmarked' for deportation because of their common '*Türklük*' and 'Armenian claims on north-eastern Turkey' (Wimbush & Wixman 1975:324-326). Their group consciousness formed through the years by their organizing together to return to Georgia, as well as the macro level influences from the Soviet Union, Georgia, Armenians, and Turkey. Through this, they argue their 'Turkishness' and being 'welded into' a 'Turkic' group helped form a national movement within the Soviet Union. This Turkish nationalism is not to be confused with the Turkish nationalism that arose in Turkey. This will be seen later in this chapter.

2.1.2 Post-Soviet Literature on the Ahiska Turks

Nearly twenty years later after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Anatolym Khazanov (1992) emphasized the Ahiska Turks' search for identity in the Soviet Union and newly

[8] They took this from *Khronika Tekushchikh Sobitii (*Wimbush & Wixman, 1975:321).
[9] They made no mention of the group once being Georgians or Georgian Muslims, but there is a note of differentiation from the Georgian Muslims of Adzhar that 'were not Turkified' and not deported (Wimbush & Wixman, 1975:326).

post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States. He included them with the most 'acute' groups being pushed down by the 'policies of the central and regional elites' (Khazanov 1992:1). Their original homeland, Georgia, was also not interested in their return, while Turkey similarly offered little help. Written shortly after the 1989 crisis in Uzbekistan, ethnic competition and rising prejudice was occurring for these groups in their varying geographic situations. Giving a good historical and ethnographic overview, Khazanov points to historical events as critical to understand their present situation (1992:1). For example, in southern Georgia in the early twentieth century, he points many Muslims kept a 'degree of ethnic and cultural isolation from their neighbors,' and 'their separate ethnic self-identification at that time was rather vague and uncertain. Even their ethnic name was not yet fixed' (Khazanov 1992:2). Though forced last name changes were happening in the 1930's, Khazanov stated that was not so important, nor 'explicit ethnic connotations' as they just 'called themselves "ierli"' (or local, natives)' (1992:3).

Before the deportation, communities were based on kinship; it changed to becoming more heterogenous relations not directly linked genetically. His thinking of why the deportation happened, agreed with previous arguments related to Stalin's planned invasion of Turkey, and removal of 'those ethnic elements who did not enjoy his confidence' (Khazanov 1992:3). He added that the memory of the Muslim population aiding the Turkish offensive on Georgia in 1918 was still fresh for them. Khazanov develops the history of their desire to return and how ethnicity was a factor in this. While resisting assimilation as hoped by the Soviets, the group 'began to conceive of themselves as a separate people' due to 'Ethnic survival in extreme conditions of exile' (Khazanov 1992:7). Their ethnic self-identification began to serve them as they sought political mobilization and return to their homeland (Southern Georgia) as well as seeing themselves 'more advanced' and European' compared to their 'Asian' neighbours in Central Asia (Khazanov 1992:8). That ethnicity, however, in the 1970's was not all

agreed upon internally. Most insisted on Turkish identity, some stressed being 'Soviet Turks' and others were willing to be 'Turkicized Georgians' to return to Georgia. He concludes that the struggles and challenges after 1989 (in Uzbekistan, Russia, and Georgia) is best solved with emigration to Turkey but adds if they would be welcomed (Khazanov 1992:13).[10]

Ayşegül Baydar Aydıngün (1998) highlights the Ahiska Turks as a deported nationality where nationality is viewed in terms of ethnic groups who have their respective territory. She affirms that a small group of ethnic groups without territory developed a 'separate ethnic group identity' and national consciousness. This was due to external factors, particularly the Soviet policies on nationalism and from ethnic-based discrimination and confrontations by other ethnic groups. Like Khazanov, she says their original villages were more homogenous, based on kinship and religion, but highlights historical connections with their Ottoman past beyond that of the 1918 offensive. She adds how prior Turco-Russian wars and pressures put on the region led to the strengthening of Turkish identity, particularly after they remained on the Georgian side of the border and were being seen as an untrustworthy people. This experience of 'ethnicity-based discrimination' resulted in a greater leaning on their ethnic roots. The Ahiska Turks did not assimilate, she argued, because of strong family ties, minimal relation with other ethnic groups, endogamy, and keeping Turkish language in the home. Baydar Aydıngün states they have a dual homeland, that of 'Ahiska' in Southern Georgia and Turkey. They do not, however see return to Georgia possible so had begun migration to Turkey both legally and illegally. Their Turkish ethnicity, which tied to a 'national consciousness' arose in that time but fell under the Soviet System of nationalism and

[10] Alexander Osipov's ethnographic thesis about the 'Major Directions of Change in Self-Awareness and Culture of Akhaltsikhe (Meskhetian) Turks' was finished in Russian. A copy of this was given by an informant in Central Asia. Though an English version was unattainable, it was noted that the term Akhaltsikhe (Ahiska) Turk was already widely used by their 'movement' at that time (1993:1).

understood in those terms. It was not directly connected to 'Turkish nationalism' in Turkey, other than the ethnic and historical tie.

A few years later, Baydar Aydıngün's (2001) dissertation on the Ahiska Turks in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Turkey further developed her previous argument. She uses Anthony D. Smith's historicist position (1991) to help understand ethnic identity formation and shifts that are shaped by state policies as well as primordial policies (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:17). Taking a constructionist position, with its emphasis on both internal and external factors, she shows that ethnic identity is situational, where 'group boundaries are malleable' and can change (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:224, 52). She demonstrates this by looking at the relationships of the state and people's interactions and attitudes (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:3). As a deported people that were impacted by the different influences of nationalism in the early twentieth century, she pointed the Ahiska Turks had large transition. They shifted from an 'ethnic category' which was not conscious of its ethnicity, to an 'ethnic group' which became 'self-aware' of who they were as a group of people (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:3, 45).[11] She explained it is '… the interaction between the state and the minority that determines the creation of an ethnic group and ethnic consciousness' (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:3), and that '… [E]thnicity can be perceived as both volitional as well as situational and strategic' (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:52). She states ethnic formation and shift was 'born in the context of' the 1944 deportation but the Ahiska Turks remained '… conscious of their origins … [which] … strengthened their ethnic identity' (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:4). In the subsequent chapters, as the Ahiska Turks are living in diaspora, that malleability and shifting is displayed in different ways depending on the location where they are living.

[11] She draws from Smith (1991) to do this.

The following year, Aydingün (2002b) continues the discussion on the 'ethnic' development of the Ahiska Turks and particularly their relation to Turkey. Examining ethnic identity, she emphasizes how former theories explaining social change (that being Modernist, Marxist, and earlier ethnicity positions of primordialism and instrumentalism) did not explain well the reality of people's experiences. Maintaining the constructionist approach, ethnic identity is a never-ending process (Aydingün 2002b:185) and pointed to the significant role of the State for the Ahiska Turks' formation. She says: 'Ethnic groups do not emerge because people are of the same race or share the same language or culture' (Aydingün 2002b:186). For the Ahiska Turks, ethnic consciousness started due to the wars occurring in what she labelled the 'Transition Period'[12] (Chapter One) and their ethnic identity 'was born in the context of the 1944 deportation …' (Aydingün 2002b:187-188). She noted at the time of her research in Kazakhstan and Turkey, those within the three groups (Turks, Kurds, and Karapapakhs) wanting to go to Turkey were also those saying Turkey is the 'homeland' and tended to see themselves in exile. Highlighting both the formal and informal experiences in many places, Aydıngün externally points that the Ahiska Turks faced complicated legal issues in Turkey, but informally were welcomed by both the State and local population (2002b:190). She also explains using the example of the post-Soviet Georgian state's influence on ethnic formation to create a pro-Georgian rift in the group and how context is key. While external factors have impacted them, their feeling of being the only Turks in the Soviet Union and their connection to the Ottoman Empire, significantly effects their nationalism in the diaspora.

That same year, and focusing on the Meskhetian Turks' lives in diaspora, Kathryn Tomlinson's dissertation (2002) examines the context and region of Krasnodar Krai,

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[12] Particularly noting the Russian Wars of 1853-54; Bolshevik Revolution 1917 and the two World Wars (1914–1918/1939–1945).

southern Russia to critique the representation of post-Soviet life (and post-displacement) that is surrounded with crisis. Recognizing the need to pay attention to the historical processes to understand the Russian context (2002:232), she looks specifically at the Meskhetian Turks' 'continuity' to live everyday experiences and lifecycles as refugees, including the trauma and crisis in life (Tomlinson 2002:2). For the Meskhetian Turks, kinship, she stated, was more important than affiliation to the state (noting particularly the USSR), or a village association. Tomlinson saw at that time they were not so bound into telling a specific history, but more about their heritage which drew in part, from their history.[13] She says the Meskhetian Turks were not seen as a 'national group' in Soviet times by Stalin's definition because of the requirement for a 'common territory' (Tomlinson 2002:210-12). Importantly, she points '… their sense of community is not bound up with identification with a specific place, and nor is their desire for a 'homeland' in this sense equivalent to demands for return to Georgia' (Tomlinson 2002:213). However, Tomlinson did refer to a nostalgia and remembering the Soviet 'homeland'. Tomlinson uses Benedict Anderson's (1983) 'imagined community' (to be discussed below) of the Soviet Union to describe that feeling of belonging to what no longer exists as well as the need for an administrative 'homeland' (Tomlinson 2002:214) that was now missing for them.

Chong Jin Oh's (2006)[14] thesis compared the Ahiska Turks and Koreans in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. His research also focused on issues of ethnicity and identity, as well as 'long distance nationalism' that Benedict Anderson (1992) also addressed. Oh calls this 'Diaspora Nationalism' (Oh 2006:46). Diaspora nationalism is impacted and influenced by the nationalization occurring in Central Asia, but also has given rise to the

[13] The struggles she pointed to were geo-political and historically of the Soviet Union (and now Russia) and the Ottoman Empire (and today's Turkey), and how the World Wars impacted the Ahiska Turks with their first deportation due to the 'security threat' of Soviet citizens relationships with the non-Soviet community across the border (2006:43). That border is Georgia's and Turkey's.

[14] See Oh 2007; 2012. Both articles are reflective of his dissertation.

ethno-nationalism between those living in the diaspora and the homelands (Oh 2006:iii-iv, 12). This is an ongoing process as diaspora groups at a local level are influenced by the affects happening internationally. Oh begins to show the ties these two diaspora groups were developing with their homelands, Korea, and Turkey.[15] Despite being deported, vulnerable, powerless and located away from the homeland, these groups are existing, surviving, and 'nation building' in Central Asia (Oh 2006:9-10). His discussion on nationalism presumes the ethnic and cultural kinship ties of being Turk (or Korean) with being a 'nation' with its 'nationalism' connected with the homelands Korea and Turkey. In this research, the dynamic of the Ahiska Turks being a (Turkish) diaspora, and the need of adjustment to Turkey as another host land is a degree adding to the conversation and presumption made by others.

Moving from Central Asia to the Caucuses, Arif Yunusov (2007) discusses the situation of the Ahiska Turks in post-Soviet Azerbaijan as it went through nation building. Azerbaijan experienced Turkification, he says, as Turkey began to influence Turkish kin groups. The Ahiska Turks saw this as a prestigious thing and took pride in being Turk and their 'connection' to Turkey (Yunusov 2007:190). Importantly, Yunusov also makes the distinction of the Ahiska Turks' differentiating their own group's identity and their historical story. He stated that because of living in Azerbaijan nearly fifty years, their '… ethnic self-consciousness' has developed extensively. They 'perceive themselves to be a separate nation with their own history, common memories and identity … [nearly] all Turks in Azerbaijan feel a sense of belonging to a single ethnic group: "Ahiska Turks"' (Yunusov 2007:192). This, 'broader Turkish identity' means more to them than local identities, like their original villages (Yunusov 2007:192). This poses a dilemma,

[15] Oh does not consider Georgia (nationally) the Ahiska Turks homeland, however the geographical location he does consider a homeland (2016:115).

however, as their group-identity and consciousness were challenged as it merged with Turkey's history and their place in it.

Elisaveta Koriouchkina's (2011) dissertation is an essential addition to Aydıngün's study in Central Asia on ethnicity and nationalism. She looks at the transformations occurring during the USSR-post Soviet state using the Meskhetian as a 'looking glass' into social changes in post-Soviet Russia (Koriouchkina 2011:24). Engaging with an essentialist view on ethnic groups which states they are natural and play a major determinant for individual behavior (Koriouchkina 2011:42). She takes a constructivist view on primordialism, due to how 'sticky' it is, and points to how a primordialist ethnicity theory remains within the Soviet and post-Soviet context. This she says '… continues to define the fate of Meskhetian Turks.' (Koriouchkina 2011:42). Koriouchkina does this by examining the history of Soviet ethnic policies with the changing laws on citizenship to highlight both change and continuity (2011:10) and the significant role party representatives and social scientists had in defining and introducing ethnic categories to the general population (2011:43).

As seen, each location the Ahiska Turks live in gives another angle of understanding them as a group in diaspora. Hatice Bilge's (2012) dissertation develops further Ahiska Turkish identity relating to the cultural connections between them and the Turks (from Turkey) living in Phoenix, Arizona. She agrees with previous study that their cultural identity is shaped and affected by their historical experiences which is connected to their past, connections with Turks, and to the geographical land. For her, however, 'This is not a connection to the land or people of Turkey, but a connection to cultural heritage and ethnicity. It is a historical bond that shapes Meskhetian Turkish identity' (Bilge 2012:97) that is influenced by discrimination and segregation (Bilge 2012:195). Their identity as Meskhetian Turks, she says, 'is an ethnic identity' (Bilge 2012:168), and preservation of culture is key for them, likely an outcome of having no homeland. Preservation, she says

includes their views of '…morality, ethics, integrity, diligence, determination, a sense of responsibility for their families and their community, and preservation of core values such as religion, language and traditions' (Bilge 2012:105). It is through community that culture is preserved, and that culture includes sentiment towards ethnic kinship communities tied to other Turks as well as to the land of Turkey. Inspite of how circumstances led to a separation from Turkey, they still 'see themselves as Turks: culturally, ethnically and historically they are Turks' (Bilge 2012:97) and use the Turkish flag, for example, as an important symbol.[16] Bilge, like Yunusov, acknowledges the Ahiska Turks see differences between Turkish heritage and their own connection to Turks and Turkey. Here Bilge brings another perspective in noting their relationship with Turkey in the diaspora. Whilst differences, it is the kinship community, culture and history that connects them together.

Religion in the context of diaspora is keyed in on by Hayri Erten (2014). He focused on the Ahiska Turks living in Azerbaijan. Defining and discussing diaspora,[17] he points to why the Ahiska Turks should be included as a diaspora group (Erten 2014:24, 205) taking into account the 1944 deportation. Primarily focusing on their religious practice, he demonstrates their identity (*kimlik*) in religious terms as being Muslims and the aim in Azerbaijan to not lose their cultural religious practices (Erten 2014:202-203). Interestingly writing from Turkey, he points the Ahiska Turks' aim from Azerbaijan is for a return to their motherland (*anavatan* or *anayurt*) in southern Georgia, but with no political ambitions (Erten 2014:24). Along with that perspective, he also affirms Oh's (2006) research seeing Turkey as their historical country (*tarihsel yurdu)*.

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[16] One area Bilge (2012) says needs to be explored greater is how Meskhetian Turks perceive Turks and Turkey in the United States and other locations and how that location affects that perception. Further study in Turkey should be done.

[17] He desires to expand the meaning beyond the Jews, Africans, and Armenians. Diaspora will be discussed later in this chapter.

Hulya Dogan's (2016) dissertation is a multi-site study[18] of Meskhetian Turks in Houston, Texas (USA) and in Istanbul, Turkey where she makes an important distinction and addition to studies on the Ahiska Turks as she emphasizes them being a de-territorialized diaspora group with no nation-state.[19] As a refugee group living in different locations who do not have a homeland, she asks how they reconcile a diasporic space with the local place they are living. She also asks how they are perceiving and possibly shifting in their views of homeland and ethnic identity. What is important is the image of community, but Dogan points that does not necessarily mean it is the location or 'territory' where that community is living (2016:182). She concludes that Meskhetian Turks do 'not have a nation state' (2016:191) nor feel belonging[20] to either Georgia or Turkey (187). They, however, still see Georgia as their original homeland and Turkey is seen as their 'surrogate homeland or fatherland' because they all share the Ottoman heritage (Dogan 2016:191, 187). She argues that the 'Meskhetian Turkish global connectedness and the constant negotiations that take place across diasporic space … are driven, in part, by the claim to a co-ethnicity that can only be realized in the diaspora' (Dogan 2016:187). Agreeing with the point of other researchers that their identity is based locally, she adds that this local identity is challenged in the diaspora: thus 'to be a Meskhetian Turk is to be diasporic.' (Dogan 2016:187).

I have intentionally drawn these studies to highlight the specific focus' in this area thus far. As many of these examples show, the location of the research influenced the Ahiska

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[18] Dogan is the only study that explicitly states the use of multi-site methodology; however, she also uses two locations as others have before (Aydıngün's Kazakhstan and Turkey; Oh's Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; Koriouchkina in Russia and includes the United States in her final chapter. Levin (2019), though unattained for this study, included Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey.

[19] This is helpful as research in that it goes beyond just the United States and Russia that most USA based research tended to do, as well as the tendency to focus on their identity, history and the political issues surrounding their arrival from Russia and tended focused on a single site. See Akkaya 2013 in St. Louis, Avci 2012 in Wheaton, Illinois; Aydar Mustufa's MA 2015 in Columbia, Missouri; Bulloch 2007 Hartford, Connecticut; Reisman's 2012 MA in Seattle, Washington; Bilge's PHD 2012 in Phoenix. Arizona.

[20] However, Dogan also said those in the Turkey did feel they belonged in Turkey, while those in the United States did not express that same belonging (2016:186).

Turks' perceptions, their similarities, and differences. Each researcher's point of reference on the Ahiska Turks gave insight to what was arising in each place, possible bias's and where more than one country deepened the perspective and analysis. Ethnicity, community, culture, and kinship ties with Turkey were all emphasized to some extent. Diaspora was noted by a few researchers, and nationalism was also addressed, but more regarding the effects of Soviet nationalism or ethnic/kinship ties to Turkey. Nationalism and Diaspora Studies will be addressed in the next two sections after briefly noting how this thesis contributes to knowledge in studies relating to the Ahiska Turkish.

2.1.3 Contribution to Knowledge

The previous section highlighted the development and discussion relating to the Ahiska Turks, their identity and groups understanding. Much of this grew out of varying circumstances which drew attention to their situation. For example, the fall of the Soviet Union and the events in Ferghana, Uzbekistan in 1989 both drew attention to their stateless situation, and subsequent movements became more noted. Studies in nationalism and ethnic studies in the early post-Soviet period highlighted the groups appeals and struggles to return to Georgia and then those leaving Krasnodar Krai to the United States.

This study joins that academic conversation of how the Ahiska Turks are representing themselves as a scattered group in various countries in regard to their being in diaspora. Specifically speaking, the relationship to Turkey continues to grow and adjust. For those living in diaspora, some continuity remains from the past, while relationship to Turkey's diaspora continues to grow and develop especially in the United States, of which this study also contributes. For those moving to Turkey, the realities of adjusting to their 'imagined homeland' is being reconciled with. I see their nationalism aims continue to shift from being Turks under Soviet national thinking into joining into Turkey's nationalism and inserting their narrative into that of Turkey's. This means moving beyond just a kinship relationship to a greater affiliation with the nation of Turkey. That is a

further contribution to Turkish nationalism studies as the Ahiska Turks' reconcile themselves as true 'Turks' who belong in Turkey.

2.2 Nationalism

Nationalism will be defined and briefly discussed using A.D. Smith's overview (2010) as a guide.[21] He looks at nationalism as an ideology, but also includes it as a social movement and symbolic language. There are five main paradigms of nationalism which Smith highlights (see Chapter Three of Smith 2010). The first paradigm is the modernist, who see that planned nation building is a modern phenomenon and began in the eighteenth century; nationalism is a direct product of it (Smith 2010:49, 50). Another paradigm is the perennialist, who view that nations always had existed throughout history and are more historical in nature (Smith 2010:53, 55). A third paradigm is that nations existed from the beginning of time, and '… lie at the root of subsequent process and developments' and '… share with God the attributes of existing before all things and of originating everything' (Smith 2010:55).[22] This is called primordialism and is more organic in nature, with origins given to Rousseau. Though primordialism has faced much critique, a neo-primordialism position has continued this position (Özkırımlı 2017:69-80). The fourth, ethno-symbolism[23], is an alternative view given by Smith out of dissatisfaction with the other views (modernist, perennialist, and primordialism). This perspective focuses more on a subjective approach to nations formation and comprehending the inner worlds of the *ethnie* and their persistence (Smith 2010:61). It emphasizes how myths, values, traditions, symbols, and memories play a role in the persistence and changes within ethnicity and nationalism.

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[21] See Özkırımlı 2017 *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* for an important overview of nationalism theories as well as the critiques for each. Chapter Two specifically emphasizes the debates, discussions, and historical overview of nationalism.
[22] For a critique of the primordialist, perennialist, and postmodern approaches on nations and nationalism, see Smith 2009:9-13, as well as Özkırımlı 2017:68-69.
[23] See Smith 2009.

Finally, the fifth paradigm is post-modernism that has a leaning toward 'post-national' thinking and a global culture (Smith 2010:141).[24] Smith focuses on two divisions within a post-modern, post-national theory. The first is based more on an economic consumerism which brings the world together through mass consumerism (Smith 2010:142). The second of these is a global culture, hybridized and strongly influenced by technology and mass communication which will unify and connect the world rather than history and culture (Smith 2010:143). A group's 'hybridized' identity (Bhabha 1990) within the multicultural nation, utilizes 'performative' narratives and the identity and perception of the past is then split and fragmented into different parts (Smith 2010:136). In this view, historically mass movements and migrations has always been happening and thus 'national identity' is, or always has been, changing. This understanding, however, must be held carefully as dominant *ethnie* are often still seen as legitimate citizens of the nation (Smith 2010:138). Smith shows the depth in nationalism drawn out of 'authenticity', political religion, ancestry, and sacred community (Smith 2010:143).

The modernist and the ethno-symbolic paradigms will be developed further. These were chosen as this thesis draws upon the ethno-symbolic approach to understand the ethno-nationalism of the Ahiska Turks. Modernism is also discussed as the ethno-symbolic approach responded to this and prior research on the Ahiska Turks often engaged with this perspective, particularly the sociocultural and constructionist. These will be looked at now.

2.2.1 Modernism: Sociocultural & Constructionist

The first paradigm Smith highlights is modernism. Modernism can be broken down into different categories: socioeconomic, sociocultural, political, ideological, and

[24] Pilkington critiques postmodernism by noting the overemphasis on the cultural construction of national formation while 'ignoring the roots of nations in real social processes…' (1998:186). The focus becomes more on deconstruction as well as over focus on the 'other rather than 'self' in the formation of national identity (1998:186).

constructionist. In this section I will highlight two of these, sociocultural and the constructionist. I choose these specifically to continue dialogue with previous research as well as not seeing significant relevance out of the data for the political, socioeconomic, and ideological categories.

The first category is sociocultural, and Ernest Gellner is one of its main advocates. Here nations are '… are sociologically necessary phenomena of the modern, industrial epoch, emerging in the transition of "modernization" (Smith 2010:51)' and '… Nationalism was product, not producer, of modernity' (Gellner 2006:xxi) and was a function of it (2006:xx). Gellner argued that nationalism's political and ethnic boundaries should not intersect each other within the state and that it is a theory of political legitimacy (Gellner 2006:1).[25] He also saw diaspora nationalism as distinct within this and an import 'sub-species of nationalism' (2006:98). Those living in diaspora face a challenge not held in the nation itself, as they face a risky choice if they do not choose nationalism, as it is the 'nationalist solution' to evade assimilation (Gellner 2006:104).

The second category under modernism is constructionist. It still views nations and nationalism as modern, yet they also emphasize how they are socially constructed (Smith 2010:52; Özkırımlı 2017). One of the main proponents of constructionism is Benedict Anderson.[26] He argues that 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.' (Anderson 2016:6). Nations are limited and with boundaries, as well as sovereign as they came out of a time when divinely ordained hierarchical dynastic realms were losing legitimacy through revolution and the Enlightenment (Anderson 2016:7). They are imagined as *community* because of being

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[25] The main criticisms of Gellner were conceptual, empirical, and explanatory (Gellner 2006:xxxiii-xi].
[26] The constructionist approach also has points to critique. One critique of the constructivist approach in the study of nationalism was the downplay on the role of religion. That will be seen later in the formation of Turkish nationalism as Dressler emphasizes (2013:81). Another critique on the modernist interpretation of nationalism is the lack of space for it to have been started or present to some extent in premodern culture. For critiques, see Dressler (2013:82); Özkırımlı's (2017:130-143).

born '…as a deep horizontal comradeship,' whether true comradeship or not (Anderson 2016:7) that unifies the people within it. All within the group live as if living in communion even though they may never know or meet other members within the nation (Anderson 2016:6). Anderson discusses how the state, or a secular idea had to replace the role that religion had played. If nation-states are both 'new' and 'historical,' the nation and its political expressions stretch to both an 'immemorial' past and future (Anderson 2016:11-12). He proposes that 'nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against – it came into being (Anderson 2016:12). To do this he shows the rise of nationalism and why he sees it is formed, significantly focusing on the influence of Creoles influence on nationalism to Europe, as well as the influence of Russification, print-language, and print capitalism, (Anderson 2016:45). Through these processes, the nation and nationalism were imagined, as well as creating an attachment that people will die for the nation (Anderson 2016:141).

2.2.2 Ethno-Symbolism

The second paradigm under modernism that will be highlighted is ethno-symbolism. Smith wanted to focus on ethnicity and show how both ethnic identity and community are an important part of nationalism and a nations historical and social context. Nation, like religion 'resonates among "the people"' which means, he suggests, a need 'to pay close attention to the role of symbolic elements in the language and ideology of nationalism, and to the moral, ritual and emotional aspects of the discourse and action of the nation' (Smith 2010:3). Smith defines nation as 'a named human community residing in a perceived homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members' (2010:13). An important component of nations and nationalism both socially and historically comes from the ethnic community or *ethnie* (Smith 2010:1). The concept of *ethnie,* he says, is 'a named

human community connected to a homeland, possessing common myths of ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of shared culture, and a measure of solidarity at least among the elites.' (Smith 2010:13). Smith, however, differentiates a nation from an ethnic community, despite some similarities, because the ethnic community usually does not have a public culture, political interest, and may or may not have a territory (2010:12-13). In the ideal, nations will occupy their homelands, ethnic communities, however, may be linked in some way, even symbolically like the 'diaspora nation' who lost their homeland, claim to be nations, and yet 'wander the earth' (Smith 2010:14). He argues that memories, rules, rhythms, links, or bridges with people's inner world of nation's concepts, symbols, and emotions (2010:3) are the 'core' of ethnicity (2010:15).

The way these core things can be measured is by the '*mythomoteur'* and the *'myth-symbol'*[27] complex. The *mythomoteur,*[28] 'indicate[s] the vital role of myths and symbols embodying the corpus of beliefs and sentiments which the guardians of ethnicity preserve, diffuse and transmit to future generations' (Smith 2010:15). The continuance of the *ethnie,* he sees, is based on how well this is passed on in form and content to future generations and its durability is less influenced by outside factors such as ecological, class, military, and political influence, etc. (2010:15). Only in rare cases does the *ethnie* break down or make alterations (Smith 2010:16). Nationalism thus requires a returning to the past, to the 'authentic roots' with its historical culture found in the ancestral homeland to find again, renew and/or restore the nation's cultural identity (Smith 2010:37). The cultural values found within the *ethnie* are what are key to what makes up the nationalism which is found within the nation. To situate the influences of nationalism

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[27] The '*Myth symbol complex'* is the nature (forms and content) of myths, symbols, values, and the memories of the past (Smith 1986:15).
[28] The *Mythomoteur* mentioned by Eric Dardel (1954), was used by John Armstrong (1982) in Nations before Nationalism and further developed by Smith.

on the Ahiska Turks from where they are coming from, a post-Soviet context, and where they are merging, an ‘imagined’ Turkey, will follow the contribution to knowledge.

2.2.3 Contribution to Knowledge

While previous studies have approached the Ahiska Turks from a constructionist or primordialist approach, I emphasize the ethno-symbolist approach to understanding the Ahiska Turks. The reasons for this are a few. First, the constructivist approach when addressing the Ahiska Turks emphasizes how the events and circumstances that occurred to them influenced them and were constructed from the elites or ‘outside’ the community. This is obviously significant, and I am not arguing that these outside influences had no impact on the Ahiska Turkish community today. For instance, the role of the Turkish-Russian wars, the Soviet Union's influence upon titular and non-titular nations, the deportation in 1944, nation building in the early Turkish republic, as well as impacts upon them in the various nations after the fall of the Soviet Union. Each of these effected the Ahiska Turks and they had little right or influence in what would happen to them. The ethno-symbolic approach is utilized in this research as it explains more clearly the influence of, and by the people themselves to these larger powers around them. As the Ahiska Turks are deterritorialized and in constant state of being in another host country, (including Turkey for at least the first-generation migrants), the ethno-symbolic approach helps reveal the place of the people, the *ethnie,* and their own responses from the people’s level.

In examining how the Ahiska Turks have responded to those that might 'construct' their nationalism, I see their subtle resistance to this. As they adjusted to the different circumstances and host nations, their ethno-Turkish nationalism, has remained steady. Being ‘Turk’ is seen through ethno-symbolic ways to display their nation when they were not legitimately recognized. In the early post-Soviet years to the present, that ethno-symbolism with its values, myths, memories, and symbols arises not to show they are

Turks in the Soviet Union to return to their homeland, but rather show an ethno-nationalism that coincides with Turkish nationalism and be accepted in Turkey, socially and bureaucratically.

2.3 Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Republics

As the Soviet nationalist project greatly impacted the peoples within the Soviet Union (see history section, Chapter One), the collapse would both reflect that and bring about new challenges. This was already mentioned briefly in the Ahiska Turkish section above. Here I would like to highlight this further. Atabaki and Mehendale (2005) argue that the ethnic formation in Central Asia and the Caucasus is based on the forced or chosen exodus of peoples at the end of Tsarist Russia and during the Russians Communist party through the Soviet Union formation. This, they said, continued in the post-Soviet era as the 'diasporic populations who had settled in compact communities … formed cultural societies, produced periodicals, and staunchly taught their children their own religious convictions and vernacular languages … [as well as followed] intimately the political changes in their country of origin' (2005:7). Those cultural communities who were 'compacted' increased their connections, hoping to restore the real, or imagined, homeland. In doing so, forming an '…ethno-communal allegiance and political solidarity which accentuated the "reconstruction" of a homeland and return' (Atabaki & Mehendale 2005:7). This was especially true, they note, for those like the Crimean Tatars, Meskhetians, and Kurds without an independent homeland.

In addressing forced migrants and their displacement and national-identity formation in post-Soviet Russia, Hilary Pilkington (1998) focuses on post-Soviet Russian national identity and discusses the complexities of theories to understand this context. Here, she considers how the primordiality thesis challenges the modernist and post-modernist claims, seen mostly with the term 'historical homeland' (1998:185). When applied, the bounded territory and national collective consciousness are rooted together in the present

but looking back to its history (1998:185). Pilkington shows the challenge in the post-Soviet space and that there are flaws in the modernist understandings, with the only other alternative to the primordial view being the post-modern perspective (1998:186). Challenging Smith (1995), she points the connection of '… blood, land and state is the most fundamental challenge to claims that "nations" are imaginary constructs…' invented by bringing together myths. This is part of the wrestling that can be seen with the Ahiska Turks. As they affirmed or 'formed' their identity in the Soviet space, they had to adjust in differing post-Soviet nations, further displacements, and attempts to return to their historical homeland (Ahiska). These all tied into their national collective consciousness, blood, and land, but also would be the myth that will be developed.

Jolle Demmers (2005:13) research specifically addresses how a diaspora group can cause nationalist conflicts within the homeland by looking at post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus. The discussion of nationalism has changed, especially regarding diaspora, Demmers argues. The central focus of national theories where territorial ethnic or national lines would not cross the political ones does not define nationalism (Demmers 2005:16). In addressing this, she questions those without a homeland, or outside the homeland, and asks if Anderson's 'long-distance nationalism' is a contradiction of terms. How can one have nationalism when not in the homeland? She goes on pointing that nationalist's '…have begun to carry out their struggles on a global scale. National communities are being 'imagined' in a new (delocalized) way [and] we are witnessing the construction of transnational national communities' whereas loyalty is given to a homeland of which they no longer live in (Demmers 2005:16). She gives an example of how the Kurds 'discover' their 'Kurdishness' in Germany as their culture, language, and history could be expressed freely and leading to 'nationalism' (Demmers 2005:16).[29] The

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[29] See Eppel, M 2015; Aktürk 2011.

problem, however, is when a group is deterritorialized or without a 'homeland.' As previous research demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, the exile led to the Ahiska Turks' discovery of their 'ethnic identity' and 'nation' within the Soviet sphere as they pushed to return to southern Georgia. Now in the present day, and the return to southern Georgia not being a reality, that Turkishness and 'exile' has led to a leaning into their 'imagined' Turkish nationality (of Turkey) which had not developed along with Turkey's nationalism.

Prior to turning to Turkey, a brief comment is needed about why Islamic resurgence in Central Asia is being omitted. Islamic resurgence has obviously played an important factor in the region.[30] Chapter Six will look at the Ahiska Turks' ethno-religious practice and its role within ethno-nationalism. Islam and their religious practice will also be briefly touched on. Despite this, in the fieldwork and interviews, there was very little empirical evidence related to neither the engagement with, nor reaction to, an Islamic resurgence in the region. For this reason, it is not included in the literature review nor discussed in this research.

2.3.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This research also contributes to studies following the Soviet Union's fall. The fieldwork and analysis reflect the continual adjustment and reactions of a stateless non-titular Soviet nation without a homeland. As minorities within the former Soviet Republics, there is a continuous relationship with their host country and nationalism that comes with this. I aim to note the Ahiska Turks' Turkish nationalism during the Soviet period was different than the Turkish nationalism of Turkey's though it was influenced by it. Following the Soviet Union's fall, it is more clearly an ethno-nationalism that the Ahiska Turks' would emphasize in relating and re-connecting with Turkey. It is being emphasized more from

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[30] See Atkin 1992; Aydıngün 2016; Aydıngün et al. 2016; Balci & Motika 2007; Botobekov 2016; Broxup 1990; Erten 2014; Gammer 2007; Geukjian 2012; Goff 2020; Münster 2014; Peyrouse 2007; Rasanayagam 2012; Ro'I & Wainer 2009.

their perspectives the connection held with Turkey and ways they as part of the Turkish diaspora view Turkey from their host nations. Finally, as return to their homeland Ahiska remains a great challenge for the community, their views of Ahiska and relationship to it is also adjusting.

2.4 Turkish Nationalism

It is important to remember the great changes in the early decades of the twentieth century that followed World War One and how that impacted a rise in nationalism. Particularly significant in this thesis was the nationalism forming in and around the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. In this section the forming of Turkish nationalism will be addressed and how that impacted up to today.

With the demise of the Ottoman Empire, one of the main arguments for Turkish nationalism and aims of the new Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was to bring Turkey once again into a competitive and equal (or better) place than Europe and to be accepted by the West (Mango 2006:3; Lewis 2002:314-15). Nationalism, according to Lewis (2002), began in the late Ottoman period, and was greatly influenced by exiles from Europe that fled to Anatolia and Ottoman exiles remaining in Europe coming into Turkey. Soner Cagaptay (2006) agrees to the role of the exiles but highlights how it was the *millet* system[31] of the Ottomans that shaped the way non-Muslims saw themselves and responded after the Ottoman Empire's demise.[32] As nation building began in the Balkans, many Ottoman Muslims fled due to how ethnicity was being shaped by religion and subsequently leading to persecution. It was nationalization through religion.

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[31] The *millet* system was an officially recognized religious structure (See Howard 2017:248; Kinross 2002; Lewis 2002; Zürcher 2017:4-5).

[32] Howard notes this: 'While the communal equality of the 1856 edict expressed the ideal of an Ottoman religious mosaic, by using the language of *millet* - religious community - it formalized lines of religious difference and contributed to animosity against Ottoman Christians, who were seen as aligned with foreigners, against not just Islam' (2017:256).

This greatly influenced how Turkish nationalism emerged at the end of World War One and had formed in part by the politically active exiled community of Turkish-Muslims moving into Turkey (Cagaptay 2006:10). He writes: 'At this time when the Ottoman *millet* system fell apart, with its religious compartments (*millet*s) yielding to different nationalist programs, Turkish nationalism emerged as a powerful political force within the Muslim millet' (2006:2).[33] To build a nation, Turkey shifted away from the thinking of its Ottoman past and turned its focus to the West. This became known as Kemalism (*Atatürkçülük*).[34] The challenge, however, was to unite a very diverse population. In 1904 Yusuf Akçura (Akçuraoğlu, Yusuf), a Tatar, who moved to Turkey from the Russian Empire helped find a way of unifying the people with a written essay.[35] Akçura saw three ideological discussions: Ottomanism, pan-Islamic, and finally Turkism (Lewis 2002:326). This final one, Turkism, would create less obstacles and be distinct from a very religious, Islamic emphasis or one holding to a past Ottoman one. Turkism meant they chose to politically turn away from Islamic traditions and practices and rather to a more secular Islam (Cagaptay 2006; Lewis 2002:3). It would, Akçura suggested, be 'a Turkish national policy based on the Turkish race and a Turkist policy would rally the loyalties of the dominant Turkish race within the Ottoman Empire and reinforce it with that of the many millions of Turks, in Russia and elsewhere, beyond the Ottoman frontiers.' (Lewis 2002:327). There was no Ottoman nation at that time, Lewis notes, (2002:339) but that would be created through the writing of the 'Turkish' history.[36] This

[33] See Ahmad (2014) claims the terms *millet* (nation), *milli* (national*), milliyetçi* (nationalist) were considered more patriotic, not nationalistic, inclusive rather than exclusive within the borders. He does, however, note the Turkish Islamic element to this (80).
[34] The six principles of Kemalism are: Republicanism (*Cumhuriyetçilik*), Nationalism/Patriotism (*Milliyetçilik*), Populism (*Halkçılık*), Statism (Devletçilik), Laicism/Secularism (*Laiklik*) and Revolutionism/Reformism (*İnkılapçılık*). (See Ahmad, 2014: 88; Zürcher 2017:183).
[35] See Lewis (2002:326). *Üç tarz-ı Siyaset* (Three kinds of policy).
[36] It is beyond the scope of this section to go into the possible and likely influences that would impact the Ahiska Turkish region in this period with the influences coming from Turks within the Russian Empire. See Lewis (2002), Chapter Ten. Yusuf Akçura would also write 'Türkçülük' in 1928. Lewis (2002:326).

would be a challenge with the pulling between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism while the transition was occurring between the Ottoman empire and Turkish republic.

In that same period, Cagaptay mentions how the 'Father of Turkish Nationalism', Ziya Gökalp[37] (1877-1924) emphasized socialization, religion (both faith and culture), ethics, aesthetics, (2006:8) as keys for the Turkish nation. Through these a national community of Turks and Anatolian Muslims could be united through assimilation, particularly Turkish language, and culture (Cagaptay 2006:16). Gökalp stated how the national personality comes out when the nation goes under great disaster (Cagaptay 2006:4, 8). While Pan-Islamism was pushed down, Turkism did not exclude religion. According to Dressler the place of religion would emphasize Muslims over non-Muslims and Turkism would be based on race, religion, and language (2013:91).

In chaotic times, Kemal had to bring together the people and create a new loyalty to the Turkish nation (Ahmad 2014; Lewis 2002:359; Zürcher 2017). By 1908, a move from how '"cultural nationalism" … had accustomed the new generation of Turks to the idea of Turkishness—of identity and loyalty based on the Turkish nation' (Lewis 2002:352) to a unified loyalty to the nation. It was patriotism at that time and not nationalism (Lewis 2002:358). The nationalist conversations however changed by the end of the 1920's as language and culture shifted to race. For Kemalists, ethnicity came to be a key factor in Turkishness and would become significant for both non-Muslims and non-Turkish Muslims within their borders (see Cagaptay 2006:63; White 2013:29). In 1924 it was a point of difference: 'Turks-by-citizenship and Turks-by-nationality' (Cagaptay 2006). At this time the Turkish national movement would come to define those who were included as 'Turk.'[38] This would be defined in *The Turkish Thesis*,[39] describing who the Turkish

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[37] *Türkçülüğün Esasları (*Principles of Turkism*)* (1923), a compilation of his teachings and essays, was published just before his death.
[38] To be Turk was to be white, share the same blood, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, and reside within the land or territory. See White 2013.
[39] Drawn from the First Turkish History Congress. See Arkman 2006.

race was and how they had founded the ancient Anatolian civilizations.[40] This is key, says Anthony D. Smith (1986), to nationalists, even when the *ethnie* within the borders are different, to bring unity. *The Thesis* would do what Smith highlights, achieving '…integration and legitimate a set of borders and a "homeland," myths of descent were needed, not only for external consumption, but for internal mobilization and co-ordination … [and] … their role in fostering internal solidarity and the sense of territorial "rootedness"' (Smith 1986:148). History is key to nationalism as well as national formation, Smith says here, and brings fraternity and unity. Cagaptay (2006) describes the significance of when the Ottoman empire fell apart. He says, '… [T]he Turkish *mythomoteur*, the feeling that the Turks were a distinct people, became a decisive force.[48] Turkish nationalism "discovered Turkishness," and the notion that the Turks shared a common past and territory (Anatolia and Thrace) spread among the Turkish-Muslim *ethnie* of the Empire' (Cagaptay 2006:8).

It was in these early years that great shifts occurred in Turkey, whether it was clothing, role of religion, changing calendar, woman's clothing, alphabet, amongst some things. Each of these influences on national identity has varied through the years, but what was important to Atatürk's nation, was that everyone should speak Turkish as a mother tongue, adopt Turkish culture, and accept Turkism (see Howard 2001:104; White 2013:29).[41] That Turkish story, is something the Ahiska Turks continued to hold onto, to some degree, after the closing of the Turkish-Georgian frontier in the 1930's.

As the Turkish narrative formed in Turkey, religion would continue to be significant, particularly Sunni Islam, as one of the clear identifiers for who would be accepted.[42] Jenny White noted, however, 'What is not clear is what it meant to be Muslim or a Muslim

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[40] See Lewis 2002; Chapter Two in White 2013, Chapter Four in Dressler 2013.
[41] This was particularly true for the Kurds, but also true for other minorities within the republic like the Jews and Christians (i.e., Armenians and Greek Orthodox).
[42] Study in 2010 is shown by White 2013:21.

Turk or a Turkish national subject' (2013:21). She aimed to look at the varying cultures within Turkishness, and how people within Turkey understand this within the Turkish framework (2013:18). That framework is very diverse, greatly dependent on the context within which it is being lived, and it was very important to not lose the national narrative (White 2013:135). When she wrote, Turkey was changing and taking a different posture with its neighbours as well as the population within its own borders. It was carefully loosening the Kemalist understanding of the nation, particularly here the perspective of being under siege from within and from without. Replacing it with a more relaxed, inclusive model drawing upon the Ottoman past (2013:50). White pointed to the change from an 'us and them' mentality to being more open with others. The challenges and tensions socially remained, pointing to the competing discourse of what it means to be Turkish and what it means to be Muslim (in Turkey). She highlights the secular nationalists' tight connections to Kemalism, while the Muslim nationalists or pious Muslims who desire to replace the secularist position looked back to Ottoman rituals. Each side, however, maintained the Kemalist positions of membership to the Turkish state, as well as the residual struggle to trust those outside Turkey (or those inside)[43]. The Muslim nationalists view on Turkish identity was seen at that time less about race, and more culturally defined (White 2013:186) while Islam as faith, rather than culture has also been on the rise (2013:32). Not long after her publication, the regional situation was changing quickly, and Turkey likewise was greatly impacted. White's view's fit the moment in Turkey when she wrote, however those perspectives were quickly being challenged and reversed as regional pressures increased and internal divides resurfaced.

The influence of religion on nationalism was also addressed by Dressler (2013). He argued that despite the attempts to make a secular State, it was '…an elaboration of how

[43] Particular issues arose for those who were not Muslim, ethnically Turks, or particularly Sunni Muslim of the Islamic Hanafi school of thought.

Islamic sensitivities and semantics contributed to the formation of Turkish nationalism as an intellectual project' (2013:78). His research and theoretical focus on Alevism[44] aimed to look at Alevism's differences beyond just nationalism so as to help bridge a gap in the literature on Turkish nationalism studies. He looked to bring religion back into the discussion as it was often 'neglected' by secular studies of Nationalism (Dressler 2013:xviii, 78, 80). The challenges and concerns of state rule are still faced today (whether nationalist/ethnic or religious) and reflects the long-term attempts of assimilation of Kurds[45] and Alevis into the Sunni Muslim and Turkish mainstream (2013:xviii, xvi-xvii). Dressler observes that a new discourse has been forming in Turkey that would see the Kurds 'outside of the nation' like non-Muslim minorities (2013:xvi). The Kurds have been one of the biggest challenges to Turkish nationalism and have been a focus from the start of the nation to assimilate and homogenize the nation. The Kurdish question continued to arise as coercive practices and state centralization did not end the challenges arising in the southeast, particularly pointing to socio-economic underdevelopment in the southeast region (Dressler 2013:123-24). Differently for Alevis, he goes on, there remains the longstanding Turkish nationalism and secularist Muslim aim of syncretism (2013:xvii).

In 2006 Andrew Mango pointed to the strength of Turkish national identity and how few others can match it. He also showed the nation's struggle to 'be accepted for what they are, a distinct people with a Muslim background …' (4). A few years after writing this, Turkey had seen great changes, and was living with great national self-confidence (Mango 2006:188). That wrestling and shifting in national identity in Turkey has brought back a recognition to their past, both the broader Turkish heritage and that of the Ottoman Empire. Dressler comments how the early Turkish history until the 1920's had included

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[44] See also Sökefeld 2008; Lord 2017; 2019.
[45] See Ahmad 2014:163-167; Çağaptay 2017; Tas 2016; Sarigil & Fazlioglu 2013; 2014; Eppel 2016.

the Ottoman History as important, but after that, and in the early 1930's, it was not seen as legitimist (2013:173). That has been changing as Cagaptay pointed to the shifts away from the reliance on the West and building relations with nations both near and far from Turkey (2014). This included rebuilding ties and honouring Ottoman heritage and achievements by Turkic kinsmen, many of whom had been part of the former Soviet Union (Cagaptay 2014; Mango 2006:7; White 2013:50). Mango notes that 'Now the two have come together: there is interest in Turkic kinsmen, but also Ottomania[46] - pride in the imperial achievements of local people of diverse ethnic origins who ruled the far-flung Ottoman state from Istanbul' (Mango 2006:7). This is important because these nations include kinships in the former Soviet Union where the Ahiska Turks were or are living.

After 2010 Turkey's success and growth would be tested as the Syrian war and tensions rising in the region with both neighbours and distant powers. Turkey would be impacted with refugees flowing into its borders, economic tensions, and a new surge of struggle with the long existing Kurdish issue.[47] As common for many nations, nationalism is a rallying cry, and this was key for Turkey to unite the population against any threats, seen (or unseen) in these years. This would be relevant after a short period of more officially[48] recognized openness for the Ahiska Turks to migrate to Turkey.

2.4.1 Contribution to Knowledge

The study of the Ahiska Turks as presented in this thesis contributes to Turkish studies several ways. First, the Ahiska Turks' experience today as they continue to move to Turkey reveals the impacts of how early Turkish nationalism affected a Turkish

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[46] See Cagaptay 2014:72-74; Mango 2006:7; White 2013:183.

[47] Recognizing the 3.5 million refugees that Turkey has embraced, not all received equal treatment. In that time the long-term struggles with the PKK also increased again, with particular focus on the Southeast (see Çağaptay 2017, 2020). Along with the wrestling with the refugee situation included those from other countries like Iranians, Afghans, and those from Central Asia.

[48] It has been well noted the social acceptance of the Ahiska Turks to Turkey, but officially it had been a consistent struggle for rights particularly for work permits, and citizenship.

community left outside Turkey following the Ottoman Empire's fall. We see how Turkish culture, Turkish language, and Sunni Islam (Cagaptay 2006; Dressler 2013; Lewis 2002; Zürcher 2017) all remained fundamental to the community throughout Soviet times and are still emphasized in the present day. This shows a continued rootedness to their Turkishness despite being separated physically (Malkki 1992; Smith 1986). It would give rise to an ethno-nationalism that could be bridged with Turkish nationalism and be accentuated as they seek citizenship and integration in Turkey.

Secondly, it shows the strength of Turkish identity (Mango 2006), particularly since the Ahiska Turks did not experience Turkish nationalism after the borders closed. The Ahiska Turks, with similarities to Pelkman's (2006) research on the Laz, demonstrate the struggles that occur along the borderlands with Turkey and how they would modify and shift as they adjusted to their different contexts. Differently than the Laz who remained on the border in their homes in Ajaria, the Ahiska Turks maintained who they were while scattered in multiple countries and faced continued hardships over the years.

Thirdly, the Ahiska Turks' place in the Turkish diaspora begins to be seen with their community being a bridge between Turkey and the host country. It is also seen indirectly as well (especially noted in the United States in this study) with its relationship with the Turkish *Diyanet*, Turkish for Directorate of Religious Affairs Turkey's efforts to relate more with former Ottoman territories and pan-Turkic host countries that the Ahiska Turks found themselves living in is also noted. Finally, this thesis points to ways the Ahiska Turks have utilized the recent situations and changes in Turkey to emphasize their Turkishness and aims for citizenship. I demonstrate that there is a further step in their relationship with Turkey from the diaspora as well as in Turkey. Informants and fieldwork have shown that it is not just a kinship relationship with Turks for the Ahiska Turks but furthering that relationship to being a part of Turkey through their ethno-nationalism. This

includes highlighting their Turkishness, their Ottoman heritage, and more pious religious cultural traits in Turkey as these are all held with greater admiration in these past years.

In this section (2.4), I have attempted to highlight nationalism generally, but also emphasize post-Soviet nationalism and Turkish nationalism as each has had a great impact on the Ahiska Turks' adjustments today. One other major impact on them that has shaped and influenced their perspective and responses is life in diaspora. This will now be discussed.

2.5 Diaspora Studies

Migration is nothing new and people have always been migrating for various reasons to escape difficult situations such as disasters or to seek new or different opportunities (Castles 2009), but in the past it was not tied to nationhood as it is today. Within this broader description of migration, various vocabulary is used to describe these movements. Examples of this are immigration and emigration, labour and/or economic migrations, forced migration (both international and internal), refugee movements, transnationalism, and diaspora. These all indirectly or directly influence the relationship to the homeland. The last two descriptive terms Faist describes as 'awkward dance partners' (2010:9). Transnational and diaspora at first glance appear to mean the same thing, but their differences bring another lens or angle to look at migration occurrences. While migration may describe the overall action of movement to and from one place, it is the descriptiveness in these two that illuminate the complexities of some migrant groups and represent what will be shown of the Ahiska Turks relationship to each other and the country of Turkey. Regarding these two migration terms, Safran states that they '... are not to be confused' (2005:50). While transnationalism relates to broader global, impersonal relationships and 'forces', diaspora specifically is the forced or voluntary movements people make from one or more nations to another nation (2005:50). A few years later Faist adds: 'On the whole, while diaspora studies have mainly spoken to issues

of cultural distinctiveness and its relevance for religious communities, nationhood and also social practices such as entrepreneurship, transnational studies have come to focus on issues of mobility and networks' (Faist 2010:17).[49]

Dirlik, helps the discussion saying diaspora '…is best grasped as part of a broader field in which it is entangled with kindred terminology. It may be resistant to definition because of these entanglements, but that suggests only that the term may be only understood historically, in its overdetermination by those very entanglements that endow it with concrete, situated, meaning' (Dirlik 2004:500). Adding to the discussion of diaspora in respect to migration, Kenny pointed how diaspora illuminates and highlights the variations and particularities within migration (2013:16). Those variations are seen in the study of the Ahiska Turks as their experience has many particularities and variations. It is out of this strength of illumination that gives clarity, meaning, and detail to draw out specifics within the 'migration' experience. While meaning and definition remain to be discussed, those entanglements help draw meaning, as Dirlik stated. To help illuminate the case of the Ahiska Turks in regard to Diaspora Studies, I will particularly focus on diaspora as described and developed by Cohen in his book *Diasporas* (2008).

2.5.1 Cohen's Phases of Diaspora

Diaspora was not always used as an illuminative, descriptive term within migration studies. It rather, has only been in the past forty to fifty years that the study has gone through great changes in meaning (Cohen 2008; Dufoix S. 2008; Tölölyan 2012). These four phases described by Cohen (2008:1-2) will now be mentioned. The first and longest lasting stage is that which is called the 'classical stage,' beginning when the Jewish people were taken into exile to Babylon in 586 BCE and continued to about 1980. [50] Safran points

[49] Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014 while desiring to further introduce the Ahiska Turks to Turkey, address the Ahiska Turks as a transnational group based mostly on family and kinship ties.

[50] Diaspora is the combination of the Greek *dia* and *speirein,* which meant spreading out, scattering, or dispersal that became the word used. Baumann, as mentioned by Cohen, shared of the two Hebrew words gôla and galût which have the meaning of being 'banished' or sent into 'exile' (2008:21). The root behind

diasporas early usage was centred solely around the Jews and this exile (2005:36). Dufoix highlighted how only much later did the meaning include both the people and the new location of their dispersion (2008:5). The term also slowly moved from only referring to the Jews, to include the African diaspora, Armenians, Chinese and Palestinians (Cohen 2008:19).

This long lasting 'Classic stage' began to make quick changes in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1960's and 1970's diaspora included the African diaspora, and that usage, as Dufoix explains, began to 'take off' (2008:19) resulting in the first shifts in meaning beginning to take place in the 1980's. At this time diaspora began to take on Cohen's second phase. The shift was one in which the focus emphasised the description of different kinds of people and as '"metaphoric designation" to describe their different categories' (Cohen 2008:1). It was more than just ethnic groups that were mentioned, but came to include amongst many: refugees, minorities, and expatriates (Cohen 2008:1). Different groups began to take the meaning and apply it to themselves, and the term expanded to begin to display great variety. Though falling into the next phase, Dufoix moves from the second phase into the third phase stating: 'I use this term [diaspora] metaphorically, not literally: diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, ….' (Dufoix 2008:24).

This shift or third phase emerged with the increased popular usage of the term and by social constructionists who were critiquing diaspora and beginning to question the earlier aspects foundational to diaspora which centred on ethnicity, race, and identity as well as 'homeland.' Diaspora began to lose the exclusivity in its meaning and the defining strength it once had. Instead, it became very flexible, including anybody 'scattered' or

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this was that of punishment for not obeying the commands of God and fulfilling the warning of the Old Testament book Deuteronomy 28:28 (Cohen 2008:21). Diaspora for the Jews, thus, was greatly centred around punishment for not following God. See also Dufoix 2008.

dispersed from their homeland as well as minority groups or marginalized people within society. Describing this Cohen points 'they sought to deconstruct the two core building blocks of diaspora, home/homeland and ethnic/religious community. "Home" became increasingly vague ...' and forced '... a larger and larger wedge between "diaspora" on the one hand, and "homeland," "place" and "ethnic community" on the other.' (2008:9, 11). This can be seen in Brah's writing, for example, as she questions if diaspora is a category of description or analysis as she reflects on 'home' (1996:15). In doing so she suggests the diaspora as a concept offers a critique in the discourse on fixed origins, seeing there is a difference between having a desire to 'return' and having 'homing desire' since not all diasporas maintain the ideology to 'return' (1996:16, 177). At this time diaspora was gaining massive popularity and came to mean anything anybody wanted it to.

This unrestricted usage continued and moved further from any real starting point, generating a response marking the start of the Cohen's fourth 'consolidation' stage. Roger Brubaker in *The 'Diaspora' Diaspora* states 'If everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so', emphasizing how the term loses its strength to make distinction, describe and identify phenomena (2005:3). This is where the idea of where diaspora needed reaffirmation and modification, which included the core elements, ideal types, and the features common to most (Cohen 2008:2). Dufoix, while noting the different meaning in each usage in different languages says that 'There is no phenomenon called "diaspora" that is independent of each individual case and independent of the use of the word "diaspora" and its corresponding terms in different languages.' The usage of the word, Dufoix says, highlights issues experienced by migrants, whether voluntary or not; their identification and attachment with either a specific land or country that has arisen again or been maintained, or in contrast to what he called 'their free-floating existence.' (Dufoix 2008:2).

2.5.2 Cohen's Ideal Types and Common Features

In the consolidation stage a meaning of diaspora began to draw out common features of a diaspora group. This method, though contentious considering the questions being asked by the social constructionists, has furthered the discussions and approach to diaspora. Cohen broke up diaspora into five ideal types: victim, labour, imperial, trade, and deterritorialized groups (2008:18). I will mention the first and fifth as they are relevant to this research and the Ahiska Turks situation.

The first, victim, usually entails some disastrous event that sent the group away from their homeland into 'exile.' Refugees are a typical example today of those who could possibly fall this type, as well as the Ahiska Turks experience described in this study. Their reaction and response over time is key to understanding them through diaspora studies (Cohen 2008:16).[51] The fifth ideal type of diaspora are deterritorialized groups that Cohen mentions. These groups, 'encompass the lineaments of a number of unusual diasporic experiences ...' and '... can be thought of as having lost their conventional territorial reference points, to have become in effect mobile and multi-located cultures' (2008:124). Examples of deterritorialized groups could be the Roma or Sindhis, Caribbean peoples or religious diasporas like Muslim or Hindu diasporas. I would agree with Dogan (2016), above, that the Ahiska Turks can also fall under this diaspora 'type.'

For all of these, time and response are important determinants in the new place of whether a group will thus be 'included' as a diaspora group. This 'inclusive/exclusive' comment immediately brings out one of the big debates for diaspora: who is included? This, too, is why Weber's 'ideal types' are a struggle for many to understand, but Cohen defends this by mentioning 'The "Ideal" is meant to contrast with "real" ... The scholar gains purchase on the phenomenon by acknowledging and evaluating the extent of real-

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[51] The victim is typified by the diasporic experiences of the Jews, Africans, and Armenians, as well as the Irish and Palestinians who are also sometimes included in this list.

life deviation from the ideal type' (2008:17). To help break down and describe or determine better the groups within these ideal types, and see how the Ahiska Turks will fit into this, Cohen also developed a list of common features.

Cohen gives nine common features in *Diasporas* (2008:17) which I will summarize into six for this study as they pertain to the Ahiska Turks.[52] The first common feature is a departure from the homeland to at least two different foreign locations and this is often a distressing event (Cohen: 2008:17). Secondly, there is memory (real of mythical) of the homeland. This includes where it was, how the departure from there occurred, how it is part of the collective group memory as well as the idealizing, maintaining, restoring, and sharing that within the group. Thirdly, the idea of return to the homeland is a felt desire amongst the group even if many in the group would never actually return there. Fourthly, there is often difficult relationships with the new host cultures or nations they have moved into, with the concern that another crisis event may occur to them. The next common feature is the development of and sense of responsibility for others in the group living in other locations. Lastly, the final feature, is a distinct life in the host country that possibly enriches life with creativity and tolerating diversity (Cohen 2008:17). This list, though not relevant to every migrant group due to their complexities, histories, and situations, is one that helps gauge how a diaspora like the Ahiska Turks negotiate their situation and realities.

2.5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis also highlights some themes withing diaspora. First, the traditional diaspora theme of victimhood (Cohen 2008; Dufoix S. 2008; Tölölyan 2012) is seen in the traumatic deportation from Ahiska, but the Ahiska Turks also highlight some of the strengths and resilience they have shown. Secondly, homeland is explored in relation to

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[52] Cohen adapted and added two features to Safran's (2005:37) seven.

the Ahiska Turks' stateless experience and changing perceptions. This adds to previous research on the Ahiska Turks (Dogan 2016; Oh 2006; Osipov & Pepinov 2003) and in Diaspora Studies (Brah 1996; Cohen 2008; Safran 1991; Tolia-Kelly 2019;). Thirdly, this study contributes to deterritorialized or stateless diaspora groups (Cohen 2008; Dogan 2016; 2020) and show ways the Ahiska Turks are reacting in uncertain and changing circumstances. Finally, this study adds to the way the Ahiska Turks are becoming part of the Turkish diaspora since the fall of the Soviet Union (Oh 2006). Though their role differs in each place, the community has become another bridge for Turkey and the host country. This is seen particularly visible in the Ahiska Turkish community in the United States.

2.6 Conclusion

This review emphasized three key areas of literature relevant for this study. The first focused on a chronological overview of the study of the Ahiska Turks thus far. The aim was to reveal the progression and changes regarding their ethnic identity and how they have been perceived, beginning in the Soviet times, and changing in the post-Soviet period, including a 'kinship relationship' with Turkey which various researchers have pointed out. The second section of this review focused on Nationalism and emphasized two primary theories: Modernism and Ethno-symbolism. This was followed by brief comments about how post-Soviet nationalism and Turkish nationalism have influenced the conversation. Finally, literature in Diaspora Studies was included to help describe the situations the Ahiska Turks have experienced with a tragic dispersion, being stateless, and wrestling with those dynamics still today.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3 Introduction

Chapter One introduced this study and the historical context of the Ahiska Turks while Chapter Two emphasized the relevant literature which this study engages. In this chapter, an overview of the methodology and my place as the researcher will be discussed. The chapter will first focus on setting the stage of the research, beginning with my personal background and placement on the field, including a short statement on ethics. Following that, I will show the methodology used to conduct this thesis. This is an ethnographic study of a particular group of people, the Ahiska Turks, but will engage them in more than one location. This section will discuss multi-site research and its ethnographic usage. The primary site, Bursa, Turkey is introduced followed by the other sites. I will note how and why those sites were chosen and how these intersect with the main means of data collection: interviews and participant observation. Interviews tend to yield more depth, and included both formal and informal interviews, face to face and by Skype. Participant observation added significant verification, differences to, and added details to the interviews. Both required some explanation due to various challenging circumstances, especially related to being trusted in the community. Finally, the remaining section touches on using social media, the potential depths there, while noting its limitations to fit the research plan.

3.1 Setting the Stage

3.1.1 Personal Background and Academic Influence.

Two of the most common questions I heard while conducting this study was ‘why are you studying the Ahiska Turks?’ and ‘where did this idea come from, was it your own idea or did someone ask you?’ Curiosity and trust fuelled these questions. It was not until 2008 in Chicago, IL (United States), that I became aware of the Ahiska Turks for the first time. I had been living in Central Asia from 2002-2008 and returned to the United States to do

a master's degree in Intercultural Studies. At that time a friend told me about some 'Russian and Uzbek speaking Turks from Uzbekistan that came as refugees.'[1] After the master's degree, we moved to Bursa, Turkey to learn Turkish and to continue towards a PhD in Ottoman Studies. As the Turkish study commenced, it was met with great struggle, being confused with the Uzbek language. At the same time, we began meeting Ahiska Turks in Bursa, Turkey. I questioned, why is this same diaspora group that I met in Chicago, and one which had lived in the former Central Asia cities I had lived also here in Bursa?

The first Ahiska Turk I met in Turkey was in our first month there. He was a small, middle-aged man, who came to paint our apartment. With no Turkish, I spoke in Uzbek, but he never seemed to notice. He was likely speaking what I now know was the Ahiska Turkish dialect mixing in Russian, Uzbek, or Azeri words. It came easy for me to understand the Ahiska Turks, as we both struggled with the same grammar and linguistic issues, throwing in Uzbek and Russian words. This would begin a long string of random contacts within the community. I came to find out there was a whole group of Ahiska Turks living up the hill from my house.

So why this group? Personally, I love history along with the study of culture, and how migrants adjust and change as they are on the move. On another side, there are still many research gaps relating to the Ahiska Turks' experience, and my passion for social justice, reconciliation, and work amongst those more silenced[2] in society also motivated me to pursue this. My own travels and experiences living outside of the United States seemed to mirror the experiences of many Ahiska Turks I was meeting. It was easy to be with

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[1] Initial searches in 2008 on the 'Meskhetian Turks' brought few hits. The most significant were a joint article for their settlement into the United States (Aydıngün et al. 2006), and a book from a large research project (Trier & Khanzhin 2007). I had not heard of the term 'Ahiska Turk' until around 2012 in Turkey. After meeting one family in Chicago, not much more developed at that time.

[2] It was also Dr Doug Howard (2001, 2017) my former History professor at Calvin University who visited Bursa in 2012 and challenged me with the research themes I presented him. After hearing of the Ahiska Turks and lack of English research conducted at that time, he encouraged: 'That is what you should research.'

them as we shared many cultural experiences from Central Asia as well as the newer experiences in Turkey. This connection helped my understanding, to some extent, the journey of the Ahiska Turks I was meeting. In some ways I felt like my story and their current story kept intersecting. Though obviously not an insider to the group, it seemed like my own life and cross-cultural experiences helped us with initial connections and build bridges.

Finally, my own family and education shaped this as well, to a small extent. My undergraduate degree in World History, with minors in International Development Studies and Geography as well as the Masters in Intercultural Studies all influenced my interest to pursue this study. Also, being a fifth-generation immigrant to the United States from the Netherlands impacted me. My family still took pride in being 'Dutch,' holding on to a distant heritage but having lost the language, current Dutch culture, and any personal direct contact with the 'homeland'. One factor that drew my attention was how my grandfather would speak of the Dutch community in the United States around us as: 'these are our people'. I shrugged when I was young, feeling it was exclusive, but now I realize the Dutch communities were much tighter in his generation. I began hearing some echoes of his words in the Ahiska Turkish community: '*bizim halkımız*' (these are our people) or *bizim sennik*[3] (our people). However, while my family lost immediate ties to the Netherlands, the Ahiska Turks seemed to be maintaining connections while being scattered across nations.

3.1.2 Methodology

Qualitative Research is the methodology used in this study. I used an anthropological approach to conduct ethnographic research on the field, examining the Ahiska Turks living in multiple sites. The predominant language used across the sites was Turkish. In

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[3] See also Tomlinson 2002:101.

addition, other languages were also incorporated into the Turkish, including some Russian, Uzbek, Azeri and for a few cases, English. My previous exposure to many of these nuances within the language meant I could understand many Ahiska Turks. Our communication often mimicked how they spoke, mixing all these together with the modern Turkish used today.[4] Being fluent in Turkish[5] seemed to bring a level of trust and respect, especially for those living outside of Turkey. From the start, a methodological plan was set, while also being encouraged to hold this methodology lightly while doing the fieldwork. The fieldwork would focus on participant observation and conducting interviews (formal and semi-structured) that arose from the sites and 'snowball' to the next participant. Fieldnotes (written or recorded) were kept through this time. As the project continued, I needed to adapt my ethnographic approaches with the experiences I was facing. For instance, it was very difficult in the beginning to have access to the community itself and thus doing participant observation and interviews was slow going. I will address this further below, but I had to ask how the research fit various people who were living in distinct places in diaspora. People's lives are not quantified, but rather observed and analysed based on the outcomes of the observations.

One example of having to adapt was how to get a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) with limited access to the other half of the society, the women's world. Though the research plan recognized most of my data would be from men as much of my time was spent with them and in the places where they spent their time. To help bridge this gap, however, relationships with Ahiska Turkish families became key. Normally visits to families were done by me and was usually with the men or mixed with the older men and

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[4] I came to understand their speech, having hundreds of hours with them and transcribing interviews. Depending on the site, age, and person's education, meant a unique blend of languages spoken. Some with more Uzbek and Uzbek grammar forms, others with Russian, others modern Turkish, and with some we did it in English. For the interviews with extensive sections of Russian, I hired a transcriber fluent in Russian and Turkish to help with those interviews.

[5] I studied Turkish in Bursa, Turkey through B1 in the TOMER (Ankara Universities), and B2 at BBC Language School. I Continued with independent studies and a language helper using the DLI course (Defence Language Institute) which I had obtained by other foreigners met in Turkey.

women. An occasional insight came when my family joined me into the fieldwork site. Bernard (2015:260, 286) does not specifically mention this method, he does show how his wife and kids were present in his long-term participant observations and brought insight to his research. For me, my family joining me as 'assistants' in this way was limited in the overall study to seven visits. In Bursa, Turkey, one family was visited twice, and another family three times. Publicly, a large community meal during Ramadan which was also the revealing of a statue in memory of the Ahiska Turks was one event we attended as a family. A second public event was a community picnic in the United States with Ahiska Turks and some families who had helped them settle as refugees. In Antalya, Turkey, my wife one day called me for tea with a woman she had met a few times in a hair salon that wanted to meet me and hear more about my research. With the public events, I did not have any issue including them because it involved such a diverse group already. With the families, however, I felt some tension over this. I struggled with whether introducing more non-Ahiska Turks would affect the Ahiska Turks' behaviour. However, it seemed to counter act the strangeness to the Ahiska Turk community for my family to be in the city but not joining me when I visited them.[6] Having them along brought us further into their world, with less concern that I was an 'outsider'. It added depth, perspective, and brought further authenticity.

Including my family helped in a few ways. First, it brought more trust. It was not just me, a male researcher from the United States visiting them, but included my Argentinian wife and two children. Secondly, it brought some insight into the lives of Ahiska Turkish women, especially as the sexes are often separated. Thirdly, it brought us further into the family's life. Several times my wife met Ahiska Turkish women and through time, I

[6] My family was often requested to join me to some people's home, and when they did not come, they were often disappointed.

would meet them and/or introduced to their families.[7] Without these connections, I would naturally be limited to observations of women in the public sphere like community events[8] or religious holiday gatherings. Our immediate discussions[9] on the way home gave me perspectives to what they observed, (i.e., in the kitchen while I was in the living room with the men) and could be added to my own field notes.

Entering the community was not as simple or quick as I had planned. Finding that entrance would require building trust and the right contacts. This will be expanded below.

3.1.3 Encountering, Rapport & Overcoming Limitations

The research and the study of the Ahiska Turks has been a great privilege. Sensitivity and recognizing the place of trust was an important key to being welcomed into the community. This was greatly felt early on when it was very hard to 'enter the field' to research and will be expanded below. I wrestled with this from the start, but it is nothing unusual within ethnographic field work to situate themselves in a way to best understand and fit the context they are researching in (Bernard 2015:277; Blommaert & Jie 2010; Cerwonka & Malkki 2007; Emerson 2011).

First, previous researchers of the Ahiska Turks were also cautious in the methods they used while doing their ethnographic study, and I could learn from them. For example, Baydar Aydıngün (2001), mentioned that she did not use recorders or cameras for her dissertation (2001) in Central Asia. Koriouchkina, (2011:32) highlighted using the snow-ball method to meet informants and stated this 'was crucial in gaining informants' trust and building lasting relationships that could result in repeated interviews.' She also stated why she felt survey was not suitable for her study, despite how important it could be.

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[7] For example, this happened in the gym, or in the salon. My wife went repeatedly and met different people, including the Ahiska Turkish women working there. They would strike up conversation and she would be asked why she was there (in Turkey). She would mention my studies and that sometimes opened the door to my meeting them. I never included anything from their times together in my fieldnotes or data unless I was present.

[8] This included weddings, funerals, a circumcision ceremony.

[9] I recorded these as I did my own field notes after many visits.

Both Koriouchkina and Tomlinson noted that they tried to keep a lower profile and gather information from everyday life in the community. (Tomlinson 2002:29; Koriouchkina 2011:33). As Tomlinson noted when she realized she had gained trusted status (2002:30), she also chose not to record her interviews nor could transcribe on the field. Instead, she asked for multiple interviews in conversations of interest (2002:29-30). Ramadanova (2014), an Ahiska Turk herself, shared getting interviews were not easy within her own master's thesis research.[10] These reflections gave me insight into possible challenges as well as means to build rapport and conduct the fieldwork.

Secondly, Dr Aydıngün, a long-standing researcher of the Ahiska Turks gave good advice as the study commenced. She told me that 'one on one interviews would be impossible unless with a close friend who knew and trusted me.' It was not that an interview would be impossible, she reiterated, but rather how truthful the information given would be. She continued telling how they have been trained in how to mis-lead with the information given, referencing the survival instincts and dynamics of living in the former USSR. My own experience of living in post-Soviet countries made me aware of this, and I wondered from the start how to get as close to an authentic perspective as I could. Knowing their minority status in all the sites and knowing how recorded interviews could feel threatening enough for people to avoid the truth, I was very careful. To deal with these sensitivities and to try to build trust, I often gave the names of other Ahiska Turks I knew and showed photos from the different locations. As trust was built, recordings began to happen, and continued contact brought surprising opportunities for input from a variety of participants or community events. For example, showing a recording of one elder greeting other Ahiska Turks would bring a smile to people's faces

[10] Personal communication.

in various sites.[11] The more Ahiska Turks relationships I had and greater knowledge of their experience I showed, it became more natural to mutually relate together.

The most significant way to gain trust was through gatekeepers (Bernard 2006:356-58; Seidman 2013:47) who welcomed me into the community. These influential people would be known and trusted (in varying degrees) in the community.[12] At times they invited me along, introduced me to others, and naturally created a greater space of trust. This enhanced the possibility of utilizing the method of snowball sampling[13] to start a chain referral of new contacts from previous participants to further build trust and to enter further into the community (Bernard 2006:192-94). This process also eased some of their worries when I was there and enabled many participant observation opportunities. Bernard advises this as a helpful method to access harder to reach groups or those that are spread out over a larger area (2006:194, 192).

As I was introduced through members of the community, ‘key informants’ and ‘specialized informants’ were met (Bernard 2006:196). Of course, this method did not always flow as smoothly as hoped, and not everybody was willing to pass new people to me.[14] The most helpful in the community tended to be community leaders, representatives, or other academics. While being very happy for these opportunities, I believe it was also important to get a broader sampling beyond those directly connected with them. This was not easy, but some relationships and friendships allowed for more variety and led to the opening of new networks and new sites.

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[11] BTR8 greetings of his relatives and the community, led to UZ2 video response to him and the Ahiska community living in Turkey.
[12] Trust issues were not just with outsiders, but also within the community, especially noted regarding association leaders.
[13] Also known as chain-referral sampling.
[14] For instance, some began through Skype, but continued with live interviews, like in Kazakhstan a key informant there. At the interview, the participant was asked if they knew somebody else. Though being a ‘guest’ in Kazakhstan, my informant often did this in front of me, asking each other who else could be interviewed, but a few times she just found a contact for the next day within her contacts.

In the fieldwork, I worked hard not to force relationships or to change locations just to 'make it multi-site.' Participants occasionally would invite me to travel with them to visit family in another country or introduce me to others there. These invitations were not always sincere, but I showed great interest to perhaps make it happen.[15] Sometimes this would lead to significant relationships. While groups of interviews occurred through this process on one site, it was not unusual for them to connect me to others beyond that location.

Those relationships developed while being amongst the people and this highlights how both participant observation and interviews built on each other, enabling the primary data to not rely solely on gathered interviews.[16] When meeting people, I always introduced myself, or was introduced, as a researcher of the Ahiska Turks, taking on a participant-as-observer role, accepting the risk that they would see me as a 'reporter.'[17] At some larger events, I was introduced or acknowledged to the group, while at other events like weddings and funerals, this was not always the case; thus I was more a marginal-participant (Robson 1993:197-98).

I could not hide, however, as I stood out as the clear 'outsider' in the group. This was mostly positive, however, as it was no secret who I was and reduced some suspicion of covert action.[18] On the other hand, more than once the insinuation of me being a 'spy' was raised, and one time I was defended by a community leader as we sat together. Naturally I had been put in a 'box,' but that suspicion extended to any larger organized activity, whether by the State, or even their own community organizations. One female Ahiska Turk from Central Asian related to this:

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[15] By not being sincere, I mean it was either a culturally appropriate invitation of respect that really was not meant, or it really was intentional, but was not followed through later.
[16] Blommaert & Jie (2010:42) warn that interviews are not enough data for ethnographic research.
[17] In Turkish they would say: '*Reportaj yapıyor*.' He is a reporter (like a newspaper reporter) to which I would have to clarify.
[18] It is important to note that most informants were born in the Soviet system and/or grew up in a context where sharing of information was highly questioned.

> I don't think we should forget about this really, the post-Soviet aspect, because I think people in general, [in the] post-Soviet space, are a bit sceptical about these things [i.e., being open] … There's just an engrained mistrust in the system, in people towards the system, and towards anything that does not have anything to do with them, that they have no control over.[19]

Although suspicions sometimes negatively (and naturally) would alter the information some people gave, at other times people were very willing to share directly with me to let their story be known. This would be observed differently in different sites, but confidence grew from both sides as experience, networks, and understanding increased.

Another way to deal with the trust issue was recognizing how conversations develop, including the use of questions, and adapting those questions in differing contexts. For instance, I began conversations asking about their family from a historical perspective. When I started this way, I found little resistance or hesitation. The primary question I asked was 'Can you tell me about your families, grandparents, your parents and your life story?'[20] There were many cases that this was enough for the discussion to get started. If conversations were not happening easily, I sometimes had to return to topics of customs like the wedding ceremony which they prided themselves in, or the Ahiska Turks' history. For that purpose, I prepared secondary questions and utilized them as needed (see Chapter 1.3).

3.1.4 Addressing Biases

As ethnographic researchers, our own background, thoughts, biases, etc. all play a significant role (Bernard 2006; Dey 1993). Coffey (1999) begins *The Ethnographic Self* by looking at the location or placement of the researcher in the project. This is significant not only in how others saw me, but also in how I placed myself in the research process (Benson 2018). I presented myself to the Ahiska Turkish community as a PhD researcher;

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[19] AKA20 (see bibliography for coding), Skype interview, 22.04.16. The context of this in our discussion was related to associations, but also clearly shows the issue an outside researcher would face. Interview conducted in English.

[20] Preliminary questions were asked before this: permission, name, age, birthplace, marital status, and employment. I also did not read the question to them from a paper, but started with a similar question to that, with a few sentences if explanation was needed. The less formal, the more relaxed things stayed.

thus they 'knew' who I was (Bernard 2006:356-58) from the start. From there, however many mixed assumptions and presumptions could arise. It was also recognized, as Clifford (1997) helpfully discusses the varying dynamics the ethnographer wrestles with on the field. I was experiencing some similarities in Turkey what other immigrants faced related to residency, work laws, and settlement. I also lived in Central Asia, so while many of my experiences could relate to the Ahiska Turks, I had to be careful not to presume similarity. Some of these were related to life living in a post-Soviet location: 'the walls are listening' and not trusting strangers or greeting those you already do not know. The later, was one of the harder dynamics to get over because I 'understood' how unnatural it was for a stranger to suddenly start engaging in conversation, and especially personal things, presuming they were thinking: 'Who would he share this with?' Another clear aspect of bias can arise being a white, male, and the Euro-American influence as well as colonial (and Cold War) impacts that has carried with it over history.

Though I felt myself in great dependence on the community, and needing much humility, I knew that may not have been their interpretation. I tried to be conscious to not impose myself but rather be present with them and allow the relationships to develop out of it. This had to be dealt with, like wrestling with time and distance within the urban setting (Clifford 1997:198) of Bursa. These meant I had to be intentional with my time together with them and choosing how far to follow the snowball method. This itself displayed a potential bias or position to wrestle with.

Obviously, my presence could impact how and what was being said, but there was an interesting dynamic seen in the different sites. No matter where I was, I was a guest within the Ahiska Turkish community and their behaviour, depending on setting, would change because of me being there. This is where time together and the participant observation in various locations was key to go along with the interviews. For example, in large group settings, like weddings, funerals, and the *mevlüt*, I often did not feel the larger community

was particularly behaving differently because I was there. In smaller groups, at first there surely was recognition of my presence, but within a short time most seemed to feel relaxed and went on as 'normal'.[21] I do recognize I remained the guest of their generous hospitality and desire to give me their best and surely conversations were amended with me there (though I was quite surprised at the openness expressed many times). I felt the greater changes to watch out for was in the homes or smaller group setting, recognizing I was always entering 'their space' and not them 'my space' and how to represent this and the community (Ozkirimli 2003). One time a family visited our house, and then I felt a difference. Part of this was because in Turkey, we were all in a context not our 'own' except within the homes, association, or Ahiska Turks' community events. We were all guests there, (except the few that received citizenship but still immigrants). In Turkey, I felt the bias in the *dernek* (cultural centre), where something may have been wanted of me, and here I felt a tension to give and take, while also seeking other means of data collection to gather as varied a voice as possible.[22]

In the United States, however, I felt something very different. I felt as another United States citizen. I felt the community was empowered by being there. The rights they had as citizens was being used and they were thankful for it. That did not change my being white, or that they were Muslims and I Christian. That was really felt while I was there and the issues of the new flight laws. My biases sometimes had to be pushed down or ignored related to politics, religion, and history. For example, while there were times, I could agree with them in areas of politics (which I did at times to allow understanding), I suppressed my feeling there. Also related to Turkey and Turkish politics and history.

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[21] Surely some topics may have been avoided, but that would be impossible to know. Likewise, additional conversations related to me could fill the conversations which obviously would not have happened without me there, with exception to the times I received phone calls from friends saying they were talking about me and decided to call.

[22] This was particularly true in Turkey. It was much harder to 'enter' the communities in Central Asia and the United States without sticking with the network passed on to me through the snowball method.

Conversations on religion and politics was always carefully done, and points on history were listened to, but I would respond carefully.

There were times when as a white male with blue eyes I could be assumed at first glance as Russian, especially in Central Asia. I am from the United States, however, which brought with it the positive sense that can come internationally (opportunities like work or study, a visa) as well as a deeper question: Do you work for the CIA? My own biases and position had to be considered as best as possible. Coming from the United States, for example likely enabled more resources at my disposal then many of the newly arrived migrants to Turkey. But how they would really know and respond to me would also depend on them and their community dynamics. Cerwonka and Malkki note 'informants, too, continually observe and learn things about the ethnographer as a social being, a person—and decide how they want the relationship to develop, or not' (2007:94). It was slow to start, but over the years, relationships developed. Through it all, however, I was clearly an outsider that would bring up its challenges.

There were different challenges that stood out in this area. More than once planned meetings or events were cancelled or changed without me knowing it. This was a real challenge, but also a way to get a broader understanding of the community and culture I was amongst. It also showed where the 'snowball' method not only opens great opportunities into new fields of study and informants but can also bring a quick dead end. The hardest was when this happened going to a new site where I had to search for opportunities while in a new location (Kyrgyzstan and Georgia). The other challenge to overcome was living and conducting research in Turkey from 2014-2018. It was a period that included a year with many bombings (2015-16), a coup attempt (15 June 2016) and the subsequent responses. These events brought stress to all areas of life. As both a foreigner and outsider, there were times I sensed my Ahiska Turkish friends did not want me to come around or be in the community. It was often not easy to 'read' everything

going on for both the local population and the Ahiska Turks themselves. On the other hand, being there through all of this also brought connections and understanding.

3.1.5 Ethical Considerations

A few ethical comments should be noted. While I did not ever see that this was a sensitive group, I was careful to show respect and to use caution in the process of research. The first way was that no children were directly or intentionally observed or interviewed nor were they a focus in this study. Observations in the presence of the whole family or in public settings was the only exception. For example, in an interview with a parent or grandparent, a group of children could be heard playing in the room, but the interviewee in this case was the focus.

Another example of showing respect was to be certain that I had permission to conduct interviews.[23] Getting informed consent at the start of the interview and concluded with the opportunity to withdraw (then or later) was given. Nobody was formally interviewed without overt permission, and semi-structured interviews only occurred with those who knew I was a researcher (Brewer 2000). In addition, I always showed them any device I used for recording, whether camera or microphone and asked them on the device if I could use it for research. I also told afterwards if they wanted it deleted and withdraw, they could inform me then or later. Due to their great suspicion and lack of trust, the signing of a document would bring too much fear and stop most interviews. Though I asked their permission if I could use their names, I also said, I would not use their name in this thesis for confidentiality and for all voices to be equal. I learned quickly, that for Ahiska Turks, allowing the recorder there to record was the granted permission, so it made sense to ask for a recorded permission rather than a written one.[24] Another aspect of being cautious

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[23] Being with the informant with their knowledge it was an interview was a consent; they found it strange I would ask them permission as well as at the end as well as the right to withdraw. With explanation, they would understand the formality of it.

[24] Often twice, at the beginning and at the end. Some joked at me for asking, looking at the recorder as good enough.

involved changing names. All participants in this thesis have had their names changed, with exception of those who were already published and quoting from that source. Another exception is given with examples in respect to a few community leaders out of their own expression of frustration with anonymity in the past.[25] With only a few wanting their names used, for the purpose of having an equal voice, they will not be so identified (Seidman 2013:125).

3.2 Multi-site Research

I saw early on that the need for more than one site was obvious. The reasons for this are multiple and I will particularly focus on its relevance in this section. First, the Ahiska Turks are scattered and living in more than nine countries. Second, most thesis or articles on the Ahiska Turks had focused primarily on one or two sites. Third, considering the reality of diasporic experiences, and the various perspectives of nationalism, this research required an engagement with the Ahiska Turks beyond one location. To this, Bilge (2012) highlights how it is important to know and learn about the individual experiences (2012:39, 68) and recognizing how their past and where they are coming from impacts their perspective. The influence of their current context was also significant. For instance, there was a bias leaning towards Turkey for those in Turkey that influenced the perspectives given. The attempt to counter that was to draw from the perspectives outside Turkey and bring diverse voices into the study. This, specifically, is how the multi-site focus could help. While beginning to fill some of the gaps noted by Bilge (2012) for further studies needed in Turkey, a question for me was to hold that with the reality of their continued scattered situation. The aim for their diasporic voice to be heard while spread out and yet maintain focus and set suitable limitations for multi-site ethnography.

Multi-site ethnography is not a new method, but according to Hannerz, (2003:202), it

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[25] This will be noted in the text but out of desire to maintain an equal voice to all interviewees, they may also be used anonymously at other points in the thesis.

was not seriously considered as a method for fieldwork until Gupta and Ferguson began to evaluate the anthropological 'field' (1997:4). Clifford (1997:190) recognized in this compilation, the ethnography in more than one locale[26] and at the same time considered multilocale *fieldwork* an 'oxymoron' asking 'How many sites can be studied intensively before criteria of "depth" are compromised?' (1997:190). Clifford also saw Edwards's work (1994) as scattered but exemplary in carrying it out.

Edwards (1994) had discussed his struggle of the traditional anthropologist's research regarding the Afghans he was researching in different contexts. He felt his writing was 'partial, incomplete, and vaguely untruthful' (346). He then discussed how he was looking for a '… mechanism that would reflect more closely the whole story as I [Edwards] understood it, a story that is not confined to any one point in time or space.' (1994:346). Edwards' work gives a helpful description of his research process, representing what was happening as he observed Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, and noticing the rising use of chat rooms as well on the internet. For him, it was not about working to develop a theory, but rather to 'pull together, in one place, experiences that are otherwise separate and distinct in time and space but that seem in some marginally inchoate way to need each other's company' (1994:346).

The next year Marcus also encouraged ethnography on multiple sites. He stated that 'something of the mystique and reality of conventional fieldwork is lost …' with multi-site research and that 'not all sites are treated by a uniform set of fieldwork practices of the same intensity' (1995:100).[27] Falzon pointed that Marcus 'Telegraphically [argued that] multi-sited ethnography defines as its objective the study of social phenomena that cannot be accounted for by focusing on a single site' (2009:1).[28] In that same period,

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[26] Referring here to Marcus and Fischer (1986) definition on 'multilocale ethnography'.
[27] See Amelina and Barglowski (2019) encouraged the use of multi-site research in the study of diaspora, listing Marcus' six modes of analysis to help analyse the complex nature of groups living.
[28] See Leonard, Karen Isaksen (2009:165-180) for advantages of multi-sited ethnography.

Hannerz (1998) began to write about transnational research, discussing multi-sited research which he followed up in 2003 with his reflections on his own multi-site research experience. He argues that several sites are possible to study, but that a selection within them must be made (2003:207) and within those it is significant to see the relationships (and I would add the differences) between them (2003:206). Hannerz also says that sometimes the sites arise 'gradually and cumulatively, as new insights develop, as opportunities come into sight' (2003:207). Noting the distinction between a single site and its cultural context, and a multisite approach, it is not to try to study the whole culture and society in all the locations, but to engage in the links and relationships involved (2003:208-209). It is the linkages; he says that are more important than just location (2003:206).

Those links reflect not just similarities but maybe more importantly the contrasts that also arise. In ethnographic research utilizing a multi-site approach, each site is not expected to be treated the same or in the same depth. Robben and Sluka stated 'Multi-sited fieldwork is not the same as fieldwork at multiple sites. … Translocal ethnographers go where their research takes them to create an emergent field and study object' (Robben & Sluka 2007:331). It is in this light and considering Edwards' search for a mechanism that might better fit his ethnographic circumstances, that this research of the Ahiska Turks has developed. One location could not adequately describe them, and thus multiple sites were drawn from for comparing and contrasting. Conducting full ethnographic research in many sites is obviously unrealistic; therefore, this research desires to look at portions of multiple locations. The research remains locally placed, but not confined to only one location. Utilizing a multiple site method from the start enabled me, the researcher, to approach it with some parameters to help maintain focus and direction and then the sites gradually grew as opportunities arose on the field (Hannerz 2003:207).

3.2.1 Locations

One primary location and three conditional locations were chosen at the start of this research. Along the research journey, specifics would be discovered within a site, revealing potential areas of emphasis and how rigorously that social setting would be explored, especially over a longer period (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007:102-103). This was something I wrestled with. How much could I control, and how much depended on those who were opening the door to me? To deal with this, the approach of mixing both participant observation and interviews would be significant. In the end, however, I consciously had to choose, where would be the best place to spend the time I had. Turkey, particularly Bursa, was the primary site of this study.[29] I was already living there and was where the idea and questions for this study emerged. The numbers of Ahiska Turks moving there continued to increase in those years and it felt like it was a growing hub of their movement and activities. From there, the other sites could be seen as extensions and supplements of that primary site as will be noted in section 3.2.3.

However, different than Hage (2005:465)[30] who considered the multiple sites as extensions of 'one site.' I disagree with this in relation to the Ahiska Turks. This is because of how each context is very distinct and each brings not only similarities but can highlight the different dynamics, reactions, and responses to their self-awareness (Bilge 2012). While an extension of the people could be argued, the site itself could not be seen as an 'extension' of the primary site as each greatly influenced the people's perspectives.

3.2.2 Primary location: Bursa, Turkey

[29] Antalya as well as students from Kocaeli University were two other locations within Turkey that I followed up on due to the contacts that I had and naturally opened. Other locations did come up (i.e., Istanbul, Erzincan, Izmir) but using the snowball method did not lead to the need to consider adapting sites within Turkey. Erzincan was the biggest draw, being where Ahiska Turks came as refugees in 2017-18.

[30] Falzon (2009:3) notes the important of considering the critiques raised by researchers such as Hage (2005) and Candea (2007) when conducting multi-site.

Bursa, Turkey was chosen as the main site for this study. This was chosen for a few main reasons. First, it had been mentioned in previous studies, (Aydıngün 2001, 2007) but nothing more current had been published when I started.[31] Second, the Ahiska Turkish population there continued to rise,[32] and third, while studying Turkish in Bursa, I could meet many Ahiska Turks there to begin to connect with some at the cultural centre and begin participant observation there.

One way that helped my focus in Bursa was a simple locational mapping of where the Ahiska Turks lived. My starting point came first from the local Turkish population mentioning that the Ahiska Turks lived in certain neighbourhoods. For example, the neighbourhood 'Teleferik[33]' (meaning cable car) is located up the mountain from the centre of Bursa, and a '*TOKI*[34]' (government-built housing development) closer to the University in Görükle, Bursa. I also had a reference from Aydıngün (2007:345) where she mentioned some of the neighbourhoods. The best source, however, came as I visited my first Ahiska Turkish *dernek* (association). While traveling the tight busy roads in a local *dolmuş,* (or shared taxi), and walking those streets, I was immediately struck by the clear presence of the Ahiska Turkish population in the neighbourhoods of Zümrütevler and Yeşilyayla often called 'Meskin' where the *dolmuş* stop is.[35] Conducting locational mapping helped centre my focus on those concentrated areas.[36] Quite quickly in Bursa

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[31] Since then, Irene Levin concluded her PhD (2018) which also included Bursa, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. She published two articles based in Bursa (Levin, 2019, 2021).
[32] There was an unofficial 30-40,000 population of Ahiska Turks in 2013 when the proposal was made, an increase from around 20,000 since the 2007 research done by Trier and his team (Aydıngün 2007:345). At the conclusion of the fieldwork in Bursa, the Ahiska Turkish *derneks (*associations) were saying there were around 70,000 living in Bursa. By 2018, the number would continue to rise to 100,000 (Ali Paşa 21.11.17, Facebook video) and others writing 120,000 to 150,000.
[33] *Teleferik* is the local term for this neighbourhood which the lower cable car station is located. It is officially Teferrüç neighbourhood.
[34] TOKI: *Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı*.
[35] At one point in my research, I heard there were seventeen Ahiska Turkish centres or associations (*derneks)* in Bursa alone. I limited my connection to those two. After I left Bursa in 2018, I was told many of those were consolidated under one association office.
[36] It was not all straight forward of meeting people and getting into the community. The fall of 2014 and winter of 2015 was painstakingly slow. It was not until the "*heykel*" (statue) ceremony, it feels, that the community really opened to me. The then '*Sürgüne uğramış Ahıskalıların haklarını Koruma Merkezi'* (Centre for the Protection of the Rights of the Exiled people of Ahiska)'; renamed Association of United

and in the other sites, too, it became clear how the community would 'cluster' together (Aydıngün 2007:345). When you find one family, you likely have found a grouping of them.

Observing this trend of clustering, the intention of using locally a snowball sampling method would lead to international connections from Bursa to the next location. This did not happen as smoothly as intended due to the trust factor mentioned earlier.

Another challenge with multi-site research was sometimes choosing the 'site location' for several interviews with Ahiska Turkish students or recent graduates. These were international students coming through scholarships given by the Turkish government. For them, I had to make a choice about their 'location'. Were they from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, or Turkey? When it came to the interview 'site' location, I often chose based on the emphasis they placed while sharing. This was usually the 'site' they were in, rather than their home country. For example, one younger lady[37] was from Kazakhstan but she had just finished her Masters in Turkey. Her mother was with her in Turkey as well as other extended family members. Her living situation at the time of interview was in Turkey, but shortly after she moved back to Central Asia with intent the whole family would return to settle in Turkey. While talking, she emphasized her experience of life in Turkey with little reference to Central Asia. Thus, I considered her 'site' Turkey.

In contrast, however, was her friend[38] (to whom she introduced me) who had also recently graduated in Turkey. This young lady had moved back to Central Asia and was not planning on moving back to Turkey. She mostly spoke with a perspective of life in

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Ahiska Turks in Bursa, *Bursa Birleşik Ahıskalı Türkler Derneği başkanı*), president Paşa Alihan also called Ali Paşa, invited me to come, as well as honoured me to present a gift to the distinguished guests. After this, many Ahiska Turk contacts suddenly recognized me, or maybe further trusted me for my place there, as well as the new contacts that would now start to be met.

[37] AnTR16, Skype interview, 11.4.15.

[38] AKA1, Skype interview, 21.4.15.

Central Asia, and only gave short reflections of life in Turkey. Thus her 'site' was Kazakhstan. A third woman[39] was born in Kazakhstan, grew up in Kyrgyzstan, did undergraduate degree in Turkey, got her Masters in Germany and was concluding her PhD in the UK. She spoke with a very broad perspective reflecting such exposure but tended to base much of her thought from Central Asia, and especially gravitated towards Kazakhstan. I thus identified her site as 'Kazakhstan' instead of Kyrgyzstan. Students studying in Turkey were generally included within the Turkey 'site' since most of their sharing emphasized and came from their current experiences as students in Turkey and did not expand on their country of birth. As I began to analyse people in diaspora, these choices to identify location felt important.

3.2.3 Supplementary Sites

As for the other sites, adaptation was needed to perceive the contrasts and comparisons of the Ahiska Turks from those in Turkey. Central Asia could presumably be a point of comparison to the Ahiska Turkish communities' perspectives based on adjustments there since leaving Georgia in 1944 and not having migrated since then. Many remaining there (particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) would likely not have experienced the trauma in Uzbekistan in 1989. Supplementing the Turkish site with this perspective could also contribute to previous studies conducted in Central Asia (Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Chikadze 2007; Oh 2006; Ray 2007; Savin 2007;) and add to broader viewpoints of the community. In Central Asia, Uzbekistan was my first desire, but access was a challenge and thus I did not follow through. Only a brief two-day visit to see family and friends of an elder from Bursa could occur. For Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan access was not an issue: through the snow-ball method participants were passed on quite smoothly.

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[39] AKA20, Skype interview, 22.4.16.

Kazakhstan was not planned on originally, but it became the most abundant in both immediate and longer-term contacts. The early Skype interviews linked me there and enabled an encouraging visit. I had multiple interviews, participant observation, a visit to a grave site, and I saw many of the villages the Ahiska Turks were settled in. Most of my time was spent in the eastern villages near Almaty, Kazakhstan. In Kyrgyzstan, the planned visit with relatives of two different Bursa friends fell through, displaying again how issues of trust are persistent, even though our communication was through those who did trust me. Needing to adapt unexpectedly, through a non-Ahiska Turkish contact we arranged a visit with a group in Osh where a new gatekeeper helped me connect with a different community of Ahiska Turks.[40]

The community in the United States would give another perspective from those in Turkey. Similar to many met in Bursa, Turkey, they had experienced the first deportation of 1944 and then the traumatic events in Uzbekistan in 1989. They also, however, had lived in Russia and the experiences within the Krasnodar Krai region that led to a third major uprooting requiring different adjustments than those in Turkey. This could also potentially highlight contrasts, differences, and the similarities from the other sites. Dayton, Ohio, was the main site where my time would be spent.[41] This was chosen for three reasons. First, it was becoming a central location for the Ahiska Turks in the United States as many were moving there. Second, when proposed, little research had been

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[40] This was a clear example where the photos and greetings from Turkey opened a door to those there who were not directly out of the snowball sampling, but rather through these elders 'greeting', continuation of research commenced. This was also remarkable at a time when Daesh/ISIS was recruiting in Central Asia and much apprehension and fear was present.

[41] I was also invited by a non-Ahiska Turkish friend in the United States who knew of my study to an afternoon picnic in Indianapolis, Indiana that gave a brief glimpse into the small community of Ahiska Turks there. Interestingly, some of the Ahiska Turkish community I met there had just been to Dayton, Ohio for a wedding, giving me some understanding of the physical distance and feel for those traveling regionally for family events. (Fieldnote, 8.8.16).

conducted there. Finally, it was relatively close to my home in the USA[42], so multiple visits were possible. I made two research visits in that research period.[43]

Visiting Georgia was always my hope due to the importance the Meskheti-Javakheti region continued to have for the community. I felt it was not a location requiring a long visit because of the few Ahiska Turks living there and the significant research already conducted there. Georgia was included due to the relevant perspective from Georgia, and I felt the research minimally required a visit to Akhaltsikhe and Rabati castle as it was such a significant part of everyone's story. Attempts of a possible trip with the Bursa Ahiska Turkish community on one of the regularly occurring tours was planned to gain access to the community in Georgia. This unfortunately did not happen. With time running out, one Ahiska Turkish friend in Bursa with good connections in Georgia said he would go with me. That also unfortunately fell through at the last minute, but he introduced me with one of the leading contacts there in Georgia. This community leader gratefully connected me with a few other men there, which allowed for a few interviews and time with one family. I also had the opportunity to visit the University of Akhaltsikhe, and they gave me significant time to hear the Georgian perspective. I met some students, and I was also introduced to 'Toleranti'[44], an association that has worked hard for the repatriation and integration of 'Meskhetians' back into Georgia.[45] In this trip I could finally visit the Ahiska *Kale* (castle) that the Ahiska Turkish community always visited.

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[42] Around seven hour drive each way, so not close enough for regular quick trips.
[43] I had met some of the community leaders in a prior visit.
[44] http://toleranti.ge/index.php/en/#.
[45] There is one community of 'Meskhetians' I was encouraged not to visit because I was informed, they were the community regularly interviewed and researchers were always sent to them (personal conversation with Ahiska researcher 12.9.18; see also Keskin & Yilmaz 2016:290). I also planned for a meeting with ECMI Tbilisi. Unfortunately, the connection fell through, the data given was wrong, and adjustment on site was needed.

I chose not to include Azerbaijan[46], Ukraine[47] or Russia[48] for the multi-sites. The main reasons for this were the issues of time, practicality, and finances. As the research continued, this choice also related to how the snowball method developed.[49]

3.3 Interviewing & Participant Observation

The primary means of gathering data was through interviews and participant observation.[50] Interviews were conducted as semi-structured and unstructured, utilizing strategies to gain trust. This next segment of the chapter has five sections for clarity, however some of these would naturally overlap. The sections are interviews, informal interviews, Skype interviews, participant observation, and finally usage of social media.

3.3.1 Interviews

Through the research, I conducted both formal and informal interviews that were of semi-structured or unstructured in nature (Bernard 2011:156). The original aim was to conduct 100 interviews. In total, 90 interviews were conducted, with 54 referenced in this thesis.[51] Of these, 43 in Turkey, 27 in Central Asia, 16 in the United States, and 4 in Georgia. Out of those interviewed, 36 were born between 1921-1960, 29 between 1961-1980, and finally 26 born 1981 to 1999[52]. Respecting the cultural sensitivity of the Ahiska Turks, I

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[46] Azerbaijan nearly opened as a location to visit at the end of the study as a number of relationships developed in Bursa who still had regular contact and visits to Azerbaijan. Due to timing and lack of specific participants continuing the snowball method opportunities, it was not pursued. Azerbaijan is an important location for the Ahiska Turks living in Bursa, Turkey particularly. Early migrations in the 1960s, and after the pogrom in Uzbekistan drew Ahiska Turks migrants from Central Asia. Some research has already been conducted there (See Erten 2014; Yunusov 2007).

[47] Ukraine has had little research written (in English) apart from Blacklock 2005; Klinchenko et al. 1999; Malynovska 2007. This is a gap in research worth covering.

[48] The main reason is that there has been good research already conducted there focusing particularly in and around Krasnodar Krai (Koriouchkina 2009, 2011; Koriouchkina & Swerdlow 2007; Osipov 2007; Osipov & Cherepova 1996; Osipov & Memorial Society 2000; Swerdlow 2004, 2006; Tomlinson 2002, Trier & Khanzhin 2007; Trier et al. 2011).

[49] This development influenced the choices made in the early stages when adaptions were more possible and could have yielded new inquires and communities to follow through on, like in the example of Kazakhstan.

[50] See Brewer 2000:59-63; Robson 1993:231.

[51] Not including interviews or time with the local population's relation to the Ahiska Turks, for example in Georgia (at the University), the United States (Dayton community members), and in Turkey (neighbours or others in Bursa and Antalya).

[52] All were over 18 years old at the time of interview.

spent most of my time with men, and thus the majority interviews, seventy-three were with men (Table 3.1). However, an unexpected 17 were women (Table 3.2).

Table 3.1: Location and Men's Ages

Birth year	1921-1960	1961-1980	1981-1999	Total
Turkey	15	15	8	38/43
Kazakhstan	8	2	2	12/22
Kyrgyzstan/ Uzbekistan	4	0	1	5/5
USA	2	6	6	14/16
Georgia	1	2	1	4/4
Total:	30	25	19	73/90

Table 3.2: Location and Women's ages

Birth year	1921-1960	1961-1980	1981-1999	Total
Turkey	0	1	4	5/43
Kazakhstan	5	2	3	10/22
Kyrgyzstan/ Uzbekistan	0	0	0	0/5
USA	1	1	0	2/16
Georgia	0	0	0	0/4
Total	6	4	7	17/90

Some interviews were compiled from conversations held over several visits (Brewer 2000:65). Interviews were done using open-ended questions and including both recorded and non-recorded conversations (Bernard 2011:156; Robson 1993:233; Cohen & Manion 1989). Using the snowball method and these variations of interviews allowed for a more diverse sample set of people (or group), and to get various perspectives within the community. For this reason, I developed a couple of approaches over time.

In Bursa, Dr Aydıngün helped introduce me to the first Ahiska Turks I would get to know there. The first of these was to one of the associations (*dernek)* leaders and his assistant. The second was a community elder and his family. Over the course of the study these became special friends and people I would regularly visit. Finally, as contacts were developing slowly, and the need to get a female voice would be needed, she introduced me to a young woman that would lead to multiple Skype interviews (discussed below).

To varying degrees these three initial contacts opened interviews, connections and relationships that would reach beyond Turkey.[53]

The second way of making contacts and getting interviews was developed on my own over the first couple years (Seidman 2013:50). This would be harder and slower but aiming to find people outside the associations and those they passed to me. Using walking routes and regular public locations, I sought to meet new contacts. Trust and rapport increased this way as regular visits and conversations with those people formed informal interviews.[54] These semi-structured interviews led to some formal, recorded interviews as well.

Despite the personal connection made through the snowball process, I would introduce myself and my research in each interview. In every interview I told them what it was for, how it would be used, and asked permission if it could be recorded. A real challenge that I faced early on was getting the recorded interviews. Recorded interviews were with a handheld recorder, and at times a video camera was also allowed, especially with the older generation. The recorder would be placed on the table, and the camcorder on a tripod. This allowed a chance to extend invitations to video record their interview. When conversing by Skype, I would verbally tell them (and show if with video) that it was turned on and was now recording.

In interviewing Ahiska Turks, it was rare to be alone, even when doing a one-on-one interview. Most interviews ended up having a few people present, family members, friends, sometimes members in the community. This added life to the interview, often bringing in further questions or thoughts throughout the conversations. Several times the interview ended being an unplanned group interview where more than one person was interviewed (Bernard 2011:172). These were not intended focus group interviews. In

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[53] For example, two of these led to connections in Central Asia that I could go meet.
[54] See Tomlinson 2002:29.

those situations, sometimes one person dominated, at others they spoke freely together. As best as possible, attempts were made to give both persons the opportunity to answer the same question, either simultaneously or following each other.

An example of this occurred when an Ahiska Turkish history professor in Bursa heard about me. Shortly after a community event where I was introduced, he called asking if I was interested to do interviews with elders in the community born before 1944. As it was still early in the process and it had already been challenging to get interviews, I readily agreed. I came with the recorder, camera, and my questions. He knew my primary question, which is what we often started with. As we spoke, he would add some questions through the conversation, and I could include any subsequent questions. In this time together, I learned important clarifying questions he used while interviewing, since he naturally did this within their cultural norms.[55] It was a very good learning process, and since he was a known insider, I could use the camera, and the interviewees could not easily exaggerate. We did five interviews together. In Central Asia, interviews were also done jointly a few times, as well as in Bursa when two Ahiska Turk students invited me to join them for an interview. Like my times with the professor, this also was a great opportunity to observe how Ahiska Turks behaved with one another in their community while interviewing.

3.3.2 Informal Interviews

Informal interviews (Bernard 2011:156) were an important dynamic bringing affirmation to the unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Barglowski et al. 2015). It was one of the key plans from the beginning.[56] One of the areas in this was to be clear about who I

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[55] He was an elder, educated and already had many of these connections. For example, they would speak about the deportation, but he would ask about the soldiers coming to the village, if there was a meeting, when did they have to leave and how many hours were given to leave? People always said many died along the train trip, but he clarified with them: ‘in your wagon did some die?’ Though I learned a lot from him, I had to take care how I mimicked him also and use my position as a younger guest appropriately.

[56] Tomlinson chose not to record her interviews, and could not transcribe on the field, but rather asked multiple interviews in conversations of interest (2002:30).

was as a researcher while also recognizing the context of whom I was with. In these kinds of interviews normal conversations were held that could include topics relating to my research. Though no recording took place at that moment, (nor notes, usually) jottings and fieldnotes would be compiled right afterwards (Emerson 2011:23, 29).[57] The rare exception was natural moments arising in the time together allowing a new word, event, or spelling to be written and then sometimes the writing pad or phone could be left visibly by my side. Even that would sometimes bring discomfort to the person, and thus most of the time I waited to write until afterwards (Emerson 2011:18).

3.3.3 Skype Interviews

One growing method of conducting interviews is the usage of technology like Skype.[58]
Skype was not considered at the outset, and even questioned after the first use. This question, however, changed as Skype interviews became significant as I got started, especially with females, and students. This unplanned and unexpected methodological adjustment moved with the field work. Skype's early usage, or how widely the Ahiska Turks used Skype, was not researched, but it was clearly one of the well-known social media tools for them to connect to their families. It showed early on one perspective of their sphere of contact with each other by enabling them to pass on someone else without being limited by their immediate location or by my own movement.[59] Internet availability and smart-phone usage clearly enabled this to be used further. As family and friends are not just cities away, but countries away, this bridge of communication using a new media

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[57] This is what I often did immediately after a field experience to give an immediate verbal recorded record that I would transcribe later and put into my academic journal. Also, while in public transportation, writing jottings on my phone were attempted or stopping at a café at an early stop to do some write up. In the United States and Central Asia, some jottings occurred on site or on the way home, but mostly write-ups occurred in the evenings.
[58] Skype was initially released in 2003. For more on Skype usage for interviews, see Alkhateeb 2018; Cater, N/A; 2011; Deakin & Wakefield 2014; Janghorban et al. 2014; Lo Iacono et al. 2016; Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom 2014; Sullivan 2013.
[59] This is a positive example I am sharing, and I could repeat it to a smaller extent later in the research. The issue of trust did come up in another attempt as one participant 'disappeared' from the interview and did not respond to me again.

is a key means of contact for the Ahiska Turks living in diaspora. It has helped bridge the barriers of distance, country, and even financial limitations. It also allowed women who may have been reluctant to interview with me to do it without a camera and with me 'distant'.

The Skype opportunities that developed provide an example of both their connections and how the snowball method worked. As I followed the leads, Skype opened a new avenue which was not limited to one site. I discovered it was normal and to be expected that most participants had experience interacting with people in multiple countries and places. A string of Skype contacts jumped first from Turkey (AnTR16) to Kazakhstan (AKA1), to Kazakhstan (AKA2),[60] and back to Turkey (AnTR18). From within those, another three contacts emerged, two face to face in Turkey (AnTR33), a contact in Kazakhstan (AKA3) and another Skype, too (AKA20). Movement went out from country to country via Skype as the snowball method was followed. As with most informants I asked if they knew anybody willing to also be interviewed in the same way we had just done. In this case, Kazakhstan and Turkey were the two main countries being linked together. Most of these participants (four of them) have higher-education degrees, and two of them are English teachers. Some of them preferred to do the interview in English, but we would slip into Turkish occasionally depending on the person, topic, or length of interview. These became significant breakthrough interviews early on.

Although generally helpful, Skype has its limitations. The first of these is the issue of bad internet connection, causing poor communication or dropped lines. Another issue was missing the immediate context of the interviewee, simply not being present to witness the surroundings or expressions when the camera was off. When the camera was on, the whole person or context could not be seen, naturally limiting observation in the interview.

[60] Another interviewee that was to be in Turkey at this point turned down the interview.

Robson noted the importance of this because what is done and said are not always the same (Robson 1993:191), and this can be picked up better when present. Another limitation is that not all generations are using Skype or willing to talk in this way. One early Skype interviewee noted this when I was asking her for any contacts. She answered that most of the elderly do not Skype.[61] The solution to this was to primarily seek face to face interviews and participant observation as much as possible.

These obvious ethnographic limitations were overruled in this instance by the possibility of gathering interviews and adapting to the field. Through it, later visits to those locations could arise through these contacts. It also enabled interviews with women, who likely would not meet with me in person. It also displayed why researching in one site is not sufficient to understand the Ahiska Turks, as they quickly connected me to other locations as well as showed different perspectives from those various locations. Skype interviews sometimes were prior to going to a location, and sometimes Skype interviews could follow the visit to a site. All in all, Skype is a fine tool for the researcher, opening new possibilities and encouraging flexibility and creativity in the research process. It also requires wisdom.

3.3.4 Participant Observation

Participant observation was a key supplement to the interviews. It allowed for comparisons, conflicting ideas, and affirmations to arise outside of formal conversations.[62] The process and description for enabling participant observation has already been discussed above. In summary, participants were first met through several activities and locations in the primary site of Bursa, Turkey. These included, but not limited to time with individuals and families, Ahiska Turkish associations (TR: *derneks*), attending community events or activities, and time in their neighbourhoods. The plan was

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[61] AnTR16, Skype interview, 11.4.15.
[62] See Bernard 2011; Brewer 2000:59-63; Emerson 2011; Robson 1993:231.

to approach the research through the participant observation and then allowing interviews to arise from that. Both have been used to solidify and strengthen the argument. Through the stages of research, I questioned how aggressively to 'push' into a site myself when some of the original plans were not opening as expected. I also questioned how far to expand outside that site when possibilities arose. The way I dealt with this with multi-site research was to remain connected with the groups or circles that were opening naturally. As the Ahiska Turks are spread out, I did not want to just leave to find possible people. I also did not want to rely totally on the key people in the community. Part of the methodology to keep the scope and focus of the research was determined by these issues arising from the field.

3.3.5 Social Media (Facebook, WhatsApp, & Odnoklasniki)

Social media was a clear mode of communication and connection for the Ahiska Turks and thus required some adaptation in methodology on the field to supplement in this study (Dogan 2016; Hine 2015; Kissau & Hunger 2010; McGranahan 2020; Pink et al. 2016; Postill & Pink, 2012).[63] I used social media in three essential areas. First, it was a mode of communication and connection between me, friends, and the community. Second, to access some of the future, or sometimes previously held activities occurring in the community. Finally, it provided a wealth of online ethnographic data (Hine 2000; 2015), including pictures and conversations.

WhatsApp[64] became the main method of communication between me and some informants that continued through the conclusion of this study. Some used the WhatsApp 'status' to show what they were up to or announce important information for the community. This increased more in the later years of the research. Another Social media

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[63] See Bailey et al. 2007; Cardullo 2014; Gallaher & Freeman 2011; British Psychological Society, Leicester 2017 'Ethics Guidelines for Internet-mediated Research' *British Psychological Society* Available at: https://www.bps.org.uk/files/ethics-guidelines-internet-mediated-research-2017pdf Accessed 9.5.2019.
[64] Initially released in 2009.

tool was Odnoklasniki[65] which was introduced to me by one informant as she showed me her family photos and told the stories behind them. She encouraged me to use these in my project. Finally, Facebook (Baker 2013; Brickman 2012) was the most important and widely used social media resource in this study. It allowed for continual contact with friends and the community even when we were not close geographically. Ahiska Turks also used the site to post important activities or topics within the community. I was hesitant to use this early on because I wanted to 'enter' into the 'field site' in the same way I would a physical one. As noted above about trust, I approached it the same way with Facebook. I would not become 'friends' with any person without their invitation, with exception of a couple community groups my friends suggested or were active with.[66] The good thing with Facebook and other social media is how it demonstrates the lines of connections in the multi-site study compared to a single site.

As I have indicated, I have had concern with social media. I did not want to just follow the snowball method anywhere and everywhere. I wondered how far I should go in these relations, so I was not stretched too thin. I had to draw a line. With WhatsApp that was easy. Those I spent time with and who gave me their number could be used. For Facebook, I had to be more deliberate. I opened up the site and was very slow to engage in it the first year. I finally added a couple friends and intentionally tried to keep my contacts to those I was already meeting in the physical locations I was visiting. It was natural to say a formal yes to 'be friends' because we were already friends here. I decided my line would be people that I knew and/or had already met. As the numbers grew -- people met, sites visited, and events attended -- I felt some internal pressure to be careful here to not easily

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[65] Odnoklasniki is predominately in the Russian language (https://ok.ru). Few of my contacts used it, from what I gathered spending time with them. I never became a big user, partly as it was based in Russian, and part because the usage of Facebook began to increase greatly.

[66] This was challenging at times with Facebook and the need to be vigilant which were friend requests or friend 'suggestions' from within the community, and which were being introduced to me through which Facebook algorithms.

add new people. That led to usually not accepting those ‘new’ friends whom I had not met personally and thus not engaging the snowball sampling here.[67] I mainly opened Facebook to see what the main activities of my contacts were and what they were posting and what comments they were making.[68] This gave me an angle on certain events from their side, as well as the opportunity to post pictures when I was at an event for friends to see. I journaled and saved a record of photos, comments, and conversations in order to evaluate later.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodology and my placement as a researcher. Establishing trust was noted as a significant dynamic to overcome, which impacted both the interviews and participant observation. Using a snowball sampling method, I gained trust, both through their own networks and through the gatekeepers and the time spent with them. This highlighted the importance of using a multi-site approach, as the example of Skype clearly showed, as participants passed on contacts from country to country. The handling of multi-site research, its methodology and the sites chosen were then discussed, followed by the manners used to enter the community. These influenced both formal and informal interviews and the participant observation. Social media also became an important means of communication and helped me to stay in touch with participants, both their personal lives and the community’s activities.

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[67] In hindsight, if social media and/or Facebook were used as a ‘field site’ early on in my methodology, those invitations and the ethnographic data could have been very rich (see Postill & Pink, 2012). Rather than a more passive approach as a supplementary source, Facebook could have been a more assertive approach.

[68] This was not done in any systematic way as it gradually grew into my methodology, again adapting to what I felt was happening on the field. I would check it every week or so, except the weeks surrounding important community dates which I would check almost daily. It felt the use of Facebook greatly increased over these years as a means for the Ahiska Turks to communicate with each other. Social media usage is one area worth further study.

Chapter Four: Highlighting the Past Through Ethno-History

4 Introduction

Chapter Three covered the methodology employed in this research, while Chapter One and Chapter Two were foundational, featuring both historical context and academic literature. Chapter Four draws from the historical context given in Chapter One and is the first area I will use to discuss the ethno-symbolic understanding of how the Ahiska Turks ethno-nationalism is merging with Turkish nationalism. This chapter will highlight the ethno-historical stories which the community shared across multiple sites, and which in turn become a crucial part of a 'web of meaning' that impacts their national self-perception (Cinar 2015:4). These points are part of a (re)discovery of who they are and where they came from and reveal roots of their 'imagined' Turkish ethnic nationalism (Anderson 2016 [1983]).[1] The first section will briefly give the background to this chapter which has been introduced in Chapter One (1.5). The second part of the chapter shares the key themes and stories they shared related to the deportation first experienced to Central Asia and then the second deportation from Central Asia's Uzbekistan. The third section looks at their successes, glory shared, and how these connect with Turkey. This is followed by some reflections and rising themes to conclude the chapter.

4.1 Background

While looking at national formation, Anthony D Smith (1986) points to the relationship between ethnic roots and important historical experiences of the collective group. In this regard, he emphasizes looking at the 'myths,' 'memories,' 'symbols', and 'values' that

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[1] As stated in the introduction, Turkish emphasis is given as that is what both informants and in the field work predominantly expressed. Though the Ahiska Turks have a deeply felt connection with Turkey, I still use imagined in the sense, like Anderson pointed: '… members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (2016:6). Malkki can add to this that 'This imagined international community ... is not a supranational or cosmopolitan world but precisely an *inter*national one, a world where *globality is understood to be constituted by internationals among discrete "nations"* (1994:41; italics hers). That they were not living in Turkey nor had any connection with Turkey until after the fall of the Soviet Union. Even then, that connection would remain a difficult one.

bring about a (re)discovery of who ‘we’ are, where we are from, and when we came (Smith 1986:ix, 2). Previous research on the Ahiska Turks often focused on the matters related to the ‘we’, or the ethnicity and formation of the Ahiska Turks. Aside from the discussions of being Georgian or Turkish, it has been argued on the Turkish side that Turkish awareness started and developed within the Soviet period where it shifted from just an ethnic category to an ethnic group (Baydar Aydıngün 1998; 2001:3, 4, 45). Aydıngün states that their ethnic consciousness was born in the context of deportation (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:4; 2002b:187-188). That research also argued this developed as a nation (Turkish) under the Soviet nationalities policy.[2]

The Soviet nationalities policy (see also 1.5.6.1) had a significant impact on the Ahiska Turks. The policy of *korenizatsiya* (indigenization) was designed to encourage national consciousness in the different nationalities of the Soviet Union (Goff 202; Martin 2001a; Ubiria 2016). This promoted ethnicity and nations development by having their own schools for education, promoting their own language, culture and their homeland (Martin 1998; 2001; Suny 2011). This, however, was for the recognized nations who had titular status. The Ahiska Turks, however, were not a recognized nation and would experience a number of identity changes.

Their registered ethnic identity shifted between Azeri and Turks. In 1926 they were referred to as Turks, but in the 1930’s they lost the right of being seen as a Turks (Aydıngün 2002b:187-188; Sumbadze 2007:291). Their identity was then changed to Azeri in the 1939 census but changed again to Turk in 1944 for the deportation (Conquest 1972; Sheehy 1980:24; Khazanov 1992:3). Sumbadze mentions some were offered in 1939 to take Georgian names and be registered as Muslim Georgians in 1944 (2007:291) Some did, but most refused. They would be regarded as potential enemies, a threat to the

[2] See Goff, 2020 for a further understanding of the formation of nationalism in the southern Caucasus, and particularly helpful is hearing the perspectives of Soviet history through non-titular perspectives.

state (Conquest 1970; Pohl 1999; Polian 2004; Statiev 2005; 2009) and would then be held in special settlements until 1957 (Polian 2004; Pohl 2004). The effects of being a non-recognized nation limited public nationalist activity. These nations did not have the rights to publish, educate in their own language, have national or titular territory, nor have the same limited autonomy as recognized nations (Aydıngün 2002b:189). It meant they could not return to Ahiska, and many remained having identity cards written as Azeri and not Turk. Despite these negative effects, it also helped strengthen their 'ethnic solidarity' (Aydıngün 2002b:189) and the forming of Turkish nationalism within the Soviet context.

That nationalism, however, was not directly the same as Turkish nationalism of the Turkish Republic. Though remote from where Turkish nationalism was forming, there was surely impacts from the late Ottoman period and early Turkish Republic into the borderlands of the Meskheti region. Some of these relationships will be seen later in the chapter as that historical experience, as well as what occurred in and through Soviet nationalism, would shape them. Some of this influencing and shaping of people by historical experiences (Smith 1986:ix, 2) will be noted below.

One aspect regarding the historical experience is the possibility to speak about them. Smith states an *ethnie* or ethnic population that is no longer forced to be quiet, or 'no longer passive objects of external domination' can allow *their* own culture to arise and the 'masses become the subject of history' (1991:129). Though efforts by the Ahiska Turks to address the desire to return to Georgia happened, like that of the Crimean Tatars, it was not successful in the Soviet period (Cavoukian 2005; Oh 2006; Panesh & Ermolov 1993; Pohl 2004; Sheehy 1980; Uehling 2007). With the fall of the Soviet Union, that voice began to be found and the Ahiska Turkish 'vernacular mobilization' has begun to be communicated, emphasizing what is important for them (Smith 1991:129). There developed an ethno-history about their deportation, displacement, and one which was maintained across the diaspora (Trier and Khanzhin 2007) in spite of the external forces

that remains (Baydar Aydıngün 2001) while they live in diaspora as a minority. Without jumping too soon to the empirical, this is still lacking in some areas as one elder born in 1940 told me as we sat in his living room, individuals or even communities in the different countries may do some research and communication, but they did not have strength or faith as a people to dig into the archives.[3] One of the reasons behind this was due to the limitations in the development of their own national writing and teaching in the different settings they lived in (see 1.5.6.1, page 21). Some of these efforts in the community will be seen here, but before that, some more of the theoretical discussions will be mentioned.

In 2002, Tomlinson's thesis finished with a very helpful suggestion. Emphasizing the need to cope by people forced to migrate, she encouraged looking first at how they have coped and lived 'with the existing practical strategies' (234). This, she said, to do rather than 'seeking out grand narratives of group cohesion and self-understanding' (2002:234). Her observation related to how the group itself continues to use existing patterns, there has, however, begun to develop some of those 'grand narratives' she points to. The study by Baydar Aydıngün (2001), Bilge (2012), Dogan (2016), and Oh (2006) helped begin to emphasize the post-Soviet 'rediscovery' (Smith 1986) of the Ahiska Turks' kinship and cultural ties with Turkey. Their Turkishness, as we will be seeing, does not appear to be a rediscovery at all, but rather a recognition or highlighting of what they already believed in their communities (Landau 1995). However, with over half a century of separation with Turkey due to the 'iron curtain', a strong ethno-nationalism would not be the same as Turkey's.

When the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the Turkish Republic wrestled with its new formation. Cagaptay wrote how 'Turkish nationalism "discovered Turkishness" and the notion that the Turks shared a common past and territory (Anatolia and Thrace) spread

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[3]AnTR33, Interview in Turkey, 1.2.2016. Born in 1940, he himself knew Russian, Georgian, and Turkish and spent a lot of his time researching in the archives to do his dissertation.

among the Turkish-Muslim *ethnie* of the Empire.' (2006:8). Part of that what Cagaptay states would also bring influence on the northeast borders where 'Ahiska' lay, however only until the 1930's when the borders would totally close. While Turkish nationalism at that time emphasized the territorialization of Anatolia (Cagaptay 2006:8), the Ahiska Turks' deportation separated them from the Georgian border with Anatolia. Their territorialization would be rooted outside that territory and form a 'long distance nationalism' (Anderson 1992) or 'diasporic nationalism' (Oh, 2006) outside the homeland. Around sixty years later, when the Ahiska Turks emerged from the Soviet Union, there began a 'discovering' of their Turkishness[4] in relation to Turkey's, as well as, on a minor scale, Turkey would be rediscovering the Ahiska Turks. Here, the *ethno-history*, filled with the collective memory or 'diasporic consciousness' of origins and birth would begin to be shared to give it legitimacy (Cohen 2008:165). It also takes the next step from what Tomlinson (2002:234) said should be focused on for forced Migrations (2002:234).

It is important to remember that '*ethno-history*'[5], which is understood more objectively and told by members of the ethnic community, may change certain emphases over time. For example, what is contested amongst the group, and across the globe may be told 'unevenly' (Smith 1999:16-17; 2009:71, 91). Some histories may be well documented and written, while others have not and are more recent. That 'uneven' telling may not be so quick to be seen in this chapter. There are clearly different contexts of which the Ahiska Turks are telling their stories within this multi-site study. The *ethno-historical* themes presented here were common across the sites and why there is much repetition which

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[4] Of the participants researched, all emphasized their Turkishness, except one. That person reflects a small group that accepted a Georgian ethnic identity, changed their last names and were able to resettle into Georgia. Due to the time restrictions and scale, this group was not visited or included in this research. I was also informed personally by a previous researcher that research conducted in Georgia has focused on this community.

[5] Ethno-history was possibly first used by the anthropologist Clark Wissler in 1909 (Gleach, Frederic W. in McGee & Warms Eds 2013 Theory in Social and Cultural Anthropology 227-28).

flowed together from site to site. This risks, however, the appearance that context does not impact them. It surely does. For instance, those in Central Asia typically told a historical story that ties them directly to 'Ahiska'. In Turkey, that was also shared, but there was greater focus placed on the relationship of Ahiska with Turkey. For instance, there have been a number of publications produced by Ahiska Turks in Turkey telling about their historical experiences in Turkish and made available to the public.[6] The Ahiska Turks' relationship to Turkey was not the emphasis in the United States nor in Central Asia. In the United States, rather, the emphasis was much more on not losing who they were (chapter Six) which was not a big emphasis for those living in Turkey. This chapter shows how the Ahiska Turks are emphasizing their *ethno-history* as a community that keeps alive their tragic story in the diaspora and how that is now being integrated into Turkey's history. With the openness experienced after the fall of the Soviet Union, however, they began to learn they would need to emphasize their Turkishness out of necessity.

4.2 Separation

Separation and dealing with national borders for the Ahiska Turks is nothing new or unusual as families are scattered and living in multiple countries (See 1.5.5 and 1.5.8). There were several separations from the Ottoman Empire due to the Russian-Turkish wars and treaties. Examples of these were in Adrianople (1829), in San Stefano (1878), in Brest-Litovsk (1918), Treaty of Moscow (1921) and Treaty of Kars (1921). A greater split then occurred with the deportation in 1944 and subsequent migrations that followed. These have required them to maintain an emphasis on family and village from which they come. Otherwise, they risk 'losing' each other. Ayşegül Aydıngün says, the 'transition

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[6] Most of these have been novels being sold online or in local stores. They are also often distributed by the *derneks*. These novels have not been cited in this study, but rather the academic ones.

period'[7] and particularly the *sürgün*, is one thing that has helped to strengthen their ethnic identity (2001:4; 2002b:187-188). For the Ahiska Turks the *sürgün,* although rooted geographically in the villages of Ahiska, is still deeply tied to their being a part of the Ottoman Empire. This renders for most of them a direct connection to Turkey. Despite the historical separation from both, the two remain deeply connected for the Ahiska Turks. That, however, would need to be explained to non-Ahiska Turks.

4.2.1 Deportation From Ahiska

'*Bizi sürgün ettiler'* ('they deported us') is a primary factor when Ahiska Turks explain their history and one that left a defining mark on them as a group. *Sürgün*, meaning deportation or exile, is a regularly used word in their vocabulary and defining point in their national memory. It carries great meaning from when they were uprooted and taken from their homeland, Ahiska. Like the Crimean Tatars '*kara gun'* (black day) that Pohl describes in their collective memory and national identification (Pohl 2004:1), it is remembered each year by the Ahiska Turks for being taken away from their homeland. Robin Cohen states that 'prototypical' diaspora cases have two key things in common: '*the traumatic dispersal from an original homeland and the salience of the homeland in the collective memory of a forcibly dispersed group' (*2008:4, italics his*).* This 'traumatic dispersal', or *sürgün,* in 1944 forced the Ahiska Turks off their land and tore them from their geographic homeland. That homeland, already having been separated from the Ottoman Empire, teetered on the north-eastern border of Turkey and was then under the control of Russia or Georgia.

Uprooted from their homeland brought very few references to neither Russia nor Georgian control of this land in the shared stories. The main reference related to this territory of Ahiska now being in Georgia and the Turks fighting on the side of the Soviet

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[7] What she labels the period of the Russian-Turkish wars, World War One, World War Two, and the deportation.

Union in World War Two. Rather, what was important to them was their villages located on the land of the five Ottoman districts that they were taken from. Take, for instance, the two different maps regularly shown by the Ahiska Turks (Figure 4.1 and Figure 5.2). They each emphasize the five districts of Ahiska from which they were deported and highlighting the former Ottoman territory of Ahiska. Showing the legal border, it also denotes a separation from those legal borderlands to set apart their historic place. Though these maps are not official, the Ahiska Turkish community use them regularly in their community to show where they are from and represent themselves. In this regard, within Turkey they can specifically display how their deportation from Ahiska happened because Turks were not wanted in the borderlands between Turkey and Southern Georgia. It would be stated that Georgian's were not deported, nor Georgian Muslims living along the border, like in Ajara (Pelkmans 2006; Aydıngün et al. 2016). If they were historically Georgians, then they would have remained in Georgia or been able to return after the war. Rather, it is expressed as part of the victimhood or trauma against them.

Figure 4.1 Map of Ahiska (1)[8]

[8] Map from Durmaz, Betül 2015 '70 yıllık Bir Sürgünün Hikayesi' *Yaşayan Ahıska Kültğr ve Yaşam Dergisi* 1/2:18–25. See also: https://www.datub.eu/ahiska-cografya-tarih

The rootedness to land is very important to the Ahiska Turks. Malkki (1992:27-28) emphasized the importance of roots and specifically territory when looking at those having been uprooted from their homeland or displaced like refugees. She also points to those from World War Two[9], including metaphors of being tied to kinship and home. These she states are ties which they cannot be cut off from; nor can they become part of another kinship line. In this sense, we can see why the development of a more ethno-nationalism tied to Turkey will be shown to be forming. For the Ahiska Turks, there is a clear choice, the kinship line of Turks or the kinship line of the Georgians. As discussed by previous research (Aydingün 2002b; Aydıngün 2007; Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Bilgi 2012; Dogan 2016; Levin 2021; Oh 2006) there has been a significant leaning towards their Turkish ties.[10] Malkki's reflections on two refugee groups, one in a town, the other in a camp both demonstrate challenges to the understanding of homeland, being a refugee, being in exile, and the understanding of their relationships to the 'national order of things' for nation states. The deportation for the Ahiska Turks reveals connections to roots that are 'displaced' for them.

The *sürgün* is a significant starting point of their '*mythico-history*'[11] that Trier and Khanzhin (2007) developed to describe the complexity of the Ahiska Turks' situation. They define '*mythico-history'* as 'a central and constitutive feature of a group's collective identity, distinguishing the group from the 'other' and underlying its originality or even superiority by virtue of having a heroic and troubled history (2007:22). For the Ahiska Turks as a group, Trier and Khazhin point to the *sürgün* as the start of this *mythico-history*, and that in 2007 they were seeing some changes in the community, especially amongst those in the United States and Turkey compared with those in Central Asia

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[9] See Malkki 1985, cited in 1992.

[10] Aside from those who chose the offer by Georgia to return there if they changed their last names and accepted Georgian descent (Osipov & Pepinov 2003; Polian 2004). See, Chapter One, section 1.5.

[11] This was first coined by Liza Malkki in 1995.

(2007:20). One of these shifts was their relationship to Turkey, which is what has happened increasingly over the past few years. Trier and Khanzhin at that time said their 'core history' and 'manifested identity' was expressed in their being conscious of 'belonging to a people deprived of their homeland along with the "collective memory" of the deportation' (Trier & Khanzhin (2007:23). That collective memory, however, goes further back then the deportation and being a deprived people. It is being connected to the larger Turkish myth. Thus, this study is revealing a further attachment to this '*mythico history'.* It is being seen how their *ethno-history* is being intertwined with Turkey's.[12] With that as a starting point, we will turn to some of the empirical work.

Many showed their rootedness to their homeland that Malkki pointed to. One *abla* (TR for older sister), a middle-aged woman in Central Asia, was one of the key gate keepers to the community. Having been introduced to her by one of her relatives, I discovered she had served many years for both the government (Soviet and then post-Soviet Kazakhstan) as well as for the Ahiska Turkish association there. She also wrote for the Kazakhstan-published Ahiska Turkish newspaper *Ahiska*. This gave her many connections as well as a broader understanding of the Ahiska Turkish community in the multiple outlying villages around Almaty and in the diaspora. Speaking personally, she shared with me about how to describe their adjustment to Central Asia after the *sürgün* in 1944:

> When you pull out [or tear out] a nation [*millet*] from its own place, like a tree, and you plant that tree in a different place, how much [more] do you need to give it water? [and] allow it to branch out. It will be a little hard, but thanks to God's greatness, my grandfather and grandmother stayed, they settled, they married.[13]

She is saying that their people, or nation (*millet*), were uprooted when they were deported from Ahiska and then replanted when they arrived in Central Asia. That replanting

[12] While they were separated at the border with Turkey, there was mostly silence on any negativity towards being left outside of Turkey. See also Baydar Aydıngün (1998) who mentioned the connections to the Turkish-Russian wars.
[13] AKA3, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.

required a lot of care for the Ahiska Turks as they adjusted to Central Asia. They needed 'watering' and help from others,[14] but eventually would become healthy, taking root, growing, and spreading out.

Another example of Ahiska Turks being tied to territory was an *emi* born in Adigön in 1933. A shorter man with a well-groomed grey beard and small black skullcap, he spoke with me and a few others in the Ahiska *dernek*[15] (association or cultural centre) about their history. Eventually he left the small room, entering the main meeting space with tables, chairs, and couches. After a few steps he turned back looking at me and gestured to me to come to him. I went over to him and there was only one other person in the large room. He then softly said 'you can record me reading my poems'. I was excited about this because earlier, rather emphatically, he had said he did not want to be recorded for an interview. I got out the recorder and he took me to the wall with a historical map of the Ahiska region that he desired as our backdrop. It was a map of the Atabek Yurdu, a historical region lived in by Turks in the Meskhetia-Javakheti region. With all the other Ahiska historical pictures or places in the room he could have chosen, this gesture highlighted the connection of their people to this piece of land.[16] The map displayed the land of Ahiska, but also going deeper into Turkey's greater history, showed earlier Turkish migrations (see Smith 1999:76). It also showed more recent history of the Ottoman rule of the Ahiska region. The map also made a statement: we are not Georgian's converted to Islam but Turks that were already here (Buntürk 2007; Üren 2016).

4.2.2 Leaving All Behind in Ahiska

[14] Those others were fellow Turkish people, the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks. It was very common to hear people giving gratitude and appreciation to the Central Asian peoples that took them in, gave them bread, and housed them in those early years.
[15] Aygen, Erdentug mentions the role of the *dernek* or associations in Turkey as a place where different social networks can meet and maintain both economic and emotional ties to their hometowns. Each of these associations 'aim to sustain its culture among its emigrants by organizing picnics and annual outings, and by providing events and courses for the younger generation that promote their ethnic characteristics such as local food, folklore, crafts, and even dialect or language' (2008:1649-1650).
[16] BTR36, Field notes, Turkey, 15.4.15; 21.11.15.

The specifics of how the events of the *sürgün* on 14 November, 1944 were carried out and experienced are shared differently from family-to-family, village-to-village. As I listened to a variety of people who lived through these events, I heard various explanations, while I also suspected that some stories were embellished and exaggerated.[17] The actual struggle depended on a number of variables: village location in regard to the train line, the soldiers carrying out the orders, and finally the health and personal situation of those put-on board. General topics where exaggeration occurred were how the soldiers treated them, when the visit occurred, and number of deaths on the train. Some villages were given less than an hour to pack and leave while others were given half a day. Families located far away from the train line often could only take the bags in their hands, while others could take a full ton of their goods with them. Some got on the train sick, while a few did not even get on the train for health reasons. These people typically were not to be seen again.

Another testimony came from an *emi,* born in 1934. A fair-skinned man with blue eyes, his greyish white moustache contrasted with his cheek's red from the sun on that hot day in March when he entered the office. He was wearing his typical black cap, black suit with small Turkish flag pinned to his left collar. The soldiers, he said, ordered every household to send one representative to hear an important news. His mother, around forty years old at the time, went to the meeting because his father was fighting on the frontlines. At the meeting they read the commands of Stalin for 15 minutes and were told they would go to Central Asia, but they were not told why. Uniquely, his village could take one ton of goods with them, but nothing else.[18] They took everyone in their village and nearby villages to Ajara, one of the larger villages, where they would be collected and brought

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[17] Field note, 1.12.2015. Professor Buntürk (real name) expressed the importance of clarifying the history and stories being exaggeration by the population. It was not uncommon in the interviews to ask for clarification on certain details of the trip. For example, clarifying the number of deaths, if any, that had happened on their *own* train wagon.

[18] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.

to the train station. For nearly three days they waited there. Finally, at nine in the morning on 14 of November, they were loaded onto trucks. 'American trucks,' he said.[19] 'Studebaker' was often a more detailed description of the trucks that took them to the train (Pohl, 1999:132). Unlike him, many mentioned they had to leave everything behind.

One *emi* living in a remote corner of Kyrgyzstan expressed it this way: 'We didn't cry. Our cows, our sheep, were left like that, were left outside. After that, … the morning came. They put us in cars, in the wagons, we went to the wagons.'[20] While he expressed that they did not cry, from what they knew they would return shortly, so crying may not have been the emotion at that time. From village to village in the Ahiska region everyone gathered at the train stations, awaiting the train for what they thought would be a short temporary trip. To many people it seemed that if the Germans were coming, the government was watching out for them; they were being moved for a short period. But as they spoke about the train-ride, that idea changed. On that month-long journey the death toll began to mount up. After they arrived in Central Asia it became clear they would not be going home any time soon.

The question of why this would happen would surface. Expressions of some blamed it on them being Turks, and as Turks they may side again with Turkey, and thus could not trusted. One community member in Central Asia, speaking of the context of the World War and the region, took a position of looking at the Soviet Union's strategic perspective. He understood why the Soviets would deport them, as he said they would not differentiate the Turks from one side of the border or the other. He said there were '500,000 to one million' Turks hidden across the border ready to help the Germans.[21] Using this rationale and a military perspective seemed to help him explain the injustice and victimization that they had experienced as a people, rather than an injustice due to their being 'Turks' or

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[19] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[20] OKY3, Interview in Kyrgyzstan, 21.3.16.
[21] AKA16, Field notes in Kazakhstan, 5.4.16.

that they were 'Muslims.' He did not diminish or avoid telling the trauma of their deportation, but he did give a different perspective to their ill-treatment. In Central Asia there was one *emi* who said before the *sürgün*, they were digging the trenches along with Turkey.[22] So why should they be deported?

This is like how another informant in Kazakhstan described it. While we were speaking about Georgia and life there prior to the *sürgün*, she emphasized how everyone lived as brothers, or family. However, she said, inside people there is evil, and then she highlighted the question: why were we deported? As no answer is clear, one presumption related to their *millet* and the question of which *millet* does one belong?[23] The border between Turkey and 'Russia' was closed, referring to the Soviet border between Georgia and Turkey and in Georgia at the time of the *sürgün*, it was said only Georgians could stay. The others would be deported. The reason, the Ahiska Turks, she claimed, were being called traitors by the Russians, who warned that the Turkish population would return to Turkey and help Germany. They would sell themselves out and betray the Soviet Union.[24] One *imam* in Georgia also noted that they were not deported because of being Muslims, since there are Ajara Muslims in Georgia who were not deported. Saying it clearly and directly 'They were deported because they were Turks.'[25] This also affirms from within the population an unjust reason the borders might have been cleared during the war effort (see history chapter). Like so many would question, and how that *abla* in Central Asia would continue to express emotionally: 'How could they be a traitor when their relatives, husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons, are fighting as soldiers while the grandmothers, grandfathers, children are left to be put on the wagons?'[26] Her concerns were seen in another man's comments.

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[22] AKA8, Interview in Kazakhstan, 2.4.16.
[23] AKA3, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.
[24] AKA3, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.
[25] GE2, Interview in Georgia, 3.10.18.
[26] AKA3, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.

During the war, one *emi* explained that his father was sent on 12 March 1944 to be a soldier in the *Alman Savaşı* or German War.[27] 'He never came back, never came back. We lost him. … [was he] dead? Healthy? We didn't know. We never heard. Where did he stay? Did he stay in Georgia?'[28] The question 'Where did he stay?' referred to where was he buried, a significant part of their history, which was also told of those who died on the train ride, and how family members may not have had a proper Muslim burial. That reality faced leads us to turn to one of the greatest pains that happened to them.

4.2.3 The Train Ride

The specifics of the train trip at the centre of the people's forced move have become some of the key images, both physical and emotional, in the *ethno-history* they share in their *sürgün* story.[29] While some showed pride in how they played a part in the building of the railways connecting the southern Caucasus with other regions, they also painfully remembered how they were victimized and deported on those same railroad tracks (Appendix 2).[30] As Bayram stated, 'It was because we were Turkish Muslims that they cut us off from our land' (2012:144).[31]

Winter was already beginning, and cold abounded. Passenger trains were not used, but rather livestock wagons, adding to the dramatic experience narrated.[32] The community elders, and publications nearly always give the details of the ride, including the conditions, sickness, and what the train was like. One of these, despite the shame of such a topic, was that there was no bathroom in the wagon, gesturing a small circle with their two hands and bringing them downward displaying a small hole in the floor. Some noted

[27] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[28] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[29] Examples of this can be seen on the Massachusetts Ahiska Turks Association website's history section at: http://www.Ahiskamass.org/about-me/#bio; Bayraktar (2015) includes the tracks on the cover, as does the journal, Bizim Ahiska webpage Header photo (http://www.Ahiska.org.tr/) The same site includes the clip for the poem by Erol Yorulmaz at http://www.Ahiska.org.tr/.
[30] It was only around fifty years since construction on the lines had been finished. (Gorshkov & Bagaturia 2000).
[31] Originally in Turkish, Translation mine.
[32] Soviet soldiers also rode in cattle cars, but with a much lower attrition rate (Statiev 2009:256).

how many people were crammed into their trains. They counted the number of *koca* (husband) present even if the husband was off to war and not present on the train. For example, one mentioned four *koca* were on his train.[33] An average household count per wagon was listed as between five and eight. Others noted how many floors were in the carriage, some saying one, while others saying two.[34]

I heard about all this directly on a warm afternoon during autumn in Bursa. Two lifelong friends talked as we sat in an Ahiska Turks' *dernek*. The interior walls and supporting beams held photos reminding visitors of their past. There were pictures of men who had fought in the Soviet Army, a map of the Ahiska region and pictures of the wounded and dead from the 1989 '*olay'* (TR: event) in Ferghana, Uzbekistan. One of the men told us he was '… around two to three [years old] when the wagon came. It was very cold, those wagons. They took us in livestock transport wagons. Four to five families in one. …'[35] Another *emi* talking on top of him saying 'ours they filled eight to nine.'[36] Without pause, he continued:

> … daughter in law[s], girls, children, grandmother[s], grandfather[s]. It didn't matter. Everyone was there, [and] . . . because the wagon was so cold, I became paralyzed, … [For] two years … my legs were folded, [and] wouldn't open. …To go around, to important places, they would take me into their arms, their backs.[37]

At age seven he slowly recovered from all the traumas.

His friend, built on this, giving a fuller picture of the experience they faced: 'In one night [the Soviets] lifted up, [and] took, 92,000 people' as they were ordered by Stalin. 'Two hundred and twenty villages in one night were loaded in wagons … animal transport wagons, … with two or three levels. One wagon had a minimum of ten families.'[38]

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33 OKY3, Interview in Kyrgyzstan, 21.3.16.
34 OKY3, Interview in Kyrgyzstan 21.3.16 and BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
35 BTR25, BTR26, Interview in Turkey, 2.11.15.
36 BTR25, BTR26, Interview in Turkey, 2.11.15.
37 BTR25, BTR26, Interview in Turkey, 2.11.15.
38 BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16. Questioned on this, he clarified saying one wagon had seventy, eighty people, or five families, seven families. BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.

Continuing, he said ‘we were on the way for one month because the railway was broken, because the railway had been bombed. It did not go in one day, two days.’[39] He dramatized this in our talk as he made the sound of the train.

> Beep beep, it started: tara tatah, tara tatah, tara tatah, one month, tara tatuh. . . . This is how they deported us. We were left in Uzbekistan. I saw very bad days. … I had lice on my face. I went around with lice. One month, no toilet. No water. This is how they broke [us] under the wagon.’[40]

Another aspect that was alluded to is the number of deaths that occurred on the way. Some said there were thousands of deaths on the trip itself. Though this is not verifiable, clearly many died on the arduous trip (Trier et al. 2011:13; Pohl 1999:132; Polian 2004:156; Trier & Khanzhin 2007).[41]

A 76-year-old man had served the Ahiska community both in Uzbekistan prior to 1989 and now in one of the *dernek*s (associations) in Bursa discussed this. He told how death came in transit:

> from hunger, from thirst, from cold on the way, that is how it was, that they came. … our people entered the forward going train. Along the train’s route they would stay [die]… Cold, no food, nothing at all, hungry, thirsty. All the men were at war, the woman faced very heavy, painful, torturous days. But thank God.[42]

As the train moved forward, families were dropped off and separated in the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The elders remembered the cold, the pain and conveyed this to the next generation so as not to forget.

Many Ahiska Turks use pictures to describe what happened. The symbolism of the train and the tracks has become part of the Ahiska Turks’ own story, and it highlights the tragedy of the past (Smith 2009). This can be seen each year from around mid-October to January when the *sürgün* is remembered. From Facebook to written books, this image, is

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[39] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[40] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[41] Based on interviews and discussions with those who travelled on the train, the number of around 457 given by Pohl (1999:132) seems most accurate. Trier, however, lists around 3000 died (Trier et al. 2011:13). The following years, however, thousands did die from disease and exposure, with numbers varying from 19,047 (Pohl:134) to 30-50,000 (Sheehy 1980:24).
[42] BTR8, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.

common, often along with an older woman who represents the suffering that would occur when arriving in Central Asia. Nearly all those pictures show an elderly woman, dressed in traditional clothes, hand to her worn face with pain and concern. Most pictures also include either the train or the train tracks representing their being taken away from their homeland to Central Asia. Figure 4.2 is one of the most popular examples of this used by the Ahiska Turkish community. It reads: The deportation of the Ahiska Turks, 14 November, 1944: Don't forget (*Ahıska Türkleri Sürgünü 14 Kasım 1944: Unutma*). In this instance, a young man is included walking the tracks, likely representing the object of the mother's concern. He appears to have a gun over his shoulder and looks to be returning to Ahiska after fighting on the front lines in World War Two, only to find none of his family present. The Black-and-white format also shows sadness in a dark time. Other photos include pictures of a mother and a young child with suffering faces, extended trains with multiple cars, or a couple (livestock) train cars with open doors for people to load into.

Figure 4.2 Remembering the Deportation[43]

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[43] Facebook, Amerikada Yaşayan Ahiska Türkleri, 15.11.18.

The Ahiska Turkish communities remember these narratives. There was great suffering through the uprooting, being forced to move away from their homes and their homeland. This would happen again as the Soviet Union came to an end in Uzbekistan.

4.2.4 Second *Sürgün*

After the deportees arrived in Central Asia, most Ahiska Turks stayed there for decades; but another forced migration, their second *sürgün,* awaited some of them as the Soviet Union began to fall apart. In the waning years of the Soviet Union and after its demise, there was a surge of nationalism and nation-building throughout the former republics of Central Asia. In 1989, the Ahiska Turks living in Uzbekistan experienced their second *'sürgün'* (see Bayraktar 2013:133-134; Bayram 2012:148; Buntürk 2007 Chapter Seven; Chikadze 2007; Üren 2016:101-107). Nearly 100,000 would be uprooted again and it is remembered by all Ahiska Turks as another example of their suffering as Turks. Few, however, spoke in detail about it, especially those who experienced it personally. The result of this second deportation was a further scattering of Ahiska Turks to the ninth or tenth nations. This is recounted in both personal accounts and in the literature. Within this study, those living in the United States and Bursa[44] tended to share the most about this second *sürgün*, having experienced it personally or having fled Uzbekistan. This *sürgün*, however, was harder to use religious terms or ethnic ones to explain as would be argued. Some said it was Russians, others said it was Armenians coming in disguise as Uzbeks (see Ray 2000). Others said it was Uzbeks, but Uzbeks are Muslims and part of pan-Turkism, with Turkish roots. However, neither of those could make sense to them. Clearly, the story is complicated, but many would still ask: 'Why?'.

This would be the second, really third unexplainable event they would tie into their story. First, a rarely discussed but surely noted dynamic which they could not justify was

[44] During fieldwork in Bursa, it was conveyed that Bursa was composed mostly of Ahiska Turks who had fled from Uzbekistan after the traumatic events that occurred.

being left on the north side of the Turkish border. While family was on one side, they were separated from them. Then, despite their helping build the train lines, and send soldiers to fight, they were deported to Central Asia with no reason, not allowed to return to Ahiska. Now, here another unexplainable event of great tragedy shook their community. Some in the community who sought answers began doing their own research (especially students) to try to find answers. This, however, is a challenge due to being scattered, having access to archives, and language.[45] Most, however, can do nothing more than retell these stories and commemorate the events that occurred.

Whatever the causes were, this dispersion added to their shared experiences of suffering as deported Turks away from their homeland and to their ethno-nationalism. One day in the Ahiska Turkish association in Bursa one elder began to open up. He told us how, after living forty-five years in Uzbekistan, in 1989 through propaganda and agitation, the Russians caused the Uzbeks to be jealous (another reason some give), saying 'kill the Turks. May there be no more Turks.'[46] Hearing this, the other strongly cut him off saying this is not the sort of thing to talk about. Later as the tea was finished and his friend left to finish preparing the soup for lunch, he continued sharing his story. The KGB were involved, he said. First that the Uzbeks wanted everyone out including Russians and Turks, and only one *millet* remain there. He also said, however, it was Moscow that wanted to remove the Turks, or to assimilate the Turks so that they would become Uzbek. They would pay the Uzbeks to burn and kill.[47] Here again we see an emphasis on them being Turks, being distinguished from other *millet* (Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz), even though they are also Turkish kin. *Millet* here is clearly representing differing ethnic

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[45] The challenges here are great, if archival material exists, the research will require Ottoman Turkish from the Turkish side, Georgian and/or Russian from the Georgian and Soviet side, and then Uzbek for what happened in Uzbekistan.
[46] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[47] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.

groups and nations, rather than religion as these Turkish groups were also Muslim. Their ethnicity sparks the 'need' that they are either assimilated or removed.

The suffering they faced in Uzbekistan was also shown on another occasion. I heard about it in the United States from those that had to flee Uzbekistan and now ended up in the United States. Sitting near the newly remodelled building which had been converted to a mosque, I was with a young Ahiska Turkish man born in Uzbekistan. He was too young to remember the events that occurred in Uzbekistan, but old enough to remember living through what some called the third sürgün from Krasnodar Krai (Buntürk 2007; Üren 2012). His sharing was genuine and heart-felt, more vulnerable than most. As a child, he had not heard of or known much about Ahiska, he said. All he knew was that he was Turkish and Muslim.[48] He himself was only a small child of four years old when the events in Ferghana happened. His family had experienced a great deal over the past years and their arrival to the United States had meant a lot of adjustment and challenges but also some business opportunity for himself. Dealing with the past, however, was a deep struggle. This struggle led him to a sincere desire to be right before God and to serve the Ahiska community and at the mosque. Honest and open, he described his family's experience of the Ferghana events.

> Him: 'My father told me, if my grandfather was late for like 20 minutes, we would be dead. We wouldn't be here. You know. My father, he saw so much, stuff.
>
> Me: Hardship.
>
> Him: Ya, you know when we get to Russia, my father and my uncle they [were] shocked, you know. To see stuff that normal [unclear] people couldn't, you know, should not see
>
> Me: Ya.
>
> Him: He had to dig a deep cemetery. You know it's not like, [they would] bury everybody separately. They had to dig deep hole and ah,
>
> Me: Like a mass grave.

[48] US10, Interview in the USA, 19.8.18.

Him: … but you know it's really like I said my father and my uncles, you know to forget all this stuff that they had been through … you fight, you know. So, it was really hard, you know, for my parents to go through all this.' [49]

Greater challenges were presented as they processed all this, but he and his family would gradually grow through it. Though few speak about it as openly as this young man, images speak for themselves, and the use of social media has increased greatly. Facebook display the painful images or links to YouTube videos to memorialize these events, particularly in June.[50] Some of these were pictures of the dead, and one seemingly most recognizable image of a family, particularly the woman with the black and white stripes is often displayed (Appendix 15). The picture shows them fleeing the event, clearly in pain. They are physically supporting one another as they try struggle to escape. The subsequent scattering from Uzbekistan led to further moves to Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, and to the United States. That young man expressed the resettling experience for them which is not unique to the Ahiska Turks:

> We start from zero, everywhere. They moved us from Ahiska. We start from zero in Uzbekistan, [then] in Uzbekistan, they moved us to Russia, … we start from zero again, and in Russia we couldn't [start], they moved us … close to Chernobyl, you know, and we couldn't get along there.[51]

Their family then had to start again in the United States.

Another elder showed how important it was to him for people to call for justice in the case of the Ahiska Turks. Pulling out his archival folder, he showed copies of his letters written and sent in 2005 along with the book he had published. Written while many Ahiska Turks were moving to the United States as refugees from Krasnodar Krai, Russia, world leaders like George W. Bush (USA), Tony Blair (United Kingdom), Paul Martin (Canada), Angela Merkel (Germany), and Junichiro Koizumi (Japan)[52] were addressed. All the letters, written in Turkish, said the same thing. It gave a brief introduction of

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[49] US10, Interview in the USA, 19.8.18.
[50] See Ridvan 2014; Veysalov 2013.
[51] US10, Interview in the USA, 19.8.18.
[52] Dr Seyfettin Bayram archive.

himself, his father going to World War Two and dying there and then of the Ahiska Turks' 1944 deportation experience. In the middle of the letter, he focuses on Uzbekistan, 1989. He writes: 'The days came and went, and the communist regime's attitude never changed from going against seeing their Turkish enemies.'[53] Emphasizing them being the only 'Turk' *millet* in the Soviet Union, the Uzbeks were sent around saying: 'Death to Turks, Turks out' (*Türklere ölüm ... Türkler dışarı*). He interestingly here did not include them as part of the broader 'Turkish' world but used '*millet*' specifically for 'Turks.' These typed letters were sent enclosed with a book he wrote about the Ahiska Turks' experience entitled: *Ahiska Turks in Stalin's Hell* [*Stalin Cehenneminde Ahıska Türkleri*] (2004).[54] Demonstrating greater boldness and willingness to speak out on behalf of their people, he wrote this publicly, from Turkey.[55]

As shown by the title of that book, it describes the suffering for those who experienced what classic diaspora emphasized with victimization (Cohen 2008). Their Soviet Turkish nationalism also mimics other post-communist nations that also emphasized their victimization by the Soviet Union (Khazanov and Payne, 2009:259). The Ahiska Turks, however, can arguably go farther than just being victims of the communist regime and their victimhood has greater grounds to stand on than those who achieved 'nationhood.' This is because most have continued living outside the 'homeland' and in diaspora. For this reason, victimhood remains very real and emphasized by many. Ahiska Turks do not point to this victimhood to gain pity. Rather they want to articulate their experience as Turks to seek recognition for the injustice faced and to gain the right to return to their homeland (Ahiska or Turkey) with rights. They also expressed a desire to include the positive side of their experiences and positive memories in the mix of their community's *ethno-history*.

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[53] Original: 'Gün geldi geçti, komünist rejiminin Türklere karşı düşmanca tavrı hiç değişmedi.'
[54] This book and the letters were written in Turkish with no translation. This translation is mine.
[55] He did not say if he sent it to any post-Soviet nations.

4.3 Success, Glory, and Ancestral Connections

The Ahiska Turks are sharing more than just suffering from the deportation when telling their ethno-history. There is also some of the glories they experienced. As they look back, heroes, ancestors, and glories of the past bring value to the present and are helping both the nation and the ethnic community find purpose and identity (Smith 1986:2). That purpose is also tied to that of the 'original homeland' and would include, as Cohen pointed out, stories from the past, where it was located and its successes (2008:4).

Today, that history and that homeland for the Ahiska Turks is more imagined than real (Anderson 2016). The homeland has been taken from them and either abandoned or in the hands of other people and thus successes of the Georgians, Armenians, or Russians living in the geographical homeland would be excluded. Their successes also could not be tied, at least in the Soviet Period, to the non-existent Ottoman empire, nor its successor the Turkish Republic. Rather, successes are limited to their own people and to their own role in all that history, which included fighting in the Soviet Army, and for Turkey, and also their relations to Anatolia.

4.3.1 Honours, Medals, Heroes of the Past

Remembering the heroes of the past includes the men who fought on the Soviet front lines in World War Two.[56] Being under Soviet rule in Meskheti-Javakheti resulted in their being called to join the war effort. The children of that generation emphasize this detail much more than the youth of today, who typically emphasize the deportations, while sometimes adding this detail. This is interesting in light of Wimbush's observation that the Soviet Union had not forgotten the number of Soviet Muslims (several hundred thousand) who had collaborated with the Germans over the years rather than serving in the armed forced (1986:223-24). Many Ahiska Turks include their involvement and

[56] The number shared by some in the community of those that fought on the front lines 20,000. Bugai (1996:132) mentions 40,000 that fought. Trier et al. (2011:12) mention up to 10,000 soldiers returning from battle were deported.

efforts to fight alongside the Soviet Union as part of their own story. Wimbush, however, also pointed how rather than national prejudices were hoped to be 'tamed and "Soviet friendship" strengthened', many Soviet Muslims rather returned from the war with an 'enhanced sense of their own nationality and an increased awareness of how their own individual and corporate goals depart from those of Russian society' (1986:224). The Ahiska Turks contribution to the War is included, however their difference is also seen in this sharing, highlighting the injustice of the situation that they were deported despite these contributions.

Many interviewees talked of the numbers who died at war, while others mentioned men returning to Ahiska wounded with missing limbs to find their villages empty, with other people living in their homes. With no home or family remaining there, they would then have to search for them. One *emi* candidly reflected on what happened: 'It was a very grave time. Dead soldiers did not return, when 20,000 soldiers of our Ahiska Turks left. Just a very small number returned, with no leg, no hand, no arm.' He continued, building emotion as he shared: 'After that, slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly, later, later, they would find their families. They would find their families [in Central Asia]' he repeated to add emphasis.[57]

Some of these stories could display their historical influence at this time. However, like the *emi* (BTR4) above, most did not give specifics to where they fought, often just described as 'the front.' One *teyze*[58] (TR for aunt, elderly woman) in Central Asia, however, told how her father had been sent to Kiev, Ukraine, and returned wounded.[59] In

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[57] BTR8, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.

[58] *Teyze* means 'aunt,' maternal side, or generally a woman significantly older than speaker in Turkey. Here the Turkish form was used. As this research was significantly conducted in Turkey, it is hard to verify if the usage of *Teyze* was because of my usage of it, or their adapting to using it in Turkey. Though going over the Ahiska family vocabulary at the start, usage of that vocabulary did not always reflect that in Turkey. As I was considerably with men in Turkey, this also impacted my continued usage of *Teyze* outside of Turkey, which, compared to the usage of *emi* that I adopted to use, was not noticed until late in the research process.

[59] AKA4, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.

Central Asia one *emi* also added the detail that his relatives were sent to the Russia front lines.[60] Those lucky to return may receive recognition for their valour. This was seen in the pride shown on the faces of those displaying their own medals or that of their fathers for the recognition for their heroics in the war. Some of the elderly men still regularly wear their medals. For example, during a meal shared in Kazakhstan, one *emi* wore his medals, describing them to us all at the table (Figure 2).[61]

Figure 4.3[62] Ahiska Turkish man (1) with war medals

These were also notably emphasized in many pictures of him they would show or post. In an interview in Turkey, Balabek *emi[63],* who had finished up his PhD on that particular period, pulled out his archive and gave me a couple of his photos. Both men had fought in World War Two. One of them, seen in Figure 4.3, has a whole side of his chest filled with honours earned while fighting against Germany in World War Two.[64] Another friend

[60] AKA13, Interview in Kazakhstan, 3.4.16.
[61] Fieldnote, Kazakhstan, 1.4.16. This was not just a one-time thing as I would see many photos of him later with the medals being worn.
[62] WhatsApp status photo 1.3.20.
[63] His real name.
[64] AnTR33 archive, Turkey, 2.1.16.

(Figure 4.4), having lived to 104 years old, was a hero, he told me, but with expressed dismay he asked: did he receive his honours? No, because he was Turk. Balabek *emi* shared this displaying again frustrations of injustice felt, while emphasizing being Turk.[65]

Figure 4.4 Ahiska Turkish man (2) with war medals

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[65] AnTR33 archive, Interview in Turkey, 2.1.16.

Figure 4.5 Ahiska Turkish man (3) with war medals

The Republic of Kazakhstan's Ahiska Turkish newspaper, *Ahiska,*[66] also drew attention to this in a published gazette in 2005 entitled *Ahiska Türk Gazileri.*[67] It was twenty pages long, written in Turkish and celebrated those who had fought in the war and were still alive in the community. The headline reads: 'We are Proud of you!' with a subheading: 'Dear Fathers! Turkish Gazi Heroes!'[68] Within the memorial, a message to the youth says: 'While the Ahiska Turks were protecting their homeland, they [the Gazi's] were sent out of their homeland … without them, we would not exist. Youth, love and embrace your elders with respect and love'.[69] Here the Ahiska Turks show pride in their history and the heroes of the past. Though fighting for the Soviet Union, in this instance,

[66] See Appendix 1.
[67] Red House Dictionary (1994) states a Gazi in religious terms is a Muslim who has gone to fight the enemy, or a person who has gone to war. This second definition could be understood more in this case, however using *gazi* links to Islamic faith and to Turkishness. Howard notes in Asia Minor within the Mongol and Turkish worldview that '*gaza* meant warfare for expansion of the worldly realm of Muslim rulers. One who did gaza was a *gazi*' (2017:27).
[68] Originally in Turkish, Translation mine.
[69] Archive AKA3; Originally in Turkish, translation is mine.

they are emphasized as Turkish heroes fighting for the homeland. The significance could mean two things: one relating to 'Ahiska' the former (Turkish) Ottoman territory, or, secondly for the Soviet Union, where they were living and a part of. This memory would be carried on, to be proud of their past and the memory of soldiers who had fought to protect their homeland, Ahiska. This also would be emphasized when recounting how they stood alongside Turkey to fight in the previous World War.

4.3.2 Religious Leaders and Joining Turkey in World War One

Looking back to the period where they kept ties with the Ottoman Empire/Turkey emphasized their purpose and meaning[70]. The Meskheti-Javakheti region's mountainous terrain and relative isolation helped cross-border relationships between Ahiska, and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey continue from the treaty of 1828 to 1921. Despite the freer movement at that time, tensions remained between Russia and the Empire, and the subsequent territorial loss is still remembered today.

An example of how the Ahiska Turks are remembering this is how their religious leaders were killed at the hands of the Russians/Soviets. Cagaptay (2006:4) noted the transition of an ethno-religious community is changed as the *ethnie* faces a threat from the outside. He pointed that Turkish nationalism was impacted because of the persecution and threat to the Muslims left outside the Ottoman Empire as well as the *millet* system which affected nationalism through religion (2006:5). In that time, suffering for those in Ahiska was not uncommon as Muslims in former Ottoman territory also faced hardships. Ahiska Turks remember how the *mullahs*, or Islamic leaders, were treated by the Russians, with some being killed and others sent away to Siberia.[71] An Ahiska Turkish

[70] The Ahiska Turks speak of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey as the same thing, they do not differentiate them as two separate things, but rather Turkey as a continuation of the Ottoman Empire.
[71] Likely referring to same group that was sent to Siberia earlier.

elder in a Kazakhstan village said that his grandfathers were *mullahs*[72] and had come to Ahiska from Turkey. One, he said returned[73] to Turkey while the other remained.[74]

The *emi* mentioned earlier (BTR36) who was born in 1933 also talked about this time in his memoir:

> With the Bolsheviks' revolution, the Ahiska Turks were not permitted freedom of religion and language. The sound of the minarets' *ezan* [call to prayer] was put out. They tore down many mosques and *madrasas*. What remained of the minaret was used for storage and warehouses. They crushed those from Ahiska who were religious and knowledgeable. Those [religious and knowledgeable ones] that remained were sent for the rest of their lives to Siberia.[75]

Another example is how they had helped fight for Turkey's independence against the Allies after World War One (see Khazanov 1992:3). It is also a reason which led to caution by the Soviet Union in World War Two (see history section). One day on a visit, an *emi* asked me if I had visited Çanakkale.[76] Knowing the significance of what he was referring to (at that time Turkey was celebrating the 100-year memorial of this key battle) I answered him 'not yet.' He then strongly encouraged that I visit there to see the historical site and graveyard. Similarly, another *emi* also asked me if I had been there, saying his grandfather had fought for three years in the First World War.[77] In the book *Ahiska Turk Folklor* published by Ahiska Turks in Azerbaijan, the chapter called *Turkuler* has a poem called 'Çanakkala.' Highlighting the relationship of the Ahiska Turks with Turkey in this battle, it included lines like: 'Mother, I am going to fight against the enemy' and 'they shot me in Çanakkala/ they buried me in the grave' (Hacili & Poladoğlu 2001:106).[78]

Being in Turkey, statements like this, including their stories and poetry that tied them to Turkey, would be vital. It appeared they felt they were not foreigners moving into Turkey, but 'returning' home as 'real Turks', like the ethnic Turks from Bulgaria who

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[72] *Mullah (Molla* in TR*)* is a Muslim teacher or leader who has studied Islamic theology and sacred law.
[73] He used 'fled' to describe this at another point in our talk.
[74] AKA18, Interview in Kazakhstan, 6.4.16.
[75] Archive Turkey, BTR36:141. Translation mine.
[76] Çanakkale is in Western Turkey along the Aegean Sea and site of a key battle for Turkey's Independence. It is also known as the Battle of Gallipoli. It has a very large cemetery for those who lost their lives in this campaign that lasted between from February 1915 to January 1916. BTR8, Fieldnotes Turkey.
[77] BTR35, Fieldnotes, 8.5.16.
[78] Translation mine.

came in 1989 (Brubaker 1996; Dişbudak & Purkis 2014; Van Hear 1998). It began to be shown, however, that just stating their ethnic kinship ties with Turks and Turkey was not always enough. Though socially welcomed, the Ahiska Turks, unlike those coming from Bulgaria, had very minimal legal pathways opened for them (see Dişbudak & Purkis 2014). It would take time and patience to open these doors. At the same time, they also have not been welcomed back to Ahiska (Georgia).

Thus, while 'there was no Ottoman nation' (Lewis 2002: 339, 351), the growth in Turkish national identity and origins significantly arose from 'outside Turks', (Smith 1999:76) and pan-Turkism included not only Central Asia, but Turks within Russia (Smith 1999:77). That influence to Anatolia at the formation of the Turkish Republic would likely have passed through the Ahiska region, though some have stated ties to the Turkish state did not happen after World War One (Cavoukian 2005:59; Chervonnaya 1998). While they may be right regarding political and legal ties, ethno-national ties would have been present. Bayraktar (2015:48) even noted how Turks from Ahiska were being sent to Siberia and imprisoned because of 'Pan Turk' and 'Kemalist' thinking. These ties to the past continue to develop in the first two decades of the twenty-first century as Turkey shifted its gaze back to the Ottoman period in what some have referred to as 'Ottomania' (Cagaptay 2014; Ergin & Karakaya 2017; Mango 2006; White 2014; Yavuz 2020). The struggle beyond just social acceptance would not easily change but visible shifts using these memories and specific historical ties to connect them were seen.

4.3.3 Ties Between Ahiska and Turkey

Participants mentioning their ancestors coming from Turkey strengthens that connection between their personal *ethno-history* and that of Turkey. Smith in 1986 notes how ethnicities that are uprooted are ready to give an allegiance they might 'feel' and 'belong' to, and this is highlighted through the 'rediscovering' of lost ethnic roots (2). When referring to 'roots,' he means roots that go back centuries. Thus, the Ahiska Turks 'roots'

tie them first to their own personal story and how they are unique, and then, within that, how that is tied to their Turkish kin. One young man in the United States told me he was a seventh-generation grandchild whose blood goes all the way back to the Ottomans. His ancestors had moved to the Ahiska region, with six brothers living there. Many Ahiska Turks, he shared, cannot go back seven generations, but his family remembered and could share about each of those generations.[79]

Another example of this was an elder in the community sitting behind his neatly organized desk with a small Turkish flag on it and a very large Mustafa Kemal Atatürk[80] poster behind him on the wall, honouring the Republic's founder after World War One. As we talked, he suddenly took hold of the flag, looked at me and raised it up passionately as he spoke. He began waving it saying that the Ahiska Turks are 'under one flag,' Turkey's.[81] That day he introduced his family story succinctly: 'I was born in [an Ahiska] village. However, before that, they [his ancestors] migrated from Anatolian Turkey … from Turkey they migrated. Why did they migrate?' he rhetorically asked, 'Ahiska is our gateway to Turkey'.[82] Asserting the importance of the Ahiska region and his being Turk coming from Anatolia (Turkey). The 'key' to that 'gate' was the five districts that hold castles built over the centuries and fortifying the region, as well as the entrance into or out of Turkey.[83]

That same day, his friend was there and sat next to him, echoing this. His family, he said, has seven hundred years of history in the Ahiska region and that a 'large castle built by the Ottomans is there … [from] yesterday [to] today. It has lasted that long.'[84] The castle in Ahiska being the key castle today symbolized in their ethno-history (Smith

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[79] US2, Interview in USA, 31.6.16.
[80] Though having a picture of Atatürk is required by law to be displayed in associations. The location of this picture right behind his desk in this scene, however, elevating the symbolism and passion he was giving.
[81] BTR8, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[82] BTR8, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[83] BTR8, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16. Ali Paşa (real name) would use a similar description in a Bursa *Linetv* interview in December 2015. (Linetv Bursa 2015).
[84] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.

2009). For him, that 700 years emphasizes his family line, not to Georgia or Georgians living in the Meskhetia-Javakheti region, but rather to Turkish history, which includes the Oguz and Kipchak Turks living in that region.

In Central Asia, I was privileged to sit with some of the elders in the community. Two of whom were born before 1944 and had experienced the *sürgün*, the third was born in 1947. While spending much time listening to one of the elders, the others in the house, family and friends came and joined us, beginning to tell their story. At one point in our conversation, I asked what was personal or unique for the Ahiska Turks compared to Turkish culture in Turkey[85]. At first not understanding my question they answered:

> Man 1: This is who the Ahiska Turks are. (The group laughs) Everything, cultural things, they were taken from Turkey.
>
> Me: Heh.
>
> Man 1: The food, everything is taken from Turkey. Why was this? Because our grandfathers would go and come from Turkey.
>
> Man 2: Uh huh, at that time.
>
> Man 1: In the 1900's, Mustufa Kemal Paşa, Russia, Ukraine, Russian government.
>
> Man 2: He means Russians.
>
> Man 1: Made a treaty, and this border of Georgia was drawn. With that, our, parents, grandparents remained in Georgia.
>
> Me: Ok.
>
> Man 1: Over the border, [in Turkey] Kars, Erzurum, were on that side, so some part of us [was impacted by] this. But just a little. Look, our weddings are the same.
>
> Man 2: Heh.
>
> Man 1: [unclear part]; Our reputation is the same. The reading of the Koran is the same, the same funeral [ritual].
>
> Me: Yes.
>
> Man 1: We can give an example, that the sayings from our mouth these are the same. The reason for this, we are from Turkey. We are the same. We are one.
>
> Me: Yes, yes.
>
> Man 1: Our *millet* [people/nation] has come from there.
>
> Woman 1: Our mother and fathers, *'ata'* grandparents, Atatürk. It is Turkey. When we say '*ata'*

[85] Recognizing the incredible diversity in Turkey myself, the question was generalized to see how they might answer it while living in Central Asia.

Man 2: Atatürk, our ancestor, our father's ancestors are Turk, Turk, Turk.

Man 1: I was born here, …I have read, worked, studied history, …people fled.

Me: Hmm, to Turkey?

Man 1: To Turkey. Now, many of our people live in Turkey. There are many. Her aunt's children.

Woman 1: Mine, mine, mine.

Man 1: Are there.

Woman 1: I have an aunt there, an uncle, their children, boys and girls, are there. In Izmir.

Man 1: From the 1930's.

Man 2: They went there.

Woman 1: And are alive.

Man 1: In those years they, the uncles, fled over there. This news got to Stalin. They were saying: 'they [the Turks] are fleeing [to Turkey]' and for that reason they were sent to drive them out [of Georgia] to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan.

Man 2. Our *millet left* belongings, their village, everything stayed behind.[86]

Not understanding my question at first revealed a common assumption or understanding seen throughout the study, that they, or within the diaspora, did not differentiate themselves from those in Turkey. For them, as elders in the community, 'everything is taken from Turkey' We are the same. We are one'.

While looking back, life was getting harder and harder and leaving the Ahiska region was one possibility for many Ahiska Turks, similar to how some fled to Turkey from the Balkans. Cagaptay mentioned how those moving to Anatolia after the Balkan wars saw Anatolia as the 'final refuge as well as the immutable homeland of Turks and other Ottoman Muslims' (2006:7).[87] On many occasions many Ahiska Turks told how their relatives and community followed a similar pattern, some emigrated while others were stuck outside of Turkey.[88] Early on, family members could travel with no difficulty to see each other and to marry from village to village until the 1930's. After this, separation

[86] AKA10, AKA11, AKA12, Interview in Kazakhstan, 3.4.16.
[87] See Brubaker 1996; Van Hear 1998.
[88] Field notes 18.8.15.

from one another and from the land would continually impact them. Now in the post-Soviet period, this impact is being revived and remembered.

One *emi,* having first turned down the request by the association director to be interviewed by me, clearly displayed in his face, gesture, and then verbally, his frustration at '*Korrespondents*[89]' (reporters). As we continued to talk and get to know each other, at one point his face softened, as he reached into his pocket and handed me a disk. Similar to others of his generation, he had written up his story.[90] 'Everything is in here,' he said, referring to his life experience and story of the Ahiska Turks' experience. 'There are 500 pages, but publishing is very expensive. [My] grandchildren are listening to me and writing.' He stated while acting as if typing.[91] Inside this disk was nearly 238 of these pages, double spaced, of journal-like life experiences, poems, and stories. Relating to this period where the borders were closing, he writes:

> A small group of people from Ahiska migrated to Turkey. Due to Ahiska Turks moving to different regions, the Bolsheviks kept tighter control of the border in 1930's. After this, those that went to Turkey, or those that went to Georgia, had to stay. In 1937 in Georgia, as within all the Soviet Union they began to gather and arrest the people.[92]

Sitting in a Central Asia guest room and eating dried apricots, raisons, and nuts, an interviewee said that her grandparents had also fled in the 1930's to Turkey. Another *teyze* told how she was eight years old at the time of the 1944 *sürgün*, being born in 1936. She shared how some of her family crossed the border and left everything behind in Ahiska while another stayed but was arrested and taken away.

> Woman 1: My grandfather's [on her mother's side] left for Turkey. They are in Ankara. In 1929 they went there. In 1933 the rest followed. The families husband went across with two children they went across the border. They came back [to Ahiska] and said they were met with music. How honorable.
>
> Me: In the area of Ankara?

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[89] BTR36, Field notes, 15.4.15. Also mentioned *Korrespondents* on 21.11.15; BTR3 Interview in Bursa 28.10.14 also mentioned *Korrespondents* coming.
[90] For example, Dr Bayram has his story written in two books (Bayram, 2004; Bayram Paşaoğlu 2012), Minecat Ahiskali (real name) has many novels and poetry books published, and Bahadir *emi* (real name) has a well written blog (bahadirAhiskali.blogspot.com.tr).
[91] BTR36, Field note, 15.04.15.
[92] BTR36, archive pp. 141-42.

> Woman 1: They went across the Turkish border from Ahiska.
>
> Woman 2: They are very hard-working people, very hard working … leaving your belongings behind to the neighbours and crossing the border to Turkey.
>
> Woman 1: [unclear] he was an important person, my grandfather.
>
> Woman 2: Respectful.
>
> Woman 1: My grandfather [on my father's side] … was taken in Ahiska. He was arrested and taken away. No more.[93]

One community member also shared how family members had heard they would be deported, but had chosen not to flee to Turkey but stay behind in Ahiska to wait for their relatives to return from the war:

> Man 1: Why didn't we go to Turkey? We would have gone; we would have run. They [Ahiska Turks] said 1944 would come, for that reason on 12 of November they said [the Soviet Union] would deport us. They heard.
>
> Me: They knew? [about the deportation] After the 'meeting' [with the soldiers]?
>
> Man 1: No, no, no, from within.
>
> Woman 1: Within their group [unclear] we had our people's[94] soldiers. Everybody aren't dogs. Inside every nation [*millet*] is the good and the bad. Someone explained it to them: 'You need to be ready, be careful. They want to deport you.'
>
> Me: Hmm, because…
>
> Man 1: They were saying 'they're going to deport you,' … [and so] half stayed in the village, half fled to Turkey.[95]

Here the use of nation, *millet* as expressed by him becomes clear. Each nation as understood by their ethnic group (i.e., Georgians, Russians, etc.) has both good and bad people. In this case Ahiska Turk soldiers had heard that the deportation was to be happening. Speaking about the soldiers, he says that not everyone are '*köpekler*' (TR: dogs), a term used in a negative sense, but rather, the soldiers made a good choice to tell their own people of the deportation. Continuing to explain how hard a choice it was to stay because it was not just their immediate family, but also the children of the brothers who were fighting in World War Two. He emotionally remarked that if they fled to

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[93] AKA4, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.
[94] *Millet* is used here.
[95] AKA18, Interview in Kazakhstan, 6.4.16.

Turkey, how would their brothers find them when they returned? Where would they go to look? For this reason, they decided it would be better to be deported and not go to Turkey.[96]

In the 1930s those who had remained on the Turkish side of the border after the Treaty of Kars (1921) moved further inland.[97] The borders were closed in 1937 (Pelkmans 2006), and no news could be passed from one side to another. This was shared on a fieldwork invitation to me when two elderly cousins met in Bursa.[98] They were both born in 1931, he north of the Turkish border in Ahiska, and she to the south in Turkey. After a search was conducted by a Bursa neighbour, they finally saw each other face to face on a hot spring day in April 2016.[99] A middle-aged man who was also present wanted to make it clear that I understood what the elderly lady was saying. What I saw, however, was how this sixty or so year old Ahiska Turkish man himself was impacted by what she was saying. His voice expressed astonishment as he heard the perspective from the Turkish side of the border when the *sürgün* happened.

> Now, the grandmother said [to us], 'we would see across there in Georgia. On the border, there was no people walking around, no call of the rooster. … on the 15th of November, Hitler, those dogs, [we] did not have news that they have taken them on the livestock trains. But we looked and said: no rooster is calling out, no people are walking around, nor animals.' She said, 'Life ended over there.'[100]

This joy of meeting after so many years of separation was a privilege many have not had, despite searching for distant relatives.

Another current situation revealing some difference in perspectives is shown by Ahiska Turks in Central Asia. Arriving to a street consisting of many Ahiska Turkish family homes, we saw property walls lining the narrow streets typical in many

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[96] AKA18, Interview in Kazakhstan, 6.4.16.
[97] See Bayraktar 2013:75-76; Bursa Migration Museum brochure (obtained 2015).
[98] They met on 24.4.16 in Bursa, Turkey. See appendix 12.
[99] I could attend this reunion. It also made the newspapers (www.haberler.com, 2016; Bursadabugun.com, 2016).
[100] BTR35, Interview in Turkey, 7.5.16.

neighbourhoods. We entered the courtyard of one family with two community elders already there waiting for us, and a few middle-aged men from the family also there, lingering around the yard. Within a few minutes of our arrival until midway through the interview, the courtyard steadily filled with many men from the neighbourhood. It was early evening, but too early for most to have already come home from their jobs. Work would dominate the conversation, as the discussion moved from the elders to the other men and their community's economic struggles.

This topic agitated some, culminating in disapproval of speaking negatively about this (at least in front of me). The theme led to the men sharing one example of Turkish construction firms coming to build large buildings but not calling or hiring anyone from the Ahiska Turkish community. The companies would come from Turkey and ask them 'Who are you?'[101] and the Ahiska Turks would answer, 'we are Turks from the Caucasus.'[102] But the Ahiska Turks would not get the job, they complained. This led one of them to praise Kyrgyzstan: 'May Kyrgyzstan live and grow!' (*Kırgızistanimiz yaşasın. Büyüsün!*). However, since the struggle also included the local population, another man in the group continued, saying that some of the local populations were stating 'Go to where you came from', but then he replied heatedly to that statement: 'But then why are there Kyrgyz going to Turkey, and why should Ahiska Turks go to Azerbaijan?' [103] There were mixed feelings in their short discussion, not so much about their identities, but especially about how they had been treated. They did not want to be called Azeri, or to 'return' to a place they did not see as theirs, Azerbaijan. They also did not feel welcomed by the Turkish firms and thus needed to explain their history, or ethno-history, to both groups. To do this, one of the men referred to current day Turkey, and their ties to the past: 'Now they [those Turks coming to Central Asia] say Turkey, [but] we are Ottoman

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[101] OKY2, Interview in Kyrgyzstan, 21.3.16.
[102] OKY2, Interview in Kyrgyzstan, 21.3.16.
[103] OKY2, Interview in Kyrgyzstan, 21.3.16.

Turks. We are not Azeri Turks. Ottoman Turks. We came from the Ottomans. Our fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers came from the Ottomans. They spread out over there (Ahiska). But we are now here [in Kyrgyzstan].' This conversation reveals there is a deep connection for these particular men to their Ottoman roots. However, this was not recognized by the Turkish companies who did not hire them. This the Ahiska Turkish men did not understand but also put some emphasis on their 'mixed' national identity as seen in their being 'Azeri' not Turk.

An Ahiska Turkish writer spoke of a similar experience she had in Turkey. This lady wrote for the Ahiska Turks' *dernek* (Association) in Kazakhstan and was attending the 50th year memorial of their deportation. She was introduced by a deputy at the *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* (Great Turkish National Assembly). He said he was privileged to introduce her, but he labelled her Azeri. Proudly and firmly, she said to me as we sat there: 'I stood up and I said: "excuse me, I am not Azeri. I am a [remaining] piece of the Ottoman Turks."'[104] After explaining how the meeting resumed, she continued the conversation with him later. He asked her how she ended up in the Soviet Union. She told him very frankly: 'Because of being Turk, for carrying your name, they deported us. … Our people (*millet*) have been split in half, in Uzbekistan they broke us (*bizi kirdi*) and 'sank' us at the end of the Soviet times.'[105] This response displayed the need to defend themselves as Turks, even amongst other Turks, it also reveals why Turkey would be an 'imagined' homeland for many.

Ahiska Turks were not always idealistic in their sharing. One man commented somewhat agitatedly that they (the Ahiska Turks) were abandoned by the Ottoman Empire, not to the Georgians, but to the Russians.[106] This was a rare moment in all my conversations with Ahiska Turks when the Ottoman Empire was described as the

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[104] AKA3, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.
[105] AKA3, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.
[106] Field note, Turkey, 15.2.15 (BTR13).

victimizer. Though nearly never heard, this was said in Turkey which suggests that question may be more present in the community than addressed.

4.4 Reflections and Arising Themes

Smith commented that a group's national formation is affected by a relationship between their historical experiences and ethnic roots. It is through looking at the past and the symbols and values that were present, he says, that a '(re)discovery' of who they are can occur (1986:ix, 2). This chapter shows some of the ways the Ahiska Turks are 're-discovering' and presenting their ethno-nationalism through their ethno-history. This section will discuss a few reflections and themes that arose from the research.

First, the *ethno-history* shared is filled with collective memories or the 'diasporic consciousness' of their origins and birth (Cohen 2008:165). These memories of birth and origin help give their 'diasporic consciousness' legitimacy. For one thing, the meaning of origins and birth goes deeper than just the exile or deportation. Rather, the stories of the deportation were referenced in light of their being Turks. The deportation was told as happening not due to the World War Two context or how other groups were also experiencing deportation; instead, they often referenced it considering their being Turks and not Georgians. This argument distinguishes and validates their views of why they were deported and why they were not allowed to return until today (unless they take the Georgian position and change their last names). In the same way when they speak about the traumatic events that occurred in Uzbekistan, they consider it because of being Turks. As Turks, they said, it was either because of the local community's jealousy of them because of their successes, or because the Soviets valued them and wanted to utilize their hard work and labour skills in Russia.

These stories that reinforce their being Turks also reiterate their ethnic ties to Turkey. Though they were sometimes seen as related kin (see Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Aydıngün 2007; Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Bilge 2012; Dogan 2016; Tomlinson 2002) with

Turks, this connection was more a deep desire than it was reality. Life in diaspora revealed an imagination for Turkey and the past. One key point here is that it is not a ‘re-discovery’ of who they are in their national formation, but I describe it as a ‘re-inserting’ themselves into the Turkish story for those in Turkey to understand who they are. That is different than in Turkey where the Turkish history is told and known, with only a ‘re-discovery’ of the Ahiska Turks happening over these years.

A second reflection considers how the deportation from Ahiska correlates to geographical-Turkish (Ottoman) ties. The Ahiska Turks’ homeland thus is rooted in two places. Though recognized as Georgian territory today, the first ‘rooting’ has been in their villages located in the five districts of Ahiska. Their Turkishness is tied deeply to their homeland of Ahiska, but deeper roots depend on their relationship with Turkey. This can be seen, for example, in the references to the Ottoman castle and Turkish flag hanging over it, or in the train and train tracks with the Turkish flag hanging on the front of it. In their perspective the castle itself, a symbol of Ottoman power, did not relate to Georgian history, but to Ottoman (Turkish) rule there and the history which it symbolized. That history was their history.

Another way they placed roots in Turkey relates to Anatolia and being separated from it. Anatolia correlates with both the Ottomans and Turkey, and the story of Ahiska intersects with this history rather than Georgian history. The Georgian history was never spoken about by the Ahiska Turks. The geographical land of Ahiska and the Turks that resided in the region were then tied into Turkish history by emphasizing they had either migrated there from Anatolia, or were descendants of the Kipchak Turks, Oguz Turks, or mentioned being part of the Atabek *Yurdu* (see Bayraktar 2013; Buntürk 2007; Kemaloğlu 2021; Üren 2016). Thus, while being amongst this demographic, most spoke about their descent in a generalized way of being Turkish. After that, the past may have been spoken about more specifically. Some were saying their descendants were the

Ottoman Turks, others were migrants to Ahiska from Anatolia, a few pointed to the Kipchak Turks living in the Ahiska region, and finally a few in Central Asia pointed to descent from other migrants to Ahiska like the Terekeme and Tatars.

Through these they desired to show their Turkishness and how they fit into the Turkish *thesis*. This was done in a few ways. For example, through referencing relatives fighting with 'Turkey' in World War One and particularly the Battle of Çanakkale. It was also through the *imams* being killed or sent to Siberia. These *imams*, most described as Ahiska Turks, were directly tied to the Ottoman Empire and had been sent from the Empire to serve there. Integrating their history with Turkish history also is evident in a memorial honouring Ahiska soldier-heroes with Soviet medals from World War Two. They fought to protect their '*vatan*' or the homeland, not referring to fighting to protect the Soviet Union, but rather their villages. As they were not yet deported when they left for the war, it is this land which, again, correlated with the Ottoman-Turkish territory, they saw as theirs to protect.

Another reflection relates to the deportation. The exile separated them from their land, but it also separated them from kin and family. This came up in two ways. First, they regularly emphasize the immediate separation of family members on both sides of the border Turkish-Georgian border. It also includes separation from those fleeing to Turkey. Next, they focused on the group of Ahiska Turks in Turkey today as their ancestors and kin. This story reveals the gap in their history of separation with them, not mentioning their time in the Soviet Union but rather prior to deportation and the re-affiliation in post-soviet times in Turkey.

It also reveals a conundrum for the group. Ahiska Turks outside of Turkey did not speak of this group of Ahiska Turks, except in reference to the flight to Turkey or to family members left on the Turkish side of the border. What was missing was any reference to their current presence in Turkey and if they were one of the group or not.

Their relationship with each other was deeply impacted by the deportation and led to a very tight group consciousness. This is obvious, for example, in how they limit marriage by only marrying someone from those villages.

In Turkey some within the group wrestled with if they belonged or not, wondering whether those having experienced the deportation were the 'real' Ahiska Turks. Despite this wrestling, this older migration is a reference point for those in Turkey to be able to show their connection and relation to Turkey and to their Ottoman roots. The example of the two cousins meeting after seventy-two years is an instance that could draw attention to their presence and reasoning for citizenship. Without this emphasis, their social acceptance continued, but the granting of citizenship rights as Turks was still awaited and not granted.

4.5 Conclusion

Chapter Four emphasizes the ethno-history of the Ahiska Turks and how that reinforces their ethno-nationalism. The traumatic events surrounding the deportation from the homeland (Cohen 2008) continue to be a core point in their *mythico-history* (Trier & Khanzhin 2007). As the Ahiska Turks are finding their voice and 'vernacular mobilization' (Smith 1991), their ethno-history reveals it is not a 'rediscovery' of who they were, but rather an expression of and merging with what they held in the Soviet times. The community has been continually adjusting to life's circumstances and context around them with the needs and possibilities around them. In the previous decades this included merging or re-inserting their ethno-historical story with that of Turkey's history.

To do this, the chapter focuses on their separation from Ahiska and the Ahiska Turks' personal experience of those traumatic events. Over the years this has led to a 'diasporic consciousness' (Cohen 2008) that would highlight both their Turkishness and their rootedness (Malkki 1992) to Ahiska. Thus, for them Ahiska, being a district within the Ottoman Empire, symbolically holds an ethno-nationalistic attachment to Turkey that

their community would highlight. The forced dispersal from that homeland (Cohen 2008) and continuing separation from that land elicited stories of victimhood, which they particularly noted was a result of being Turks. Aside from stories of victimhood, the community also expressed pride in their community's heroic activities and successes. For example, fighting for Turkey in World War One against the threats from outside the nation, (Cagaptay 2006) as well as Soviet heroes who fought to protect the homeland. These heroic actions reinforced the Ahiska Turks' Turkish ethno-nationalism (Wimbush 1986) as well as their participation as a non-titular nation within the Soviet Union. It also re-enforced the place of Ahiska in the Ottoman Empire and their dutiful loyalty to Turkey.

In the ethno-historical retelling of these events, the Ahiska Turks consistently affirmed their Turkishness beyond being just non-titular Turks of the Soviet Union or their being pan-Turkish (see 1.5.4 and 2.4). Reaching past the 1944 deportation, they revealed how their Turkish communities' historical ties had roots in Turkish Anatolia and how they had been attempting to unite the diaspora community with Turkey and Turkish nationalism. In essence, their history was a part of Turkey's history. This aim will continue to appear in the next chapter, which will look further at their perspectives of homeland and return.

Chapter Five: Homeland and Return

5 Introduction

The Ahiska Turks' ethnonationalism was shown in the previous chapter through how they conveyed their history and where they put their emphasis. Anthony D Smith (1986) emphasises the role 'myths,' 'memories,' symbols, and 'values' have to help the (re)discovery of a collective group (1986:ix, 2). As the Ahiska Turks are scattered in multiple nations, they have sought to protect those values while stateless. While many nations living in diaspora seek to 'return' to their homeland (Cohen 2008; Dufoix 2008; Safran 1991; Tölölyan 2019), the Ahiska Turks' perspectives on what that means will be discussed in this chapter. To do this, I will utilize Brah's (1996) idea of 'homing' to emphasise that instinct to return to, or point towards, the homeland while away from it. Two areas will be shown that the Ahiska Turks are 'homing' towards. First, the continued homing to each other and how that is designated through the question: *nerelisin*? (Where are you from?). The second section will discuss their homing towards Turkey and then emphasizes the struggles faced and ways that that has begun to be overcome.

5.1 Notions of Homeland Amongst Ahiska Turks

The Ahiska Turks have brought on a mixture of responses to homeland influenced by the different situations they have experienced. Each place shows areas of comfort and ease, struggles, insecurities and different needs to respond to. Cohen (2008:104) states homeland almost universally draws many feelings, often sacred and idealized; taking on familial terms related to a mother or father. Terms like motherland and fatherland are some ways this is expressed. In Turkish this would be *anavatan* and *vatan*. *Vatan* translated to English means homeland or motherland, but as Ozkan (2012) points out, in Turkish, it developed to include political implications.[1] Using *vatan* carries significance

[1] *Vatan* comes from *Watan* in Arabic, meaning place of birth or residence and thus based on context, could be their village, a province or country they are from (See Lewis, 2002:334). Ozkan develops the meaning in Turkish and explains the shift from an Islamic and birthplace of origins to a national homeland (2012:3).

to whom it is given. Tölölyan (2019) highlights how within diaspora studies one must be very careful to not locate the 'home' too quickly in the ancestral homeland. He states his view that 'a collection of transnational migrants becomes a diaspora when its members develop some familial, cultural, and social distance from their nation yet continue to care deeply about it not just on grounds of kinship and filiation, but by commitment to certain chosen affiliations' (2019:27). For most Ahiska Turks, that distance occurred in the Soviet and post-Soviet years as they were scattered to ten nations. In that time, a deep care for each other and maintenance of their group occurred, while affiliation to being Turk and looking to return to Ahiska began. For them, however, there is no 'nation' they look back to, only a non-existing empire, the Ottoman Empire and Turkey which arose from it (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:175-76). The power of the Ottoman Empire's legacy is shown in its continuance in the nation of Turkey. The Ahiska Turks continued to look to Ahiska, which was part of the Ottoman Empire until handed over in the Treaty of Kars in 1921. Across the border, in Turkey, Kemalism sought to remove much of the Ottoman past and in the creation of the Turkish republic (Howard 2001, Lewis 2002, Zürcher 2017). While appearing successful over the decades, the Ottoman Empire's influence has remained in Turkey and its memory resurging in the past years (Cagaptay 2014, 2017, 2020; Ergin & Karakaya 2017; White 2014). The Ahiska Turks in the Soviet Union would hold onto their Turkishness (see Chapter Four and Six) and while remembering their Ottoman past, in post-Soviet times many would look to Turkey. Their connection to the land, 'Ahiska' located in southern Georgia would also remain as it would help them relate to kin and their past.

Tölölyan's (2019) warning is clearly seen in the Ahiska Turks' views on their motherland (*anavatan*), fatherland (*babavatan*) or nation (*vatan*) as person to person

revealed differing perspectives.[2] This is also seen through the research from outside the community. For example, Tomlinson (2002) conducted her research in Krasnodar, Russia only a decade after the Soviet Union's fall. She showed homeland was confusing for many Ahiska Turks and that it was not seen as Georgia nor any territory (2002:209).[3] Instead, homeland was an underlying nostalgia of the Soviet Union and in the security of having proper documentation.

The aim for return to Georgia as their homeland was an aim for much previous research.[4] In this multisite study, however, I did not hear views like Tomlinson did towards the Soviet Union or those focusing on Georgia. An exception here was the nostalgia in the field work by the middle aged and older generations of their positive experiences within Soviet times and for a few people that showed a desire to return to Ahiska itself. Similarly, it was certainly true the Ahiska region (Samtskhe-Javakheti) was seen as a 'homeland' (like that of the ancestors) but not as a place of a physical return for most. It rather has become a renewing (Cohen 2008; Safran 2001) of this imagined homeland (Anderson 1983). In a sense like the case of how the Jews began seeing the homeland, Palestine, as symbolic in nature (see Smith 1995:8), or the temple for the Sikhs (Cohen 2007:117) 'Ahiska' has become symbolic for the Ahiska Turks. Since return to that territory is not possible, it is more like a 'homing desire' (Brah 1996) across the sites that is seen.

Brah's concept of a desire to 'return' home could be accounted for here. Critiquing the idea of fixed origins, she uses diaspora to do this. She says since all diasporas do not sustain an ideology for return, there is a difference between 'a desire for a "homeland"

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[2] Outside researchers, he points out, looking at those in diaspora can run the risk of taking perspectives from one or two sites and generalize that for the whole group. The emphasis of the multi-site study tries to reduce this. In this study, the sites primary site of Turkey admittedly influenced the Turkish perspective. The aim to draw from other sites desired to gain a broader perspective.

[3] Her participants saw it as the place of their ancestors (209).

[4] See Bardzimashvili 2012; Pentikäinen & Trier 2004; Sumbadze 2007; Swerdlow 2004; Tarkhan-Mouravi 2007; Trier et al. 2011.

and that of a “a homing desire”’ (1996:16). Her statement is helpful because ‘homeland’ for a deterritorialized group looks to an imagined place, a ‘non-fixed’ homeland. The Ahiska Turks’ diverse answers to homeland, showed it was not just a ‘fixed’ place that was desired.[5] The hope of return to their villages in southern Georgia for the Ahiska Turks has remained unmet in both the Soviet period as well as in post-Soviet times. Also migrating to Turkey in the past during the Soviet years was not possible and remained a challenge in post-Soviet times. This left mixed feelings towards the homeland, and it thus naturally has come to mean different things.

Tolia-Kelly (2019) also addresses the ‘home’ for displaced peoples. She says because home is ‘always elsewhere’, ’inaccessible,’ and ‘immaterial’ it becomes imagined and ‘live on through shards of memory, stories, narratives and fragments of nostalgia.’ (2019:217). These memories and stories were shared in Chapter Five and the ‘home’ of Ahiska (the geographical place) being inaccessible. Home thus remains ‘elsewhere’ except while remaining amongst their own ‘Ahiska Turks’ or as we will see, in turning to Turkey and their Turkish kin. This becomes a difference for the Ahiska Turks. While the ‘return’ to Ahiska cannot happen, nor a ‘return’ to the memory of the ‘Ottoman Empire’, the Ottoman Empire, could be ‘accessed’ through its continuance in the Turkish republic. Thus ‘home’ could be an ‘accessible’ place (real or imagined) but it meant emphasizing how the Ahiska Turkish story fit into the narrative held in Turkish nationalism.

5.2 ‘Homing’ Toward Each Other

A continued ‘homing’ to each other is a first area we will look at. While being amongst the Ahiska Turkish community it was often said they needed to stay together (Kassanov 2017[6]; Ray 2000) and that those who were separated from the rest of the community ‘would get lost.’[7] For them, this meant to lose their Ahiska Turkishness which assumedly

[5] A secure place was mentioned.
[6] See also DATÜB (3.4.17).
[7] See Tomlinson 2002 and Koriouchkina (2011:73) both focus on roles of kinship and the village.

included their Turkishness and Muslim faith. That will be addressed in chapter Six, but in relation to this discussion on 'homing' towards each other, it also carried a deeper significance.

One young man in the United States shared has mixed feelings. He said how it was good in the United States for the opportunities to work and that he was thankful the community was received there. On the other hand, he said quite strongly that it was very tough. In that regard, his comments related to being a close community and that he did not want to lose his Ahiska Turkish identity or that they (the Ahiska Turks) lose themselves. 'People are going crazy, it's a sickness' he said, about 'losing' the tight familial bonds.[8] Despite the transition in the United States being a more drastic change (culturally, linguistically, religiously) another young man[9] in Turkey stated something very similar. He said that he saw the things being 'lost' are normal things because of the passing of time (number of kids, language adjustments, etc), but they still do not want to lose themselves and remain united as a people. He felt in Turkey the Ahiska Turkish youth were adapting and integrating so that he saw no difference between the Ahiska Turkish youth and the youth in Turkey. Some of these differences will be seen in Chapter Six. While this seemed to not bother him, he did show concern of losing the tight community they had as a group.

Other students, however, saw this differently. For example, one young lady[10] greatly wrestled with some of the traditions of her community and enjoyed the freedoms in Turkish culture. For her, some of those freedoms related to the role of women in society and the family. She joked that because she was educated, it meant many Ahiska Turkish men would not be interested in her. As a woman, she had a specific role within the family that she would fulfil (Koriouchkina 2011). That place in Turkey, at least in the western

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[8] US15, Interview in the USA, 21.8.18.
[9] BTR40, Interview in Turkey, 4.11.16.
[10] AKA1, Skype interview, 21.5.15.

city where she studied, gave her a different perspective of a woman's role and place. She stated, the Ahiska Turks 'do not fit the Turkish system'. She gave some further examples to explain their differences or 'rules as she called them.' Some things an Ahiska Turkish girl could do, and others she could not do. For instance, she shared how she was given permission to take musical instrument lessons (guitar), but after a community member spoke to her dad, they changed their mind and said she could not do that. Another example was related to dancing. Weddings were fine, but to do other dance, like ballet, was something she could not do. To do this, she said, 'it's not ok, it's making you different and you start to be, you know, like, more free.' Another difference she pointed to in Kazakhstan and is the same in some demographics in Turkey is that women smoke and drink. That, for an Ahiska Turkish woman, is not cultural. Each of these examples give perspective and significance to her statement.

The association's main purpose, she added, was to not lose connection with each other but to stay close.[11] Koriouchkina highlights that: 'Staying related and remembering one's historical origins (even if without intentions of returning to the historical motherland) was a way to sort out who is and who is not a member of the group and to preserve group integrity (2011:73).[12] They kept their community close and tight by living near each other as well as remembering where they are from.

Fieldwork verified this 'homing' dynamic towards each other[13] as it is still very consistent across the different sites where people were moving close to each other. In Bursa, there were specific neighbourhoods they were gathering in and Dayton, Ohio has seen a very large movement of Ahiska Turkish families move to that region to be close

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[11] AKA1, Skype interview, 21.5.15.
[12] Interestingly that practice was seen, i.e., linking the villages with heritage, but going back through my interviews and fieldnotes the term was not.
[13] Diaspora groups congregating together is nothing unusual.

together[14]. One community leader stated a first question the community will ask is: 'Are there Ahiska Turks there? And can they [we] live there?'[15] Fieldwork in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan similarly led to specific villages where they were congregated together. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, I was told a specific street was an Ahiska Turkish street. In this sense of 'homing,' in terms of nationalism and return, there is a movement towards each other that is not (yet) to a geographical nation. It is not that they are against the idea of 'return' but as they draw near each other it is perhaps in expectation for a future return. As Malkki (1995) is often quoted for saying 'the national order of things' meaning a return to a nation or territory. As this is not possible to return to Ahiska, the first place the Ahiska Turks turn to is not a geographical territory, but rather to each other.

Bilge's study (2012) showed the importance of preservation for the Ahiska Turks as well as connection. Connection arose for the need of community and preserving their culture. She showed in her study in Arizona that this was done through connections with Turks in that community. So Turkish schools in the diaspora, for example, helped reinforce the language, culture, and faith they wanted to preserve (2011:193). Likewise, in this research, the fieldwork revealed that was one of the main purposes of the *madrasa* in Dayton. It was to preserve faith, culture, and language (this will be touched on more in the next chapter).

One example showed the importance of preservation, revealing it was not an easy thing to maintain. A middle-aged man and the family's *gelin* (daughter-in-law) were serving a lunch to me as we talked in the United States about the Ahiska Turkish community. The *gelin* brought up twice how they do not want to lose their kids. 'We can lose them anywhere, even in Turkey' and then she added the importance of family. 'If we lose our

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[14] US2, Interview in USA, 31.7.16/18.8.18. He was also discussing all the communities of the Ahiska Turks in the states near Ohio.
[15] US4, Interview in USA, 30.7.16.

families, we lose ourselves.'[16] In this comment, the role of both family and remaining tightly together in diaspora is revealed. That sense of being 'lost' or losing being 'Ahiska Turk' included what could happen even in Turkey. Their own unique ethno-history, story, and experience as shared in Chapter Four keeps them close together. It is part of that 'homing' towards each other that keeps it alive and not lose the values they hold dear.

Another example from a female university student in Turkey who had also studied in a Turkish high school before coming pointed out life outside Turkey and then inside. In each place they did not assimilate and kept their own traditions, culture, and language, etc. She stated:

> If you want to speak of Russia, or of America, or of Azerbaijan, in no instance, for example, there was not any assimilation. We speak our own language. We cherish our own religion. Those from Ahiska are like this. We always go and come with our friends, our family. We don't break our relationships. We keep alive our culture. We'll go anywhere to our weddings [and] of course we know all our relatives and everybody. So, for that reason, no matter which country we go to, none of us, will lose being together. We do not lose our culture. … for example, when we lived in Azerbaijan, we only spoke the Azeri language when we went out. But in our homes, we spoke our *Ahıska'ca* [*our Ahiska* language] because we did not forget.[17]

When asked about being in Turkey, her response was nearly word for word, other than that as a student living in Turkey, they tend to speak a lot more '*Turkçe' (Turkish)* and not '*Ahıska'ca*'.

> Shall I say it like this. Turks, ah, don't see us [differently], they see us as Turkish family. For example, in language, we speak more in Turkish, but again as I said, at home we speak *'Ahıska'ca'.* Again, here [in Turkey] there is no assimilation. It's like this. Whether it's our weddings, our traditions, we keep them alive'.[18]

Through her eyes, she felt there was no assimilation and that the community maintained everything the same. It shows the deep concern for her and most Ahiska Turks. Chapter Six will show some of the responses to those that are not keeping the Ahiska culture alive. However, here, even in her comment, the fact she spoke Azeri (or others Russian, Uzbek, English) in the host countries but *Ahıska'ca* in the home does not mean everybody remained so strict. In fact, a number of those interviewed learned Turkish later in life.

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[16] US1, Fieldnotes, USA, 2014/2016.
[17] IzTR48 Interview in Turkey, 17.1.17.
[18] IzTR48, Interview in Turkey, 17.1.17.

Though both Turkey and Azerbaijan are ‘Turkish’ and ‘Muslim’ there is still a differentiation felt as she highlighted in neither place, they ‘assimilated’. For her family, their ethno-nationalism leaned toward Turkey as she went to a Turkish High School in Azerbaijan and then a Turkish University in Turkey.

It is worth adding a comment here that within Turkey, those attending school will attend the government regulated schools with its officially accepted curriculum. This will encourage assimilation and affect in varying degrees the Ahiska Turkish youth’s perspectives on being Turks, Turkish nationalism, and how they ‘home’ toward each other in the years ahead.

While the community continued to ‘home’ toward each other while living in different host countries, there were ways they would distinguish themselves from others. One of these ways was through their attachment to each other because of where they were coming from. This continuance in community between the Ahiska Turks was seen through how they greeted each other. We will turn to that now.

5.2.1 Opening Questions

A question asked can open and close conversation very quickly. As the research commenced general questions about their Turkishness or religious practice would not draw much reaction to them, almost a trained avoidance.[19] However, to ask them directly: Are you ‘Ahiska Turk?’ often drew an immediate reaction of surprise and wonder at how a stranger would know that, or suspicion arising on their face, revealing a questioning and often distrust instinctively arising. Trust would be significant here to be earned. The word ‘Ahiska’ and Turk amplifies a symbolic element to their group and embracing of the group’s feelings. Here the use of ‘Ahiska’ becomes critical as it clarifies for them of being Turk, and secondly which part of Ahiska their family came from. It was a way of

[19] Other than occasionally a look at me as if saying how naïve to be asking such an obvious question.

protecting themselves from assimilating into the majority culture around them[20] and could maintain a group consciousness over all these years. In a sense it exemplifies what Conner (1990:97-98) showed how national consciousness could be assumed early as the masses would look to their own regions, and yet they also utilize that region symbolically to connect to an empire that no longer exists but re-emerged as the Republic of Turkey.

5.2.2 *Nerelisin*? (Where Are You From?): First Responses

The question *nerelisin?* (Where are you from?) reveals a great deal of information and is one of the first and most common questions asked by Turks, Ahiska Turks, and many others around the world (Dogan 2016:97).[21] Recognizing the trust issue as well as the location the question was asked, the answer could vary. I saw early on that the first answer would fit what was assumed to be understood by those around them. Dogan (2016:97), as a Turkish researcher, stated she (and average Turks) never heard of the Meskhetian Turks and while in Turkey the community often struggled to answer, 'where they were from' (Dogan 2016:127). This was also seen in Turkey in the early stages of this research but would quickly change in the later years. For example, with the rise of 'Ottomania' and 'Neo-Ottomanism', (Cagaptay 2014; Ergin & Karakaya 2017; Yavuz 2020) the Ahiska region could be highlighted as well as the Ottoman roots of the Ahiska Turks. Both terms refer to the rising interest and nostalgia in the Ottoman past, with 'Neo-Ottomanism' referring to ensuing political projects and where 'Ottomania' is reflected in popular culture (Ergin & Karakaya 2017:34). Figure 5.1 shows this below, as well as the usage of traditional clothes at different public events (see Chapter Six). Through this, the region, and people of 'Ahiska' become known to the average Turks I met on the street.

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[20] This varied person to person but also in the context. In Turkey people spoke to be glad to be there with other Turks, but most in the first generation continued to maintain the close insider group mentality, with very few mixed marriages with Turks from Turkey. A number that had married, I was told, had gotten divorce.

[21] The Crimean Tatars in Crimea, who experienced a very similar history to the Ahiska Turks ask the same question for the same reasons. It identifies them with their personal village as well as with the place in Central Asia where they lived (Pohl 2004).

Ray (2000) noted the group's ability 'to identify themselves in non-national terms as an important instance of resistance' against the differing States inclusion and exclusion manners.[22] The experience of being a deterritorialized people remains true (even with citizenship) from what was seen in the fieldwork, including Turkey.[23] More often than not, the community would point to the most recent place they had lived. In Bursa, many would first say Russia or Azerbaijan. Exceptions could also be Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan. For instance, while meeting students at Uludag University in Bursa and Kocaeli University in Izmit, Azerbaijan had a strong academic influence. These first locations are notable because when asking further, nearly everyone in Bursa at the time of this research had come out of the traumatic experience in Uzbekistan in 1989, either directly or indirectly. The exception to this, was those from Kyrgyzstan or a few from Azerbaijan who had moved from Central Asia to Azerbaijan in the 1960's.

While doing research with Ahiska Turks in the United States, they often first stated Russia as where they were from. This was also despite most having fled Uzbekistan in 1989. Uzbekistan was said only rarely. While in Georgia, most first said they were coming from Azerbaijan, but one mentioned Turkey (he had been working in a bakery there), though he was from Azerbaijan.[24] Some of them, however, were also coming from Uzbekistan. While spending time in Central Asia a different response to the initial question was given. Everyone pointed first to the Ahiska region and in Kazakhstan particularly the district of Aspinza[25] was where their villages in Southern Georgia were located. All these mentioned are of geographical significance to them and did not correlate with any nationalist feelings. In the study I did not hear Ahiska Turks refer

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[22] Those in Azerbaijan typically are those who have a stronger desire to return to Georgia. This was also in the context when repatriation to Georgia was seen as a greater possibility (i.e. the Georgian President signing an agreement 1996 granting citizenship to former deported peoples, but this was not enforced, Ray 2000:398).

[23] Confidence seems to be rising in Turkey and in the United States for a more vocal or outward response to their situation.

[24] GE3 interview Georgia, 3.10.18.

[25] One of the other five districts the Ahiska Turks were deported from.

themselves in national or cultural terms to the countries or localized regions from which they were coming from. For instance, none called themselves Azeri, Kazakh, or Uzbek, because they had been living in that country. They did refer to it as a place where they resided as well as out of respect. For instance, respect was given to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, for receiving them in 1944. Cultural trends from those places were also rarely recognized, but sometimes considered their own 'Ahiska' culture. For instance, some foods could arguably be originating from those around them, like from the Uzbeks, Georgians, or Armenians, but would instead be seen as their own national dish. Ethno-nationalist sentiment came as they pointed to their being Turk as well as direct connections to coming from 'Ahiska.'

These different answers are also significant. Most Ahiska Turks did not say they were from Turkey. The exception to this was the older generation that noted their parents moving from Anatolia to Georgia and the Ahiska Turkish student from Azerbaijan saying he was from 'Turkey'. Though relating to Turkish kin, they are not 'from' Turkey and had to work through this in Turkey. Rather they pointed to being part of the Turkish diaspora that remained from the Ottoman Empire outside Turkey and now attempting to migrate there (Aksel 2014). One way to emphasize their Turkish connection is to emphasize the Ottoman (Turkish) location they are coming from: Ahiska. This, rather than the Georgian terms of Akhaltsikhe, Meskheti, or Meskhetian. Appendix 9 shows this well as the Ahiska community in the United States are protesting for the return to 'their homeland Ahiska'. The flags waving in the picture are Turkish (along with one flag of the host country). Ahiska here is recognized as well as Turkey. The two go together as the protest to return does not represent them alone, but the Ahiska Turks being under the Turkish flag. Again, this ethno-symbolic term (Smith 2009) brings meaning and bridges the past Ottoman territory for the Ahiska Turks with Turkey.

5.2.3 *Nerelisin*? Secondary Responses[26]

Returning to the 'homing' towards their own group, the second meaning behind '*nerelisin?*' would open deeper understanding. Once I was 'in' the community and they knew what I was asking, or that I would understand, they would answer that question further. Koriouchkina (2011) develops this while researching in Russia and focuses on the *küv*. According to Tomlinson (2002:117) and Koriouchkina (2011:71), the *küv* refers to the original village they came from and how they identify (and differentiate) from each other. Interestingly in this research, that term was almost never used. Instead, the Turkish word *koy* (village) was the term used. Reflectively, I ask if this is a change occurring in the community due to their drawing near to Turkey, this research being mostly in Turkey, or perhaps my own use of Turkish? One strong possibility is the influence of Turkish on the group as those in Central Asia and the United States consistently used *koy*.

For example, the man first mentioned above from Kazakhstan who clarified 'but I'm a Turk' responded this way as the conversation continued. Mentioning the villages around Almaty and my research I asked again, 'but *nerelisin*?' his face perplexed at the question. I listed a few main villages of Ahiska, and his eyes lit up: 'you're like one of us'. He then gave me his village name. Koriouchkina noted the Ahiska Turks only respond to this when speaking Turkish (2011:72). I found that made a difference, but just Turkish was not enough. It had to be questioned further or being closer to them. One person stated to me 'when Ahiska ask you "where are you from?", they [mean] which village of Georgia?'[27] and a female interviewee stated to me the '… Ahiskalar have a question: "*nerelisin*" and that makes them [feel] very proud because it is how they find their

[26] I could also clarify with '*Hangi koydasın*?' (Which village are you from?).
[27] AnTR43, Interview on Skype, 6.11.16.

home,' meaning their own people.[28] I asked her: '*Sen nerelisin*?' (Where are you from?) and she answered without hesitation: 'I am from Ajara, but my husband is from Hirtiz.'[29] Or, for instance, while sitting in the living room of a friend and drinking tea together, he specifically explained the importance of knowing this to me:

> Him: My father was born in Ahiska, Tinisli village. [Others outside the Ahiska Turkish community] may say: 'Where?' And I will respond Tinisli. … When someone says '*nerelisin?*' it means which of our villages. I am from Ahiska. 'Which village?' Tinisli, and Kuldal, and Oshura.
>
> Me: Can you give examples?
>
> Him: Yes. I was not born over there [Ahiska]. I should really say I am from Kokand [Uzbekistan], but that is different. *Nerelisin?* Which village? I am from Ahiska, I am from Tinisli. After that, they can say: ah, you are from them. Who are you from and from your roots the elders can find you. From whom have you come? [30]

What he emphasizes here is the specific villages which they were from within the five districts in Georgia.[31] This younger man pointed to the elders and the roots that the place revealed, underlining: 'ah, you are from them.' He also distinguishes the way he felt he 'should' respond based on place of birth: Uzbekistan. However, that was not where he felt his home lay.

That sense of 'home' and 'rootedness' (Malkki 1995) here has significant meaning that was not seen when stating they were from Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, or Russia. Within the Ahiska Turkish community it meant the 220 villages that they came from and continue to maintain their ties to. It is also where some difference can be seen from the common Turkish response that most ask and know where their ancestors came from. Here that past is significant as it holds them together (ie marrying only those from these 220 villages) as well as it signifying their Turkish ties as they are no longer in Turkish territory. Smith (1995) pointed to a similar example of the Jewish people and their rootedness in their terrain and homeland which gave authenticity and identity (Smith 1995:7). Here,

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[28] AnTR18, Interview on Skype, 5.11.15.
[29] AnTR18, Interview on Skype, 5.11.15.
[30] BTR20, Interview in Turkey, 21.12.15.
[31] Adigon, Ahiska, Aspinza, Ahilkelek, and Bagdonovka.

remembering the territory of Ahiska for the centuries long role it played in the Ottoman Empire helped bring an authenticity for them and connection with Turkey. For the Ahiska Turks in this sense, unlike that of the Greeks, Jews and Armenians who fit the 'archetypal diaspora groups' (Cohen 2008; Dufoix 2008; Tölölyan 2012) seeking restoration of the homeland, is not dependent on the restoration of Ahiska. Rather it is in connecting to these roots and relationship to Turkey (Levin 2021).

Figure 5.1 Map of Ahiska Villages[32]

Maps are one way that the Ahiska Turks are remembering their roots and territory. It was mentioned earlier in Figure 4.1 and similar maps are seen here in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2. These two maps are also in Turkish, but more detailed than Figure 4.1. They both signify the Ottoman territory held in the past. Figure 5.1 exemplifies this connection

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[32] http://www.ahiska.org.tr/?page_id=1842 (last accessed 26.10.21). The original website allowed the viewer to scroll and zoom in on each area. That site is no longer available: http://ahiskalilar.org/ahiska/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ahiskabolgesi-3.jpg).

and shows the 220 villages of the Ahiska Turks. Made available on websites that contained a wealth of community history, pictures, music, current affairs, and stories,[33] it could be accessed by the community to find their village and keep that connection to both their past and present kin. These sites also included maps of both older regional maps as well as maps like this one specifically referencing ‘Ahiska’. Written in Turkish and not using current Georgian names infers their homeland’s ‘Turkish’ root. As time has passed and very few could return, the maps allowed them to see which of the five districts they were from and where their villages were located. With diaspora tourism picking up over the past years, it also gives reference to Ahiska. How often it was utilized, is impossible to know. A newer site has used it as a cover photo. The Family Tree DNA website[34] was set up by Ahiska Turks to test the theories between their Georgian and Turkish roots and encouraging DNA testing in the community. This map references the region, Ahiska (also recognizing Meskhetia) that mostly only insiders would presumably recognize.

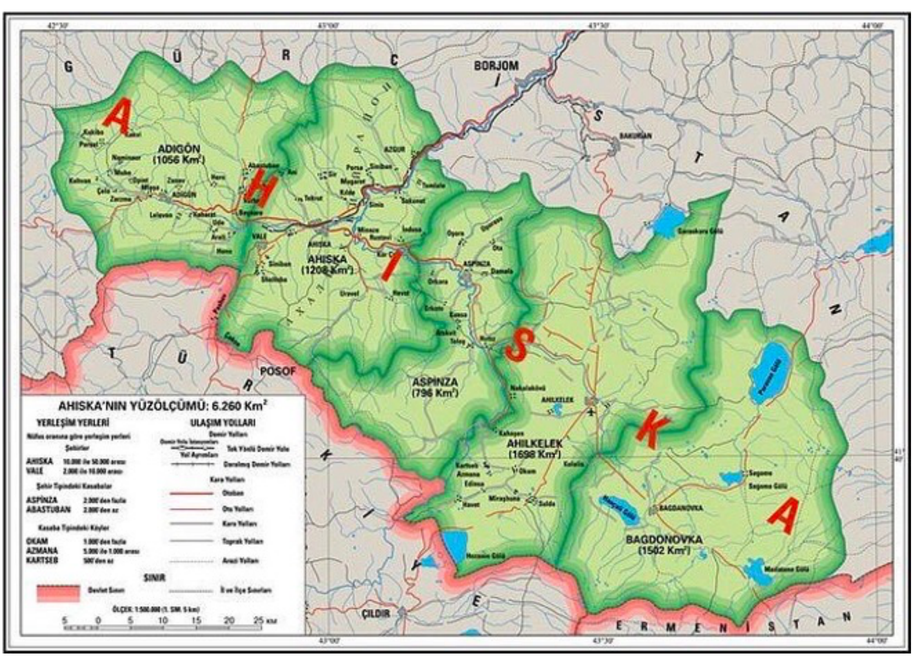

Figure 5.2 Ahiska Map (2)[35]

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[33] Interestingly, as this research concludes, most of these sites have been shut down, likely shifting to social media outlets.

[34] https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/akhaltsikhe-ahiska-turks/links (last accessed 26.10.21).

[35] Original source could not be confirmed at end of research, Buntürk 2007:473 references source as Ahıska Dergisi, Ahıskalılar Vakfı Tarih ve Kültür Bülteni, Haziran 2001, KAPAK.

Another example of using the web came from a young entrepreneur in the United States. He also had been working on a website that would connect their people back to their roots.[36] He continued talking about the connections or chains of relationships to keep them together. 'We try to keep the chain. Ya know?' he said to me. 'That's how we are here, all relatives, lots, and lots of relatives. Every family is attached to each other…' [37]. While explaining how important this was, he emphasized that through this website, they could find where each family was living, who had died, and where were they buried. That was so family and friends could go to pray at the gravesite if they wanted. For the Ahiska Turks, funerals play an important role for the community (see Aydıngün et al. 2006:19; Tomlinson 2002). Interestingly, I attended several *mevlüt,* but people did not emphasize them to me (it was always the weddings they pointed to as important). Prayers are not offered just at the time of death, but through the first 40 days as well as into the future. Meals are offered on some of these events I could attend a *mevlüt* one year after the death of a community member (Chapter Six; see Tomlinson 2002:186). The hall was packed with people as the community came together from distant places (Aydıngün et al. 2006:20; Tomlinson 2002)[38]. On such occasions, a visit to the gravesite brought great significance and prayer was a religious act or good deed done (TR: *sabab* or *sabap*).[39] *Sabab* is important to them as these prayers were good deeds done before God which held not just temporal significance but eternal also. Funerals, like the wedding, were a place where families from the different Ahiska villages could meet up.

In spite the constant movement they experienced, it was a very rare moment that a younger person did not know the specific village their ancestors came from in Ahiska.[40]

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[36] US2, Interview in USA, 31.7.16.
[37] US2, Interview in USA, 31.7.16.
[38] They mention that people gather for meals on days like the 7th, 40th and sometimes 9th and 52nd.
[39] *Sabab* can mean two things. First it means reason, or what reason you did something. The second meaning means 'good deeds' done.
[40] It seemed, without data to back it up, the exception to this came from the families that had migrated to Azerbaijan in the 1960's.

One student living in the United States that came from Russia, but born in Azerbaijan showed this when I shifted to Turkish from English to ask *nerelisin*? He answered immediately, but did not knowing specifics:

> Me: I forgot one important question. I'll say it in Turkish: *Nerelisin*?
>
> Him: Ahıskalı [from Ahiska]
>
> Me: Ahıskalı. Do you know which *koy [village]* your *dedeler* [grandparents] came from?
>
> Him: Um I'm not sure.
>
> Me: You're not sure, ok. Um, whether it was from Ahiska, or Adigon, or …
>
> Him: Ah I don't know[41]

Another third year University student in Turkey answered with the specific village, but did not know the district:

> Me: And *nerelisiniz*? Your family?
>
> Her: Ah, my mom, my dad, all of us are Ahiska Turk. Just, ah, what we know, that after that event [in 1944] we had to migrate. For that reason, we lived in Azerbaijan.
>
> Me: Which village did you come from? Do you know? From Ahiska?
>
> Her: I, we have come from the Ahiska village of Kaharet.
>
> Me: And is that in Ahiska? Or Adigon, Aspinza? Do you know?
>
> Her: Ah, not in Ahiska itself, I know that.[42]

While the first interview shows his general answer in Turkish of where he is from, 'Ahıskalı,' without a clear knowledge of either real district or village, the second student used 'Ahıskalı' but knew the village so could place it within the districts. Through family and kinship relationships, as well as verifying through '*nerelisin*,' Ahiska Turks identified each other and those outside the group by their village (Koriouchkina 2011:72). Even a family met in Georgia that researched their history and claimed Georgian ancestry[43]

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[41] US5, Interview on Skype, 2.2.17. Conducted in English with mixed Turkish.
[42] IzTR48, Interview on Skype, 17.1.17.
[43] They also still display the same struggles others face related to citizenship and acceptance. They still had not received citizenship after living there ten years.

continue to speak Turkish at home and their cultural behaviours displayed were like Ahiska Turks met on other sites.

The desire for the possibility to ‘return’ to Ahiska has been clear in the past twenty years, there has been very few that migrate there. Like that which Dogan also saw, there is a ‘dreaming about their villages in Georgia’ (2016:37) amongst the elderly. One difference, seen, however, on her field sites is how the group was staying together. She noted it was ‘the hope for going back to their homeland [that] continues to keep the group together (2016:37).’ In the interviews held, the elderly did continue to speak of their villages, but that was not how they expressed their unity as a group. Rather, in regard to ‘homeland’, it is the sense of security, or lack thereof, that feels very significant (Ray 2000:401). Security is related to a physical sense of being minorities in their present host countries and the fear of discrimination or more forced moves. It also relates to in security of ‘losing’ who they are. It is assumed that being in Turkey amongst other Turks will give that security. For that reason, many have begun to move toward Turkey (Aydıngün 2007; Aydıngün & Aydıngün 2014; Bilge 2012; Dogan 2016), an imagined homeland (Anderson 1983). This transition would not be as easy as assumed and the following section will focus on two dynamics. First the ‘homing towards’ Turkey and then secondly the challenges faced and some ways these were addressed.

5.3 ‘Homing’ Toward Turkey

For nearly a century the Ahiska Turks have been in a survival and protectionist mentality to not lose who they are as a people. Scattered to ten countries, families remained tight and maintaining their culture and traditions despite no titular state or ‘territory’ of their own. The return to Ahiska has realistically not been possible. Georgia has set specific guidelines for who and how some may return and has shown it was not ready to quickly receive returning Turks, Kurds, and Hemshin and that their reintegration process would not be so easy (Bardzimashvili 2012; Pentikäinen & Trier 2004; Sumbadze 2007;

Swerdlow 2004; Tarkhan-Mouravi 2007; Trier et al. 2011). This precarious situation led to first look to each other, but also the need to look to a state that did fall in line with 'the national order of things' (Malkki 1995). Many, no matter where they live, still look to Turkey in line as 'their nation' due to the fact it arose out of the Ottoman Empire (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:176). Even if they are not interested in moving to Turkey there is still a linking to the Empire and thus Turkey.

As Turkey has slowly recognized them, some have argued Turkey is their homeland (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:175-76; Dogan 2016[44]; Oh 2006) but I would argue it is still an imagined homeland, one for which there is that 'homing desire' as Brah mentions. The reason for this is that none of the Ahiska Turks researched were born in Turkey but rather related to and see Turkey in an elevated way from the diaspora. In saying this, I am not arguing against what, for example, Baydar Aydıngün already stated in 2001 (176) that those in Turkey no longer felt homeless or insecure. As mentioned earlier, Turkey for many of them holds great cultural connections and those Ottoman roots to which the Ahiska Turks hold (Buntürk 2007; Dogan 2016; Aydıngün 2007). Brah's concept of seeing a 'homing' towards rather than 'return' fits as 'return' (to the Ottoman Empire) is not possible for them. Despite the physical return to Turkey having been a challenge, a 'homing' towards is still present (Aydingün 2002b:190) and actively being pursued. All migrants coming from the diaspora, must fit into their new host. Turkey is no exception. These first-generation migrants would be moving back towards Turkey as a homeland but remaining 'imagined' in this process. Not all would remain in Turkey, as some left, but the vast majority expressed this 'homing' towards Turkey.

Having great distance physically from Turkey, a young male from Kazakhstan shared about his visit to Istanbul, Turkey. He had a feeling of 'peace' where the Turkish language

[44] Dogan's research focused on Ahiska Turks in the United States and Turkey (see 2016:24).

was spoken everywhere and with hearing the '*ezan* call'.[45] It was something he could not express in words, 'not in Russian, not in Turkish', he said. It was especially distinct when he experienced an 'Ottoman March'[46], commonly experienced in Turkey these years with the men dressed in Ottoman traditional clothes and playing marching songs from that period. Contrasting that to a visit to Georgia he said:

> Him: In Georgia, I didn't see any mosques. I didn't see any Turks. I didn't see any culture like ours, and ah it was foreign for me, foreign.
>
> Me: Ya, ya.
>
> Him: But in Turkey, when ah, in the sites, in the left side, right side, all the people were Turks and everybody spoke Turkish, and everywhere the sounds and everywhere was mosques.[47]

The nostalgia of being in Turkey, the call to prayer and sound of others speaking Turkish brought him that sense of peace. As we concluded our interview, he showed this excitement and joy again as he spoke in mixed English and Turkish:

> I'm glad that you [are] interested in this [study]. [It is] very important for me. I feel myself Turk, Ahiska Turk. [he laughs] For me it is very good. It is very, ah, it feels very good. It's very wonderful. I have a happy feeling because, I feel this. Our problem in Kazakhstan is that we, ah, since we are Turk, we sometimes forget because nobody reminds us. … But, like this conversation, it reminds me, it comes back: I am Turk.[48]

He showed how for some in the diaspora they would sometimes 'forget' being 'Turk' and how happy he was to be reminded of 'being Turk.' His inclusion of 'Ahiska Turk' and saying 'I feel myself to be a Turk' points to the inclusion of Turkey for the diaspora within the Ahiska Turkish community today. Interestingly, while with his family in their living room, they were joking with each other about some of them being *yerli* in Georgia and some of them being Terekeme.[49] Being *yerli* for them meant they had been living in Ahiska (Aspinza) for a very long time. The Terekeme, on the other hand, were a group of

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[45] AKA19, Interview on Skype, 16.2.17.
[46] In Turkish: 'Osmanlı Marşı'. He did not give the context of where or when it was played, but during the fieldwork and living in Bursa, it was common for special events to include marches from the Ottoman times. Men dressed in traditional Ottoman outfits and play as they would then. For an example of this, see WoiXs (2017).
[47] AKA19, Interview on Skype, 16.2.17.
[48] AKA19, Interview on Skype, 16.2.17.
[49] This distinction happened only in Kazakhstan, and at more than one place.

Turkish immigrants that began migrating to the Ahiska region after 1800 (Baydar Aydıngün 2001:1; BilgiFili.com 2015). Here both were mixed and considered themselves Ahiska Turks.

The idea of ‘home’ or ‘return’ is ‘imagined’ but is now looking to include a real fixed territory. Return to ‘Ahiska’ means taking on a ‘Georgian’ identity and Ahiska is not Turkey. Thus, the Ahiska Turks have bound it together with their roots in the Ottoman Ahiska territory to bring that ‘imagined homeland’ together with the ‘imagined homeland’ of Turkey. The former Ottoman territory is replaced with Turkey the homeland of Turks. Ray (2000:400) stated that the Ahiska Turks do not ‘proclaim a collectivity that is distinctively nationalist’ but this has changed in the use of ‘Ahiska’ as a term and as they continue looking to Turkey. They are putting (particularly in Turkey) an emphasis on this rooting (Malkki 1992) that is a distinctively ethno-symbolic nationalism (Smith 2009). A great example of this is seen in Figure 5.3 of the community greeting when the then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited Bursa in 2015. Here the men are holding up a sign saying: Turks of Ahiska: grandchildren of the Ottomans. Behind them further signs stating ‘*emeklilik*’ or (pension/retired) highlighting one of the main concerns the community in Turkey had for those retired and having lost their pension when moving to Turkey.

Figure 5.3[50] Grandchildren of the Ottomans

Another example was in one of the associations. I sat with four elderly men, all of whom had been born in Georgia, lived in Uzbekistan, and had found their way to Turkey in the last years. They stated, 'Turkey is our second homeland [*vatan*]. We are Ottoman Turks [*biz Osmanlı Türkleriyiz*]. We did not lose our traditions, our ways, language, religion, and *sünnet.*'[51] The first 'vatan' for them was seen as Ahiska. Historical connections of empire and language are overlapped with religion and its practice. For them, these come first before the nation of Turkey, but the two overlap.

İsmail Kemaloğlu (2021), a middle-aged lawyer, also revealed this. While meeting and talking in Turkey, he gave me a draft of the book he was working on that also demonstrated the bridging of their Ottoman heritage to that of Turkey. His first chapter was dedicated to Turkish history and fitting the Ahiska Turks into the Turkish historical myth.[52] For example he used quotes of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and then going back to

[50]http://manera.az/uploads/posts/2015-05/1431116257_ahiska-turkleri-vatandaslik-istiyor-20141109aw238685-1.jpg (See En Son Haber 2015 '17 bin Ahıska Türkü Türk vatandaşı olacak' Ensonhaber Available at: http://www.ensonhaber.com/17-bin-ahiska-turku-turk-vatandasi-olacak-2015-05-20.html Last accessed 20.5.15).
[51] BTR3, Interview in Turkey 28.10.14.
[52] Field notes. 31.1.16. See also the influence of Mehmed Fuad Köprülü and Ziya Gökalp.

the prophet Noah in the Quran and *Tevrat*[53] (Kemaloğlu 2021:20). Saying this emphasized the Ahiska Turks being a part of Turkish history as retold in the early republic going back to the prophets of the Quran. He also emphasized saying 'Ahiska' Turk was wrong, but that it should be: *Ahıskalı* Turks (Turks of Ahiska) or '*Ahıska bölgesinde yaşamış Türkler'*[54] (Turks who lived in the Ahiska region). This slight shift in phrasing and Turkish grammar accentuated the geographic region they lived in and not being separate from those of Turkey. It also shows how Turkish national formation influences them today. It emphasises the importance of speaking Turkish well and signifying through that who they were. This slight change in speaking emphasizes their Turkish ties with or under Turkey rather than a difference, separateness, or autonomy from Turkey.

Turkey has had some influence on the Ahiska Turks' movements also, particularly related to their going to Georgia. Two comments that showed this in the fieldwork came from someone in Central Asia and in Georgia. Each of these brings a view from the community that may not be said or seen by those in Turkey itself. One person who has a broader perspective of the repatriation efforts to Georgia expressed her frustration. There was a 'sole focus on the Turks. We were all [i.e., Turks, Kurds, Hemshin] sent out of that region, why are we focused as Turks and not for all to return?'[55] She said a problem arose when they approached Turkey, and then a division arose out of that focusing on being Turks, Ahiska Turks. It separated the other groups (Hemshin and Kurds) out, she stated. Aydingün (2002b) confirmed this reflection when she said it appeared the groups were separating again as some emphasized Turkey.

One person living in Georgia concurred with some of this movement. He mentioned how he thought maybe half Ahiska Turks wanted to move to Turkey. He said those who

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[53] The Pentateuch or also used more generally for Biblical Old Testament.
[54] Kemaloğlu, Ismail, 2019 Unpublished manuscript. Book was published in 2021 but I could not engage with this draft. However, this can be found in the book (2021:20).
[55] AKA2, Field notes, Kazakhstan, 2.4.16.

wanted to 'work the ground' and do agriculture would like to come to Georgia. The other half, who want to work in factories, would like to go to Turkey.[56] While I did not sense that in this study, it was his perception from where he was.[57] In the time of the *sürgün* he said some Turks stayed in Georgia but said they were Georgian. Now some come to Georgia as Turks, and Turkey want them to be Turks here because 'Turkey is trying to come here,' he said. He then clarified that each country, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, have their own emphasis or agenda with this group of people.[58]

The echo of influence, within the community also came as an elder[59] living in Turkey reflected on those that chose to go to Georgia and not Turkey. He told me 'those in Georgia, they're not Turks. They changed their name, religion, to move there. They are not Turks. Not one of us.' He got quite serious saying this, with tone and attitude (words) of betrayal. Here his emphasis shows the pressure that community can place on each other. While living in Turkey he gives this strong emphasis. Those outside Turkey did not speak so strongly towards Georgia, but the feeling was similar towards being Turk and not betraying who they were. In this instance the influence of place also impacted his perspective.

An example of that is also helpful to show before shifting to some of the struggles faced when the 'imagined homeland' becomes the new host. One contrasting example of how that 'homing' towards Turkey is still not straight forward is how not all felt a 'homing' toward Turkey. One highly educated young lady[60] shared her story, and how she had changed over the years in her perceptions and understanding. She felt Turkish because that was how she was discriminated against and the identity she had in Central

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[56] GE1, Interview in Georgia, 1.10.18.
[57] Factory work and construction were two of the key jobs in Turkey, but there were also those still willing to do agriculture. There was even a time I sat with the community where they discussed some of the families move to a northeast province to have cheaper agricultural land (Fieldnotes, Turkey, 24.4.16).
[58] See Baydar Aydıngün's thesis (2001) looks at how the State influence's identity and ethnic belonging.
[59] BTR19, Field notes, Turkey, 8.5.15.
[60] AKA20, Interview on Skype, 22.4.16.

Asia. However, she did not feel 'Ottoman Turk' nor see anyone in her community emphasize or relate to that. It changed when she went to Turkey to study.

> I think I became 'Meskhetian', because, um, not because I didn't like the Turkish culture, not like this, not in negative term or sense. It was this realization, that, um, I mean we certainly have a lot of similarities, but at the same time we're different. I think my Meskhetian identity was reinforced precisely when I was living in Turkey, during my time in Turkey.[61]

Whereas she felt a closer connection to Turks of Turkey before her experience, it changed after the visit as she saw the differences between the two communities. It was through her experience in Turkey that she felt 'Meskhetian'.[62] In this there was no hint of meaning 'being Georgian' but rather as part of their own group. Her experience was unique amongst those interviewed, but the experiences in Turkey for many would lead to the continued 'homing' toward each other while adjusting to their imagined homeland.

5.4 Migration To Turkey

That 'homing' towards Turkey has led many to migrate to Turkey over the last years despite the continued struggle for work permits and citizenship.[63] This sense of 'homing,' has begun to break with Brah's stance in that they have kept or created a strong idea of 'fixed origins.' There was no suggestion of (re)creating their own fixed origins, but rather joining the Turkish historical myth (Chapter Five). Over the course of this study there has been overwhelmingly clear evidence for the nostalgia and love for Turkey. Aydıngün (2007:366), researching in Turkey, stated the Meskhetian Turks 'felt at home' in Turkey, that they socialize with Turks and relate well with them. For many of them coming as stateless peoples living in diaspora, the relational connections to Turkey (and Turkishness) were seen in expectedly familial terms and was met with joy (Cohen

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[61] AKA20, Interview on Skype, 22.4.16.

[62] Questioned on the use of Ahiska or Meskhetian, she said there is no difference between them for her. They both mean the same people. She said it is 'political stuff' and 'how you name us does not matter at the end of the day.' (AKA20, Interview on Skype, 22.4.16).

[63] This was not new, as attempts to come to Turkey had already begun in the Soviet period with appeals to Turkey when Moscow did not grant them return to Ahiska (as well as right after the Soviet Union's collapse. See Aydıngün and Aydıngün 2014; Buntürk 2007; Oh 2006; Ray 2000).

2008:104). This was seen as more families arrived and greater recognition of their presence was heard. Contrary to that peace of arriving there (mentioned above), however, their adjustment was not so easy. Many faced struggles and challenges as they adjusted to another new 'host' (Cohen 2008).

The nostalgia of being in Turkey would be affected very quickly and different sentiments were heard that gave a contrast. Some came to Turkey and then left again on their own. Other examples abounded like some middle-aged friends I spoke with in Kazakhstan who regularly visited Turkey. One of them even received citizenship but was requested by the Turkish government: 'We need you there [in Kazakhstan] to work for us' ... 'work hard, do not speak bad of us, let's not let the people fall apart'. Many years later she still showed interest in moving to Turkey but chose to stay in Kazakhstan.[64] Another Ahiska Turkish man chose to call himself Kazakh because he was raised by Kazakhs after his parents had died. He felt allegiance to them and a move to Turkey was not in his thoughts.[65] Many also shared how families were brought into Turkey in 1990 before the government stopped it.[66] Turkey was not wanting further large migrations from the Soviet areas as a large migration had just occurred from Bulgaria (Baubock & Faist 2010; Dişbudak & Purkis 2014). Ray pointed out that Turkey in one sense welcomed the Ahiska Turks and wanted to stand by them, but also to keep away from a large migration into Turkey (Ray 2000:410). Though loving Turkey, one person in the United States spoke of this in relation to the struggles that happened in Krasnodar Krai: 'Russia didn't want us, Turkey didn't want us, but America would have us.'[67] Those that arrived in Turkey faced the constant need for official acceptance, particularly hoping for work permits, medical insurance, and retirement pensions.

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[64] AKA2 & AKA3, Fieldnotes, Kazakhstan, 30.3.16.
[65] Fieldnotes, Kazakhstan, 30.3.16.
[66] BTR42, Interview in Turkey, 5.11.16.
[67] AKA2 & AKA3, Fieldnotes, Kazakhstan, 30.3.16.

The challenges faced would be something they needed to work through as they arrived in Turkey. Turkey held a position of keeping Turks born and living outside Turkey in those host countries to represent it and not encouraging return migration (Bilgili & Siegel 2011; Dogan 2020; Inglis et al. 2009; Şenay 2009; 2013). This has remained the case, however the large influx of Syrians as well as granting refugee status to many Ahiska Turks living in Ukraine (Anadolu Agency 2016; BGNNews.com n.d.; National Native Ahiska TV 2015) gave fresh reasoning for Ahiska Turks to migrate and push for citizenship.

Once they arrive, they continue to hold onto their unique Ahiska Turkish attributes while also needing to (re)introduce themselves to their Turkish kin. This would require, as Cohen pointed, a need to 'mobilize co-ethnics', especially if tensions (direct or indirect) are present when they are scattered (2008:7). Their ethno-Turkish nationalism would particularly be emphasized while they were in Turkey.

Cagaptay argued that at the nation's foundation, there were three zones (concentric zones) of Turkishness (2006:160) particularly related to ethnicity and religion for those coming from Soviet space. The outer was for non-Muslims. The central zone was for non-Turkish Muslims and the inner was ethnic for 'Turks and Muslims.' In the 1930's, this filtered out the 'refugees' who would be, or would not be accepted into Turkey. It was in that time when the borders were getting tighter, and many Ahiska Turks migrated south into Turkey. Today, that history of acceptance 'into Turkey' reflects the Ahiska Turks' narrative which they are trying to fit into today. Different than the Turks from Bulgaria who fled in waves prior to 1989 when thousands came, the Ahiska Turks had to emphasize their Turkish nationalism, especially while being in Turkey (see Dogan 2016:95-6).[68]

[68] This did not seem to be the case in the diaspora, as they appear more accepted as Turks there. Turkish migration policy also would come into play here as there was a greater emphasis on keeping diaspora Turks in their host countries to represent Turkey and not on 'return' migration. (Dogan 2016).

5.4.1 Struggles On Arrival To Turkey.

One of the key dynamics of a diaspora group's development or growth is their relating to the host culture around them (Cohen 2008; Cohen & Fischer 2019; Knott 2010). For many diaspora groups the struggle is in the host country. For deterritorialized or stateless groups like the Ahiska Turks, who might have nostalgia for an imagined homeland, it may include movement 'back' into that imagined homeland. Aksel (2014) also included this terminology when describing kin-state relationships that have come about from an 'accidental diaspora'[69]. He regarded the homeland as core and the relation with the kin remaining outside of that core. He states that this 'constructs an "imagined community" by disregarding the territorial and physical borders and establishing the membership based on putative shared traits such as ethnicity or religion' (2014:205). That perspective fits well with the comments and relationship with Ahiska Turks and Turkish kin. As the Ahiska Turks are 'homing' towards Turkey, that 'imagined community' without the physical borders would be breached with the reality of being in Turkey. Along with positive feelings at arrival, it also brought several struggles at different levels.

Turkey was experiencing an economic boom following the crisis of 2001 (Acemoglu & Ucer 2015; Cagaptay 2014, 2018; Iyigun 2012) and this was drawing much labour migration. Bursa, a Western Turkish industrial city was no exception with its large automotive and textile factories. Though it is said the slowdown started in 2007 (Acemoglu & Ucer 2015), in the years of fieldwork, jobs were easy to find for the Ahiska Turk men and women. This made the invitation easier to family outside Turkey and those desiring to migrate there. It could be seen through the men's talks as they worked construction jobs and in the factories. Ohers worked in small shops within their neighbourhood. While walking the side streets on a warm day in their neighbourhoods,

[69] He borrowed this term from Roger Brubaker (2000; 2009).

Ahiska Turkish women could be heard talking, laughing, and sewing just inside the open door of a large room with tables covered with material to be sewn. Work was easy to come by, but despite the social acceptance among the population and the ease of getting residence permits, their immigration and arrival from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia also highlighted their differences. Particularly relating to stronger accents and for some little to no Turkish. Some said they were seen as Russians (as most still speak Russian, or at least understand it) and wanting to legitimize their presence in Turkey.[70]

One example of this challenging experience was of an informant's brother. He had arrived in Turkey, bought a house, and even got citizenship. Despite these things, he did not adjust to Turkey and returned to the country he grew up in.[71] This also was seen while speaking outside a tiny shop where construction material was being sold. The Ahiska Turkish man, often shy at first as we started talking, opened more than once that he wanted to leave back to Russia. For some unspoken reason, he stayed paying rent and having a low paying job when, as he pointed out, he had a home and land to plant crops on.[72]

Other examples arose where people were forced to downgrade to take jobs at minimal wage and at a lower skill level. Not unusual for labour migrants in general or those coming to Turkey from many countries, including the former Soviet Union. For the Ahiska Turks, they felt that as Turks, they should have their rights given quicker to them as Turkish citizens (or at least receive the work permits that gave a reasonable wage and insurance).[73] Turkey, on the other hand, has generally held a migration policy for Turks in the diaspora to keep them there rather than to allow them to move into Turkey (see Aksel 2014[74];

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[70] AKA1, Interview on Skype, 21.4.15

[71] Fieldnote, Turkey, 23.8.15.

[72] BTR15, Interview in Turkey, 1.5.15.

[73] See also Levin 2021. It was normal for foreigners to be working without work permits as these were very difficult to get. There was risk of fines, but this was rare, especially for the Ahiska Turks.

[74] Aksel gives a very helpful historical overview of Turkey's relationship with kin abroad, which includes those left outside the 'core' (Turkey). This article also addresses the changes over the past 30 years where the Ahiska Turks' situation would fall.

Karaman & Mursül 2018; Şenay 2013). This began to change in 2017 for the Ahiska Turks[75] in my opinion due to several factors. First, the number of Ahiska Turks migrating to Turkey had increased greatly since 2000, leading to greater awareness of their presence and relationships between the Ahiska Turkish Associations and the Turkish city governments.[76] Secondly, with the reception the Syrian refugees, the Ahiska Turks made it public their presence as Ottoman grandchildren (Figure 5.3)[77] and questioned how Turkey can receive those from Syria and Iraq and not receive 'their own Turks' (www.hurriyetdailynews.com 22.9.17).

Thirdly, the reception of Ahiska Turkish refugees from Ukraine was a big political gesture, leading to the follow-up measures for other Ahiska Turks. Finally, many Ahiska Turks in the diaspora stood alongside Turkey publicly against the coup and recognitions of the Armenian genocide.[78] All of these brought changes for the Ahiska Turks since 2017. I will return to the struggles they were facing prior to this.

One man showed great disappointment and sadness in his voice as he said he was a dentist; but was working as a painter. The greatest pain was he had even graduated in Istanbul, Turkey from dentistry school. The fact he did not have citizenship, or a work permit meant he had lost his skill and would no longer be able to practice. At the same time, his family awaited him in Azerbaijan to return or to call them to come join him in Bursa.[79] Another doctor that I met had practiced medicine many years in Azerbaijan. He was highly trained and skilled but like the dentist had also lost his ability to practice in Turkey. For him, having experience doing 'alternative medicine' in the Soviet times and being one of two that practiced this technique he could do this in Turkey. He began in the

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[75] See yenisafak.com 2017 n.d.; www.hurriyetdailynews.com 22.9.17; hurriyetdailynews.com 17.9.19; hurriyetdailynews.com 23.1.19.
[76] See Appendix 5 and 6 for an example of a flyer passed out for the seventieth anniversary commemorating the deportation from Ahiska. This flyer was also noted by Levin 2021.
[77] Appendix 3 is another example of this stating they were Ottoman orphans wanting citizenship.
[78] For example, in Kyrgyzstan (haberler.com (24.4.15) and in the United States.
[79] Fieldnote, Turkey, 8.3.16.

spas and resorts and then moved to practice it in his own place.[80] Another dentist, having worked many years in Azerbaijan and now old enough to retire, was helping the Ahiska community in Bursa because he also frustratedly could not practice dentistry. His son now aimed to gain a degree to bring back the honour of his father.[81] Despite many having high education, many would have to work without a work permit and with no insurance or possible benefits.[82] Through all these challenging circumstances, the newly arrived community needed to find ways to deal with being a minority, diaspora community in Turkey.

5.4.2 Connecting With Turkey

In the diaspora, ethnic-national revival is often sought (Cohen 2008; Smith 2010). For the Ahiska Turks, that ethnic-national revival was often focused through their 'homing' toward each other. In Turkey, and increasingly in the diaspora, it is also 'homing' towards Turkey. They would do this in several ways.

Through all the sites of this research, an arguably most important and dominant expression of ethno-symbolic meaning, already mentioned, was the word 'Ahiska'. It links them to each other and to Turkey. Calling themselves '*Ahıskalı*' or 'Ahiska Turk' carries great symbolic weight. Through it they would 're-fix' or 'revive' their ties to the Turks and Ottoman past.[83] Consistently saying '*biz Türküz,' (we are Turks),* '*ben Türküm,' (I am Turk) and 'Osmanlı Türküz' (we are Ottoman Turks*)*, has* constantly been emphasised and to not be separate from the Turks of Turkey. It is rather to see themselves

[80] BTR20 Interview in Turkey, 21.12.15, and BTR19 Fieldnotes, --.5.15.
[81] BTR45, Interview in Turkey, 11.1.17.
[82] With many job opportunities at the time of the research, some of the major work available was in the construction industry. Manual labour such as painting, general construction, and wood working, were very common. Factory jobs was another area that was well used. In Bursa, the use of Russian was not common or needed, so that limited those coming to use and learn Turkish quickly.
[83] Bilge points to the kinship relationship socially and culturally and ethnically pointing to 'our people' (2012:136) but also the differences, including resentment and frustration that Turkey did not help them (2012:136, 138). Dogan (2016), also wrote more in relation to the kinship shared with Turks and not Turkey itself. Both scholars wrote from the United States relating to Turkey and notably later than those writing closer to end of the Soviet Union.

as part of, and the same as, Turks from Turkey (Levin 2021). It also highlights the themes that were pushed during Turkish nationalisation and remains up to today in the Turkish Republic. Remarkably present and seen through the current day after the Soviet Union's fall, an association with the national construction of what it meant to be Turk: Turkish language, Turkish culture, and Turkish (Sunni) Islam. This begs to question Dogan's (2016; 2020) comments that they consistently see themselves as a different ethnic group: the Ahiska Turks. While they do have many cultural expressions that are different then Turkey today, these remain central. Within the fieldwork and this study, I did not hear or sense they saw themselves as a different people than Turks from Turkey. It was only certain lifestyle differences that were highlighted which will be seen in the following chapter.

One young father in the United States said this as we sat under a tree and asked about his grandfather's stories. He said 'when I was small, I didn't really know he [his grandfather] was from Ahiska. I just knew that I'm Turkish, and Muslim'[84]. In this example, we see that for nearly every Ahiska Turk that was deported in 1944, being Turkish and being 'Ahiska Turkish' is inseparable.[85] This points to the influence of Kemalism they would carry with them from the Soviet Caucuses border and remaining through the Soviet period (see Yavuz 2010:304). It also fit with the Ottomania and Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey that revived the nostalgia of the Ottoman past (Cagaptay 2014, 2020; Ergin & Karakaya 2017; Yavuz 2020). Something the Ahiska Turks could tap into, however knowledge of the Ahiska Turks seemed to be forgotten within Turkey. It was rare to find somebody in Turkey from 2011-2014 who knew much, if anything, about the Ahiska Turks. Even the Ahiska Turks joked about it with the misunderstandings made. Like 'Alaska Turks', inserting 'Alaska' for Ahiska. Or 'Mexican Turks' for Meskhetian

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[84] US10, Interview in the USA, 19.8.18.
[85] The same can be said about being Muslim.

Turks.[86] For this reason, there has been an increased emphasis on the term 'Ahiska,' which would also be wrestled with.

5.4.3 Using 'Ahiska Turk'

Drawing from their past territory under the Ottoman Empire by using Ahiska, or Ahıskalı[87] would be one significant way to help them find their place in Turkey. For those living in Turkey, particularly, 'Ahiska' has increasingly been used, gaining momentum, and spreading into the diaspora. It draws them away from any reference to Georgia or the Georgian terms of Meskhetia which points to a Georgian heritage. The usage of 'Meskhetian Turk' on the other hand was rarely used while speaking Turkish within the community[88] and felt looked down upon as Russian or Georgian produced word. The only exception was when I spoke in English with those who knew the literature and/or possibly assumed that is what I would say.[89] Those that did use 'Meskhetian Turks' while speaking in English would switch and use 'Ahiska Turks' in Turkish and still acknowledge their Turkishness.[90] This goes contrary to Dogan's suggestion that it was the (restoration) of the homeland Georgia that unified them. Rather, with those I spoke with, it was their 'homing' towards those that came from 'Ahiska' and went through the *sürgün* and subsequent trials (Chapter five). This is where they drew commonality and unified them as a group. 'Restoration' of the homeland was not an emphasis, but rather a 'restoring' or inserting themselves through ethno-symbolic nationalism to Turkey.

In 2000 Ray already was showing that 'If they can prove that they are Ahiska Turks, Meskhetian Turks are readily able to obtain tourist visas at the border between Georgia and Turkey.' Noting here the differential use of the terms Meskhetian and Ahiska, if they can show they are 'Ahiska Turks' to Turkey, they can get tourist visas into Turkey. This

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[86] Fieldnotes, 5.12.16; 24.6.21.
[87] See Baydar Aydıngün (2001).
[88] The term 'Meskhetian Muslim' was never used.
[89] For example, the young woman mentioned above (AKA20).
[90] Using google translate Meskhetian Turk (in English) translates to Ahiska Turk (in Turkish) and vic versa.

remained a real dilemma and challenge for them, but also an open door. The challenge laid in being able to 'prove' they were from Ahiska.

5.4.4 Two Ahiska Migrant Groups In Turkey

'Homing' toward each other and a 'homing' toward Turkey was mentioned above. A unique experience would bridge these in Turkey. This distinction, while not seen in the other sites, would also bring some tension in the community. Earlier in this thesis it was noted how some Ahiska Turks fled from the Ahiska region and migrated to Turkey (Dogan 2020; Günay 2012) while those that remained would experience the deportation of 1944. While the Ahiska Turks used the question *nerelisin* to highlight which village they came from, it would bring up tensions within the community as they came across other Ahıskalı in Turkey. These Ahıskalı included the refugees that Cagaptay (2006:160) mentions being part of the 1933 Kars and Artvin directives. In the 1930's Turkey was distinguishing 'zones of Turkishness' and defining who was admitted or not into Turkey. The directives in Kars and Artvin was used as an example to demonstrate differences for those who were Turkish and/or share Turkish culture, and secondly those who were not Turkish, but speak Turkish or are married to a Turk (2006:160).[91] While showing who was accepted, it also characterizes who would not be accepted in Turkey. Today those early migrants from Ahiska are totally integrated and indistinguishable from any other Turks who grew up in Turkey since the Republic was founded. The only area of notice is their reference of where they are from: Ahiska.

Levin (2019) analysed multi-culturalism in Turkey through the lens of migration history as told or displayed in the Bursa Museum. Museums, she says, include or do not include the histories of those desired or not. The recent Ahiska Turks migrants are briefly included, or attached to the early migrant's story, but their current situation in Bursa or

[91] The city of Bursa also itself emphasized the first group in the Bursa Museum but noted the new migrants to a lesser degree. See Levin 2019. In this article one emphasis was the representation given in the museum, and whose history would be accepted or not.

the challenges they face in Turkey is not mentioned. It avoids the issue '… that thousands of them had no clear pathway to Turkish citizenship' (Levin 2019:43). The Ahiska Turks drew on that past to re-unite and re-introduce themselves in Turkey but wrestled with reconciling that with their 'homing' towards each other.

Bursa today has a large community of these early migrants who also call themselves Ahiska Turks and meeting them was not unusual. An early interview was conducted with a man whose last name was 'Ahiska' and he said he was 'Ahıskalı.' Moments into the interview, however, it became clear he knew nothing of the deportation, or the 'Ahiska Turks' to which I was researching other than that there was Ahiska Turks who underwent the *sürgün*. His family had migrated into Anatolia in the early twentieth century after the situation was worsening in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. The early migrants experience was very different as they merged and grew up in the changing Turkey. He maintained some knowledge of his ancestor's region, knowing of 'Ahiska' as a place, but had no reference or significance placed on it compared to those having been deported. It felt many of the newer migrant Ahiska Turks were not ready to include these earlier migrants from the Ahiska region as 'their own' but could utilize it.

Meeting with an association leader showed this differentiation within the community itself. A close friend who was a grandchild of the earlier migrant group, was researching his past and connecting it with the newer Ahiska Turk migrants. His grandparents had moved from the Akhaltsikhe region nearly a century before and he was born in Kars, a north-eastern city of Turkey. As we talked in the small shop, the association head asked him: '*nerelisin?'* My friend answered 'Kars.' The association leader's questioning look was followed by some further statements that clearly displayed a non-acceptance and a non-verbal: 'then you're not Ahiska Turk.' My friend then continued to describe his family's history and in that shared several common words that highlighted: 'I grew up hearing those words.' Through this, the leader's demeaner changed as he warmed to him

and seemed to be accepting him as an 'Ahiska Turk' raised in Turkey due to his knowledge of certain cultural foods and words that only would have come from that region.

A conversation pursued another time while at the association where this distinction was shown. Two men and a woman walked in seeking financial help from the Ahiska Turkish community as they were having medical struggles. They were again asked where they were from, and they gave a village that was unknown to the leader which prompted further questions. He began noting to them there were 220 villages which the Ahiska Turks came from, and he had not heard of that one. Politely they were sent to the secretary to talk more with him about their situation. After they left, the director looked at us and said, 'I've never heard of those villages.'[92] Said with suspicion in his tone of voice, but also with compassion if there was misunderstanding or a lack of knowledge.

The clearest and most pointed distinction given differentiating these two groups and distinguishing them was said while sitting in a small café with a doctoral student who had been involved with the Ahiska Turkish youth. We had been sitting for some time, sipping on tea together and talking about his family and issues arising for the community. He looked at me inquisitively, and said straight forward to me what he saw separated the two Ahiska Turkish groups and unified those deported:

> Him: What unifies our group together is this. Do you know what deep down binds us? Do you know what is the strongest unifying thing?
>
> Me: Language? [The] deportation?
>
> Him: If we hadn't been deported, we wouldn't be bound together. That's all.
>
> Me: I understand.
>
> Him: Look, I'll say it like this. If we had migrated in a normal way … [like those in] Chorun, Yozgat. Theirs is normal migration. They left Ahiska and live normally [here in Turkey. It was an] older [migration] until the border was closed.
>
> Me: Older [migration] from Ahiska?[93]

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[92] Fieldnotes, Turkey, 15.2.15.
[93] BTR41, Interview in Turkey, 10.1.17.

He then continued more emotionally clarifying how the two migration groups could be seen differently today. The older group seemingly wanting to be part of the newer wave, but not having experienced the pain of the latter group which kept them separate:

> Him: Do they [the early migrants] have that much unity? … For example, we say with respect 'Ahiska' [for them]. But, from where [or which village]? How? Who [are they]? They don't come to any conference. It would be beautiful if they came. Where are you from? How [are you from] Ahiska? Where are you from? They don't know! 'From who are we from? [they would ask] I don't know' Deported [from Georgia]? No. [Then] you are not from Ahiska! You are from outside. Like that. Who are our Ahiska Türkler? The deported. … These things [experienced in the deportation] all unite us. The deported Ahiska. We saw Ahiska. All countries …' [94]

For him it was clear who was cultural identified as an Ahiska Turk: those that went through the deportations was one of them, the others did not know their village, experience what they experience, nor participate in the community events, like seminars that he mentions. That clear distinction and separateness felt within the community that highlighted their diaspora nationalistic identity would not, however, encourage integration in Turkey. For that reason, their ethnonationalism would be emphasized and their Turkishness which they had held over the past seventy years.

The Ahiska Turks already living in Turkey would be a clear bridge to show they were Turks and should be accepted. How could they not be accepted if their ancestors and families are already living in Turkey? A very clear example of this was seen in the conference held at Kocaeli University,[95] Veysel Veysel's presentation included his research on the Ahiska Turks' population and gave much higher numbers than most give. Rather, than around 500,000, he felt that all those from 'Ahiska' originally should be included in their ('Ahiska Turks') numbers. Thus, he argued there were over two million Ahiska Turks.[96]

Bridging with the early migrations was already mentioned in Chapter Five when the two cousins were reunited after seventy years. That connection was further made public

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[94] BTR41, Interview, 10.1.17.
[95] Attended in Izmit, Turkey, 10.12.16.
[96] Conference at Kocaeli University Izmit, Turkey, 10.12.16.

through this event. I was given a call and asked if I would like to attend this reunion. As I arrived with the association leader, two reporters were already at the gate to the apartment complex. Realizing this was bigger than what I had anticipated, it was planned to make the news. Two cousins in their seventies meeting for the first time after being separated from the border. One 'Ahiska Turk' having grown up in Turkey, the other in Central Asia. While driving home, the association leader emphasized again to me his desire for the Ahiska Turks' situation to be heard and known.[97] That day, as he had requested many times, he told me to 'write, write' to make this known. That night articles appeared online including a short video of their greetings.[98] In the newspaper article, it was highlighted how the deportation was difficult, but this event reunited those from Ahiska after all these years. Emphasizing here that the Ahiska Turks from Turkey are the same as the newer Ahiska Turk immigrants. Community events like this enabled their profile to arise in the country.

5.4.5 Community Events

In these years the Ahiska Turks were making themselves known through events in the community. The example mentioned above relating to the population was at such an event. Turkish universities are holding conferences or symposiums in November and December to remember the *sürgün*. In each one, it is often the student body that helps to organize, inviting Ahiska Turks, scholars, and government representatives. One Uludag University student who has been in Bursa since 2004, explained how they formed their own groups: 'the students [Ahiska Turks] at Turkish Universities are there. So, we say 'Ahiska' [to designate ourselves]. Each year we do different things and we set up plans. We are coming from many countries, like Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan.'[99] One student leader was helping in two University Ahiska student groups. While interviewing

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[97] Fieldnotes, Turkey, 24.4.16.
[98] www.haberler.com 2016; www.bursadabugun.com 2016.
[99] BTR40, Interview in Turkey, 4.11.16.

him, he was interrupted by a phone call about a meeting being organized in Istanbul for Ahiska Turkish PhD students.[100] As we talked, he shared these groups had special social times together as well as organizing cultural events, seminars, or meetings. One aim for the students coming together is to help unite, connect, and create opportunities for the youth. The young man mentioned above (AKA19) that went to the teacher's training in Istanbul was very excited to share he met other Ahiska Turks coming from several nations.[101] These opportunities also played a key role in internationally networking students and families with those already in Bursa (and Turkey). As they are being educated, the thinking of the group is changing.

For example, a female student shared how in her university, students went to busy places in the city interviewing the local population and asking: Who are Ahiska Turks.'[102] Another example was a musical event with artists from Central Asia was planned at the Uludag University as well as the many conferences and symposiums to remember the deportation.[103] The Ahiska Turks were involved in this kinship relationship between Turkey and other Central Asian countries.

Connections made by the Ahiska Turkish associations and University is another place where they could bring more profile to the Turkish public. Intentional activities by the association like organizing a visit to the Red Crescent blood drive for the war effort in Syria would be newsworthy. It would show their patriotism and support of Turkey as well as give the community attention (Appendix 8). I was invited to this and with many of us coming from different nations, the article highlighted this diversity and support for the war on terror (habercizniz.biz 2015).

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[100] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 10.1.17.
[101] AKA19, Interview on Skype, 16.2.17.
[102] IzTR48 Video link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-y16cEMw0DPQlJGeVZTMGZZdXM/view.
[103] There have been many of these conferences to raise awareness held in the Universities across Turkey (Appendix 4).

It also displayed the frustration for some of them as they could not give blood without the proper paperwork. Likewise, a documentary was made about the Ahiska Turks in Kyrgyzstan. Guests came from Kyrgyzstan and the show was being shown throughout Turkey in different auditoriums. Attending in Bursa, the Barış Manço Theatre was filled to its 750-person capacity (Appendix 11). Two Ahiska Turkish children dressed in traditional Ahiska Turkish [Ottoman time] outfits greeted guests at the door, and we were led past a book stand near the door. City officials were invited, as well as making it known to the public. One young man applying for university explained how there is a lot of educated [Ahiska Turkish] youth now and that can be seen in how different generations were thinking.[104] Those youth are being a voice helping to bring awareness of the Ahiska Turks' needs in Turkey as well as in the diaspora and awareness of the growing community in Bursa. Here we see that intersection of ways the community was making itself seen and known in Turkey.

One of the most obvious examples during this study was a large outdoor event hosted by the Nilüfer municipality of Bursa. A statue in memory of the Ahiska Turks' deportation was being unveiled. Signs were posted throughout the city advertising the event (Appendix 7) and a large crowd gathered for the Ramadan *iftar* meal. Tables and chairs were placed in a parking lot near the busy intersection the Statue was placed. Most present were Ahiska Turks, but important city leaders and Ahiska Turkish leaders[105] were invited to the event. Multiple speeches and gifts were passed to the important guests present. Ahiska Turkish dishes were on display, labelled to educate the public with children again dressed in the traditional [Ottoman time] outfits.

The Turkish public became increasingly aware of their presence in the country through these events. This also effected their opportunities and rights as they migrated into

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[104] BTR45, Interview in Turkey, 11.1.17.
[105] Most from Turkey, but some came from outside the country.

Turkey. For instance, special consideration was shown in the migration office. Every year that I was renewing my own resident permit, the Ahiska Turks were given special treatment as they renewed theirs. For example, in 2013 the tightly congested immigration office had a small sign on one wall for the 'Ahiska Turks …'.[106] Two years later when the office moved to a newly constructed and larger building, we had to choose between three buttons to push for our number: Syrians, Ahiska Turks, and other. This was written on a piece of paper stuck on the machine. Entering the building, the Syrians had a huge room off to the right, the Ahiska Turks an equally sized room to the left. The rest of us entered a small room with just a couple desks in it.[107] In Antalya it was similarly experienced. The Ahiska Turks had a special procedure from the rest of us. On a residence permit application visit, there were four long lines inside the building. Three clearly Ahiska Turkish women were in the line next to me. As our lines inched forward together, the officer addressed them: 'Are you Ahiska Turks?' 'Yes' was their reply, 'then you need to go there,' pointing to the doors leading into another area of the office.[108]

The Ahiska Turks are adjusting to their host, Turkey, in the Turkish context through these experiences. While the struggles and challenges continue for many, a momentum arose that enabled them to be visible in the public's eye. That 'homing' towards Turkey drew them closer to each other through the challenges, but also closer to their imagined homeland.

5.5 Reflections and Arising Themes

There are several themes that have been highlighted over this chapter relating to perspectives of homeland and return. The impacts of being stateless still impacts the Ahiska Turks' perspectives towards the homeland. This is seen in the views of Ahiska,

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[106] Fieldnotes, Turkey, 2013.
[107] Fieldnotes, Turkey, 2015.
[108] Fieldnotes, Turkey, 2020.

how they respond to questions of where they are from, and in the adjustments shown after migrating to Turkey.

Ahiska Turks indisputably regarded themselves as Turks, with exceptions, on all the sites. It was also clear that previous research noting their different perspectives of what 'homeland' meant. Those differences included the country they lived in. The homeland of 'Ahiska' remained but clearly did not mean 'Georgia'. There was nearly no instance of showing a strong desire to move to Georgia from any of the sites. The return to 'Ahiska' was predominately present as a piece of nostalgia and also an 'imagined homeland' for them. Returning to Ahiska, however, has not been realistic (other than for tourism). With no 'homeland' to return to, a 'homing desire' (Brah 1996) is a more suitable explanation than 'return'. With no fixed origins of home (Tolia-Kelly 2019:217) they begin 'homing towards' each other and a more fixed 'imagined' homeland, Turkey (Anderson 1983).

Informants drew on their Turkishness arising out of their ethno-nationalistic (Smith 1986, 2009, 2010) ties to the Ottoman Empire and early years of the Turkish Republic. While in Central Asia, 'Ahiska' was the first answer given for their 'homeland' and their second emphasis was on the Central Asian country they had been living in since the *sürgün.* Moving to Turkey was still emphasized but was less dominant.

For those in Georgia, there was a clearer recognition of being in Ahiska. Here, one meeting engaged a person who was culturally Ahiska Turk. Behaving like so many others met in this multi-site, there was little obviously distinct about him and his family except one thing. He was the only one who said he was of Georgian descent after his own careful research.[109] Other Ahiska Turks there greatly respected him despite this claim, but I was told I could only believe some of what he shared. Interestingly, he stated the same regarding some of the Ahiska Turks he knew that claimed were Turks, but he claimed

[109] GE1 Interview in Georgia 1.10.18.

were of Georgian descent. It is clearly a mixed situation there, with influences that impact their day to day lives (Aydingün 2002a). For another in Georgia that 'homing' toward Turkey was clearly notable. He was born in Azerbaijan, but emphasized he was from Turkey, as he had worked there. This short period of his life in Turkey (one year) was enough for him to see Turkey as his home. Sharing very little to nothing of Azerbaijan or being in Georgia.[110]

The United States gave further distinction of prioritizing their own community and staying together. They did not want to lose their community and relating with Turks was an important way to do this (Bilge 2012; Dogan 2016). While engaging more with Turkey through activism, visits with family in Turkey, and receiving Turkish visitors which included Turkish government representatives, their role within the Turkish diaspora has stood out.

Most did not see Turkey as their 'nation', but rather there was a strong ethno-symbolic relationship with Turkey. This was rooted in the 220 Ottoman villages. The idea of 'homing' towards Turkey rather than 'return' fits because many are migrating to Turkey as foreigners, distant kin, or Ottoman Turks while seeking acknowledgement as kin.[111] They are 'homing' not as nationals, but as distant kin that looked to their Turkish heritage.

Arriving to the 'imagined homeland' and rebuilding kinship meant a need to restore and maintain (Cohen 2008:104; Smith 2009, 2010) that past. Even in Turkey while they are socially and culturally accepted, their Ahiska Turkish heritage and homeland needed to be preserved. Many challenges arose and the Ahiska Turks would draw upon the situation they met to display their ethnonationalism. First, their 'homing' towards each other as a group would continue in Turkey and in doing so would begin to engage with

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[110] GE3 Interview in Georgia, 3.10.18.

[111] This has changed greatly in the last years of the research and write-up. After 2018, many were being granted citizenship (drawing more immigrants to Turkey) and their role in the Turkish Diaspora became more noticeable. Both increasing their 'homing' towards Turkey and seeing Turkey as their 'homeland'. Turkey has also regularly stated publicly relating to the Ahiska Turks that Turkey was their 'homeland'.

the early Ahiska Turkish migrants that happened prior to the sürgün. Here, the question of *nerelisin* would help to distinguish who was one of them and who was not.

Nerelisin was usually answered related to the context they were living in and who they were speaking with. If the person was clearly not an Ahiska Turk or from the host country, their roots in their Ahiska villages was not mentioned. Rather it would be the country or place they were last in or what the listener may understand. If the person was known as Ahiska Turks or understand their community, then 'Ahiska' was said or more specifically their family's village would be given. In Turkey, the older Ahiska Turkish community would be accepted by some as 'their community' and for others they were not. What was significant here was the relationship to Turkey. 'Ahiska' represented their community, villages, and experience which held them together as a people. It also symbolized their Turkishness which came out of the Ottoman and early Turkish Republic past. This bridging of the two in Turkey would be one way to highlight their Turkishness and see recognition in the country. This group of Ahiska Turks were not noted in other countries except as those who had migrated or fled to Turkey earlier than the deportation.

For those in Turkey, other areas were utilized to emphasize their Turkishness as the realities of adjusting to their 'imagined homeland' occurred. Community events were used to highlight their story (Chapter Four) as Ottoman Turks and the struggles they faced. Universities and the Associations public activities enabled this, highlighting their Turkishness, the symbolic Ottoman 'Ahiska' region, and their continued Turkish traditions not lost (Chapter Six) over the years. In and through this emphasis, Brah's thoughts of a 'homing' towards have begun to mix with Malkki's well known point of the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1995) as those in Turkey are taking on Turkish nationalism. Those outside Turkey continue to 'home' toward Turkey and relate to Turkey through the diaspora.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by looking at 'return' for the Ahiska Turks and their view of homeland (*vatan*). Being deterritorialized, the usage of Brah's term of 'homing' is a better expression of the Ahiska Turks' situation than a return. There were two main areas seen the Ahiska Turks were 'homing' towards. First was towards their own tight community and highlighted when people ask them *nerelisin?* (Where are you from?). Their first answer touches on their last place of residence however the second and deeper answer would show within their community their roots (Malkki 1992) connected to their ancestral villages. This second answer also connected them to Turkey and their Turkish kin. In and through this an ethno-symbolic nationalism arose which affiliated not only their community together in the diaspora as Ahiska Turks, but also with Turkey itself.

Arriving to Turkey would bring with it the nostalgia of 'arrival' to their imagined homeland, but also the challenges of arriving to a new host country. Due to these struggles, the Ahiska Turks sought to connect with Turkey through a symbolic-nationalistic meaning of the term 'Ahiska' and its Ottoman past. This history and emphasizing '*Ahıskalı*' also (re)connected them with the earlier Ahiska Turkish migrants as well as the Turkish public. In the next chapter, the Ahiska Turks' ethno-religious nationalism will further develop the unity within the community and their affiliation with Turkey.

Chapter Six: Ethno-religious Nationalism

6 Introduction

An ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism has been addressed in the previous chapters. First, Chapter Four, placed an emphasis on the ethno-historical narrative to which the Ahiska Turks connect their being Turk with that of Turkey. Chapter Five followed with a discussion of homeland for the Ahiska Turks and pointed to the mixed feelings of being both Ahiska Turks and Turks at the same time. In so doing, highlighting their relationship to both the ancestral land of Ahiska and modern-day Turkey. In this regard one of the most common assertions Ahiska Turks made throughout the study was 'we did not forget our religion; we did not forget our language'. In other words, they did not lose, nor forget where they came from. What are the roots of this conviction, and how is it significant today? This chapter continues to look at the Ahiska Turks' ethno-symbolism by examining the place of ethno-religious nationalism as essential factors for the Ahiska Turks' ties to Turkishness. First, ethno-religious nationalism will be identified as one of those 'structures that bound them' together (Dressler 2013) and preserved their 'horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1983) despite their being stateless. Second, we will look more specifically at how their ethno-religious practices would be significant in their responses and adjustment in the different locations, particularly towards and with Turkey.

6.1 Ethno-Religious Impacts From Turkish National Formation

Ahiska Turkish ethno-religious position was influenced by the historical and contextual impacts of Turkish nationalism. In Turkey, nationalism is said to have developed through three leanings: Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism (Cagaptay 2006; Howard 2001; Lewis 2002; Zürcher 2017). The desire to unite the country led to an emphasis on Turkism (Cagaptay 2006; Lewis 2002), but also resulted in extending that Turkism to the former Ottoman frontiers, including Russia (Lewis 2002:327). Cagaptay showed how 'the Father

of Turkish Nationalism,' Ziya Gokalp (1877-1924)[1], emphasized these main things for the Turkish nation: socialization, ethics, aesthetics, and religion (2006:8). The later included faith and culture. Once the Republic was established Cagaptay reveals the tensions that arose from Kemalism between Islam as religion and Islam as identity (2006:162; 2017). How those two are lived out, expressed, and emphasized still impact Turkey today (Cagaptay 2014:116; 2017). Likewise, Dressler highlighted that the founding of the Republic included establishing a 'secularist Turkish nationalism based on ethno-religious boundaries' (2013:66). The early founders of Turkey wrestled with modernism and how religion (Islam) would influence the republic. Dressler included the role 'Russian Muslims' (some of whom had come from the Caucasus) had in developing an 'ethno-religious nationalism' (2013:90) in Turkey.[2] They had seen how religion was 'a powerful tool in the articulation of ethnic and national distinctiveness' and saw how cultural autonomy was essential for a religious revival (Dressler 2013:90). Though these founders from the Caucasus' nationalism was directed against Russian imperialism, pan-Slavism' and against the assimilation politics of Russia (2013:90), their experiences influenced Turkish nationalism.

In the Turkish context, the secularist positioning of Kemalism did not replace religion, as Turkishness also emphasized being Muslim (Dressler 2013; Lewis 2002; Zürcher 2017). Over the years, however, the role of Islam would be contentious within the Republic (Lord 2017; 2019). Various shades of ethno-religious consciousness, Dressler pointed out, were already intensifying. For example, in the late nineteenth century with the Ottoman's Tanzimat reforms[3] and as ethno-religious identities were being politicized, they were 'preparing the ground for nationalist discourses' (Dressler 2013:63).

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1 See also Mardin 2007; Zürcher 2017.
2 Cagaptay 2014:71 also stated how they saw nationalism as an ethno-religious community.
3 The Tanzimat era, was seen as a period or reorganizing in Ottoman empire, with two significant dates where reforms took place. These were the Rose Garden (Gülhane) decree in 1839 and the Imperial Rescript

These dynamics naturally impacted the Ahiska Turks, especially those on the border between Turkey and the Soviet Union (see historical background and Chapter Four). What carried on, however, was a non-titular nationalism drawing upon their Turkishness and religion in Central Asia. This will be shown after a brief look at the influences from the Soviet side of the border.

6.2 Ethno-Religious Nationalism & Borderlands in the Soviet Union

One of the closest 'frontiers' to the newly forming Republic of Turkey was Meskheti-Javakheti or 'Ahiska', teetering on the borders between Turkey and the Soviet republics. Russia (later the Soviet Union) was also undergoing processes of nationalism. Ideology rather than ethnicity, would initially be the primary emphasis for nationalism in the Soviet Union (Goff 2020)[4]. Even so, ethnicity and religion would both play an important role in ethno-national and ethno-religious formation for both titular and non-titular minorities. For instance, Goff noted how the curtailing of rights for nontitular nations in Azerbaijan in the 1930's had an 'Azerbaijanifying effect rather than Russifying one' (Goff 2020:23). As a result, religion would be an important marker in Soviet Azerbaijan's Baku, like Kemalism in Turkey (Goff 2020:102). The religious marker in Baku would be Islam, but she also pointed out specifically how each titular (or nontitular) nation would be affected by their religious beliefs.[5] Goff's emphasis was that nationalism was less significant than religion, but the *ethnie* of the group was still recognized, and, in fact, would have an important influence in that place.

Dressler (2013) commented that in the eastern part of the Ottoman empire the ethno-religious composition led to more intercommunal tensions and vulnerability than in the western and central provinces of Anatolia. In the east, the Sunni Muslim Turkish-speakers

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in 1856. Out of these many differ reforms and changes arose (Ahmad 2014; Howard 2001; Zürcher 2004:61-62). Some of these focused on religious freedom and equality (Dressler 2013:73).

4 See Martin 2001; Suny & Martin 2001; Suny 2011.

5 Goff used examples of the Muslim Georgian-Ingilois and Christian Georgian-Ingilois and their different treatment (2020:88-90).

were 'in-general-most-loyal and less-suspect subjects of the Ottomans,' but they were outnumbered by other smaller ethno-religious groups (2013:73).[6]

A major shift occurred between the 1926 census and that of the 1930's (Martin 2001; Suny & Martin 2001). Hirsch (2005) pointed this could be seen through the ethnographic work in map making and census taking. Whereas earlier identity was seen in religion, tribe or clan, and place of origin, it later shifted to show how mentalities began changing; 'national consciousness' was forming in nomadic or rural populations. Nationality, Hirsch writes, 'had become a fundamental marker of identity, embedded not just in the administrative structure of the Soviet Union, but also in people's mentalities' (2005:145)[7]. People began seeing themselves as part of a nationality and beyond religion alone.[8]

As this change was occurring, those past markers would not just disappear, but remain as people's mentality. This shift also relates to Anderson's observation that 'nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that precede that nationalism, out of which – as well as against which- it came into being' (1983:12). In this regard, the Ahiska Turks' 'self-conscious political ideology' points not only to the rule of the Ottoman Empire or the Soviet Union's, but rather to the cultural systems (including ethno-religion) that they had prior to the deportation and adapted with to the present time.

6.2.1 Ethno-Religious – (Hidden) Practices

The Ahiska Turks are generally religious and in varying degrees display their Islamic faith, rituals, and practices while living a conservative lifestyle (Aydıngün 2007; Bilge 2012; Trier and Khazhin 2007; Yunusov 2007). Their religious expressions are more

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[6] See Cagaptay 2017. Cagaptay includes a section of Turkey's relationship with the Kurds and notes how South-eastern Turkey was not close to the Ottoman 'core' territories of western and central Anatolia and the southern central Balkans.
[7] See Martin 2001; Polian 2004; Suny & Martin 2001.
[8] See Yemelianova & Akkieva 2020 for the role of 'Adats and Shari'ah in the Caucasus.

personal, whether in the home or in public but these occasions would emphasize core Muslim practices. Examples of this would be the saying the creed (*Şehadet*), fasting during Ramadan, prayer (*namaz)* on Friday or religious holidays, and helping the poor. Pilgrimage to Mecca was spoken very little about. Along with this was emphasizing religious practices like circumcision and other customs (*örf adetler*[9]) that will be mentioned later in this chapter. The private practice was in a large part due to their experience in the Soviet Union (Martin 2001:184; Yemelianova 2002) and can still impact them today. Over the course of this study, as stated earlier, the topic of religion, beliefs, or religious activity was rarely spoken about. Thus, I had no noticeable references or hints at influences of Sufism on the community nor the role of religious groups or orders called *tarikats*. Similarly, there was little discussion or comparing between Sunni and Shi'a practices. I presumed this could have arisen particularly for those having lived in Azerbaijan, but Yunusov also stated the majority there 'is against attempts to divide Muslims in the country [Azerbaijan] into Sunnis and Shiites' (2007:193)[10]

Like other nationalities in the Soviet Union, religious practice would predominately remain active outside the public square.[11] One example of where religious practice was publicly acknowledged was from an *emi* in Central Asia:

> I was a communist, and they [Soviet officials][12] would come to me and say "that [the Ahiska Turks] are doing *namaz*, they are fasting, they are doing those things." But [his voice speaking strongly] I said to them: "Don't touch them! They are my community [*cemaat*]."[13]

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[9] Or *'adat* (customs) in Arabic. *örf adetler* was typically used rather than the Turkish word '*gelenekler*'. See Hacili & Habib 1994; Yemelianova & Akkieva 2020.
[10] Azerbaijan was always spoken of positively in Turkey by the community and how they had been received there and had good relationships with the local population (See also Yunusov 2007:193). The only note was that the Ahiska Turks often continued living close to each other in the villages.
[11] See Geukjian, O (2012) who gives a very helpful description of the changes within the Soviet Union Nationalism policy. This included noting that in the 1960's the Crimean Tatars and the Meskhetian's in Central Asia starting to organize themselves during Khrushchev's leadership (2012:94). See also Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Buntürk 2007; Eren 2017; Pelkmans 2006; Rasanayagam 2012; Wimbush & Wixman 1975.
[12] He did not specify who the officials were, whether KGB, government officials, etc.
[13] AKA11, Interview in Kazakhstan, 3.4.16.

He demonstrated that, though a communist party member, he would take the risk and seeming authority to protect religious practices of his '*cemaat' (*community) that had drawn the attention of others. The *ethnie*, here and its religious practice merge the Turkish community and religious practice which contradicts the Soviet principles of removing religion. Even so, throughout most of the Soviet period, they had to keep those religious practices hidden due to the overt deemphasis on religion and much more emphasis on Soviet ideologies (Dunlup 1986:279; Eren 2017; Martin 2001:184; Rasanayagam 2012). Throughout this time most mosques were closed, and very few official clerics were publicly officiating and sanctioned (Dunlup 1986:283; Eren 2017).[14] Due to this pressure, a 'parallel Islam', or 'underground Islam' arose to counter this (Wimbush 1986:227), but as Khalid (2014:85) noted, 'being Muslim was *not* repugnant to being Soviet.' This was particularly notable within Sunni Islam, as it did not require an institutionalized clerical structure for religious practice. After all, Wimbush pointed, almost anyone with any Islamic knowledge could oversee rituals like birth, circumcision, burial, etc. (1986:227). This grew very quickly as Soviet authorities strictly limited and often oppressed Muslim clergy.[15]

I heard this directly as I visited with two men. They told me how everything in Soviet times was done in secret, including the *Bayram namaz,* or the prayers held during religious holidays. There was one active mosque in Almaty, but in the villages, everything was done in the homes they shared.[16] Another clear example of this was one of the *nene* born in the Ahiska region. She told us as we sat together drinking tea that her father was an *imam* and how she had learned about *din* (religion) from him and her mom. While living in Central Asia after the *sürgün*, she was one of two women who were the women's

[14] See Atkin 1992:63.
[15] Wimbush states most Muslim clergy were 'liquidated' (1986:228). See also Eren 2017.
[16] AKA10 & AKA11, Fieldnotes, Kazakhstan, 3.4.16.

mullah.[17] Speaking together with another lady present (AKA3), they both described the difficulties of practicing their faith in those days and how it could be preserved or maintained. Over time they made it a community action:

> Nene: We hid it. We could not do anything.
>
> Abla: In those times it was forbidden to do *namaz*. It was forbidden to read the Quran. However, where one or two Turks lived over there, in the Caucasus, they did not lose their customs, their religion, nothing. Here, even if it was secret, they did *namaz*. They also taught the young children. They protected every work, every cultural thing and continued giving it to their children. When the Soviet government broke apart, everything was possible. In those days everything was secret. Mosques were [kept] secret, Quran's were [kept] secret. But those of us that came from Ahiska did not lose anything.
>
> Nene: No, no, when I was 12 years old, I started to read [the Quran]. When the guest's door opened, we would be putting it [the Quran] here [under the mat she was sitting on].
>
> Abla: The Quran, we hid the Holy Quran.
>
> Nene: The police would immediately close [stop activity] and arrest [people].
>
> Abla: They would imprison.
>
> Nene: My mother was an important Mullah. She was a translator.
>
> Abla: She translated.
>
> Nene: She would make me read, and we were afraid.
>
> Abla: She would translate from Arabic to Turkish, Latin.[18]
>
> Me: [to the nene] Your mom?
>
> Nene: Yes, yes, [and] now I read myself. My mom and dad read [the Quran].
>
> Abla: Always hidden, hidden, hidden. … after the Soviet government collapsed, they [unspecific who][19] went to Turkey to be mullahs, and now they opened mosques.[20] Normally they do *namaz*. Thanks be to Allah's greatness. Allah is one, but everyone says something different. Generally, they did *namaz*, read the Quran, held the fast of Ramadan.
>
> Nene: Our grandkids are holding the fast. Even now when they work, they hold the fast…
>
> Abla: Before, they [Soviets] would say you cannot know *Tanrı*[21]. It was atheism. Everything was atheism. Communist, atheism. Our *millet* [nation], our Turkish *millet* [nation] did not lose its religion. Religion, customs, traditions. Nothing was lost. Secretly, secretly they taught the children. The Quran was hidden under the mattress.

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[17] AKA4, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.

[18] She is highlighting the alphabet usage. She does not say it was in Turkish Cyrillic or Ottoman Turkish, but the new Turkish Alphabet from the Turkish Republic reforms changed to Latin script in 1929 (see Bayar 2011; Lewis 2002; Zürcher 2017).

[19] Likely the Kazakhs under the new Kazakh government and its growing relationships with Turkey.

[20] Seems in reference not to the older lady, but rather the younger generation who would go and study in Turkey to be *imams* (or teachers) and come back and open mosques. I met two *imams* with her that same week (Field note, Kazakhstan, 25.10.16).

[21] *Tanrı* is another way of saying Allah in Turkish. It was used early in the republic to replace the Arabic form 'Allah', but is typically used for polytheistic gods, like Roman or Greek gods.

> Nene: Thanks to Allah we learned, we received [instruction]. Now we teach the younger generations.[22]

The two ladies emphasized that those who knew the Quran, would teach it secretly to their children or others; there was no school to learn in. While it was common for men to take on these roles, we see here that women also played an important role in the teaching. She shared with me, for instance, how she would read the Quran as a woman with the women (if men were present, she would not read). Through this religious activity, hidden in the past and continued in the present, it helped maintain 'community togetherness' through religious practice. It was one main way that helped them to keep alive their customs and religious practices and not be influenced by the external pressures around them (Aydingün 2002b). This long dialogue was kept highlighting the repetition of how the Ahiska Turks, or their *millet*, did not lose their customs, ways, or religion despite having to conceal everything and how they would pass it on to their children.

While religious life was forcibly downplayed in Soviet times, it did not disappear, and would slowly emerge over time. Religion for diaspora *ethnies* or in stateless situations, Smith (2009:51) states, would play a significant role in protecting the shared customs and laws to be followed. It would 'create a strong sense of ethnic cohesion' and the more formal religious institutions would 'become guardians' to protect the community's customs and laws (Smith 2009:51). The practices just described by the *nene* and *abla* are examples of how it was not just the formal religious institutions, but the informal ones that would maintain an 'ethnic cohesion' through religious practice in the Soviet times.

These instances show ways in which ethno-religious practices continued during Soviet times in Central Asia. Most of these were private, but some were public in nature. When the fall of the Soviet Union occurred, it elicited many responses and brought new experiences which would require adapting to the changing times.

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[22] AKA4, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.

6.2.2 Post-Soviet Ethno-Religious and Nationalistic Adjustments

In the post-Soviet days to the present, the Ahiska Turks' ethno-nationalism and Turkish/Muslim identity were more evident. Hidden practices, that were developed in Soviet times would continue for them. Smith (2009:37) states how religious rituals are slow to change, and this process helps bring continuity with the past for ethno-nationals. Khalid (2014:85) showed this writing that Soviet official ideologies were a 'mere façade', while the social dynamics and (Islamic) rituals would continue to be widespread. Islam, he stated, would become 'a marker of ethnic identity and an aspect of national culture (2014:85). Maria Elisabeth Louw (2007) who discusses everyday Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia also describes how it was not uncommon for religious practice to continue, even in the home or clandestine during the post-Soviet period. Religious rituals continued, such as Ramadan, circumcision, and different marriage practices for male and females (2007:3-4). It was also not unusual, as we saw above, to continue having unregistered clergy practicing their faith in the home. Even party officials, Louw notes, might publicly have been atheist, but still be participating, calling the rituals 'national' ritual rather than Islamic and thus 'Islam continued to inform the lives of Soviet Muslim citizens' and continue afterwards (2007:4).

Thus, a groups' religion would be a significant factor on the personal and national level. In 2013 Aydıngün focused on the 'ethnification and nationalization of religion,' in the post-Soviet state of Georgia and using the case of the Ahiska Turks. One emphasis she points to is that secularist thinking of nationalism still misses the influence of religion. In post-Soviet nation building, ethnic-religious influences were key and not the civic-secular as many assumed. She states: 'religion, which was latently a part of ethnic and cultural identity during the Soviet period, came to light after the dissolution as the openly expressed ethnic and cultural identity marker … and certainly still is being used for the strengthening of ethnic and national solidarity and consolidation.' (Aydıngün 2013:811).

Religion, or being Muslim in this instance, impacts the Ahiska Turks and their desire to return to Georgia as well as who they are as Sunni Turks.

While ethno-religious practice continued to inform them, particularly in the informal setting, it did not mean religious practice would not be impacted. The Soviet period offered less formal education of the Quran, and that led to different responses in the different sites. It could be seen by one mid-fifties man's attitude in Central Asia as he bluntly pointed this out to me. He told me he was very sick when born and near death. His brothers had died also from sickness. He was brought to a healer and lived.[23] The mullah then gave him his name to signify the healing that saved his life. Despite such an experience, over the years he became critical of the community because they did not know the Quran. Particularly looking negatively at religious leadership in general in Central Asia, he was critical of both mullahs and Christian *papas* [priests]; he said the Muslim community looked to the crescent, but still practiced shamanism.[24] This comment while a critical one revealed his perspective on the role religious leaders had in the community. Healing was encountered through the mullah, but he also pointed to a how there was a limitation felt in Quranic knowledge.

In the years after the Soviet Union's collapsed to the present day, shifts could be seen in the community in both examples given above (6.2.1). The two men who said everything was done secretly (AKA10 & AKA11), highlighted how changes were occurring at the end of Soviet times. They were free to speak in Turkish *(dil açıldı)*, and also practice Islam (*din de açıldı).* I asked what they meant, if this was for funerals (TR: *cenaze*), weddings, (*UZB: toy),* and they responded, yes, 'The law would not say anything, nor the government. It would not touch [those things]'.[25] Likewise, the two ladies (AKA4 & AKA3) pointedly showed that change in the community in Central Asia. Whereas atheism

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[23] Rasanayagam 2012, Chapter Seven discusses healings and the Spirits in Uzbekistan.
[24] AKA21, Fieldnote, Kazakhstan, 29.3.16.
[25] AKA10 & AKA11, Interview in Kazakhstan, 3.4.16.

was enforced in the Soviet period, following its collapse community members could begin to go to Turkey to be trained as mullahs and returning as religious leaders and a part of the Turkish diaspora (Bruce 2020).

The early post-Soviet years would have an impact on both rising Islamism alongside nationalism in the different countries (Khalid 2014; Gammer 2007; Rasanayagam 2012). For the Ahiska Turks, much would continue as seen above with the unofficial Islam, but they were also influenced by the Turkish *Diyanet*.[26] Mosques and theological educational openings across the globe arose as well as opportunities for those who had travelled to Turkey to study the Quran (Bruce 2020). For example, a new Turkish sponsored mosque was opened in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (www.aa.com.tr 2018) and in the village of Talgar, located near Almaty, Kazakhstan, a mosque stood out to me as clearly influenced by Turkish design. It is located in the midst of many villages that the Ahiska Turks are living in. Looking at the locations of the Ahiska Turkish communities, their news shared online or on Facebook, and the activities of Turkish religious diplomacy discussed by Ozkan (2014), there is a visible relationship present. Interestingly, however, while I was doing fieldwork in Central Asia, there was no mention or discussion of these mosques, attendance, or whether there were any differences between them, and the mosques attended by their Muslim neighbours around them. In Turkey, the mosques and religious education is all regulated through the Turkish *Diyanet* which is directly under the Prime Minister's control (Zürcher 2017).[27] Thus in Turkey there is no way to distinguish between the Ahiska Turkish community and others in Turkey. All *imams* there would

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[26] Diaspora Journal, Fall 2021 has a special issue focused on Turkey titled: 'Special Topic: A State of Diasporas: The Transnationalisation of Turkey and its Communities Abroad. This could not be consulted prior to submission.

[27] Zürcher (2017:189) states this is 'not so much separation of state and religion as state control of religion'. This can be further understood by looking at non-Sunni's experience in Turkey like the Alevi. See Tee (2010:336) for an example of the Alevi in Turkey and some ways they differ as well as look to relate to the Turkish Sunni majority.

have been educated and trained through the *Diyanet*. The role of the Turkish *Diyanet* and more official Islam was seen most significantly for those adjusting to the United States (Bilge 2012; Cetinkaya & Kodan 2012; Dogan 2016; Koriouchkina & Swerdlow 2007; Yavuz Alptekin 2014) after arriving as refugees in 2005/06.

It was not unusual for me to meet Islamic *hoca*[28] (teacher) while in the fieldwork[29] and this was the same in the United States. Aside from some of the elders, younger men were also taking on this role. On my first visit in 2016, I met one of the *hoca* in the cultural centre. We spent little time together, but I learned he had been trained in Turkey and led the service in both Turkish and Arabic.[30] This would not be the only Ahiska Turkish cultural centre in the United States that had a place to hold their prayers together formally and publicly, though they did not call it a mosque. The second visit I had (2018), he was still there as the *imam*, but I would spend more time in the Osman Gazi Mosque community (Appendix 13 and 14). There I met the *imam* who was sent from the Turkish *Diyanet* and spent time with him and some of the men serving in the mosque. This time yielded great insight into the hopes and desires of the community.

It could be seen by the young men the importance given to the role religion was in their lives. Each of them had their secular jobs but were also working long hours to serve the Ahiska Turkish community through the mosque and *madrasa*. The mosque and *madrasa* were primarily for the Ahiska Turkish community (and other Turks in Dayton), as it was conducted mostly in Turkish, mixing Arabic in the prayers. Their doors, however, were open for other Muslim visitors as well as the Dayton community living

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[28] While *hoca* in Turkish is often referred to religion teachers, it also can be used for other teachers (schools, music, sports, etc).

[29] This included three Ahiska Turkish imams trained in Turkey who were serving in Central Asia (2) and in the United States (1), an Ahiska Turkish *imam* trained in Azerbaijan whose family experienced two deportations from Georgia (GE2) and the Turkish *imam* met in the United States. Interestingly, none were met in Turkey in relation to this study. It felt the community had no need for it or need to emphasize it in my fieldwork time there.

[30] I had attended the Friday prayer (*Cuma namaz*) on this occasion and enjoyed a meal with the community afterwards.

around them. These young men's importance was shown, for example, one of their roles included reading at the opening of the Friday *namaz* before the *imam* came in. Another was that there was a meal served after a family moved to a new home. Community men gathered for this, and a prayer was given to bless the home and family. In each of these, the intersection is seen of the informal leading within the community and the role of formal training. In this instance the formal is through the Turkish *Diyanet,* but both played a role for the community in its priority to not be 'lost.' In the time spent together, however, there was no conversations about the role or place of the Turkish *Diyanet* nor its place in the community

Reflecting afterwards, I wondered if the lack of conversations was because it just was not important to them, or something they felt did not need to be highlighted to an outsider from the United States? Methodologically, I did not dig deeper or follow up at that time as it was something they were not revealing to me. Only in later reflection and analysis, did this arise as significant. In part because I would later note through newspaper articles that the mosque was a normal place of visit for Turkish officials to the Ahiska Turkish community.[31] Examples were seen in Massachusetts, Washington State, and in Kentucky following the boxer Muhammad Ali's funeral.

Another example of this was seen the morning following the *toy* (UZB) mentioned above. Several of us were sitting together around a table on the porch outside the house as food was prepared and the remaining guests were yet to arrive. The bride's family was gathering for the *gelinin hinkali,* a special meal for her family before they leave for home after the wedding celebrations finished. A few musicians were preparing to play, and the excitement of the preparations filled the air. As we spoke together, a stimulating moment

[31] See Washington State: http://www.corumhaber.net/guncel/doc-dr-haci-ahmet-sezikli-abdde-konferans-verdi-h69764.html. In Massachusetts: https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/diyanet-abdde-cami-acti-58044.html; In Kentucky following Muhammad Ali's funeral, President Erdogan attended an iftar with the Ahiska Turk community there: https://www.karar.com/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-abdden-ayrildi-153387.

arose that highlighted the importance of religion for the community, as well as the fear of being 'lost' came up. Intertwined in this conversation again exposes the importance of the Turkish language, culture, and customs.

> Man: Nobody in the *cami* [mosque] gets paid. Whatever we do, it's all volunteer. I mean every week, Saturday, Sunday, [for] four hours we teach the kids. I mean, I could spend those hours with family. I could spend time with my kids or somewhere else. I see on Snapchat and stuff, people have fun Saturday and Sunday, but I'm out there with the kids. Why? Because I want my community to go forward.
>
> Me: Ya.
>
> Man: I mean if I would think about myself, or the money, I would just take my time and do whatever I want, which I'm not doing because I'm doing it for the community, and I wouldn't dare. I mean this guy, [turns to the boy sitting near us on the table] how old are you? eleven, twelve?
>
> Boy: Eleven.
>
> Man: Eleven. He knows the basics of *din* [religion]. He knows our culture. He knows what's going on. He already knows why there's people here [at the *madrasa*]. Why? Because of his parents. He is the youngest. They gave him to the *madrasa*, to the *hoca*, and he was taught all this. If his parents wouldn't have thought about him, or just [let him sit] in front of YouTube, ah, like I said, about my [relative]…. He's 'gone.' He's already American. You don't expect anything from him. …
>
> Me: Ya.
>
> Man: But, you see, his parents cared about him and gave him to the hoca. He already knows how to read the Quran, and our [Turkish] Quran, he reads as well. About a year ago we started teaching kids, and we already have about a hand full of kids, like seven or eight that can [read] any Quran, or any prayer
>
> Man: So that's what we're there for. Right now, at the moment, we have a little over 140 kids out there, ah, [learning to] read the Quran and stuff … otherwise they will be lost. In [another city] they have about 20 families like that. They're already 'lost'.
>
> Me: ok.
>
> Man: I know a couple families out there. Last week I had my uncle's son's *sünnet* [circumcision]. So, I invited them, and they could come with their kids to see what's going on. To see what our traditions and stuff are. Ya know? Right now, the parents see that they lost their children. Their children don't know anything. Not a culture. Not even a language.
>
> Boy: My neighbour kids are like that.
>
> Man: Ya because those kids, they were never taught Turkish. Therefore, see that's why, ah in the family, they need to speak Turkish, [learn] Quran. … That's what we're here for. All this, all this community stuff. To stick together, … but see if they don't know, if they don't stay together, or don't think about their future, they will not accomplish anything. They will not. They will be lost.[32]

[32] US2, Interview in USA, 31.7.16.

In this discussion it was clear the association being given with learning the Quran, their Ahiska religious traditions, and their Turkish language. Holding these three together were essential and to not have these things meant for them that there was no future. They would be lost without these. Success economically or socially meant nothing to him without the Turkish language and the Quran. To be someone meant to him hold those national and religious traditions together.

He also showed a real desire for the *cami* (mosque) and *madrasa* to have a positive presence there. First for the Ahiska Turkish community, and then for the local community around them.[33] He did not want the kids to be isolated from the neighbours and culture around them, but also not to 'lose themselves' by not remaining close to their own community. He continued saying:

> Man: … That's why I want my community kids to be together with other [non Ahiska Turkish] kids, but not lose themselves, ya know? Not lose themselves culturally, language-wise.
>
> Me: Ya.
>
> Man: That's why we say it all [cultural events, the mosque, and local community activities] connects to each other. The whole community and stuff.[34]

All of these came together and 'connects' to each other for the whole community. That is where both the *cami* and the *madrasa* played a role. He also felt strongly in several comments that the mosque was specifically for praying, and nothing else. It was not to be mixed with cultural or political things.

> Man: The *cami* is a *cami*. There is no political thing. [The] *Dernek* (association or cultural centre) cannot be a *cami,* for all Muslims it is Allah's house.
>
> Me: Ya, ya
>
> Man: It's a mosque. In the *cami* we don't have any political stuff or cultural stuff. *Cami* is for praying. We have the *madrasa* which counts as a cultural centre as well. Where we can do all the educational stuff for our future. The *dernek* is different, as you see in Turkey, and as you see over here.[35]

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[33] They did this by having sports, serving in the community, and other activities for the kids. He discussed trust, first who could they give their kids too? He also shared how the community would not trust them because they were Muslims and the fear of 'terrorists. They wanted to break that stereotype by being a positive influence in the community.

[34] US2, Interview in USA, 31.7.16.

[35] US2, Interview in USA, 31.7.16.

These reflections in the United States demonstrate some of the adjustments the community is undergoing to maintain their Ahiska Turkish culture while also connecting more with Turkey.

Dogan (2016) in the United States showed some of these tensions and contrasts that remain, stating that the Ahiska Turks were afraid to become too Turkish.[36] The emphasis here, however, was not related to the contradiction of their emphasis on being Turk, but rather on their losing their unique cultural traditions. That tension was between the similarities with Turkish culture today and the old traditions from Ahiska they held onto and not wanting to lose them to modernization (wherever they were living). Dogan stated they consider themselves 'distinct' from Turks in Houston (another diaspora group of Turks) and do not want to intermarry with them (2016:168). She used the term 'Ahiska' for the first and only time there to distinguish them from other Turks in Houston. In this study, the Ahiska Turks in the United States did not point so overtly to any distinctions from Turks of Turkey as Dogan (2016) had mentioned.[37]

Though not *fundamentalist* (Bilge 2012), piety or being conservative remained a high value, and something not to be 'lost.' Dogan's (2016:142) point that it was only language and religion they could cling to in the Soviet period would shift in present times. This, it seems, is linked with Pelkmans observation that within the post-Soviet context there was a shift towards hybridization, working through various 'hidden ambiguities,' which resulted in 'hardening of cultural and social boundaries' (2006:222). While striving to not be assimilated into the various host nations they lived in, that 'hardening of cultural and social boundaries' has been occurring.

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[36] See also Bilge 2012 as she discusses Turkishness and distinguishing the Meskhetian Turks and Turks from Turkey.
[37] This could be in part due to my being in Turkey and how coming from Turkey and using Turkish contacts or community led to those leaning more in that way.

Aydingün (2002b) pointed out something similar as a resistance against the official policies and influences of the Soviet Union. She writes 'The preservation of language, religion, certain rituals and celebrations, stories related to the past of the group or to their collective history were among these informal channels of resistance' (Aydingün 2002b:192). This separation of the private and public spheres continues today but is changing, especially in the diaspora. In the United States, public activities were seen much more, whereas in Turkey the Ahiska Turks' conservative lifestyle would 'speak' to the shifting Turkish context and the fear of losing language or religion was no longer a concern. Assimilation or being lost was not a concern.

Religion and nationality would continue to impact the Ahiska Turks despite the ideologies pressed on them through the Soviet Union. Pelkmans' (2006) conclusions for the Laz in Ajaria also can apply here. His study focused on the city of Sarpi on the Georgian Turkish border in Ajaria, neighbouring the five districts the Ahiska Turks were located in. He pointed out that post-Soviet theories of rising nationalism did not fit what was happening in Sarpi. It was neither the 'freeze theory' which emphasized how loyalty and tensions prior to the Soviet Union would re-emerge or un-thaw after the Soviet Union, nor the theories of rediscovery and rewriting of an ethnic group or nations histories (Pelkmans 2006:218). Rather, he points that in the case of the Laz the importance of analysing the ways these '. . . forms of identity were shaped and modified to fit changing social and political contexts' (2006:219).

The Ahiska Turks' situation was like that of the Laz in Ajaria. It was not frozen but continued to adjust with their context (Pelkmans 2006). The Ahiska Turks' difference from the Laz, however, was the loss of their homeland, deportation, and stateless situation since then. The emphasis on both their Turkishness and religion remained significant to them in this time. Islam endured as an important part of their cultural identity (Bilge 2012:9, 31), mixing their Turkishness and religious practice. This was critical as they

viewed themselves separately due to the need for ethnic survival in exile (Khazanov 1992:7). It also helped them adjust in those different situations. For example, in Azerbaijan where Yunusov highlighted their feeling of having their own 'ethnic self-consciousness' and perceived they were 'a separate nation with their own history, common memories and identity' (2007:192). That commonality was 'separate' in the Soviet/post-Soviet situation, but as Yunusov also highlighted, would be seen in relation to (not separate from) Turks of Turkey. That relationship would not be as close however, as would be assumed.

6.3 Ethno-Religious Influences and Turkey

In Turkey, there was an interesting conundrum for them as they adjusted to life. Coming to Turkey meant safety for some but would also mean adjusting to another new nation. For most, that sense of being in a Muslim nation who spoke Turkish brought ease but also idealizing this arrival was not realistic. A middle-aged male that had come from Uzbekistan explained that he came to Bursa because it '… has a lot of work' but then he revealed his deeper concerns: 'Bursa has a lot of Muslims, mosques are everywhere.' He told me. 'If we fear Allah, it will be OK, but if we don't fear Allah, then we're not safe.' And then he added, 'Nobody [in Bursa] asked me: "Are you Turk?" Because I am Turk.'[38] Here he corelates his faith and ethnicity. He was safe being Turk in Turkey, and because there were mosques everywhere. However, his expression reveals something deeper than some showed. Fearing Allah, which included practicing Islam as they knew how (Ro'I & Wainer 2009) was of great importance. In Uzbekistan, where he had come from, was a pan-Turkish Muslim context, yet he did not have that 'safety he felt in Turkey. It appears, however, the greater ethno-religious presence of Turkish mosques and being Turks in Turkey made a big impact for him. I wrote in my field notes that day after we had spoken:

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[38] BTR7, Interview in Turkey, 10.10.14.

‘As he spoke, my understanding or immediate interpretation gave me the feeling that he was trying to say he felt safer or more secure with so many *Cami* (mosques) present, and in the context of the more religious nature of the city [Bursa].’[39] Being in Turkey (or Bursa), and in the presence of Turks gave a sense of ease for most (Baydar Aydıngün 2001) and not needing to fear ‘being lost’.

This was also seen in a young man who went to Turkey from Kazakhstan for teacher’s training and how he explained his feeling of being in Turkey. He said that ‘if we will not go to Turkey, our children will [be] Russified completely, and it will be a problem for us.’[40] Though speaking honestly with me, he said only half of his people felt that way in Kazakhstan. He continued that half his generation was already ‘Russified,’ and many were afraid their Turkish language was being lost. As we talked about that aspect, I questioned what Russification meant to him: ‘No, not just language, … I mean culture difference and [how] culture changes. [How] *' bakış,' ' bakış'* [views or perspectives] changes. How they see the world, and religion also, that our religion [religious practice] did not change.’[41]

Clearly his view of life and fear of assimilation of Russian culture intermixed language (Turkish), religion (Islam) and culture. The going to Turkey was significant for him in dealing with being Russified even while living in Kazakhstan, another Muslim pan-Turkic nation. A crucial thing for him was to not change their view of life, and that their perspectives (*bakış*) does not change. That *' bakış',* included the importance of not losing their religion. Showing a contrast in the community that I rarely saw in my own study, he pointed that only half the Ahiska Turks shared his concern. It is a fair assumption that those with the greatest concern were the ones who had already moved to or were planning to move to Turkey.

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[39] Personal fieldnote, 10.10.14.
[40] AKA19, Interview on Skype, in English, 16.2.17.
[41] AKA19, Interview on Skype, in English, 16.2.17. Turkish words were kept for depth.

The sentiment of not being assimilated is also heard in its converse statement: 'We did not lose our religion or language.' To not assimilate meant not to lose their religion or language. There is an interesting dynamic here since the assimilation was direct, whether alluding to the Russians, the United States, or Georgia, although the word *assimilation* was not used within the fieldwork for the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, or Uzbeks.

Other perspectives also showed ethno-religious connections to Turkey. Smith states that the 'shared values, memories, rituals and traditions have helped to ensure a sense of continuity with past generations of the community – a sentiment greatly enhanced by the widespread acceptance of collective symbols such as the flag…' (2009:25). The expressions used would show how they relate being Turkish (or using the language), their religion, and including the flag as a symbol. In this fashion, an older man, born in 1940, showed his relief to be back in Turkey as he spoke in Turkish: 'I have forgotten my mother tongue.'[42] We were in Turkey and though we were speaking in Turkish, he looked down as if saddened, his hands folded in his lap. Then he continued, 'forty-five years were very difficult. Language, religion, flag. My body will not go to another place.'[43] His intonation emphasized the epithet: 'language, religion, and 'flag.'[44] While the first two were repeatedly said in the community to summarize what they protected over the years, he added the flag. Now that he was in Turkey, he said he would not go anywhere else, and he could find rest. That symbolic place of the Turkish flag was displayed in many places outside Turkey. For example, the Turkish flag[45] placed on the Ahiska Turks' *yurt* at a

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[42] This was common in Turkey for many of those moving there and feeling they did not have good enough Turkish.
[43] BTR19, Fieldnotes, Turkey, 8.5.15.
[44] '*Dil, din, bayrak'*.
[45] See Bilge 2012. She notes different Turkish artifacts seen in her study, the flag being the most common (2012:64).

navruz[46] celebration in Kyrgyzstan[47], or hung at the cultural centre and mosque in Dayton.[48]

Another *emi* stated with gratitude for Turkey's receiving 677 refugee families from Ukraine when the conflicts with Russia was greatly affecting them.[49] Connecting that to their community's multiple experiences of forced migrations, he also pointed to the symbolism of the flag:

> *Emi*: This is how our people (*millet)* live. May [Allah] give health to Turkey. They [Turkey] gave us health.
>
> Me: yes
>
> *Emi*: There was only one flag. It protected us. We are under that flag. We did not have a flag in Georgia. In Uzbekistan, we were under the Uzbek flag. It was like that.[50]

Allegiance is given to Turkey and that they are only under the Turkish flag. Though the statement that the Turkish flag protected them was not true historically, for him, being under the Turkish flag meant protection. He also recognized the Uzbek flag, but likely out of respect for their hosting them after 1944. He does not recognize the Georgian flag where Ahiska is located. His friend said something similar regarding his own travels:

> We are under the Turkish flag [picks up the flag resting on his desk to emphasize this]. Thank Allah. We want to live under this flag. Our people moved around many countries (*memleketler*). The Turkish flag is a separate thing. We are Turk. We go around with Turkish blood. For seventy years we travelled in different countries. We did not lose our language. We did not lose our religion. We did not lose our customs. We did not lose [the showing of] respect. We did [not stop] saying *selam aleyküm,* [or] to be Muslims. We want to live under the Turkish flag. That is how our peopl*e [millet]* are.[51]

Once again, we see the consistent sense of their not losing themselves and that corelation with an ethnoreligious position. The symbols of their Turkish practices of customs, religion, language, and Turkish blood drew their relation to Turkey. By emphasis these

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[46] Ancient Persian holiday celebrating the spring new year.
[47] Fieldnotes, Kyrgyzstan, 21.3.16. See Appendix 10. At that event there was also an Ahiska Turkish dance at the city's festival where all the different ethnic groups performed. The Ahiska Turks wore their traditional outfits, and their Kyrgyz yurt displayed all their traditional foods. The Turkish flag hung over the yurt.
[48] Fieldnotes, USA, 2016, 2018. See Appendix 13
[49] See BGNNews.com n.d.; http://nativeahiska.ucoz.org 2015.
[50] BTR4, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.
[51] BTR8, Interview in Turkey, 1.3.16.

all together are symbolic of how they see themselves. They were not lost in the years after the deportation and something they cherish now being under the Turkish flag.

Another dimension of these feelings was that being Turk, even within Pan-Turkic countries, led them to face struggles. For example, one man shared with me about the challenges he faced prior to arriving in Turkey:

> I got tired because every time I left home: [I heard] “You are Ahiska”. In Azerbaijan, [I heard] “Where are you from?” [and in Russia] “Your identification says you’re Turk”. “Your family is Turk”. “Come here”. [It was a] ritual. “You’re Muslim.” [It was] always “come here.” In Russia it was always a problem.’[52]

What he was pointing to is that his ethnicity/nationality and religion were all highlighted in a negative way in the former host countries. To emphasize the repetition of this struggle, he called it a ritual. Saying ‘come here’ stressed the pressure and discrimination against them and how they were treated poorly in Russia. Moving to Turkey, he felt it was now a ‘safe’ place for them to be Turks.

This freedom of opportunity was seen in a few examples in Bursa. One young lady mentioned one major difference in Turkey compared to Azerbaijan was that it was much easier to practice religion and there were more opportunities to do it together: ‘… there are always mosques and *majids* to pray at [in Turkey].[53] This sentiment was shown by a Ahiska Turkish family that visited our house one evening. They told us how good it was to be in Turkey and to be able to do *namaz*, read the Quran, and how special it was for the kids. As we sat around the table as the meal was ending, the mother asked the girls to recite some of their memorized prayers. With no hesitation, the two young girls both raised their hands up and said a few prayers in Arabic for us.[54]

There was also a sense of relief and relaxation to simply be where the *ezan* would cry out in Turkish and the population around them were Muslim. One of the men I spoke with

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[52] BTR20, Interview in Turkey, 21.12.15.
[53] IzTR48, Interview in Turkey, 17.1.17.
[54] BTR1 & BTR2, Fieldnotes, Turkey, 5.5.14.

continued to emphasize being a '*temiz adam*' or pure person. He was very glad for his kids to be in Turkey. We did not pray in Soviet times, he told me, but now my kids can learn to pray.[55] He revealed that it was great for the children to have the opportunities to learn the Quran in Turkey, but they would still need to wrestle with purity and not just be 'religious' by going the mosques. They would still need to live differently. He struggled with too much religiosity and hypocrisy, giving an example of the old *dedes* at the mosque: 'They look at girls [on the streets] and then go and pray'.[56]

These examples draw a conclusion relating to their ethno-religious posture towards Turkey. While living in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan amongst predominately pan-Turkic Muslims (see 2.4), the Ahiska Turks did not feel the same sense of security as they did in Turkey. Arriving to Turkey, the impacts of the Soviet times on their religious knowledge would be able to be addressed. The posture towards Turkey would also be changing as will be seen below as they began to look to Turkey.

6.3.1 Ahiska Turks' Emphasis for Turkey

Examples outside Turkey show the relationships and love for Turkey. For example, in Central Asia, one prayer given by two of the ladies in the middle of our conversation alludes to the complications they face. It was shortly after the Russian plane was shot down on the border of Turkey in November, 2015, which led to tension between Russia and Turkey.[57] It begins after a comment of how the former Kazakh president had helped the Ahiska Turks.

> Nene: May we be friends with Kazakhstan, friends also with Turkey. May Allah protect Turkey. Here also may all of us be protected. We could not look [ahead] without Turkey.
>
> Abla: [Looking at me] May Allah also protect America, who took our beautiful families.
>
> Nene: May Allah protect the whole face of the earth.
>
> Abla: May there be no war.

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[55] BTR12, Interview in Turkey, 25.11.14.
[56] BTR12, Interview in Turkey, 25.11.14.
[57] See MacFarquhar & Erlanger 2015.

> Nene: I do my *namaz* and say: Allah give our community (*cemaate*) wisdom. Show the right path to our rulers (*padişahlara*[58]).
>
> Abla: To the Kazakhs and our Kazakhstan first.
>
> Nene: To the *Sultans* [Presidents] over there, may they show Allah's greatness. May it [Allah's greatness] fall upon their hearts. Show them the right path all the time. May Allah also protect the person who has gone down the wrong road.
>
> Abla: Allah give Putin and Erdoğan wisdom.
>
> Nena: Allah, whatever work they do, may the two be together.
>
> Abla: Allah, it is difficult for our *millet.* Give them wise ideas.[59]

These women give a great example of a stateless group living in and amongst host countries. Beginning with the country they were living in, they prayed for the presidents and leaders of countries the Ahiska Turks were living in (Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, and the United States). She also emphasized the importance of living in the right way as a community and wisdom for them to make the right choices in the situations they were living in.

Shifting to the United States and the community I spent time with, the ethno-religious influences was particularly detected. There was a striking difference amongst the Ahiska Turks met there then in the other sites. Just over a decade from their arrival to the United States, they had citizenship, most were working, and as a community were quite successful.[60] Within that success, there was also the challenge that some within the community were losing their Turkish language as well as culture. They were adjusting and adapting to life in the United States. In this, an emphasis on their Turkishness was critical. Religion (Islam), culture, and language were stressed unlike in Central Asia where they had been over the past decades and like Turkey where they could relax being surrounded by Turkish life.

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[58] *Padişahlar* is another word for Sultans.
[59] AKA4 with AKA3, Interview in Kazakhstan, 1.4.16.
[60] See Preston 2013; www.nytimes.com (10.6.13); Navera 2015.

Like the ladies mentioned above, another *nene* well into her seventies also showed deep sentiment for Turkey as we sat in an entrance room visiting their family during *Kurban Bayram* (*Eid al-adha*). As she shared her story, she would pause and give a short prayer. At first, I did not understand who she was praying for, as it did not seem to fit. Then her son told me, and I was surprised by the strong emotions she displayed. As we mentioned *vatan*, their thinking about Ahiska, and their coming from Uzbekistan and Russia, the strong Turkish emphasis seemed out of place. He pointed to me that she loves and respects President Erdoğan so much that she had travelled to see him on three occasions when he visited the United States. Listening again to the interview with the tear-filled prayers, she was asking for long life and for his protection. She prayed that all Ahiska Turks could go to Turkey. Interestingly she also revealed their deterritorialized situation saying that they still had 'no *vatan*'.[61]

Her response reflected that attachment to Turkey and desire to go there, while also maintaining the close-knit community they held over the years. In the *Song of the non-aligned*, Gupta reflected on how Anderson's (1983) ideas for nationalism growing through print media helped the masses 'imagine the nation' and have a 'deep horizontal comradeship' (2003:327). Gupta, however, saw transnational groups who lacked such media still desired to have a transnational community; they were less able to 'imagine the nation' or to represent themselves as a nation state (2003:327). In response to this, Gupta suggested the need to 'study structures of feeling that bind space, time, and memory in the production of location' (2003:333).[62] It is these 'structures of feeling' that bound the Ahiska Turks to each other but also to their 'Turkishness'. This helped maintain a tight ethno-nationalistic (yet non-political), transnational diaspora community over these

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[61] US11 & US12, Interview in the USA, 21.8.18.
[62] The other conclusion was the need to pay attention to processes in the global political economy that will 'redivide, reterritorialize, and reinscribe space' (Gupta 2003:333). See Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Aydingün 2002b; and Keskin et al. 2016 for some perspective on some of those global dynamics have affected the Ahiska Turks.

years. These ‘structures of feeling’ over space and time ‘produced’ a (re)connection with Turkey and can be seen in other examples.

Though their Islamic identity, perse, was not central to their nationalism,[63] being Muslim (and thus Islam) was fundamental in keeping the community together while the geographical boundaries separated them (Baydar Aydıngün 2001, Aydingün 2002a; 2002b; Koriouchkina 2011). For example, this young man living in the United States explained how they held themselves together as a community while intermixing the way religion and culture played a role:

> Man: Yes, I think the main reason [we remain united] is because we [Ahiska] Turks live together as a community. Because in some places, where two or three remain [alone], they adapt [read: assimilate].
>
> Me: I understand.
>
> Man: For example, we protect our culture. They [unclear] slowly, slowly, lose it, but we from Ahiska [*Ahıskalılar*] generally continue it because of living in community.
>
> Me: Hmm, and what are the most important traditions? For example, what do you teach the children? Right now, you are here, in America, and everybody is different, and each has a different community. You help each other, but also, they [the kids] go to school, etc. What do you teach them? What are the important things?
>
> Man: Generally, now, it’s not culture. More religion. It’s like that. We teach how our religion is. We teach how Islam teaches these things, for example. But as kids grow up, generally [we say] we marry like this. Within our group. Of course, sometimes some did marry others, but generally our Ahiska Turks would marry their distant relative [*yeğen*][64] and that way our culture would continue.[65]

Interestingly, though he says they do not teach ‘Ahiska’ culture, it is the culture they want to protect by focusing rather on their religious (Islamic) practices. And though he did not go any deeper, he tied that to marriage within their own community.

While talking with another man around thirty years old who was involved with the mosque and *madrasa*, I asked about the unity in the community and how they keep it across the borders. While there is connection, he rather pointed to the importance of the

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[63] See Juergensmeyer 1993; 2019. He draws a distinction between religious nationalism and ethno-symbolic nationalism.
[64] This traditionally would have been the case but has changed over the years.
[65] US9, Interview in the USA, 19.8.18.

Ahiska Turkish community living near them. He particularly emphasized the next generation. Using a local proverb to describe this:

> Man: I am thinking of our culture, Eric, because, ah, for example there can be a wedding. We have a proverb: 'The neighbour next to you is closer than the distant relative.'
>
> Me: Yes
>
> Man: If something happens in the days ahead. If I have a wedding. If I read the Quran. If I have a need that requires help, I cannot call my relative from Russia. Who will come? My [friends] here will come.
>
> Me: I understand.[66]

Unity, he saw was reliant on those that were nearby to each other and not necessarily for those across the border. He took this very serious because of what he was for-seeing happening already in the Ahiska Turkish community in the United States:

> Man: For that reason, in that way we remain together. We always remain together that way. We protect ourselves that way. But the new generation, unfortunately do not see this as necessary. They have adapted quickly here.
>
> Me: Hmm,
>
> Man: Ah, they do not remain united. For example, some children do not help [at the mosque or *madrasa*], they think our ways are dumb.
>
> Me: Do you think this is not just because of being young? Or this is their [real] thoughts?
>
> Man: This is their thinking. Completely different thinking, Eric. They, think of our culture. Ah, I think, May Allah protect, but I think that after 10-15 years … ahhh. Already look: They do not speak a language. They do not speak Turkish. Now they are speaking English. What does it mean if they are speaking English? After fifteen years, after we have left the Turkish language, the Turkish [language] will be gone.
>
> Me: Hmm.
>
> Man: Our culture will go if too many people leave [the language]. For that reason, it is why we are here [at the mosque and *madrasa*], to teach our children religion.
>
> Me: Uh huh.
>
> Man: We teach who we are. We teach our culture. It is not only: Quran, Quran, Quran. Let's be united. Be together, All our ways. . .. For the future.[67]

This conversation again highlights the intersection of the Turkish language with religious instruction. It is not just about teaching religion to them, but the Turkish is key to not

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[66] US16, Interview in the USA 22.8.18.
[67] US16, Interview in the USA 22.8.18.

being lost culturally. There was no 'meaning' to speak English, and this sentence particularly stands out: 'Our culture will go if too many people leave'. In other words, if too many in the community lose their Turkish and replace it with English and generalized culture of the United States', they will also lose their religion. That was shown as he continues, 'for that reason we are here, to teach our children religion.'

Two cousins, both in their early twenties, had an interesting conversation along these same lines. Having already spent their teen years in the United States, one was very happy being in the United States with the opportunities it presented and wanted to live that 'lifestyle.' The other, however, was more frustrated and pointed out that it was so easy for people to 'lose it,' and that people were 'going crazy.' For him, Turkey was important, but even more so being Muslim. He said he respected other religions, but as Muslims 'we have the same culture.' Even if they speak a different language, he knew how to behave: 'wherever you go and you see somebody, you know you can say "*selam aleyküm*", … you're gonna understand each other. … I'm just saying this about the culture. We have the same culture.' Obviously oversimplifying the major differences, he found comfort in the similarities there were in Islam compared to that of being in another culture like the United States. For example, he continued, '… let's say I'm a different religion, I don't speak their language, I don't know how to [be] or how to greet [as in *selam aleyküm*]'.[68] For him, that important link was with the *Ummah*, though he did not use that word, and the shared connection across the globe for Muslims. Within that broad connection to Islam, he also challenged his cousin about his perspectives. Relating to his media work, he said it would be better to do it 'in Turkish' rather than English, or at least 'do it bilingual.'[69] This again displays an indirect but clear connection for him to Turkey and Turkish speakers who would be listening or watching online.

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[68] US14 & US15, Interview & fieldnotes, USA, 21.8.18.
[69] US14 & US15, Interview & fieldnotes, USA, 21.8.18.

Finally, a last example here in the United States is of a young father that displayed this same sentiment as we talked about life, faith, and the changes happening in the Ahiska Turkish community in the United States.[70]

> Man: I went on *hajj*, you know *hajj,* right?
>
> Me: Uh huh.
>
> Man: By the time I got there, I went through other countries. I never felt like, ah, even here [in the United States], I live here for many, many years and I don't feel like it's home. But, when I arrived in Turkey, when I landed there, I just uh, it was really different.
>
> Me: Ya.
>
> Man: Everybody speaks your language [he laughed], even not your language, you just go there you feel, 'it's mine.' It's where I belong (ya). … when you hear everybody speaks your language. Everywhere, the *ezan* is everywhere. You hear *ezan*, you just, [he pauses] *ezan*, and flags everywhere, and [it's] so nice, so nice.[71]

He notes the symbols are both religious and national. Regarding his travels on *hajj* (pilgrimage),[72] he does not speak about his highlights or that experience, but rather points to how significant the language and the nation (Turkey) was to him. He felt at home and belonged because 'everybody speaks your language' despite also recognizing the difference to his Ahiska Turkish ('even not your language'). It was also 'home' because of how the *ezan* calls out in prayer, and because of the flags--all these for him gave him a feeling of 'home' or *vatan*. Here the mixing and symbolic nature of language, the flag, and belief are all being shown.

These examples above display greater overt emphasis on the place of religion and their loyalty to the group. In 2002b, Aydingün focused primarily on the place of language, but commented: 'They have also been loyal to their language. In fact, they judged their loyalty to the culture by their knowledge of the mother tongue, so much

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[70] Much of this relating to the working of women and not needing dependence on the men. Also, the clothes that they are wearing. He did not like going to weddings because he felt women were getting to tight and short their dresses. He gave an example of a Christian pastor who asked the people to wear a cross. He said it was sad because they could not tell who a Christian was. In the same way, he said, at a wedding you cannot tell who a Muslim was and who is not.
[71]US10, Interview in the USA, 19.8.18.
[72] Very few Ahiska Turks shared with me they had been on the pilgrimage, but some said they would like to.

that sometimes language is treated as if language, ethnicity, ethnic pride and identity are one and the same thing.' This is still the case as language here is interwoven in many of the comments. It can be argued, however, that the place of an ethno-religious emphasis is growing for parts of the community.

While Dogan noted that concern in her study in the United States, that the community may become too 'Turkified' (2016:181), this was not a concern in the groups studied (though could be mixed with the 'homing' desire mentioned in Chapter Five). While these examples continue to highlight Turkey, one comment showed where the community still had a contrasting reaction. Marriage and endogamy continue to be key to their cultural survival and to the strengthening of the community (Aydingün 2002b:192; Bilge 2012; Dogan 2016; Koriouchkina 2011; Tomlinson 2002). This was one area where they continue to hold distance with Turkish nationals. One young lady showed a perspective of this. She emphasized how their Ahiska Turkish ways had not assimilated in Azerbaijan or Russia, but then pointed to me that they also had not assimilated in Turkey. [73] In this, she was saying they had not assimilated in marriage. While I had heard of a few marrying Turks, for example, the mother of our friends in her sixties who had married a local man,[74] marriage outside their community seemed frowned upon. Endogamy remains a priority to stay together as a tight community[75] and would fit into a conservative lifestyle which helped them in their adjustment in Turkey.

6.3.2 Conservative Lifestyle & Adjustments in Turkey

As the Ahiska Turks adjusted to different nations as well as to Turkey, their growing ethno-religious emphasis is not unusual. In the discussion above, there has been a continued concern with being 'lost'. Smith in Ethno-Symbolism noted the role religion

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[73] IzTR48, Interview on Skype, 17.1.17.
[74] BTR2, Fieldnote, Turkey, 22.10.14.
[75] This included marriage across the borders as heard throughout the fieldwork. The most challenging cross-border marriages would be those in the United States.

plays for diaspora communities. Religion 'was particularly marked in diaspora *ethnies* where, despite local variations, the ecclesiastical authorities provided a framework for interpreting shared scriptural texts and their laws, as well as in providing common legal institutions and procedures for the various diaspora communities.' (2009:51). He also shows that the activities which occur in public, like ceremonies and rituals, create a public culture (2009:51). For the Ahiska Turks, however, the role of the ecclesiastical authorities to hold the diaspora together over the years was not as significant as the role of the family and community in utilizing these religious practices. A mutual interconnected relationship of support was at work: the community's connection and maintenance came through these religious ceremonies, while at the same time individual families also sustained and held dearly these practices and rituals, thus reinforcing their ethno-religious position.

In Turkey, Sarigil & Fazlioglu (2013; 2014) illustrated how religious discourses mixed with ethno-nationalist sentiments have been seen within the Kurdish situation. Their research pointed how religious sectarian sentiments matter for the Kurdish population in Turkey (2014:438) and that ethnic-national sentiment conveyed an important factor shaping Turkey's attitudes towards different groups. Dressler agrees as he looked at the Alevis. The context of the secularist Turkish nationalism that developed out of the Ottoman Empire, he points, 'was based on ethno-religious boundaries' (2013:66) and that things have not changed in relation to religion in Turkey (Dressler 2013:xvi-xvii). Religious activity is monitored and controlled by the *Diyanet* (Directorate for Religious affairs). As the Ahiska Turks struggled to understand why it was so difficult to gain citizenship as Turks and Sunni Muslims, the relevance of emphasizing this ethno-religious boundary became very important.

It has been well noted the legal challenges over the years which the Ahiska Turks faced in Turkey despite their socially being accepted (Aydingün 2002b:190; 2007; Aydıngün

& Aydıngün 2014).[76] In this regard, relating to Turkish religious national identity would be essential. Unlike some of the population in Turkey like the Alevis or the Kurds, the Ahiska Turks could have an advantage. As Turkish Sunni Muslims (Aydıngün 2007; Lord 2017; 2019; Dogan 2016; Erten 2014), their conservative religious lifestyle could be utilized within Turkey. This, however, would need to be highlighted both in and outside Turkey to sway prejudice against the foreigner as most were coming from a 'Russian'[77] context. While continuing to remain connected as a community, their conservative lifestyle would bridge to Turkish nationalism as well as the Neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania occurring in Turkey at this time.[78]

As we begin to look at this, it is important to draw the distinction between religious nationalism and ethno-symbolic nationalism. It is not 'religious nationalism' (Juergensmeyer 1993; 2019) that is countering a secular nationalism (held mostly by a more modernist position). Rather, ethno-symbolism emphasizes the role of values, traditions, and symbols in the formation and persistence of nationalism (Smith 1986, 2009, 2010). Pelkmans (2006) helps describe this by looking at the Laz in Ajaria (Georgia) and how ambiguities and tensions present in the Ajarian context along the Turkish border were suddenly arising again at the fall of the Soviet Union (2006:222).[79] He states that 'After socialism, people had to reposition themselves vis-à-vis religion and ethnicity, and straddle the connections between those categories' (2006:223). The Ahiska Turks' ethno-nationalism which was held through the Soviet period would not overtly emphasize their ethno-religion, being that it was held in the private sphere. With great

[76] Examples of this included struggles to get citizenship, work permits, and need for health insurance.
[77] 'Russian' could be assumed in Turkey because of the Russian language some spoke, even if coming from Central Asia or were speaking Turkish in their dialect.
[78] One dynamic relevant to Neo-Ottomanism is the fluctuating perspective and position within Turkey towards world politics (Cagaptay 2014:63).
[79] See Balci & Motika (2007).

changes after the Soviet Union's fall, as with the Ajarians, the questions of ethnicity, nation, and religion arose as it could not do under communism.

In the discussion above, it has been shown the continued concern of the community becoming 'lost'. For the Ahiska Turks, the role of the ecclesiastical authorities to hold the diaspora together over the years was not as significant as the way the religious ceremonies were held and passed on through the family and Ahiska Turkish community. This has begun to change, depending on the context, and reinforced ethno-religious practices that could be conducted more freely and be influenced by Turkey and the *Diyanet*.

One hint of this was made by a woman in Central Asia that I had in my fieldnotes. While sitting at her table eating, she talked about her daughter and son-in law who had moved to Turkey. In my fieldnotes I wrote:

> Tonight, there was a lot of praise for the president of Turkey, though tonight I heard the difficulties too from an informant's (AKA2) sister. … Her daughter was married fifteen years ago and moved to Turkey. She even has citizenship [*vatandaş*] but was separated (or divorced) because the husband became too religious [*dini*]. The daughter has now returned to Kazakhstan. When the two women spoke together in the kitchen, it was in Russian.[80]

This fieldnote displays a few things for the community which could be seen in several examples. First, separation (or divorce) seems more common than first expected. In the instances that were encountered, the daughter would usually return to her family. Also, the fact she had Turkish citizenship meant she had been in Turkey for some time, likely five or more years which was when foreigners, including Ahiska Turks, could apply. Having been in Turkey that long meant there was a longer time to adjust to life in Turkey and for her husband to have joined a more religious segment of society. No details were given to what that meant, however, the fact she was speaking Russian in the home meant a couple possibilities. Either she struggled with the Turkish dialect in Turkey (maybe she had not learned it well growing up) or her family could have been more 'outside' the Ahiska Turkish community in Central Asia and had been influenced by communities

[80] Field note, Kazakhstan, 4.5.16.

outside the Ahiska Turkish one. In any sense, the fact her husband became too religious in Turkey brought enough tension in the home that they separated, and she left Turkey.

This contrast could also be seen in the reaction of men in the Bursa community on two different occasions. While being conservative culturally, many distanced themselves from too much religiosity.[81] For example, it was more visible during the years of the largest influx of refugees from Syria and the subsequent rise in Islamism (both for and against) in Turkey. This included perspectives towards Daesh/ISIS[82]. I had joined a couple of middle-aged Ahiska Turkish men one morning to drink tea at a small shop in Bursa. A young man was walking in our direction, and I wrote this in my field notes related to this event:

> My friend had short hair, shaved close, and with no facial hair; the other guy had a similar look. It was very interesting when a man was coming toward us about a block away, at the other side of the market [*pazar*]. This young guy had a full, long beard, with a very Islamic, religious wardrobe. My friends said, 'ah, he is a terrorist. Why does he need a beard? Why, because they can know each other that way. What is important is humanity, people are first, and the most important thing for people is the heart.'[83]

This stood out because this young man's appearance was not uncommon in many Muslim contexts whether culturally or religiously. In parts of Central Asia and in Turkey, however, (even in Bursa at that time), this was a rare thing.[84] Even the *imams* I met over the time in Turkey would not (or rarely) dress in such a way on the streets. To wear such a wardrobe made a religious statement. The beard, also, in these two contexts made an intentional religious statement beyond the norms accepted previously. Beards in Turkey, however, did begin to take on a political-religious expression in these years of study, becoming a more accepted popular style worn across the country. For these Ahiska

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[81] See Dogan (2016) for her comparison of the Meskhetian Turks and secular and pious Turks in the United States. See also Koriouchkina (2011) relating to how their being Turkish meant being Muslim and should not signify if they were practicing their religion or not.
[82] Radical Sunni Muslim Organization (Daesh: dictionary.com). See Irshaid 2015.
[83] BTR21, Field note, 25.7.15.
[84] There has been, since the beginning of the Republic concern for religious groups or orders (*tarikats*). Along with that, another area of sensitivity both religious and politically was related to the coup attempt in 2016. Nobody spoke to me about this, but the cultural centres and associations gave public support of Turkey.

Turkish men representing the middle-aged and older men in the community, however, a clean-shaven face was what was acceptable. To have more facial hair signified someone overly religious, or seen as a 'terrorist,' as he stated.

Another example of this distaste for religious pressure was shown by a man who owned a small shop. It sold many different products but included some alcoholic beverages.[85] He was sharing to a group of us about an experience he had when a couple men came in and told him that as a Muslim, he should not sell alcohol. His reaction really struck me: 'what's this to them? This is between me and God.'[86] A contrast to this worth noting, however, was in the United States' context where the Turks were invited to a city festival. This included Turks' who had Turkish restaurants in the city. The Ahiska Turks' Osman Gazi Mosque was also invited, but they were concerned if the Turkish restaurants would also be selling alcohol, that this was wrong for them as Muslims to be doing. In the end they did attend the festival to represent the community and mosque, however made it clear they would not have alcohol. Instead, they purchased a few thousand dollars' worth of Ottoman and traditional Turkish outfits for guests to take pictures in.[87]

While these two examples are given related to this, it represents a general feeling across the sites and that within Turkey for the community. The private practices of their beliefs remained personal and within the group, except where it was represented in a public manner through ceremonies and prayers offered at the events. Being religious was a value, but overly religious was not. Only a couple times was there hints of pressure or the presence of some more radical religious influence. The first occurred in the Central Asian fieldwork when one gatekeeper showed concern that I was a reporter when I showed up. This was in part due to the growing anxiety at that time for the recruitment by ISIS in the region (Botobekov 2016; https://www.csis.org 2017). Over the years of

[85] See Koriouchkina 2011.
[86] Fieldnotes, Turkey, 2016.
[87] Fieldnotes, USA, 2018.

this study, I did not hear of any Ahiska Turks going to Syria. Another example was related to Kazakhstan. I was told by an informant that the young men were being taught a 'little different religious teaching' and being pressured to be more religious. They were growing their beards long and pressured to do their five *namaz* (*beş kere*). It was said in a more negative tone, and then the person compared it to Turkey: this kind of teaching was not taught, and people could do their *namaz* as they wanted to and are not pressured.[88] This example centred on the Central Asian context (Yemelianova 2011) and had been present prior to the war in Syria.

One dynamic of being in Turkey revealed distinctions within the Ahiska Turkish community that contrasted it from 'modern' Turkey (Cagaptay 2006; 2017; Cinar 2005; Cook 2017; White 2014; Zürcher 2017). Whereas the examples above showed more of those 'modern' leanings, they also displayed mannerisms fitting with the more pious section in Turkey. In this light, the Ahiska Turks could uniquely fit themselves between both worlds. The 'modernity' emphasized and lived in Soviet/post-Soviet times in Central Asia (Ro'I & Wainer 2009) would enable their adjusting to the more secular parts of Turkey while their conservative traditional ways of life to the more pious sides of Turkey. This distinction will be shown through a few examples.

One factor of the Ahiska Turks relating to a more conservative Turkey today is with the family.[89] For example, Ahiska Turks placed great importance on the family and the most obvious was that they take care of their elders. This is not an unusual feature for many ethnic groups, but for Ahiska Turks in the United States (Dayton, Ohio) and Turkey (Antalya and Bursa) they compared themselves to the communities they lived around which was mostly urban. Every generation spoke how important it was that they would

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[88] AntTR16, Interview on Skype, 11.4.15.

[89] See Koriouchkina (2011) for an extended description of traditional Meskhetian Turkish weddings. Her examples give a great example of how this Meskhetian Turkish tradition can align with conservative Turkish thought.

care for the older ones and that it was inconceivable to be sending their parents to retirement homes (*huzur evi*). To do this, as mentioned by one informant on two visits, was seen as very shameful (*çök ayıp*).[90] Rather, they would take care of the elderly relatives in their homes. This would also benefit the family as the children could be watched by the grandparents, enabling many Ahiska Turkish women to work.

The role of women would be another example of their straddling the modern and pious communities in Turkey.[91] The modern sector in Turkey, for example encouraged the role of women in society, however that has been shifting in Turkey over these years. Here, the Ahiska Turkish women would work, but their appearance and behaviours fit more of the conservative sectors in society. As stated, while the grandparents would watch the children, the women would be working. Depending on their work context, they may remove their headscarf's going to work (more as an ethno-religious symbol then purely religious) but put them on when they returned home. Their roles in the home and within the Ahiska Turkish community can be seen as very conservative behaviour. Others have noted this divide of the public and private. This distinction could also be seen above (see Chapter Five, Section 5.2) with the young lady[92] who said she would struggle to marry an Ahiska Turk because of her education level. Her perspectives were too 'modern' for an Ahiska Turkish man. While risking generalizations, the role of the family and that of the male and female's world remain distinct (Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Dogan, 2016; Koriouchkina 2011; Tomlinson 2002) which fit a most conservative Turkey.

Another example of a cultural/religious tension were also evident in behaviours. While the place of alcohol in the community could be varied as seen above, this was also related to smoking. For example, amongst the men it was not an issue to smoke or do *naz (*a small

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[90] BTR44, Fieldnotes, Turkey, 14.8.15, 25.10.16.
[91] For perspectives on Ahiska Turkish women's lives, see Bilge 2012; Dogan 2016; and Tomlinson 2002. Bilge's (2012) introduction and 'starting point' gives an interesting perspective where she discusses her own starting perceptions of the Ahiska Turkish women in Phoenix, Arizona.
[92] AKA1, Interview on Skype, 21.4.15.

green ball of nicotine put in the mouth and popular in Central Asia). It could be unacceptable, however, where men would do it. For women, however, they should not do either of these. In this regard one man mentioned this.

> Regarding cigarettes, believe me, in front of our [people] over there [in Central Asia], with children alongside, [he adds to clarify] of course women did not smoke, men did not smoke in front of children. Don't let the children see it. [but] What do they do here [in Turkey]?

He continued:

> Wherever you go, women, men, and children, [are smoking]. It's always like this [everywhere].[93]

Whereas smoking was very prevalent in Turkey, this sort of thinking matched the changes occurring as the government (including the president) was pushing for greater health laws.[94] While it is not religious ritual, the moral aspects touched on religious piety.

Returning to the man (BTR12) above who spoke about too much religiosity, he proudly stated: 'I am a socialist' and equality and concern for the poor was repeated often.[95] He told multiple stories of how people were not caring for those in need around them, showing a critique of capitalism and the waste he was seeing. For instance, he questioned how the kids (in Turkey) could throw *simit* (a small dry circular baked good) on the ground when others do not have bread to eat. He then emphasized his own actions and that he would only drink one or maximum two cups of tea. More than that he felt was excessive.[96]

These examples are given to highlight the importance of how the community lived and expressed themselves as Ahiska Turks. Smith discusses religion in relation to ethno-symbolism: 'Religion may also furnish the basis and symbolism for a distinct public culture [which include] public rituals and ceremonies such as festivals of independence or remembrance, public symbols … and various public codes – of dress, gesture, image, music, name and word' (2009:51). For Ahiska Turks, religious ritual practice (doing

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[93] AnTR33, Interview in Turkey, 1.2.16.
[94] For example, in 2016 Erdogan dedicated a day to stop smoking (see haberler.com 2016).
[95] BTR12, Interview in Turkey, 25.11.14.
[96] BTR12, Interview in Turkey, 25.11.14.

namaz, fasting during Ramadan, weddings, funerals, etc.) are deeply important to maintain their own diaspora community's unity as well as living out a public culture correlating with their Turkish-Muslim heritage (Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Aydingün 2002b; Koriouchkina 2011). These ethno-religious practices, symbols, and values are interconnected and seen as the same as their ethno-nationalism. Recalling what it meant to be Turk (1.5.4): to speak Turkish, have Turkish culture, and to be (Sunni) Muslims, it is hard to untangle them from each other. In the context following the Soviet Union, however, it can be differentiated from the religious nationalism mentioned earlier. The Ahiska Turks do not have a specific 'religious nationalism' or 'Muslim/Islamic nationalism' that is being emphasized to counter secularism (or communism). Rather it is like the Laz (Pelkmans 2006) as the Ahiska Turks could reposition themselves and emphasize this important part of their Turkishness that was not lost during the Soviet period. While this would draw from Islamic religious practice, most rituals, like funerals (or memorials), weddings, and circumcision parties were still primarily held within the Ahiska Turkish community (including those in Turkey).[97] Connections and group cohesion through ethno-religious celebrations continued even in Turkey despite the solidarity felt living there.

6.3.3 Ethno-Religious Ritual & Group Solidarity

Juergensmeyer (2019:2) observed that 'Religious affiliation, while providing a connection to transnational networks, also offers resources for shoring up local identities.' These could be seen in the Ahiska Turkish community. One first example revealed some tension over this 'religious affiliation' during *Kurban Bayramı* (*Eid* of sacrifice) in Dayton, Ohio. The community was full of excitement as the *bayram (*religious holiday) approached. There was an invitation from the Islamic community of Dayton as well.

[97] Except for close non-Ahiska Turkish friends or special guests invited to join.

Recognizing they are part of a larger Islamic community (*Umma*), there was a clear interest of the men to join in. It was going to be held in the stadium, I was told. Being a religious holiday, it could connect them further with the other Muslims in the City. Celebrating in their own community and using the *madrasa* and the Osman Gazi Mosque[98] was the other option. As the day approached, it became clear the elders were hoping for the community to stay together this year. This desire of the elders was honoured and the *bayram* prayers would be held at the mosque. Though they were not exclusive to others coming to the mosque,[99] the Turkish language and culture would impact how inclusive they could be. Not attending the broader gathering reiterated the strengthening of their own ethno-religious nationalism and their joining the broader Islamic community for the *bayram* would be wait for another year. This, Ro'I & Wainer (2009) pointed was not uncommon for those in Central Asia where each country had differing responses to practicing their Muslimness and views to the Umma were less a priority. The younger men's desires here reveal a shifting in the community's attitudes towards the larger Muslim community (at least in the United States) as well as how the younger generation were playing a significant role in the community alongside the elders. This is a shift, at least in this group of young Ahiska Turkish men, from what Ro'I & Wainer (2009) highlighted in Central Asia where the younger generation saw the importance of religion but would practice it later in life.

Clearly, the *bayram* was a time of community connection and bonding. But nothing did that more than weddings. The *toy* (UZB) or *düğün* (TR)[100] is an event that draws families from distant places. Ahiska Turks almost always marry other Ahiska Turks, and weddings are generally arranged by the family (Koriouchkina 2011; Tomlinson 2002).

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[98] http://www.osmangazimosque.com/about-us/. See Appendix 13.
[99] While being there, guests were observed visiting the mosque.
[100] Sometimes pronounced '*dugun*' in Ahiska Turkish without the Turkish soft 'g'.

Couples meeting and marrying in the same country would be the simplest, but it was not unusual for the bride and groom to be from different countries.[101]

One such wedding held in the United States was the most obvious example of an event that connected the distantly spaced community. Arriving to the rented wedding venue in downtown Dayton, Ohio, I was swept into the Ahiska Turkish world. The car park, the grassy areas, the steps leading to the rented gymnasium-- all were filled with Ahiska Turkish men standing in small circles, smoking, and talking together. The sounds of Turkish were prominent, with only a few hints of Russian or English heard in the crowd. No women gathered outside, and when we went inside the men and women were separated, men on one side, women, and children on another. The groom was from Dayton, Ohio, and the bride from Chicago, Illinois, about 6 hours apart by car. I was told more than once that Ohio was great because it was close to many states, making it easy for people to drive for weddings. Ahiska Turks came to this wedding from Kentucky, Georgia (not the country), Washington, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio.[102] A visit the next week to Indianapolis showed that a planned picnic was cancelled because of a wedding in Dayton (the same one I attended!).[103]

Others came from further away. Family members from Turkey and Russia were invited to the mic by the *yenge*[104] (master of ceremonies) to bring blessings and greetings to the new couple and their family. The entertainment and music was by a popular Ahiska Turkish group called 'Miko Show' that came by invitation from Uzbekistan.[105] At the wedding, interspersed with the music and dancing, there were opportunities for families to greet the bride and groom from their family and city and short prayers of blessing could

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[101] For example, this was seen in the example of one *emi*'s (BTR8) daughter that was living in Turkey and her husband in the United States. Another example was a young man (BTR42) was in Turkey while his bride was from Azerbaijan (Field note, Turkey, 21.12.15).
[102] Fieldnote, Wedding, USA, 30.7.16.
[103] Fieldnotes, USA, 8.8.16.
[104] This is an Ahiska Turkish term (BTR20, Fieldnote, 16.11.15). It is not to be confused the Turkish '*yenge*' for aunt and sister-in-law.
[105] Fieldnotes, USA, 30.7.16.

be said in the speech.[106] My field notes highlighted one of these greetings, and particularly the final *temel etmek[107]* (greeting of respect) given by the bride (*gelen*):

> There were also the greetings [to family not present]. They sent greetings by video to family in many places ... and the *gelen* [bride] would give the gesture [*temal etmek*]. It was the best recording that I had [of them greeting and blessing each other, especially international]. It was at the very end of the wedding celebration, thus very noticeable. This was very good opportunity for me, since so many were walking around with cameras, I just pulled mine out too ....'[108]

In these greetings, each family were giving prayers of blessing, uniting families from border to border, and all symbolically holding the *ethnie* together. Representatives from various countries were there, and after the three-hour ceremony, I left the huge, rented gym, and I was shocked to 'suddenly' be in the United States again. It was as if I had been transported to an Ahiska Turkish wedding in Turkey.

The *nikah* (wedding nuptials) attended in that same trip at the mosque only highlighted the ethno-religious dynamics more (see Ro'I & Wainer 2009). The newly remodelled Osman Gazi Mosque, fully decorated in Turkish ceramics, carpets, chandeliers, *mihrab*, and *minbar[109]* could have been in almost any mosque in Turkey. Clearly, Turkish influence was there as the *imam*, sent by the *Diyanet*, conducted the official ceremonies.[110] With such a direct example of Turkish influence, it is worth noting the community did not speak of this relationship or the role the *Diyanet* had. Through observations and commentary to me, the mosque and *madrasa* functioned for the cultivation and preservation of the Ahiska Turkish community. It was there in the United States, however, that the ethno-religious intersection between the Turkish republic and Ahiska Turkish community was most visibly seen in this research. In the other locations, this 'official' relationship was not observed, (except meeting the two *imams* in

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[106] Fieldnotes, USA, 30.7.16.
[107] See Dursun (2019) for Ahiska Turk wedding Terminology. She used the term '*Temenna Almaẖ'* but carries the same meaning.
[108] Fieldnotes, USA, 30.7.16.
[109] The *mihrab* is the semi-circled niche in the front of the mosque facing Mecca. The *minbar* is the raised platform in the front of the mosque where the *imam* may speak from. In my visit to the Friday prayers (18.8.18), this was not used. Rather they were seated in front of the mihrab. See Appendix 14.
[110]https://diyanetamerica.org/mosques/diyanet-mosque-of-dayton-osman-ghazi/; http://www.osmangazimosque.com/about-us/.

Kazakhstan that were trained in Turkey and served the Ahiska Turkish community in Kazakhstan).

Shifting from the United States to Turkey, another example of the connections through religious ceremonies was evident at a *mevlüt*[111] (memorial ceremony) in Bursa. Attending with an Ahiska Turkish friend who invited me to join, we slipped in the large second floor salon. It was located down a side street in Zümrütevler *Mahalle* (neighbourhood), where many of the community were congregated. The *mevlüt* had already begun and the *imam* was reading from the Quran. The room was filled with a couple hundred people. Most tables were expectedly separated, men on one half, women on the other, but a surprising number of mixed tables were seen where families sat together. Following the reading of the Quran, we ate the typical Ahiska Turkish *pilav*, salads, and other foods. As we ate, I was introduced to the men sitting with us. One man looked at me peculiarly, then suddenly spoke in good English with lingering hints of the Central Asian and Turkish accent. He asked me where I was from, and I learned he was traveling from the United States to visit family in Bursa and could attend the *mevlüt*. He said the following day he was traveling to Russia to see his mother.[112] This was a sad event, remembering the loss of someone in their community. As the ceremony broke up, the men stood around talking together, using this as a time to catch up with each other, about life, sports, and particularly the issues the community is facing. This example showed a clear moment of how the religious ceremony was a place for them to affirm their ethno-nationalism with each other again. While the ritual played a religious function, it also played an important role for the *ethnie*, even while they were living in Turkey. Here, again, Ro'I & Wainer (2009) pointed to something the Ahiska Turks were adjusting to wherever they were. Whereas religious

[111] The *mevlüt* will occur right after someone has died, or as a remembrance ceremony, occurring often on the 7th day, 40th day, one year, and sometimes other days too. This *mevlüt* was the one-year remembrance event of a woman's death. I did not know her nor the family. Another '*mevlüt*' I attended was at a newly purchased home and the prayer amongst friends and family to bless the house.
[112] Fieldnotes, Turkey, 22.11.15.

praxis had to be shared carefully in light of the state, belief as a Muslim in Allah and his prophet remained essential to them. Over the years in Central Asia, it was not so specific to follow ‘specific religious practices or precepts other than those that have simultaneously an ethnic and social connotation, like circumcision’ (2009:318). Without using the terms of ethno-religious nationalism, this is where the Ahiska Turks’ emphasize how the two overlap and are critical for them in their stateless situation to not lose their Turkishness.

6.4 Reflections and Arising Themes

In this chapter the Ahiska Turks’ ethno-religious nationalism is highlighted and encourages the ethno-symbolic approach to understanding nationalism. Smith’s (2009:51) statement how religion can provide ‘distinct public culture’ as well as ‘codes’ that are to be followed holds true to for the Ahiska Turks. These codes and symbols would hold relatively firmly yet require adjusting in practice as they experienced major community changes through the years. This included the years prior to the deportation where both Turkish nationalism and Russian/Soviet national policies would impact them. The Ahiska Turks share how they could practice Islam in Soviet times and how that began to change in the post-Soviet period. That change in these past decades has seen a growing influence and relationship with Turkey, the *Diyanet,* and the Turkish diaspora.

One unanticipated finding was the role or place that religion had in the Ahiska Turks’ ethno-nationalism. While their devoutness and religiosity had been previously noted, it was rarely noted or discussed by the community or by informants. Although I approached this research open to the role of religion in a diaspora community, the methodological choice of open-ended questions and following the community seemed to leave religion (Islam) ‘silent’. I assumed this was likely a natural tendency or response from Soviet times where religion was not openly talked about. The surprise came as I analysed interviews, participant observations, and my fieldnotes. The presence of religion was

subtly, yet consistently, arising in the community and was connected with their being Turks. The more this was observed, the more significant the role of religion was seen in the Ahiska Turks' ethno-nationalism

As was shown, religious structures which were already present in their communities prior to the deportation in 1944 would carry on through the Soviet period to the present. It would be instrumental to help hold them as a cultural system together (Anderson 1983:12) and be a significant marker for them as a non-titular nation within the Soviet Union (Goff 2020). The Ahiska Turks' emphasis on religion, in a similar way to their Turkishness, revealed possible connections to early Kemalism but were clearly not directly impacted by the Republic of Turkey's nationalism due to the borders closing. It would emerge while under the Soviet Union, where being Sunni Muslim Turks showed an ethno-religious emphasis in terms of Soviet nationalism. Since the Soviet Union's ending, however, they have begun to merge with Turkey's diaspora. Yunusov (2007) perceived the Ahiska Turks had their own 'ethnic self-consciousness' in Azerbaijan, but I would argue that that was owing to the nationalistic lenses required in Soviet times. In the Ahiska Turks' perspective from this study, it is seen to lean towards Turkey but always impacted by their stateless situation.

It was also perceived that community members knowledge of the Quran was weakened, but those with knowledge of the Quran would take an informal religious role to oversee the rituals within the community. That religious practice by both men and women enabled them to maintain a relatively high level of religious practice to keep religion alive and despite lack of formal training. This would also be instrumental in community continuity through marriage, funerals, and births that would cross borders. In post-Soviet times, and seen in all the sites, the role of informal leadership would continue, however, the influence of formal religious training, especially from Turkey would begin to be shown.

A shift in the community can be seen there. While the importance of language and religion are critical for them, Pelkman's observation of the post-Soviet 'hardening of cultural and social boundaries' (2006:222) is happening in the different contexts. As some are being 'lost' to the host country around them, (i.e., in the United States), ethno-religious practice is driving the community to emphasize not only their Islamic practices, but also pointing them more to Turkey.

This was seen in greater light in the United States where the Ahiska Turks' ethno-religious nationalism could be sensed to a greater extent. The presence of the Osman Gazi Mosque and *madrasa* next door displayed some of the community's intentional emphasis to address concerns within the community. The mosque's place for religious practice with the interlocking aims of the *madrasa* to have religious teaching, Turkish language instruction, and community involvement, all aimed to help the next generation of Ahiska Turks.

In Central Asia, the informal religious teaching held over the Soviet decades from within the community continues though there was more freedom religiously to pray or go to the mosque. With this freedom to pray and go to the mosque openly, this was an appreciated dynamic within the community. This enabled the possibility for further religious training offered by the Turkish Diyanet. Though there was only a glimpse of this, it is fair to cautiously suppose this would influence the Ahiska Turks in both their Islamic knowledge as well as furthering their place in the Turkish diaspora.

In Turkey, however, their ethno-religious practice is less notable in this sense as in the United States where they stand out. Rather, in Turkey the community seems to enjoy being absorbed into Turkish culture and are generally comfortable with assimilating religiously as the *ezan* calls and Turkish language all around them. The Ahiska Turkish conservative culture that was preserved over the years brought connections to the more pious Turkish community of the past years. The comfort, however, is also a stretch with

realities of living in Turkey. Too much religious pressure was something some of them showed was not what they wanted and negative comments were seen towards this. Their stateless diasporic experience within multiple host lands also brought commonalities with the more secular Turkish segments of society. In Turkey, thus, they could utilize both the religiously conservative and the modern secular segments of Turkish culture. This, however, also has stretched them in how to keep their community close together.

For that reason, the rituals continue to play an important role. As Smith (2009) writes, they can help create a strong sense of ethnic cohesion. Turkish weddings, the *mevlüt*, and *bayram* celebrations all were critical for both the spiritual ritual as well as ethno-national. During this study, these events were mostly attended (with some exception) by only Ahiska Turks. While not intentionally excluding other Muslims or Turks from Turkey, a main function was to keep the group together and not lose themselves to the hosts around them. While Marriage and endogamy continue within the community, the concern of becoming too 'Turkified' (Dogan 2006) did not seem any concern within those I studied. Nothing in those regards were so directly mentioned other than the young woman who related to how marriage with Turks in Turkey was seen as being 'assimilated' to Turkey and something that was not happening. Despite that, the research also showed some contrast to Aydıngün's (2002b, 2007) research showing that the Ahiska Turks were not differentiating themselves in Turkey and were marrying Turks. I agree the community ethnically do not differentiate themselves from Turks' and had no conflict in theory of marrying Turks of Turkey. However, it was rare that marriage happened with Turks and was one way they did express a differentiation with Turks of Turkey culturally. It seemed the community wrestled with who they were in Turkey to still not lose their own community's story. Concern was to be accepted as 'Turks' in Turkey while also not losing the tightly held cultural traits sustained through the numerous changes and challenges experienced or the way of life they have lived together.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter continues to look at the Ahiska Turks' ethno-symbolic nationalism by highlighting the place of ethno-religious nationalism. The chapter began by observing the influences of early Turkish nationalism. First, the later years of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of Turkey shaped the emphasis of being both Muslim and Turkish. Dressler (2012) pointed to how ethno-religious nationalism at the founding of the Turkish republic would be an ethnic unifier. The place of religion within the people of the early Soviet Union (and within the new nations after the Union's fall) also influenced the place of religion (Hirsch 2005) within the Ahiska Turks' ethno-nationalism.

The Ahiska Turks' ethno-religious nationalism was highlighted in several ways. First, religious practice would continue to be a unifier for the Ahiska Turks. Smith stated that religious rituals are slow to change and so bring continuity with the past (Smith 2009), and the Ahiska Turks' ethno-religious practices would be both privately and publicly carried on. Though their emphasis would shift from country to country, these rituals, values, symbols, and traditions also brought to each community some continuity with the past (Smith 2009). Second, that continuity agrees with Pelkman's (2006). Like the Laz, the Ahiska Turks' Turkish nationalism was not 'frozen', nor 'rediscovered', but rather modified to fit the context they were living in. The community adjusted by emphasizing its Turkishness outside Turkey by looking to Turkey and relating with the Turkish *Diyanet*. Finally, they also supported their group cohesiveness by highlighting and utilizing those values, rituals, including their conservative lifestyle. These religious and cultural traits also helped them be accepted and welcomed by the more pious sections of Turkey.

The final chapter will give a summary of the research, the findings, and contributions to knowledge, as well as suggestions for further research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7 Introduction

This ethnographic study examined the case of the Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks' response to change in multiple locations. I aim to demonstrate how a deterritorialized (Cohen 2008) and minority group is merging Turkish ethno-nationalism (Cagaptay 2006; Smith, 1986; 2010) with their own diaspora nationalism (Oh 2006). This investigation highlights the Ahiska Turks' recent perceptions of 're-entering' one of their 'homelands,' Turkey, and their views towards Turkey from outside it. Cagaptay's (2006, 2014) focus on the *ethnie* (drawn from Smith (2004; 2010)) illuminates the rise of Turkish nationalism from the end of the Ottoman Empire to the changes in Turkey since 2000, which in part has nourished nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire (Cagaptay 2006; 2014). The Ahiska Turks' ethno-nationalism began to arise during their years in the Soviet Union (Baydar Aydıngün 2001; Aydingün 2002b; Oh 2006; Dogan 2016) and has continued since its demise. This study of the Ahiska Turks reveals some of their on-going wrestling with the Turkish national story that Cagaptay tells as they remained outside of Turkey and now seek citizenship there. Utilizing an ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism, their myths, values, traditions, symbols, and memories (Smith 2009; 2010) tells of their ethno-nationalism that relates to Turkey today.

This research reveals that the 'return' to Turkey by the Ahiska Turks living in diaspora has simultaneously strengthened their sense of ethno-nationalism and enhanced their Turkish nationalism. However, the research suggests further that, due to the Ahiska Turks' national consciousness being shaped and influenced primarily in the Soviet times, it was not necessarily 'Turkish nationalism' (Baydar-Aydıngün 1998). In addition, analysis of this data reveals how the Ahiska Turks are reconciling this tension in varying degrees today across the nations into which they are dispersed. I argue that an ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism helps us understand how this 'diaspora nation's' (Smith

1986; 2010:11) ethno-Turkish nationalism relates to Turkey's nationalism, while also maintaining their own group consciousness.

7.1 Research Contributions and Findings

An ethno-symbolic understanding of national formation best describes the Ahiska Turks' perspectives and relationship towards Turkey and their situation in diaspora. This argument was constructed and developed throughout the study. The qualitative methodological approaches utilized in the ethnographic fieldwork included participant observation and semi-structured interviews with a multi-site approach. A dynamic field of data emerged out of this method. This methodology also gave a fuller perspective of the Ahiska Turkish community in Turkey, which then extended to supplemental sites outside it to better determine differences and similarities from these diverse contexts. Those sites were to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the United States and a brief visit to Georgia and Uzbekistan. As the research developed and was evaluated, a number of themes emerged contributing to diaspora studies and nationalism.

Through the study I felt the need to express the repetitions or similarities shown from site to site, while also looking for any divergences that may stand out. I initially asked an open-ended question about their story, which provided a safe opportunity for them to share about their lives and community in their own words. In addition, participant observation helped support the communities' spoken words with activities, comments, and actions as well as reveal new or differing thoughts. Recognizing I was in Turkey and the bias that could come with it, I used the supplemental sites to help highlight any further differences. All along, the primary question simply asked 'Tell me your family's story, which naturally helped bring out these themes.

These core findings pointed out that ethno-symbolic nationalism helps describe the Ahiska Turks' stateless situation. Although late Ottoman and early Kemalism in Turkey may have had some influence on the community's nationalism, their Turkish ethno-

nationalism, as shown by previous studies, arose in the Soviet Period. In that restricted context their Turkishness stood out, being a non-titular Soviet nation and having no state of their own. In those years direct ties to Turkey would remain very limited and 'imagined' (Anderson 2016 [1983]) in the Soviet period, since none of those researched were born in the Turkish Republic nor experienced Turkish national development. That 'imagined homeland' would remain as such while a diaspora nationalism began forming (Oh 2006) during those Soviet years. They were not a part of Turkey's diaspora, but after the Soviet Union's demise, many Ahiska Turks further demonstrated and insisted that their Turkishness was in relationship to Turkey itself. This is more reason to argue for the usage of ethno-symbolism.

First, I emphasize their use of ethno-history in Chapter Four. Trier and Khanzhin (2007) discussed how the Ahiska Turks' *mythico-history* looked to their collective memory, and how group cohesiveness arose from the 1944 deportation that deprived them of their homeland. Though they mentioned a growing relationship with Turkey, especially for those living in Turkey and the United States, Trier and Khanzhin also emphasized the significance of Ahiska and Georgia. In this study, I agree with those conclusions. However, since those research conclusions, there seems to be a significant increasing emphasis amongst the Ahiska Turks on their relationship with Turkey. In contrast with them and other researchers who speak of the importance of Georgia, this study found that no one in the various sites spoke about their relationship to Georgia or their place in its history. The exception to this is the geographical fact of Ahiska's location in present day Georgia. Thus, at least in the groups I met outside Turkey, it is important to see a growing shift in the Ahiska Turks' attitude or perspective on migrating to Georgia or to Ahiska. Rather, it reveals a further openness towards, or 'homing toward' (Brah 1996) Turkey. Yet, their (imagined) relation and rootedness to Ahiska, has not changed. These 'roots' have been maintained but originate in their historical relation with the Ottoman Empire

and thus are tied to current day Turkey. The rise in Ottomanism and Ottomania in Turkey in recent years would become a significant help to the Ahiska Turks' within Turkey to emphasize their place in Ottoman and Turkish history. For instance, the Ahiska Turks also emphasized their role historically in siding with the Ottoman's (or Turkey) against the Russians and Georgians. In this way the community looks beyond the kinship ties (Khazanov 1992; Baydar Aydıngün 1998; Bilge 2012; Oh 2006; Tomlinson 2002) with Turkey and begin to contrast what Tomlinson suggested in 2002 regarding looking to heritage and not needing to tell a specific history. Since then, however, they are connecting their ethno-historical narrative (Levin 2021) with Turkey's history and nationalism.

Separation from their villages was another significant part of the story told across the sites, which highlights a common feature within diaspora studies (Cohen 2007). Traumatic experiences such as the *sürgün*, train ride, adjustment to Central Asia, and the subsequent deportations all feed a sense of their victimhood which is shared in their stories. These experiences also helped form 'past' memories (Smith1986:177) and add symbolism to them, like the train and train tracks have become symbols that show their suffering happened due to their being Turks. Though this story, expresses victimhood much like it is often emphasized in a classical diaspora perspective (Cohen 2008), it is significant that they would also underscore their successes and how they maintained their community and did not get 'lost' despite the victimization.

This part of their ethno-history is key to how they are (re)discovering their own roots and tying them into a 'grand narrative' (Tomlinson 2002) that has developed in Turkey. Throughout Chapter Four, I highlight the use of their historical narrative and how they tie ethno-history and symbolism to their Turkish nationalism present in the Soviet Union to the Turkish nationalism present in Turkey today.

As I continued to develop thoughts and evaluate the data related to those villages, the theme of return (Cohen 2008; DuFoix 2008; Safran 1991) and homeland naturally arises. In Chapter Five I discuss these themes but emphasize they do not carry the same meaning for a deterritorialized or stateless group (Aksel 2014; Cohen 2008; Dogan 2016; 2020; Tas 2016). For the Ahiska Turks this contributes to conversations relating to the lives and experiences of those who had lived in the Soviet Union and who felt the effects of being stateless after its fall. It also adds to research regarding former Ottoman citizens that remained outside of Turkey, and how they are relating back to Turkey. Often conversations regarding home or homeland included return to a physical place (Cohen 2008; Safran 1991), and studies on the Ahiska Turks usually point to Georgia, Turkey, or a dual homeland of both; sometimes these conversations have included their current country. For instance, Dogan pointed out that the original homeland was Georgia, and the fatherland was Turkey (2016:191, 187). While agreeing with most of her findings, my analysis slightly contrasts and adds to hers. I argue that those in this research never saw Georgia (the nation) as an 'original' homeland. Instead, while stated slightly differently from person to person, the homeland is called Ahiska, the symbolically named region located inside today's Georgia where their villages were found. Ahiska, I would argue, is seen in an 'imagined' (Anderson 1983) sense as still Turkish, with its Ottoman heritage represented by the castle. In this sense they associate their historical villages with the Ottoman Empire, which also bonds them to Turkey today. In other words, although the homeland of 'Ahiska' is today not legitimately Turkish territory (but Georgian), most Ahiska Turks remember it as such. In this way, they relate to Turkey as a homeland. This also refers to Cagaptay's (2006:175) asking 'Who is Turk' and the concentric zones of Turkishness, which the Ahiska Turks want to use to prove their Turkishness.

This reveals that the Ahiska Turks' perceptions continue to shift. Again, in terms of Dogan's conclusions, I see another thing changing. As the Ahiska Turks are without a

nation state, she stated they felt no belonging to either Georgia or Turkey (2016:187).[1] I argue that the communities in the different sites do have a sense of belonging to Turkey. Even if this belonging is only 'imagined' by most, it is evident in their ethno-nationalism. Despite the social acceptance within Turkey, settling in Turkey was not straight forward or simple. They were entering another new host nation to which they must adjust. Certainly, that on-going adjustment to Turkey will continue in the coming years.

One of the interesting dynamics within the Ahiska Turkish community in Turkey was the seemingly strong effort to show themselves as Turks while also struggling within their community to maintain their distinctive 'Ahiska Turkishness'. This was notable again in Chapter Five as I considered the question of *nerelisin?* (Where are you from?). Brah's (1996) concept of 'homing towards' helped develop this idea. The Ahiska Turks, as a stateless diaspora group, continue to 'home' towards each other. The practice of endogamy and desire to live in proximity with each other has not changed. In fact, they consider this as vital to maintain their own Turkishness. This is where the question of *nerelisin* (Where are you from?) is still so relevant, acknowledged, and mentioned across all the sites. Asking *nerelisin* connects and differentiates Ahiska Turks from others, including Turks of Turkey. This has helped protect their families and community from getting 'lost' while being deterritorialized and living in the various host countries. Along with 'homing' toward each other, however, this study also examines a second 'homing' towards and growing relationship with Turkey. This was noted as breaking from Brah's (1996) discussion of returning home for those without a fixed territory and begins embracing Malkki's (1995) 'national order of things' as they look to Turkish nationalism. Those arriving in Turkey revealed they were much less fearful of 'losing' themselves, their language, and their culture. Across all the sites, I was hearing that Turkey was seen

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[1] Clarifying, she also said those living in Turkey did feel a sense of belonging in Turkey, while those in the United States did not express that same belonging.

as the natural and 'safe' place to migrate to, even if they planned to stay where they currently were living. The symbolism, evolving in their ethno-nationalism, helped to hold them together and is connecting their diaspora nationalism with Turkish nationalism. That, however, is still in process. Thus, while they look to Turkey, I maintain that Turkey is still an 'imagined homeland,' since none of those researched had been born there.

Since Turkey was the primary site, most time was invested there. The 'homing' toward Turkey has included a lot of hardship. While interviews revealed the positive feelings, fieldwork showed the struggles and frustrations felt as well. Social acceptance was not the issue, but they still awaited more bureaucratic changes particularly for citizenship and work permits. This is where I address another theme in Chapter Five. In their struggles to adjust to Turkey, they could use their Ottoman heritage to help "reinsert" themselves into Turkey by pointing out they are the grandchildren of the Ottomans (Levin 2021). In this way, Ahiska was not merely the villages of their ancestors, but it was also the symbolic Ottoman castle and former 'Turkish' region they were deported from. They speak of the Ottoman religious leaders (*imams)* from Ahiska were killed by the Soviets; and they remember from where their Ahiska Turkish kin fled into Anatolia nearly a century before. Though the Ahiska Turkish community itself wrestled with whether this first migration wave of Ahiska Turks would be seen as 'their own', they could also point to that history to demonstrate to Turkey that Ahiska Turks should be given citizenship. It turned out that utilizing this Turkish ethno-national sentiment would be well received in the current Turkish context. This leads to another ethno-symbolic theme related to the values and symbols they have held over the years that is also important in Turkey.

On all the sites, the Ahiska Turks stated they did not 'lose' their religion or language. This emphasized their Sunni (Hanafi) Islam and their Turkish language. In Chapter Six I highlighted how ethno-religious practices were significant to their ethno-nationalism. While religious activity was mostly conducted secretly, there would also be occasional

public activities. The Ahiska Turk community would remain close 'nationally' through their ethno-religious customs and traditions and help bind them together (Dressler 2013) to maintain that 'horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1983) across the diaspora. These ethno-religious practices would also encourage (or discourage) behaviours acceptable to them and help determine who was part of the community. Keeping and maintaining these customs was also critical for those outside Turkey and would become additional bridges with those in Turkey. While those in Central Asia seemed more relaxed, those in the United States were very concerned about their community 'getting lost.' Therefore, many were attending the mosque and *madrasa*. This would be a clear example of the Ahiska Turks developing relationship with the Turkish *diyanet* and how their ethno-nationalism would connect them with the Turkish diaspora (Aksel 2014; Bilgili 2011; Bruce 2020; Şenay 2013).

Emphasis remained focused on their Turkish language and Islamic identity (spiritual practices and/or customs and traditions) which related to the situation in Turkey (Sarigil & Fazlioglu 2013; 2014). Different, however, than the Kurdish population or the Alevi population, the Ahiska Turks could highlight 'ethno-religious boundaries' which could be easily accepted within the Turkish religious identity defined by the State and *diyanet*. While in the diaspora following the Soviet period they could emphasize or 'reposition themselves vis-à-vis religion and ethnicity' (Pelkmans 2006). Different than the Laz who repositioned as a minority in Georgia, the Ahiska Turks would emphasize those symbolic words '*din* and *dil*' (religion and language) as what was not forgotten or abandoned during the Soviet period. They remained faithful to their religion (Sunni Islam) and to their language (Turkish) but could also fit their own ethno-religious experience in the Turkish context by relating to both secular and pious sentiments. This would help in Turkey where outside Turkey there would be a growing relationship with the *diyanet* and the Turkish diaspora.

In summary, the three chapters drawing upon empirical data (Chapters Four, Five, and Six), displayed the ways in which ethno-symbolism plays a significant role in seeing the ethno-nationalism currently displayed in the Ahiska Turkish community. Through ethno-history, ethno-religion, and the symbols and values lived out in community, we see how their Turkish ethno-nationalism is being linked to the Turkish nationalism of Turkey. The fieldwork showed a consistent emphasis on being Turk and a consistent 'homing' towards Turkey in some form. This is a further change away from Georgia as has been argued by some in the past, except the memory of and 'imagined' connection 'Ahiska'. It appears the reluctance over the decades to return to Georgia has left most with the sensible response to stay where they are or gradually move their families to Turkey as the opportunity arises.

7.3 Directions for Future Research

Throughout the study, I encountered areas beyond the scope of the research as well as possible new directions for future research. One dynamic is that the fieldwork for this research ended at a time when the Turkish government was in the process of granting citizenship to Ahiska Turks. This has led to increased migrations into the cities I was living in (Bursa and Antalya). That continued despite international political and economic tensions in the country up until 2020, when Covid19 may have had significant impacts on their movements. There is much material here that scholars can build upon.

Another area of further research could be related to education levels and its importance for the Ahiska Turks. This could be looked at generationally, like seeing former Soviet influence and emphasis on education, as well as noting scholarships given by Turkey to Ahiska Turkish students in the Turkish diaspora. Those scholarships are encouraging students both to come to Turkey as well as supporting attendance in other Universities. For example, several interviewees had come to Turkey with scholarships to study, and

several others were studying in Georgia after receiving Turkish government scholarships to study there.

A third recommendation for further research relates to religion. I had not researched religion intentionally, but it soon arose out of the analysis. This could be studied through Soviet/post-Soviet lenses, or through the question of how the Turkish *diyanet* is playing a role in drawing the Ahiska Turks closer to Turkey (since this was not seen or heard directly through the interviews, and minimally in the field work, I did not follow it up). Yet it remains a legitimate question for study: in what ways has the connection, role, and relationship of the Turkish *diyanet* with the Ahiska Turks in the Turkish diaspora contributed to the Ahiska Turks relationship with Turkey? Or another question is ripe for research: how much change religiously has occurred in and out of Turkey for the Ahiska Turks.

Another recommendation of further research could be how Ahiska Turks relate to the different groups of people in Turkey. For example, Bilge (2012) looked at the Ahiska Turks and the pious Turks in Arizona, United States. In Turkey, for instance, in what ways do they relate to pious Turks or to secular Turks? Are they becoming more religious, or relating more with secular Turks? Another interesting overlap seen in Bursa was with the Alevis. Ahiska Turkish musicians often played music with the Alevi community, and there seemed to be some unique cultural similarities between the two.[2] That would be an interesting pursuit.

Finally, as the Ahiska Turks continue to move into Turkey and relate to Turkey from the diaspora, in what ways do the Ahiska Turks seem to merge with the Turkish diaspora and in what ways have they kept to themselves? For example, consider this particularly in the Ahiska Turkish community in the United States (Bilge 2012; Dogan 2016). This

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[2] One musician friend in Bursa said that everyone he knew who was playing the keyboards in the city were Ahiska Turks.

relationship has grown so much that Ahiska Turks in the United States were offered dual citizenship with Turkey, a citizenship granted much faster to them than to those in other countries, or even to the many already living in Turkey who have had an extensive wait period. Another example here could be the role the Ahiska Turkish community has had in international relations between Turkey and their host countries. Again, the United States and Turkey is one example, but relations between Russia and Turkey, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Turkey, etc. could be examined in this light.

7.3 Conclusion

The research presented here represents a perspective of the Ahiska Turks' adjustments and changes in multiple locations. Looking particularly at their ethno-nationalism and how that is presented in Turkey and subsequent sites, this research reveals evolving expressions of their relationship with Turkey. Utilizing an ethno-symbolist approach (Smith 2009, 2010) to nationalism, this research highlights the Ahiska Turks' utilization of symbols, memories, and values while living in diaspora. This study attempts to represent this diaspora community's experiences and challenges. The fieldwork and interviews give a glimpse into their current situation in an ever-changing, complex world to which they continually adjust and adapt. This includes a continuing migration and relationship to Turkey from the diaspora, while also at the same time trying to maintain their own group's tight relationship together as a stateless people.

APPENDICES

Appendix One: Ahiska Turk Gazileri Gazette Cover

Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti'ndeki Türklerin Gazetesi (özel yayın)

AHISKA TÜRK GAZİLERİ

9 мая 2005 г. №1

Қазақстан республикасы түрік қоғамының газеті

BİZ SİZLERLE GURUR DUYUYORUZ!

Ahıska Türkleri Derneği Başkanı Ziyaettin İsmihanoğlu`nun Zaferin 60. Yıl dönümü münasibetiyle Gazilere tebriği

Değerli Babalar! Kahraman Türk Gazileri!

20 milion kişinin hayatını kaybeden, binlerce şehirleri, köyleri verane koyan, II Cihan Savaşının zaferinden 60 yıl geçiyor. Bu kanlı yılların, kanlı savaşların yaşamış, Sizler, her türlü ada layıksınız, asıl kahramansınız. Bütün dünyayı başına götürecek ağır bir rejimin – faşizmin belası üzerinde zaferiniz, insanlara bağımsızlık, sulh, firavan yaşamlar getirmiştir. Ünlü geleceğin temelinde her birinizin iğitlik remzi duruyor.

Ahıska Türkleri'nin ömür yollarına faşizmden de ağır ikinci bir zerbeni – kırmızıların vurduğu sürgünü, Sizler zaferin tadını görmemiş aldınız. Büyük bir Vatanı korurken, onun uğruna ölüme giderken, kalbinizde sürgün yarasını gördünüz.

Değerli Babalar!

Bu bir tarihtir. Tarihin kara ve altın sayfaları oluyor. Tarihin kara sayfasını yazanların kazandıkları lanetten başka bir şey değildir.

Sizlerin – Türk halkının kahraman gazilerinin isimleri tarihin altın köşesinde, altın harflerle yazılmıştır. Asırlar geçecek, ama Sizler her zaman yüreklerde yaşayacaksınız. Kahramanlığınız, Sizlere ölmezlik getirmiştir.

Bizler, Sizlerin devamçısı olarak, her zaman yolunuzu tutacağımıza, örf adetlerimizi yaşatacağımıza, gençlerin telim terbiyesi yolunda çalışacağımıza, milletimizin uğruna her türlü yardımlar yapacağımıza emin olabilirsiniz.

Ahıska Türk Derneği adına önünüzde baş eğir, ellerinizi sıkar, Zafer Bayramı günü münasibetiyle Sizleri tebrik eder, can sağlığı dilerim. Bayramınız kutlu olsun!

Biz Sizlerle gurur duyuyoruz. Allah Sizleri korusun!

УВАЖАЕМЫЕ ВЕТЕРАНЫ, ДОРОГИЕ ОТЦЫ!

60 лет прошло с того дня, когда прогремел первый и долгожданный салют в честь Великой Победы. Каждый год 9 мая его яркие раскаты украшают мирное и светлое небо над нами. Только Вам мы обязаны счастьем миллионов людей, миром на Земле. Каждый из Вас героически рисковал жизнью ради Отчизны, ради не знающих горя войны счастливых улыбок детей.

Мы благодарим Вас за Победу, за Мир, за красоту весеннего цветения садов и полей. Для нас каждый из Вас - Герой. Вы, знавшие ужасы войны, видевшие гибель, испытавшие жесточайшие условия тех времен, всегда остались безупречным примером для всех. Куда бы ни сворачивало свои, порой непредсказуемые, пути быстротечное время. Ваш подвиг вошел в историю навсегда.

От всей души я поздравляю Вас с этим большим праздником! С Днем Победы! Пусть будущее Ваших детей, внуков будет только светлым, таким, о котором вы мечтали, к которому вы стремились. Желаем Вам крепкого здоровья, благополучия и мира!

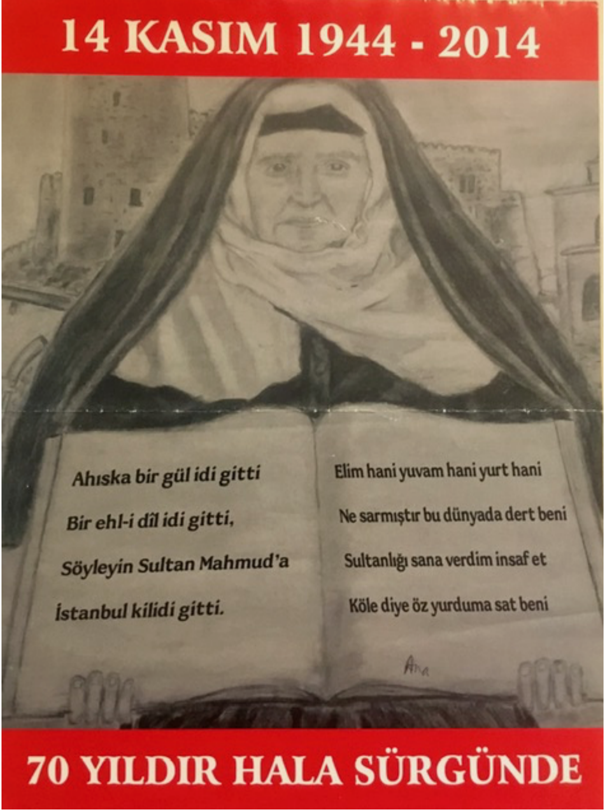
Герои Советского Союза из числа турок - ахыска: Исрафил Торосманов, Исмаил Каримов, Муртаза Карслиев, Мафиз Жульфаев, Ибрагим Тужигил, Убри Бадалов, Бадир Беймер-оглы Мурадов и Бакир Дурсун-оглы Мустафаев *(сведения из книги "Герои Советского Союза", "Воениздат", Москва, 1988 г.).*

Appendix Two: Railroad Tracks in Ahiska (Akhaltsikhe, Georgia) 1.10.18

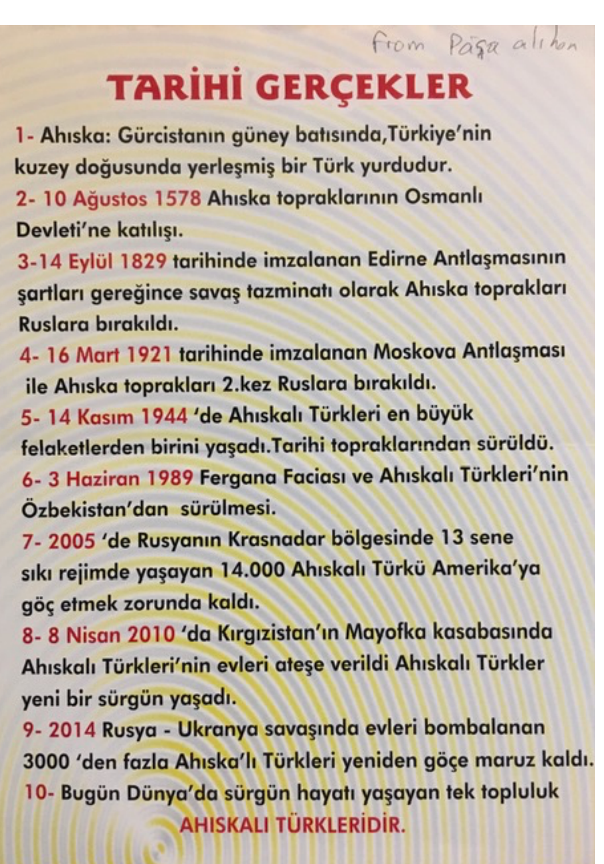
Appendix Three: Ottoman Orphan Grandchildren Want Citizenship (Facebook 18.9.16)

Appendix Four: Kocaeli Conference 10.12.16

Appendix Five: Ahiska Turk flyer, Bursa, Turkey 2014 Side1



Appendix Six: Ahiska Turk Flyer, Bursa, Turkey, 2014 Side2



From Paşa alihan

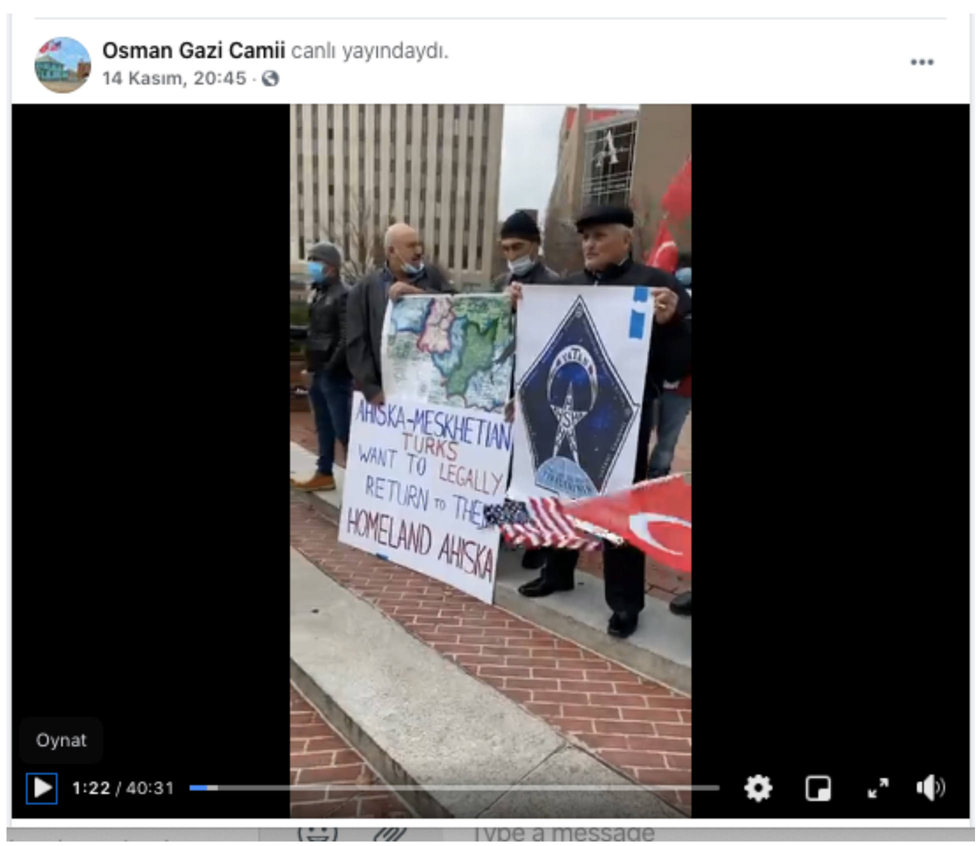
TARİHİ GERÇEKLER

1- Ahıska: Gürcistanın güney batısında,Türkiye'nin kuzey doğusunda yerleşmiş bir Türk yurdudur.
2- 10 Ağustos 1578 Ahıska topraklarının Osmanlı Devleti'ne katılışı.
3-14 Eylül 1829 tarihinde imzalanan Edirne Antlaşmasının şartları gereğince savaş tazminatı olarak Ahıska toprakları Ruslara bırakıldı.
4- 16 Mart 1921 tarihinde imzalanan Moskova Antlaşması ile Ahıska toprakları 2.kez Ruslara bırakıldı.
5- 14 Kasım 1944 'de Ahıskalı Türkleri en büyük felaketlerden birini yaşadı.Tarihi topraklarından sürüldü.
6- 3 Haziran 1989 Fergana Faciası ve Ahıskalı Türkleri'nin Özbekistan'dan sürülmesi.
7- 2005 'de Rusyanın Krasnadar bölgesinde 13 sene sıkı rejimde yaşayan 14.000 Ahıskalı Türkü Amerika'ya göç etmek zorunda kaldı.
8- 8 Nisan 2010 'da Kırgızistan'ın Mayofka kasabasında Ahıskalı Türkleri'nin evleri ateşe verildi Ahıskalı Türkler yeni bir sürgün yaşadı.
9- 2014 Rusya - Ukranya savaşında evleri bombalanan 3000 'den fazla Ahıska'lı Türkleri yeniden göçe maruz kaldı.
10- Bugün Dünya'da sürgün hayatı yaşayan tek topluluk AHISKALI TÜRKLERİDİR.

Appendix Seven: Memorial event signs for Ahiska Turks Bursa, Turkey

Appendix Eight: Ahiska Turks Blood Drive Donation, 23.8.15

Appendix Nine: Ahiska Turks USA, Facebook, 14.11.20



Appendix Ten Ahiska Turks at Navruz Celebration, Kyrgyzstan 21.3.16

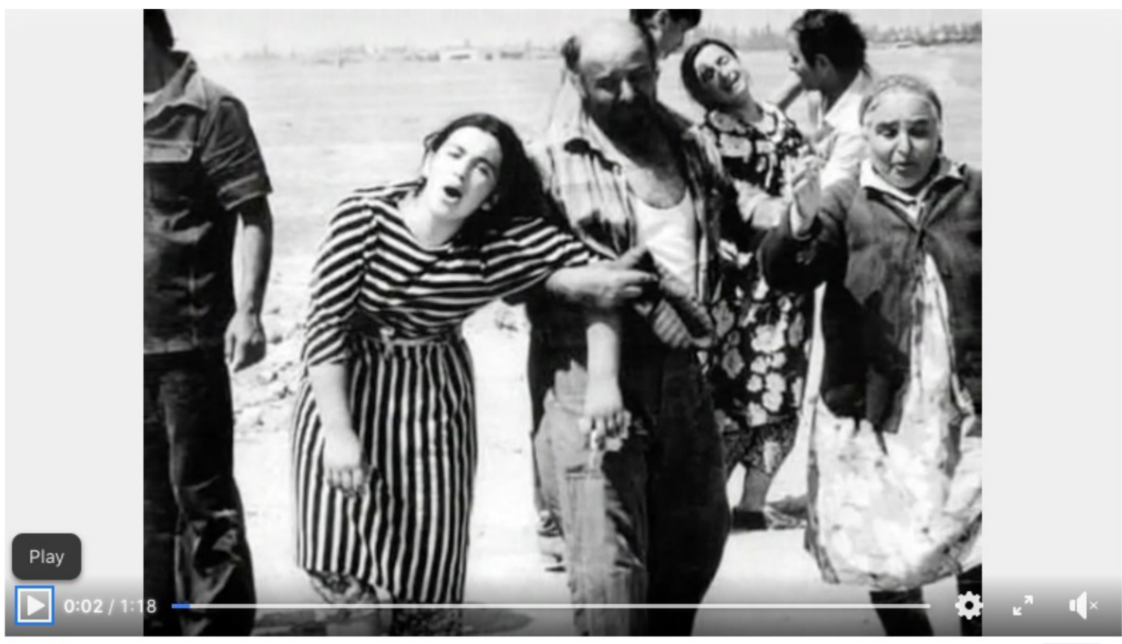
Appendix Eleven: Documentary at Barış Manço Theatre, Bursa, Turkey 10.1.16

Appendix Twelve: Ahiska Turks reunite in Bursa, Turkey_24.4.2016

Appendix Thirteen: Osman Gazi Mosque & *Madrasa*, Dayton Ohio 8.18

Appendix Fourteen: Friday Prayer, Osman Gazi Mosque Dayton, Ohio USA 8.18

Appendix 15 Video remembering Ferghana, Uzbekistan June 1989
(Source: Ahiska Turks Of America 2010)



Ahiska Turkleri 1989 yili Fergana Faciasi - Kanit resimleri

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Interview Codes

Each letter (or set of two letters) represents a participant's site location. The number represents the number in the site. For example: 'BTR1' breaks down as: Bursa (B), Turkey (TR), participant 1.

Interview Codes	
City	Country
An: Antalya	TR: Turkey
B: Bursa	TR: Turkey
Iz: Izmit	TR: Turkey
O: Osh	KY: Kyrgyzstan
A: Almaty	KA: Kazakhstan (all villages around Almaty)
	US: United States (Dayton, Ohio)
	GE: Georgia (Akhaltsikhe region)
	UZ: Uzbekistan

Cited Oral Sources

Code	Location	(Interview date)
BTR1	Bursa, Turkey	Unrecorded
BTR2	Bursa, Turkey	Unrecorded
BTR3	Bursa, Turkey	(28.10.14)
BTR4	Bursa, Turkey	(1.3.16)
BTR7	Bursa, Turkey	(10.10.14)
BTR8	Bursa, Turkey	(1.3.16)
BTR12	Bursa, Turkey	(25.11.14)
BTR13	Bursa, Turkey	(15.2.15)
BTR15	Bursa, Turkey	Unrecorded
AnTR16	Antalya, Turkey	(11.4.15)
AnTR18	Antalya, Turkey	(5.11.15)
BTR19	Bursa, Turkey	Unrecorded
BTR20	Bursa, Turkey	(21.12.15)
BTR21	Bursa, Turkey	Unrecorded
BTR25	Bursa, Turkey	(2.11.15)
BTR26	Bursa, Turkey	(2.11.15)
AnTR33	Antalya, Turkey	(1.2.16)
BTR35	Bursa, Turkey	(24.4.16; 8.5.16)
BTR36	Bursa, Turkey	(15.4.15; 21.11.15)
BTR40	Bursa Turkey	(4.11.16)
BTR41	Bursa, Turkey	(10.1.17)
BTR42	Bursa, Turkey	(5.11.16)
BTR44	Bursa, Turkey	Unrecorded
IzTR48	Izmit, Turkey	(17.1.17)
GE1	Akhaltsikhe, Georgia	(1.10.18)
GE2	Akhaltsikhe, Georgia	(3.10.18)
GE3	Akhaltsikhe, Georgia	(3.10.18)
AKA1	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(21.4.15)
AKA2	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(5.5.15)
AKA3	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(30.3.16)
AKA4	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(1.4.16)
AKA8	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(2.4.16)
AKA10	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(3.4.16)
AKA11	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(3.4.16)

AKA12	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(3.4.16)
AKA13	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(3.4.16)
AKA16	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(5.4.16)
AKA18	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(6.4.16)
AKA19	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(16.2.17)
AKA20	Almaty, Kazakhstan	(22.4.16)
AKA21	Almaty, Kazakhstan	Unrecorded
OKY2	Osh, Kyrgyzstan	(21.3.16)
OKY3	Osh, Kyrgyzstan	(21.3.16)
US2	Dayton, USA	(31.7.16; 18.8.18)
US4	Dayton, USA	(30.7.16)
US5	Skype, USA	(2.2.17)
US9	Dayton, USA	(19.8.18)
US10	Dayton, USA	(19.8.18)
US11	Dayton, USA	(20.8.18)
US12	Dayton, USA	(21.8.18)
US14	Dayton, USA	(21.8.18)
US15	Dayton, USA	(21.8.18)
US16	Dayton, USA	(22.8.18)
UZ2	Namangan, Uzbekistan	(1.2.16)

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