

AHISKA/MESKHETIAN TURKS IN TUCSON: AN EXAMINATION OF ETHNIC
IDENTITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Ahıska/Meskhethian Turks have been deported multiple times; first from Georgia in 1944 by the Stalin regime, then from Uzbekistan in 1989, and lately leaving the Krasnodar region of Russia for the USA as refugees in 2004. This study is based on fieldwork in Tucson, Arizona among Ahıska Turk refugees in order to examine Ahıska Turk identity and its wider periphery. Institutions, especially the state, have had highly influential roles in the formation of this identity. On the other hand, multiple deportations have prevented the emergence of an authoritative and central discourse among Ahıska Turks. As a result, Ahıska Turks have heterogeneous views about the different components related to their identity even though this does not prevent a certain level of coherence in their perspectives.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I first came to Tucson, Arizona from Turkey in August 2007, I had never heard of Ahıska Turks before. While my Turkish host was telling me about the city, he mentioned Ahıska Turks in Tucson and in the rest of the United States (U.S.). He was not sure about their history and how they end up here in the middle of the desert. This initial discussion piqued my curiosity.

Over the next few months, Ahıska Turks as a thesis topic started to appear as a practical option that also supported my interest in the Soviet Union and the counties that emerged from it. However, I could not find a single book in the University of Arizona's library solely dedicated to Ahıska Turks or Meskhetian Turks as they are often referred to in English literature. Due to my limited Russian I could only read Turkish and English sources, and what I could find was a little more than 40 or 50 pieces of work all together in the form of books, articles, dissertations and reports. Almost all of these sources start with the problem of naming and the "ethnic origins" of Ahıska or Meskhetian people. Three different explanations of their ethnic origin were given, including their being Turkish, Georgian, or a mix of these, and the dozen terms describing the group all pointed to the relatively high degree of heterogeneity of their historical, geographical and linguistic background.

This thesis examines Ahıska Turk identity and focuses on the concept of "ethnicity" and its wider periphery. At the beginning of the first chapter, I will demonstrate the problematic nature of ethnicity as a concept and its historical formation.

Neither the concept itself nor Ahıska ethnic identity are fixed phenomenon. In order to show this throughout this paper, I have chosen some important themes that are often mentioned by Ahıska Turks as well as academics writing on the group. Many of these themes show shifting positions and the multiplicity of voices that might appear to be inconsistencies and contradictions. I do not claim this heterogeneity is unique to Ahıska Turks; I will simply put my focus on some of the fault lines to make sense of the larger Ahıska identity processes.

Ahıska ethnic identity has been and is still being constructed in relation to other ethnic groups and sometimes their identity can be seen as a conglomerate of different components of various ethnic identities. The similarities and differences with other ethnicities are loaded with various values that have been chosen, minimized, magnified, and judged in various ways in different contexts. Turks, Turkey, Russians, Russia, Americans, the USA, the Soviet Union, Azeris, Uzbeks, Kurds, Caucasians, Muslims and other groups and countries are all different “identities” that represent certain values and ideas and are the epitome of certain histories, experiences, discourses, and practices. Ahıska Turks refer to these different identities, appreciate, criticize, adopt, lament over, and yearn for them and try to make sense of themselves in relation to them.

There are different ways to think about the formation of identity related to ethnicity. When a particular ethnicity emerges, forms in a bricolage, and is imposed on people in a nation-state context, those who do not fit with this ethnic identity do not simply soak it up as passive receivers. Ahıska ethnicity in this sense is not fixed but is a dynamic and multi-layered mechanism. These layers are not just segments stacked on top

of each other, but each layer is closely related to the others. These dynamic relationships form and change the meanings of each identity in relation to other identities. We can liken this to a dynamic Hegelian dialectic of self and other, but instead of presenting it in singularities, we can think of it in multi-dimensionality. Here, there are self(s) and other(s), and the possibility of changing the relationships and also the meanings of every component.

Bakhtin, on the other hand presents a messy multivocality where it is impossible to trace many of the sources that influence the different voices and manifestations of identity because each source is derived from somewhere else (1981). Despite this messy dialogical multivocality that we cannot keep track of, changes in meanings and relationships are not freely done in this “liberal” environment but under limitations of wider institutions like states, agencies and academy. For instance, these institutions are trying to name the people who were deported from Meskhethia/Ahıska. As will be shown in the first chapter, the debates about this naming effort vary from discussions of “origins” to culture, tradition and language, and in relation to certain nation-state ideologies. Some of these academic debates are not a concern for the Ahıska population in Tucson. Their naming is primarily related with Turkishness and Ahıska community. However, these identifications are not simply “free choices” of the group but have been influenced by various institutions limiting as well as opening up new possibilities for identity.

In the second chapter different pieces are brought together in relation to the Turkish political sphere. An unusual identification of Ahıska Turks is with the Ottoman

Empire. When in need of affirmation, Ahıska men claim to be “Ottoman Turk”. This is not a common identification in the post-Ottoman era of the region both in terms of politics and class. Ahıska men both liken themselves to and distance themselves from Turks from Turkey. Identification with the Ottoman brings an explanation of the difference and affirmation of Ahıska identity. Turkey’s foreign and interior policies towards Ahıska Turks as well as the attitudes of Turkish people in Turkey and in Tucson deepen this sense of difference.

Ahıska’s relations with pious Turks in Tucson, who are recent migrants from Turkey and are influential especially in religious tradition, are quite telling. While both groups are Sunni Muslims and share a common Islamic tradition, they have distinct differences depending on their lifestyles and interpretations. Turkish language is also an area of similarity and difference. Despite the fact that Russian is often spoken and borrowed Russian words are integral part of Ahıska Turkish, they proudly claim that they preserved their language (Turkish). They have pride in their ability of still speaking Turkish despite being away from their homeland.

Despite Kakoli Ray’s argument that daily life, practical matters and kin networks are more important than homeland, I claim that it is a subject regularly surfacing and lack of a homeland is still felt among Ahıska people in Tucson. Uzbekistan, where most Ahıska men were born, grew up and even married has no potential for homeland; Turkey and Russia have a limited sense of it. Georgia, where the least number of Ahıska Turks live, has the highest potential for the future. This is attitude of some Ahıska Turks and also based on my observation.

The last chapter examines Ahıska identity in relation to “The Soviet political sphere”. Ahıska Turks who have been living under Russian and Soviet rule since 1829 have been deeply affected by this. Ahıska sympathy towards the Soviet Union is not negligible. Neither the fact of the deportation nor the religious limitations prevent this identification. While there is a general sympathy towards Russians, one can also observe harsh criticisms and even racist comments. By including Russian racial categories and attitudes towards people of the Caucasus, the negative attitude of Ahıska Turks can be explained. The solidarity of the Caucasians against the Russians is mostly limited to the personal level rather than extending to geopolitics. I will conclude the third chapter examining Ahıska attitudes towards Uzbeks and Azeris to show another example of the multiple and heterogeneous voices of Ahıska Turks. As both nations are Turkic and Ahıska Turks can speak their languages proficiently, ethnic differences and attitudes towards these groups vary, and a degree of superiority is present despite the Soviet discourse of brotherhood/sisterhood.

Methodology

The fieldwork-based parts of the thesis are preceeded by a brief history, followed by known statistics on Ahıska Turks. The thesis presents both my fieldwork as well as other pertinent literature addressing the topics of ethnicity and identity. For this research I used qualitative ethnographic research methods that involved participant observation, informal open-ended and formal voice recorded interviews. Initially I began visiting Ahıska families that I had been introduced to and tried to listen to their stories, observed

their lifestyles and interaction with their relatives, neighbors as well as various officers and employees of institutions Ahıska Turks had contact. Then, I started doing in-depth, open-ended formal interviews with voice records in order to obtain better linguistic data. After seven voice recorded interviews, I focused more on participant observation and informal interviews that are not recorded.

Most of my research is done in Ahıska peoples' homes and in the parking lot and garden of La Milagro [pseudonym] apartment complex. While sometimes I called Ahıska Turks to schedule a visit, often times I went to La Milagro after five o'clock to find the men chatting in the parking lot or at the bench in the garden, which was their regular social activity.

I certainly have no claim of gender balance. As a male researcher and due to cultural restrictions often limiting interaction between men and women unrelated by kinship, I had limited opportunities to interact with Ahıska women. On several occasions, I went to interview women but ended up interviewing their husband or son. Faced with difficulty of interviewing women in person, I did talk to them on the phone. Whenever I called an Ahıska household, I used this opportunity to ask questions and found that both women and men would easily answer my questions for brief periods of time.

In order to understand the refugee adaptation processes and its effects, I became a volunteer in Tucson International Alliance of Refugee Communities (TIARC) for a short period of time, participated some of their activities, gave computer literacy classes and interviewed case managers both from TIARC and also from other refugee organizations in the area.

Transcriptions from voice recordings are indicated as “interview” at the end of the English translation. Their Turkish originals are present as footnotes. I transcribed Turkish material with the modern Turkish alphabet to my own bias. They do not reflect the whole Ahıska phonetics since the Turkish alphabet is designed for Istanbul dialect. Other quotations are based on my field notes which sometimes I could not write in Ahıska Turkish. There may be some inaccuracy of phonetics as well as the sentences or sentence structure in some of the quotations. Some of the dialogue in English does not have a Turkish version as a footnote because I simply noted the main frames rather than the accurate dialogue. I tried to write Russian words in the Cyrillic original and their translation in brackets. I used some transcription signs. “:” means prolonging of the letter before the sign, two “[“ on top of each other before a word means that two speakers uttered simultaneously and extra spaces for silences. While the sign “↓” shows falling intonation, the sign “↑” shows rising intonation.

Brief History

In 1944, Ahıska/Meskhetian Turks were deported from Meskhetia region, which is now called Samtskhe-Javakheti currently in the Republic of Georgia. It is located at the south-west of the country bordering Armenia and Turkey. The Caucasus that Meskhetia is part of is one of the most linguistically diverse areas in the world¹ (Comrie 2008); this

¹ See the linguistic map of the region at <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/didact/karten/kauk/kaukasm.htm>

area also has seen a large number of military conflicts over the centuries and up to the present.

The Caucasus was a migration route that was part of the historical Silk Road. In classical antiquity there were Caucasian Albanian, Armenian, Georgian, Persian and Abkhazian, later on Byzantine, Khazar and Seljuk Kingdoms dominating the region. While the Altaic people (Huns, Akatzirs, Bulğar or Oğuric Turkic groupings) were migrating to Eurasia by 4th A.D., Khazars (semi-nomadic Turkic-Ugrian people) were ruling Caucasus, Ukraine and Western Russia between 7th and 10th cc AD (Golden 1980:14-21). The Turkification of parts of the North Caucasus started during Khazar period (Golden 1980:19). In 1121, the great Georgian King David (the builder) with the help of the Kıpchaks (Christian Turkic people) defeated the Seljuks (Muslim Turkic people). The region was fraught with Turkic and Mongol assaults and conquests between 11th and 14th cc. By 1578, the Ottoman Empire conquered the region but conflicts over it with Iran did not stop until 1639. In 1829, about half of Meskhethia and a large part of the Caucasus were occupied by the Russian Empire. With the 1853-4 and 1877-8 Russian-Ottoman Wars, the Russian Empire secured the region until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. The Caucasus was in turmoil between 1917 and 1921 in which wars and alliances between Georgia, Armenia, the Ottoman, Russia and various smaller political units were changing the borders quite often. By 1921, borders were defined again in the Caucasus with the Treaty of Kars between Turkey and the Soviet Union. Meskhethia eventually became part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).

With Lenin's nationality policy allowing a degree of self-determination to ethnic groups based on linguistic and ethnic categories, Ahıska Turks started receiving their education in Turkish until 1935-6 and in the Azerbaidzhani language afterwards (Akiner 1986:261). The Soviet administration did not want any group of people inside the Union associating themselves with a foreign power, which they saw as an obstacle in the creation of the Soviet nation (see Hirsh 2002, Pohl 2004:19). In the 1930s, central control increased, and the Russian language and culture were promoted (Kreindler 1986). By the mid-1930s, all Turkic people of Caucasus were designated as "Azerbaijanis"². There was no separate entry for Turks in the 1939 Soviet census (Gachechiladze 1995:92, Yunusov 2000:28). During World War II, the Stalin administration deported the Volga Germans as a precaution and the Crimean Tatars, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Karachay, and Balkars due to their alleged collaboration with the Germans "although many of them had fought with distinction in the Soviet army or partisans" during the war (Sheehy 1971:5). In 1944 Ahıska Turks were deported for strategic reasons due to suspicions of espionage, smuggling activities and collaboration with Turkey, despite a lack of concrete evidence of significant subterfuge (Pohl 2004:272). With the secret resolution No. 6279 referring to Turks, Kurds and Khemsils [Muslim Armenian], the deportation of these people started at night. People were put in goods wagons and sent to Central Asia in extremely harsh conditions. Although the statistics of the deportation is disputed (see Bugai 1996, Pohl 2002, Khazanov 1995), the official numbers estimate that 92,307 deportees arrived

² In fact Azeri people had been listed as "Turk" in the 1926 Soviet census (Akiner 1986:261).

in Central Asia from Meskhetia. The death toll varies from 15,000 to 50,000 depending on the source and calculations used (Khazanov 1991:4, Pohl 2002, Bougai 1996).

Ahıska Turks, like all other deported nationalities, were placed under the special settlement regime, which meant material deprivations, lack of proper housing, unsanitary living conditions, strict traveling restrictions and military surveillance (Pohl 2002:25-41). Khazanov describe these special settlers as “people deprived of elementary civil rights” (1992:4). At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956, Khrushchev blamed Stalin for the deportations of the Karachais, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush and Balkars, and rehabilitation for these peoples started during the next year. Ahıska Turks, Crimea Tatars, Volga Germans and many other small nationalities were not mentioned or offered apologies. However, the special settlement regime was lifted for all the deported nations soon after the 20th Congress.

Ahıska Turks like the Crimea Tatars started campaigning to return to their homelands after 1956. Internal conflicts surrounding the ethnic identity of the group (whether they are Georgian or Turkish) started soon after (Sverdlow 2003, Yunusov 2000:31). However, this did not prevent them from acting together in order to achieve their goal: repatriation to Meskhetia (Osipov and Sverdlow 2007). In 1957, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet released a decree informing the unwillingness of the Georgian SSR to repatriate Ahıska Turks but gave authorization for the Azeri SSR. Some Ahıska Turks started moving mainly to Azerbaijan and other parts of Caucasus. Throughout 1960s, Meskhetian Turks organized small meetings, lobbied, sent petitions and signatures to Moscow. In 1968 the USSR Presidium of the Supreme Soviet issued

Decree No. 2709-VII confirming the rights of Turks, Kurds and Khemsins to resettle to Georgia on the basis of existing civil rights; however the ban on resettling in Georgia was not lifted. Some Ahıska activists were arrested and imprisoned during the late 1960s. The early 1970s mark the decline of the movement; however a group of Meskhetians were able to visit Eduard Shevardnadze, the Communist party leader of Georgia and also the future president. The group received promises from the Georgian authorities for repatriation, which were not realized (Osipov and Swerdlow 2007).

During the late 1980s, the Soviet Union was marked with turmoil, rising nationalism and conflicts in many Soviet Republics with the effects of declining economy, and Glasnost [openness] and Perestroika [restructuring] policies. Resentment in Uzbekistan towards Moscow had grown drastically in the 1980s with long imposed cotton monoculture and Moscow's attempt to regain party control in the Uzbek SSR. By 1989, 109,000 Ahıska Turks were living in Uzbekistan. From May to June 1989, Uzbek mobs attacked Ahıska Turks in densely populated Fergana region on the border of Kyrgyz and Tajik SSRs. The Soviet Prime Minister Rzyhkov described the events as "well-organized, large-scale, and skillfully implemented political action" (Khazanov 1992). It is claimed that while the real target was Tadjiks, Meskhetian Turks were attacked because they were the least protected group (Khazanov 1992). Similarly, Blandy claims that Meskhetian Turks were used as "whipping boy" to display strength (nd:6). Ahıska Turks I spoke with for this study, however, never mentioned any Uzbek-Tadjik tension. Many Ahıska Turks in Tucson have two theories about the Fergana events. One is the KGB [Committee of State Security] provocation. Another is that Uzbeks had come

to Ahıska Turks with an offer to drive away Russians; however Ahıska Turks had refused because it was too much of a power imbalance and if failed Ahıska Turks would be destroyed or would have nowhere to go. Blandy has a very similar explanation with the latter one but with a Pan-Islamists ideology³.

In the Fergana events, 98 Ahıska Turks, 69 Uzbeks, 19 Tadjiks and 9 unknown nationals died; 16,282 Ahıska Turks have been evacuated; 753 houses, 27 state buildings and 275 vehicles were burnt down (Golovkov in Blandy nd.). Majority of Ahıska population left Uzbekistan very soon with their own means. Today estimated population of Ahıska Turks in Uzbekistan is 20-25,000.

In the first year after the Fergana events, Ahıska Turks searched for a place to relocate. Many of them moved two to four times after the event. A few had settled in Chechnya or the Nagorno-Karabakh where wars broke out. Some went to Kabardin-Balkar Autonomous Republic in the North Caucasus (Russia). Despite having relatives there, they were pressured to leave. Some of them went to Azerbaijan. While some who already had families there stayed, others were temporarily given small houses in the poorest rural part of Azerbaijan and they soon left. Some of them started going to Turkey. Others began settling in the Krasnodar *krai* [province] at the North Caucasus of Russia nearby the Black Sea because it was close to their kin, close to Caucasus and also they heard Crimean Tatars in Krasnodar *krai* were moving to their homeland, and there were cheap available houses.

³ I have not seen a similar explanation somewhere else that an Uzbek committee meet Ahıska elders, asked for help and Ahıska Turks refused them.

Most Ahıska Turk refugees in the U.S. came from the Krasnodar *krai*. Those in Tucson said that things were fine in the first couple of years in the *krai*. After these initial years, xenophobia and racism started in a much institutionalized basis⁴. In some parts of the *krai*, they were not given passports despite the existing citizenship law that grants them the right. Some of them were also not given *propiska* [residence permit], which eventually prevented them from accessing social services and kept the community open to police and Cossack [a Slavic group] harassments, which varied from beatings to regular bribing. Regional TVs and newspapers made blatant racists comments that furthered discrimination towards them.

The first diplomatic meeting about Ahıska Turks was held in 1996 at the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that consisted mostly of the former Soviet Republics. In 1998, a special meeting was held about the issue of Meskhetian Turks in the Hague between the Council of Europe (CoE), Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE), United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR), representatives of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia and a few Meskhetian Turk organizations. In 1999, Georgia became a member of the Council of Europe with the condition that Meskhetians be repatriated within 12 years. After the mid 1990s, international Jewish organizations paid attention to the rising tone of racism and anti-Semitism in Krasnodar lead by the governor Nikolai Kondratenko and eventually oriented the U.S. Embassy in

⁴ Swerdlow has an interesting note: “[In 1982-83] Head of RAIKOM of the Krymsk district in Krasnodar krai invites Hemshins and Meskhetians to settle in the region as a work force...(The man who had initiated the invitation would later become one of the leaders of the xenophobic anti-migrant campaign against Meskhetians, Hemshins, Kurds, and others.)”(Swerdlow 2003)

Moscow to unofficially break ties with the *krai* (Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2007:383). The U.S. ambassador paid a visit in 2001 for an investigation of the human rights situation. The next year the U.S. embassy sent a mission to Krasnodar in consideration of resettling Ahıska Turks to the U.S. The resettlement began in 2004 under the “special humanitarian concern” of Immigration and Nationality Act of 1999 (Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2007). Approximately 11,000 Ahıska Turks came to the U.S. as refugees and now many have their permanent residence.

Socioeconomic Profile and Statistics

In order to situate Ahıska Turks and provide a general picture of what is relevant to discussions of ethnic identity and its components, some social facts and statistics will be helpful. I am presenting them as a supplement with awareness that they are not very accurate and comprehensive. Osipov and Swerdlow state that “any broadly reliable statistical or survey data on the social or occupational structure of the Meskhetian Turks is lacking with regard to all periods” (2007:559-560).

In the 1989 All-Union Census, only 22.9% of Meskhetian Turks throughout the Soviet Union were living in urban areas, while in the Uzbek SSR 30% lived in urban areas (Osipov and Swerdlow 2007). According to the 2002 Russian Census, the total number of ‘Turks’ in Russia was 95,672 (Goskomstat 2002). However, these numbers are not an accurate reflection of numbers of Ahıska because some Ahıska registered under different national titles like Uzbek, Azeri, Kazakh or Kyrgyz etc. 75,926 of these ‘Turks’ in Russia were rural dwellers. This number also requires a careful analysis because many

urban Ahıska populations were forced to move to rural areas for economic reasons. Ahıska Turks say it was impossible to live with a salary and support a family in the urban Post-Soviet economy and argue that farming was more lucrative. Most Ahıska men in Tucson are *tekhnikum* graduates which are 10th to 14th grade schools that aim at developing technical skills. No Meskhetian Turks are known to have been a “high-ranking official, party functionary or public figure” but some were “low-level managers” during the USSR (Osipov and Swerdlow 2007). Osipov and Swerdlow do not think educated Ahıska Turks would be considered as “intellectual” compared to the Soviet society in general.

While many Ahıska Turks show rural dispositions, it is a very limiting description for the group as a whole. For example, I was surprised to learn that one Ahıska man in Tucson has two university degrees, worked as a specialist, taught diplomats and had instruction books from which he taught other people. He also worked as a prosecutor in a rural court back in Uzbekistan. After the Union fell apart, he began working as a farmer together with his brothers. Today, most Ahıska men in Tucson including the man mentioned above work in the service industry as gardeners, janitors, loaders, drivers and mechanics.

Ahıska women, which I had limited interactions with, have relatively lower education levels compared to the men. There are however an economist, accountants, teachers, a school manager, salesclerk and sale manager among them. Most of them worked in factories back in the Uzbek SSR, especially in the textile industry. Even Ahıska Turks who were living in town however did not give up farming all together.

Many cultivated their private lots with other members of the family for household consumption. Upon coming to Russia after 1989, many of the urban dwellers became farmers. Now in Tucson, most Ahıska women work outside of the home as well as doing all of the domestic work. While most of them are doing low skilled jobs, some of the younger women are going to community colleges for short term job education. There are however two exceptional Ahıska women among those I have come into contact: one is a supervisor in an international company and the other is a medical student.

Case managers at refugee assistance organizations who help refugees in their initial months and sometimes for several years after their arrival differentiate Ahıska Turks from the rest of the refugees in Tucson. They say that most refugees are coming from a refugee camp or have at least been through some sort of material deprivation. They usually come to the U.S. with nothing but their clothes on their backs. Ahıska Turks however came with many suitcases, usually a big iron pot, blankets and carpets. Case managers also said that Ahıska Turks were quick to learn the system here and found easier ways of solving bureaucratic problems. Someone who worked in a school to help integrate refugee children in the Tucson Unified School District said that neither she nor her colleagues spent much time helping Ahıska children outside of providing them with Russian translators. Most case managers think that Ahıska Turks have a high degree of adaptation skills.

Ahıska Turks are patriarchal and usually patrilocal. Married couples initially live close to the husband's family. This has important influences on Ahıska populations, especially for women. Since many Ahıska Turks have relatives in up to eight different

countries, women usually have the least number of blood kin around because they have moved away from their own families. While it was relatively easy to visit relatives in Russia because of close proximity to one another, some women have no blood kin in Tucson or even in the U.S. However, the situation is no easier for men. The Ahıska population is distributed in 32 states and 66 cities in the U.S. depending on the capacity of resettlement agencies and also to ease integration (Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2007). This creates a burden on people's budget because whenever a relative has a wedding, funeral or circumcision, the whole family flies to wherever the event is taking place. Many Ahıska Turks are considering moving out of Tucson in the near future not only to be closer to relatives but also for better social benefits in different states.

As of spring 2009, there are around 30 Ahıska families in Tucson. Half of them are living in La Milagro (pseudonym) apartment complex; the others are living at different apartment complexes around it, and a few rent houses. Due to the recent economic downturn, some of them postponed their plans to move. While some of the Ahıska families are receiving rent and utility aid, most of them get food stamps from the Department of Economic Security (DES).

CHAPTER 2: ETHNICITY AND NAMING

What is “Ethnicity”?

Before we can dive into what ethnicity means for Ahıska Turks and examine how they became an ethnic group, we must first get a better grasp on how this term came into being, how it became a subject in anthropology and other disciplines, and how its meanings change over time. Ethnicity as a term does not just simply exist in a vacuum. We must first examine historical processes to determine how this term came to mean what it means today. Differences as well as similarities among human groups have always existed, but they alone did not create ethnicity. The terms have been conceptualized in a nationalist, colonial and “modern” context that we should bear in mind.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary(OED), the first use of the term “ethnic” in English goes back to the 15th century and its meaning is registered as “Pertaining to nations not Christian or Jewish; Gentile, heathen, pagan”. In the 18th century “ethnicity” meant “Heathendom, heathen superstition” (OED). Only in the 19th century did the definition of “ethnicity” change closer to what we understand it to mean today:

Pertaining to race; peculiar to a race or nation; ethnological. Also, pertaining to or having common racial, cultural, religious, or linguistic characteristics, esp. designating a racial or other group within a larger system; hence (*U.S. colloq.*), foreign, exotic (OED retrieved March 2009).

As historical definitions show, from its earliest uses in the English language “ethnicity” is denoted to describe the “other” in a context where the nation-state did not come into a clear conceptualization. At the turn of the 19th century, the Age of Revolutions, the definition became what we usually understand today.

Wide usage of the term “ethnicity” developed during the Post-Colonizing world. Prentiss claims that its broad use as a unit of analysis appeared simply due to increasing discomfort with the term “race”. It was first used by sociologists Warner and Lunt in the 1940s (Prentiss 2003:6). While Williams accepts this discomfort with race, she points out that since the 1970s, race was not a term considered to be very meaningful. There was however a vigorous effort in anthropology to define ethnicity in order to define a unit of analysis (1989). Ethnicity became popular especially in identity politics of the Post-Colonial era. The definition of “ethnicity” was not only important for anthropology but also for common people, and its meaning was “the product of combined scientific, lay, and political classification” (Williams 1989:402). In order to understand what ethnicity means, it is necessary to look for a connection between its components, which cannot be separated from each other.

Williams reviewed A. Cohen and Ronald Cohen's work, which showed that as early as the 1970s ethnicity started to replace traditional subject matters of anthropology such as “tribes, villages, bands and isolated communities” and it received a “ubiquitous presence” (Cohen and Cohen in Williams 1989:402). According to Ronald Cohen, this marked a theoretical shift in anthropology; the intensity began with Barth's 1969 essay *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (R Cohen in Williams 1989:402).

Barth argued that ethnic groups formed on the basis of differences of culture not similarity. Barth claimed:

A few select items of culture, preferably organized as contrastive idioms, are then selected as icons of these contrastive identities. That is how cultural variation is enrolled to serve as the basis for the social phenomenon of ethnic groups. Ethnic group membership is constructed without reference to the real diversity of culture, reaching right into the individual family, but through an overdrawn myth of contrast and sharing respectively (Barth 1995).

While Barth (1995) involves state and power dynamics in the same article, he presents this relationship as actual “ethnic conflicts” and recommends finding a common ground first by giving the example of the Scandinavian labor structure. His example of a Pathan [Peshdun] moving from Pakistan to Norway as a labor migrant is presented in such a way as if a Norwegian moving to Pakistan as a labor migrant would be in a similar position and face the same difficulties as a Pathan. One might suspect if any Norwegian would move to Pakistan as a labor migrant there experience may be much different. Passports given to these two labor migrants by their designated states would have different actual capital values. While a Pathan male will have to learn Norwegian out of obligation, it is dubious that Norwegian migrant would learn Urdu or any of the other languages in Pakistan.

While cultural differences are important in the formation of ethnic identity, we cannot take them at face value either. The definition of the word “culture” has changed from being a specific training of the mind and soul for certain purposes (in the sense of ‘cultivation’) and has come to mean “the common way of life of a whole people” since populations came to be included in the state project (Asad 1993:248-259). In the OED,

the oldest definition of “culture” is found in the 15th century with meanings related to agriculture and cultivation. Less than a century later, the term holds meanings related to development and improvement of manners and mind. In the 17th century “culture” gains a meaning of collectivity but only in reference to “artistic and intellectual development” (OED retrieved March 2009). During the 19th century, it means, “the distinctive ideas, customs, social behavior, products, or way of life of a particular society, people, or period. Hence: a society or group characterized by such customs, etc.” (OED retrieved March 2009). As Asad summarizes Raymond Williams, “culture” is the name of a totalizing project (Asad 993:249) that helps to manufacture consent for those given the right to vote. Returning back to Barth's description of ethnicity through “culture”, we should be cautious of viewing culture as a neutral term with no mentioning of being entwined with power relations embedded in history. Culture, just like ethnicity, belongs to a similar historical period.

Ethnicity is “by definition not an isolated but a relational unit” and its “context of investigation” is the nation state that has intense resource competition (Williams 1989:404). Williams criticizes A. Cohen's lack of analysis for “groupings with nonpolitical ethnicity” and points out that this is a classical characteristic of resource competition models in which “ethnics compete on the basis of ethnicity, whereas non-ethnics compete as individuals” (1989:405). Instead of looking at relationships between the nation state and interest groups, Cohen prefers to look at informal/formal and difference/sameness dichotomies among interest groups without defining what “interest” is and how people know their “interest” is (1989:409). A general assumption of the

nation state ideology is the creation of a national identity and a national loyalty rather than ethnic or tribal identities and loyalties. This idealized nation state ideology however does not work the same for different groups. Objective and subjective membership criteria that decide inclusiveness and exclusiveness are the focus of R. Cohen (1989), which shares similarities with Barth's discussion of ethnicity based on cultural difference. Williams criticizes R. Cohen's attempt to classify all groupings as ethnic groupings while neglecting unequal power relations between groups (1989). Equal and autonomous relationships in a group and between groups do not exist. Williams asks a critical question: why are elite groups not often seen as ethnic groups? And why is national identity presented as neutral and normative while hierarchically lower groupings with cultural, linguistic and religious similarities are seen as ethnic? (1989). Asad similarly illustrates that while the term "cultural minorities" is never utilized for the English upper classes, the term "ethnic groups" is never utilized for the English, Welsh, Scots or Irish (1993:258). The label of ethnicity is largely avoided for many dominant groups.

Despite the relative and relational features of identity, "not all individuals have equal power to fix the coordinates of self-other identity formation" (Williams 1989:420). Williams questions "whether those who identify themselves with a particular ethnic identity could also successfully claim *no* ethnic identification" (1989:420). Williams undermines the agency of the "individual" who can shape ethnic identity and points out "the societal production of enduring categorical distinctions" (1989:428).

The modern nation state as the epitome of power and hegemony diversifies as much as homogenizes. Political hegemony works through differentiation, diversification

and classification (Asad 1993:264, Foucault 1975/1977,1976/1978, Williams 1989, Mayaram 1997). These are not simply side effects but ways and means of control (see Asad 1993, Foucault 1975/1977,1976/1978, Said 1978).

Williams illustrates the creation of ethnic identity in asymmetric power relations of nation state (1989). Williams further illustrates the dynamics between different groups. When a dominant group tries to marginalize other groups, the dominant one tries to erase the contribution of marginal groups to the nation and gives the impression that marginal groups are preventing the nation from actualizing its full potential(1989). If a marginal group tries to become like dominant group, then it tries to prove its contribution even though the dominant group does not believe or trust the marginal group (1989). Every group wants a return for their contributions (1989). Adult Ahıska Turks over 40, more or less can utter their own, their parents' and their grandparent's contribution to the Soviet Union. Stories of Ahıska Turks returning from World War II to their homes in Georgia and not being able to find their families are widely known. Even those with high honor medals could not save themselves or their families from deportation or the special settlement regime (Kyzaeva, Dotsenko and Begaliev in Pohl 2004:286). Ahıska Turks lament on their treatment, but they still demand inclusion into the wider Soviet nation. Cemil (50s) laments, “I could not understand. What is our guilt? What have we done that they treat us this way? [*Ben ağnayamadım Bizim suçumuz nedir? Biz ne yapmışığk ki bize böyle muamele ediliy?]*”.

Discussion of ethnicity is organically related with the term race. While difference is often presented in opposition to cultural and biological features, Alonso clarifies:

What is called race in much of the literature is the variant of ethnicity that privileges somatic indexes of status distinctions such as skin color, hair quality, shape of features, or height. What is called ethnicity is the variant that privileges style-of-life indexes of status distinctions such as dress, language, religion, food, music, or occupation. there is no sharp distinction between these two variants of ethnicity (1994:391).

Similar to Williams, Alonso points out that despite the fluid, invented and constructed nature of the term ethnicity, the term's creation is strongly related with the modern nation state formation whose hegemony limits the fluidity of the term (1994:392). In this sense groups create their own identity and community that they deeply value; we should not forget that “racial inequalities have been constructed as systems of inequality” and they will continue to damage (Roger Smith in Benhabib 2007:13)

I use ethnicity, identity and culture in recognition of their multilayered character and changing meanings loaded with force and power relations in them. However it is also necessary to recognize people's sense of unity even though the components of that unity can be contradictory internally and externally. For example, Asad is critical of Bhabha and Gilroy's celebration of hybrid, emergent, playful and dynamic understanding of culture that denies holism and unitary culture (1993:262-265). He claims that it is a process and despite its incoherent parts, many cultures as well as traditions aspire to coherence. In this sense, I recognize multiple voices, attitudes and behaviors of individual Ahıska Turks and different Ahıska communities under the influence and the interaction of many different forces. My overall focus will be on Ahıska Turk people in Tucson, Arizona who came here after 2004 as refugees.

Ethnicity Debates and Problem of Naming

Almost all academic articles and institutional reports begin with the problem of naming Ahıska or Meskhetian people. This is partially because of the Ahıska people's lack of uniform name use, which is a result of historical and structural instability that occurred through larger institutional doings and undoings. State apparatuses that tried to colonize and appropriate the Caucasus worked on populations as well as military and administrative spheres. These apparatuses tried to convert people to other religions and decrease the number of rival groups in a relatively short period of time. People of Ahıska or Meskhetia who were subjected to these influences and deported in 1944, formed a heterogeneous group whose nature was ethnic based in the given nation-state context. The Soviet nationality policies were influential in the formation of and Ahıska identity movement (Osipov and Swerdlow2007)⁵. These policies constituted autonomous republics, autonomous provinces and national districts with limited administrative, social, cultural and linguistic rights for recognized indigenous people, which set a future example for Ahıska/Meskhetian people as well as other unrecognized people (or whose recognition was canceled during the Stalin era).

The Ahıska/Meskhetian movement was not the only one of its kind when it started during the late 1950s. The Crimean Tatars had already started an organized

⁵ Even though in the Soviet Union nationalism is condemned, this does not change the fact that there were many state recognized nations, national republics, autonomous national republics and smaller political units.

movement with protests, appeals, petitions, telegrams, an office in Moscow and journals to be able to return to their ancestral homelands and demanded the re-formation of their autonomous republics (ASSR) (Sheehy 1971, Pohl 2004). Due to strict central control and a limited means of appeal, they were forced to mould the movement to these conditions to fall in line with the existing state apparatuses and changing geopolitical forces. This had a decisive influence over the problem of naming, which in my opinion is not an issue at the micro level among small Ahiska communities. On the macro scale, which is the nation-state context, the naming issue is an international problem because words and terms convey messages beyond their “basic meanings” that might refer to an identity, a history and a morality.

During the presence of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus from 1829 to 1917, Ahiska people were referred to variously as Muslims, Turks, Tartars and Georgian-Sunnis⁶. In the Soviet era before 1944, they are referred to as Azerbaijanis or Turks. A separate identity as “Meskhetian” started to be expressed in the late 1950s (Wixman in Tomlinson 2002, Osipov and Swerdlow 2007). Depending on the author, the use of the term “Meskhetian” in the literature can include Kurds, Khemsins⁷ [Muslim Armenians] and Karakalpaks [Shi'i Turkomans or Terekeme].

The Georgian government and scholars refer to them as Meskhi, Meskhetians,

⁶ Sunni is the largest orthodox Muslim group. The Ottoman Empire was promoting Sunni Islam. %75-80 of Turkey could be described as Sunni Muslim today.

⁷ Also written as Hemshin, Hemsin, or Hemşin.

Meskh-Muslims, Georgian Muslims or Georgian Sunnis. Their choice of terminology is due to their claim that Meskhetian Turks were not “originally” Turks but Georgians who were converted to Islam by force (see Lomoyrin, Enokh, Upushadze, Mamulia, Baratashvili in Blandy nd; Gachechiladze 1995, Sumbadze 2002). This is also related with denying them the right to return to Georgia; even those who are willing to assimilate into Georgian culture are denied for the right to return (Pohl 2004:257). Georgian state apparatuses seems not trusting to Meskhetian Turks whose mother tongue is Turkish.

The Turkish government and scholars dominantly use the term *Ahıska Türkleri* [Ahıska Turks], which refers to the Turkish version of “Meskhetia” and Turkish ethnicity at the same time. The term *Ahıska Türkleri* was not created after deportation. Turkish people of the region had a society called “Ahıska Türkleri” in 1912 (Yunusov 2000). However, scholars do not know how widely it is used by common people. In the English literature, the term “Meskhetian Turk” is translated from the Russian term “Turki Meskhetinski” [Турки месхетинцы], which is widely used but is not a universally accepted term for the group either by outsiders or by the group itself.

Khazanov reports that Ahıska Turks' grandparents called themselves “ierli” (1991:4), which is written “yerli” (native) in modern Turkish. Sumbadze claims that name tags “yerly” (native), “Gurjo Oglı” (son of Georgian) and “Gurjidan donime” (converted from Georgian), which are inscribed on the 1870 Russian census are proof that “speak of their Georgian origin” (2002). This claim needs further research considering the region was not in political stability and was under the influence of the Russian Imperial project after the Ottoman Empire. While in Georgia during this period,

despite the Meskhetian Turks' relative isolation from their neighbors, ethnic identification was obscure and unsettled (Khazanov 1992:3). In the political context, Azeri people were called “Azerbaidzhanskii Tiurki” (Azerbaijani Turk) or “Turk” up until the 1930s but the terms were replaced with “Azerbaidzhanian” or Azeri. Calling oneself a “Turk” was not favored after the 1930s (Khazanov 1991:3) and the change was done to prevent any population inside the Soviet Union from identifying with states outside of the USSR. The Soviet linguistic revolution's attempt to break from the Tsarist past (Yurchak 2006) contributed to this naming controversy.

Koriouchkina and Swerdlow, who conducted their fieldwork in the U.S., argue that the use of the term “Ahıska Turk” to define the group “has not garnered broad appeal among the majority of Meskhetian Turks and seems to reflect the interests and attitudes of only a small segment of the population” (2007:420). These authors position the term “Ahıska Turk” as opposing “the more dominant category 'Meskhetian'” (2007:420). This research was the reverse of what I found in Tucson. During my fieldwork, Ahıska Turks never mentioned the term “Meskhetian” or its derivatives unless I asked. They knew the term, but they did not use it in their daily conversations at least not in Turkish. Some referred to it as a terminology given to them by those who are not Ahıska Turks. Many of them began hearing the term when they got to Russia after 1989.

Aydingün states that the term “Ahıska/Meskhetian Turk” is controversial and she refers to them as “Ahıska Turk” on the basis that the group called themselves this term during her fieldwork in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey at different periods between 1995 and 1999 (2002b). She claims that the term includes “Turks, Kurds and

Karapapakhs who were unified under the name of the ‘Ahıska Turks’ as a result of a similar experience of deportation and discrimination” (2002b). She also points out that “in the Western literature this group is known as ‘Meskhetian Turks’ or as ‘Meskhetians’” (2002b). Aydingün usually uses “Ahıska Turks” throughout her articles written in 1999 and 2002. In a book chapter as part of a Meskhetian Turk research project, she uses “Meskhetian Turk” like the other fifteen authors in the book entitled “Meskhetian Turks at a Crossroad” (2007). Blandy, Pohl, Tomlinson, Wimbush and Wixman use the term “Meskhetian Turks”. Sumbadze calls them Muslim Meskhetians, Muslims or Meskhetians based on her fieldwork in Georgia where around 600-1000 Meskhetian Muslims reside. In the very same book, based on their fieldwork in the U.S., Koriouchkina and Swerdlow point out that Ahıska Turks call themselves simply a “Turk” and when they are asked in the U.S. where they are from, they say they are “Turks from Russia”. Here is a similar answer from Selman (30s) upon my question on how he presents himself to different people:

If Russians ask who I am, I say I am a “Turk”. If Americans ask, I say I am a “Russian Turk”, because when they ask “Where are you from?” I say “Russia, but I am a Turk”. Then Americans say “Russian Turk”. Since then I start telling everybody “I am a Russian Turk”. Nobody asks anything further.

Selman also states that he had heard the Russian term “Turki Meskhetinski” in Russia after they left Uzbekistan. Many Ahıska Turks like Selman do not give any negative reaction to this term. When a Russian speaking case manager refers to them as “Turki Meskhetinsky”, they simply continue the dialogue. When asked why they are called this, they often explain that Meskhetia is the Georgian name of Ahıska and

Russians started calling them it.

In a Google search, the Russian term “Турки месхетинцы” [Turki Meskhetinski] receives 16,200 hits. The English term “Meskhetian Turks” gets 21,700 hits. The Georgian terms used to refer to Meskhetians “თურქი მეხეზი” [Turki Meskhebi] and “მაჰმადიანი მეხეზი” [Mahmadiani Meskhebi] receives 5,140 and 1510 hits respectfully. The Turkish terms “Ahıska Türkleri” and “Ahıska Turkleri” get 77,500 hits; these include Ahıska Turks who migrated to Turkey before 1944, Ahıska Turks who migrated recently after 1990, and also Ahıska Turks from other countries.

Naming is not a common topic of discussion for many Ahıska Turks in Tucson. During my fieldwork, which was predominantly done in Turkish, Ahıska Turks referred to themselves in Turkish as *Türk* [Turk], *Ahıskalılar* [people of/from Ahıska], *Ahıska Türkleri* [Ahıska Turks] or *bizim şenlik*[our people]⁸. Turkish -lı suffix (also -lu and -li) at *Ahıskalılar* associates a person to a specific location that means the person has been living in the location for a quite some time and/or the person is considered “originally” from that place. The suffix -lar and -ler in the same term makes a word plural. *Ahıska Türkleri* [Ahıska Turks or Turkish people of *Ahıska*] as it is written and pronounced according to modern Turkish on the other hand gives a meaning that these Turks are living outside of Turkey just like Gagavuz Turks or Western Thrace Turks.

⁸ “*şenlik*” in modern Turkish used for festival. Tomlinson transcribe it as “*şennik*”. Both words used as crowd, group, family, children, festivity crowd, gathering in different dialects in Turkey (Dictionary of Dialects of Turkish of Turkey www.tdkterim.gov.tr/ttas/)

Through comparing literature on Ahıska Turks and conducting my fieldwork in Tucson, it is clear that the spoken language and the naming of Ahıska Turks are interrelated. While the heterogeneity of the group is widely debated in the literature, academics who conduct fieldwork do not usually see the need to state which languages they can speak and in what language they interact with Ahıska people. One has to guess from names of the authors and from the fieldwork what languages the authors might be speaking and understanding. While Osipov, Khazanov, Koriouchkina and Swerdlow clearly speak Russian, we do not know if they also speak Turkish, Azeri or Uzbek. It is clear from her name that Aydingün speaks Turkish, but we also do not know if she speaks Russian. Kakoli Ray's dissertation shows basic mistakes in directly quoting official Turkish texts. Ray does not say whether she speaks Azeri or Turkish. Considering certain claims about Meskhetian Turks, it is a good idea to state what languages the researcher can speak and understand, and differentiate in which languages the people refer to themselves as *Ahıska Türkleri* or *Turki Meskhetinsky*.

Tomlinson briefly touches on the relationship between the naming and spoken language of the researcher in her footnote. Regarding her fieldwork in a village of Krasnodar (Russia), Tomlinson states that:

Although some had heard of the name *Ahıska Türkleri*, *Osmani Türkleri* was mentioned more frequently, and the former is not used in daily Meskhetian Turkish conversation. This contrasts with Aydingün's work with this group in Kazakhstan and Turkey. However, it should be noted that Aydingün herself is Turkish, and that her informants were on average far better educated and better employed than mine, and had access to institutions connected with Turkey (2002:39 footnote 30).

Considering different accounts of academics, it is clear that certain terms can be dominant among different Ahıska groups, depending on the language spoken.

I dominantly use “Ahıska Turks” and “Ahıska people [Ahıskalılar]” as the group refers to themselves in their daily Turkish conversations with me. However, in order to give a better sense of this shifting position, I also use Meskhetians and Meskhetian Turks and different combinations especially when using the material of other authors. Referring to the place the Ahıska people were deported from for the first time, I will try to use both Ahıska and Meskhetia together.

According to Pohl, prior to the deportation of 1944 Ahıska people “lacked a conception of themselves as a common people” despite their common religion, language, kinship and ancestral land (2004:298). Pohl presents the first deportation as the main factor of Meskhetian Turk identity formation (2004). Aydingün similarly supports the impact of the 1944 deportation in the formation of national consciousness; however she states that Ahıska Turks had already started to have ethnic consciousness prior to the deportation thanks to the ongoing power dynamics between the Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire, Bolshevik Revolution, early Georgian and Armenian Republics and the Soviet Union (2007, 2002b). The region also had its own micro-dynamics that combined modernist and Islamist discourses influenced from European Enlightenment and colonialism (see Reynolds 2008).

Osipov and Swerdlow present interesting research regarding social dynamics and leadership among Meskhetian Turk communities as they look at the movement since the 1960s. According to Osipov and Swerdlow, the Meskhetian movement of repatriation

gradually developed into two different orientations (2004). One is Georgian and the other is Turkish, which refers to their “ethnic roots”. Although these orientations were presented as “extremely hostile” to the other in later narratives, Osipov and Swerdlow show that there is no evidence showing the existence of these faction until the late 1960s (2007). By the late 1980s and early 1990s, these factions became mutually exclusive and positioned themselves as diametrically opposed (2007). Both sides claimed the majority of support and asserted that the other faction was made up of traitors (2007). Osipov and Swerdlow claim, “in fact, for a time, hundreds and thousands of average Meskhetians supported the idea of their Georgian origin. The Georgian orientation was not a myth and it had its peaks and valleys of support” (Alekseyeva in Osipov and Swerdlow 2007:571). The Turkish orientation, on the other hand, was on the rise from the late 1960s to the early 1970s and again in the late 1980s. “People once known as supporters of the 'Turkish' faction claimed their 'Georgianness' and vice versa” (Osipov and Swerdlow 2007). The changing popularity of different views in different times might be a good indicator of the fluidity of perception of ethnic identity among Ahıska Turks. As the authors also point out later in their essay, this flexibility, compromise and changing popularity of different factions does not necessarily means an actual and involved support from the larger Ahıska population (2007).

In 1980, Sheehy and Nahaylo wrote about the confusion of Meskhetian Turks with regard to their ethnic origins (Tomlinson 2002:40), but Tomlinson argues that Meskhetian Turks do not feel the need to decide because “to be a Turk is to live the past, as inherited practice, in the present; while deciding whether or not one is Georgian

requires one to see epistemic ‘history’ as relevant to one’s present, which, I argue, the majority of my informants do not” (2002:40). Here Tomlinson draws from Daniel’s (1996) division of history and heritage/mythic. According to this division, history is an epistemic discourse and heritage/mythic is an ontological and embodied discursive practice (1996:50). In lay terms this means that Ahıska Turks do not know “history” in the same sense that moderns learn in school and from books. Their knowledge of the past comes through what they have heard around them and not in a very factual modern sense⁹. This division of past can be a useful tool, however, the state’s role in using, producing and creating the past and present to designate certain histories, ethnicities and identities cannot be neglected. It is probable that Meskhetian Turks do not feel the need to decide because they are spread out in eight different countries, and there is no single and central institution providing them with an authoritative narrative of their history and ethnic identity.

An intellectual class that could create such a narrative could not be formed due to ongoing turmoil from the Caucasus to Uzbekistan in the last 150 years. Migrations, multiple deportations, material and population losses seem to push many Ahıska populations to focus on survival, adaptation and practical matters rather than producing acknowledged social scientists.

⁹ I did not have many conversations about history with Ahıska Turks, however at the start of my fieldwork, I had an impression that Ahıska Turks’ knowledge about history was a bit “mythic”. Later in my fieldwork, Ahıska men seemed to know after World War I fair enough, but it is hard for me to make a general claim. Urban and rural Ahıska are mixed in Tucson which may effects degree of historical knowledge.

Throughout this chapter, I demonstrated that ethnicity is not a very stable concept. Ahıska ethnic identification reflects this problem. With multiple deportations and the lack of central authority among Ahıska Turks, these multiplicities of ethnic identification perpetuate ambiguous meanings that are as problematic as British and French national identities.

CHAPTER 3: TURKS, TURKEY, TURKISH AND HOMELAND

In the previous chapter, I illustrated the problems that arise from naming and ethnic description regarding Ahıska Turks and how they are related to the modern nation state context. In this chapter, Ahıska identity will be dealt with in relation to Turks, Turkey, Turkish language and their homeland. Most Ahıska Turks in Tucson have never set foot in Turkey; however, they speak Turkish, know Turkish people, watch Turkish television and read books about Turkey. Even though they primarily identify themselves as “Turk”, they also differentiate themselves from *Türkiyeliler* [people of Turkey] in terms of history, culture, language, religious practice and interpretation of Islamic knowledge. Below I will report on and analyze these dynamics.

“We are Ottoman Turks”

Ahıska Turks have multiple claims of identities. One of these claims is being Turk just like other Turks. Another claim is nearly the opposite of this and stresses their differences from Turks from Turkey, especially with regard to morality. The latter source of identity is also connected to claims of authenticity, which relates to historical continuity. Contemporary Turks from Turkey can be seen as inauthentic due to their novel attitudes, ways of speaking and different culture. Turks from Turkey can be associated with the negative side of modernity like individualism that is seen as selfish and greedy. Ahıska identity on the other hand is seen as communal in which Ahıska people should ideally live together, protect their culture, language, religion and ethnicity.

Ahıska men in Tucson sometimes refer to their community in general as *Osmanlı Türkü* [Ottoman Turk]. This claim of being *Osmanlı Türkü* is interesting because according to the famous Ottoman chronicler Evliya Çelebi, in the 17th century, “being Ottoman” was defined by the “fusion of privilege, urbanity, class, patronage, and Sunni Islam” (Maksidi 2002:773). In the 19th century, *Osmanlı* [Ottoman] as an identity referred to an urban elite culture with focus on “urbanity of manners and quality of style” rather than on ethnicity and/or religion (Birtek 2007:30). It continued to denote elite identity even after the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Birtek 2007¹⁰, Blake 1991¹¹). During the nationalist movements of the post-Ottoman context, finding a group of people calling themselves “Ottoman” is extremely unusual. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire there was no political unit that was interested in emphasizing its Ottoman roots or nature (Brian Silverstein, personal communication). All Balkan and Arab states and the Turkish Republic had anti-Ottoman stances and pre-dominantly leaned towards nationalism.

It is difficult to know when the claim of being *Osmanlı Türkü* started to be used by Muslim people of Ahıska/Meskhetia. In 1926, in the All-Union Census of the Soviet Union, the term *Osman Turk* [Ottoman Turk] was a defined ethnicity (Hirsch 2005:329–

¹⁰ “The great part of Ottoman success in the nineteenth century was the fine-tuning of the affiliational web within which the “self” was anchored, and the direct identification of urbanity of manners and quality of style with the Ottomanist public identity – a source of elite aspiration, across ethnic and religious lines, or even across most political projects. In the post-war period, for example, in the language of an Arab Christian nationalist or a Balkan revolutionary, who might have fought against the Ottoman state, an *Ottoman* was still a positive term signifying elite manners and gentlemanly aspirations – a positive image nostalgically reminisced.” (Birtek 2007:30)

¹¹ See Blake's dissertation on Syrian bureaucrats educated in Istanbul (1991). According to Blake “For centuries, Ottomanism had formed the basis for the terminal political community--the largest community which commands allegiance--to which provincial elites were generally loyal” (1991:240).

333). The 1999 national population census of Kyrgyzstan still includes this term (Osipov and Swerdlow 2004). In 1990, Ahıska Turks in Kyrgyzstan created an association called “Osmanlı Türkleri Society” (Osipov and Swerdlow 2004:576). According to Aydingün's fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, “the Ahıska Turk identity was based on an emphasis on Turkishness, the idea of being the only Turks in the Soviet Union and the belief of belonging to the Ottoman Empire and later to Turkey” (Aydingün 2002b).

In my fieldwork, this identification was slightly different from Aydingün's account. Most of Ahıska Turks in Tucson had never been to Turkey and most did not have a sense of belonging to Turkey. Some Ahıska men in Tucson were very critical of Turkey due to the lack of initiative to solve some of the Ahıska's problems. While Ahıska Turks recognize and highly appreciate the late president Turgut Özal's short lived efforts in early 1990s, they are well aware of the lack of initiative in Turkey after him. Many have relatives in Turkey and know that many Ahıska Turks in Turkey do not have citizenship. While bureaucrats and officers in Turkey are positive towards Ahıska Turks, those who do not have citizenship are treated as foreigners in terms of paperwork (Aydingün 2007). There are many important implications with regard to citizenship and the rights that come with it. They have to get a residence permit every six months and not all of those who have residence permits are able to obtain work permits (Aydingün 2007). Those who do not have Turkish citizenship cannot access free health services that are given to those living under the bare minimum. Given the current situation and the failure of the Turkish government to take action, some Ahıska Turks in Tucson are openly critical while the rest accept the fact that Turkey does not have enough financial

resources to help Ahıska Turks. While these critical Ahıska men are few among the total 120-130 Ahıska population in Tucson, it is important to note that this group is vocal in their opinion. Turkey's lack of initiative regarding Ahıska Turks in Turkey seems to widely impact the attitude of those located in Tucson.

In the winter of 2008, the Consul of Turkey from Los Angeles came to Arizona for a conference, and he also paid a visit to the Turkish communities in Tucson, which included La Milagro, the apartment complex where many Ahıska Turks live. In the meeting hall, Ahıska men were present along with a few pious Turk men who were escorting the ambassador. The ambassador gave a short speech, asked listeners to introduce themselves and received questions. Ahıska Turks who had been debating for at least a year about where to move next after Tucson, seemed to be expecting something, a recommendation, a solution or at least an advice from the consul on behalf of Turkey. The consul recommended that they obtain American passports and told them that the Turkish passport was not that big of a deal. While the meeting got into heated debate towards the end, Ahıska men seemed dissatisfied with the meeting and the whole visit. After the meeting, Yaşar (40s) told me in anger:

“Abdullah Gül [president of Turkey] is behind Ahıska Turks in the U.S.”¹² [quoting the ambassador]. They do not even give passports to Ahıska people in Turkey; well two children of my brother do not have passports. The ambassador says ‘Abdullah Gül is behind Ahıska Turks,’ behind me is Bush, Bush! Abdullah

¹² He used a Turkish tense often called “Mişli Geçmiş Zaman” which gives meaning that speaker did not witness or heard the event. It can also be used to undermine and mock somebody's speech which this Ahıska man was actually doing. He was mocking ambassador's and the president's speeches and pointing its lack of substantial base.

Gül did not even help us while he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Is he going to help us now?¹³

Claim of being *Osmanlı Türkü* [Ottoman Turk] “left out of Turkey” bypasses modern Turkey, which was not part of reality or daily life for Ahıska Turks during the Soviet period. Turkey is also unable to fulfill its expected duties to help its ethnic kin outside of Turkey. In this sense, claims of *Osmanlı Türkü* can be seen as a distancing from the modern Turkish identity. It is an effort to authenticate their Ahıska ethnic identity as if it is left out of Turkey's modern time; they still present their ethnicity as better, essential and authentic in relation to Modern Turks¹⁴. It is as if during their absence from Turkey, something bad happened to Turks and Turkishness that caused them to lose their good morality, compassion and honesty. When Rasim (40s) was trying to tell the consul that some *Türkiyeliler* [Turks from Turkey living in Tucson] did not keep their promise they gave to Ahıska Turks in Tucson like getting cemetery plots, a pious Turk who accompanied the ambassador almost scolded Rasim. After the consul's talk was over, Rasim was not happy. I overheard his conversation with another pious Turk in the hall, “I have Ottoman blood in my blood, not the blood of Turkey. Cut my veins...” [*Benim kanımda Osmanlı kanı var, Türkiye kanı değil, damarlarımı kes...*]. He was reacting this way because the pious Turks refused to

¹³ “Abdullah Gül Amerika'daki Ahıskalıların arkasındaymış. Türkiye'dekilere pasaport vermiyor, ahaa benim kardeşimin iki *çocuğunun* pasaportu yok. Konsolos diyor ki “Ahıskalıların arkasında Abdullah Gül var,” benim arkamda Bush var Bush! Abdullah Gül Dışişleri bakanıyken sahiplik etmedi de şimdi mi edecek?”

¹⁴ Upon reading my paper on Ahıska Turks, Jane Hill told me that in her own fieldwork, “years ago with indigenous communities in Mexico, these people, who were very marginalized and oppressed, would often

acknowledge that they had given any promises, and while not siding with pious Turks, the consul made no offer to help the Ahıska Turks. In effect, Rasim was distancing himself from and bypassing Turkey.

Association with the Ottoman gives the impression of pride. During most of my fieldwork, *Osmanlı Türkü* was not often invoked as a common category, but when needed to emphasize something like in the example above it is uttered in comparison and opposition to the modern Turkish identity. Another short example is from Eldar (late 20s) who spoke to the superiority of Ahıska Turks living in his town while in Uzbekistan. The following dialogue illustrates the hierarchical relationship between Ahıska Turks and Uzbeks. Here we see the reference to the Ottoman as a title of distinction:

E: Everybody [Ahıska Turks] was educated. Compare to Uzbeks, the minds of our people were working well.

U: Ahıska people were more...?

E: Ahıska people, yes *Osman Türks* yes [their minds] were working. There were only one or two who were farming, almost none. [Interview]¹⁵

Upon my questions on *Türkiyeliler* [people of Turkey], Ahıska Turks stated that they had heard from their relatives in Turkey that Ahıska Turks are referred to as *Gelinciler*, *Gelmenciler* or *Gezintiler*, which was certainly a new word construction for me based on verbs *gelmek* [to come] and *gezmek* [to travel]. The first two have a meaning like “those who come” and the latter is “those who travel”. Such words that sound neutral

claim to be the “real” Mexicans. They call their language “Mexicano” and in fact the word “Mexico” comes from their language” (Personal communication 2008).

¹⁵ E: Herkes okumuş insan idi Üzbeğ’e bakanda bizim milletin aklı biraz iyi çalışıyor idi.

U: Ahıskalılar daha mı...?

E: Ahıskalılar, he Osman Türkleri hee işliyordular. Tarla ekenler bir tene iki tene idi. O da yok hesabı

however tend to be slurs. Turkish suffixes -ci, -cı, -çi, -çı “produce a noun of profession or habitude” (Watson 2002:193). A very known, common and normalized slur for Turks in Germany is “Almancılar”, which is done through the very same suffix and gives a meaning like “adherents of German”. Many people often use it as if its meaning is “Turks in Germany”. Ahıska Turks in Tucson do not have a good impression of these terms because they remind them of gypsies whose profession or habit is seen as traveling by many Eastern Europeans and Turks. Ahıska Turks do not want to be compared to these groups because they consider themselves to be superior to them.

There are similar accounts of tension between Ahıska Turks and other Turks. Koriouchkina and Swerdlow briefly show that Ahıska Turks' sense of difference sharpened with their contact with Turks from Turkey in the U.S. (2007). According to their fieldwork in the U.S., Ahıska Turks were critical of weddings of Turks from Turkey for not having any Turkish food and for people not dancing very much (2007:421). The authors do not describe what kind of Turks these people are (e.g. from urban or rural backgrounds; religiously observant or not). Dynamics of shifting identification and distancing may differ with contact of different Turkish groups in the U.S. Ahıska men may feel more at ease with Turks who drink vodka with them and not judge them for it. However it is true that Ahıska Turks' sense of difference also increases with their contact. In the case of pious Turks in Tucson, Ahıska women seem to be more eager and open towards them. Raziye (40s), an Ahıska woman, speaks positively about pious Turks contrary to her husband. She complains that her husband and other Ahıska men are wasting their time for other things instead of learning more about Islam.

Respect for older people is often emphasized and valued by Ahıska Turks.

Mehmet (30s) who was a mechanical engineer while in the USSR emphasized different hierarchical attitudes of pious Turks and Turks in Turkey in general. He said, “Turks are respectful to people of higher post. There is this Ahmet guy among the *Türkiyeliler* who calls his students Mr and Mrs, but when it comes to me, he calls me with my name even though he is younger than me. I asked him why he was calling his 20 years old student “Mr” but not calling me *beğ* [Mr in Turkish]. They respect money and position”.

Abdullah (40s) in the room added how fraudulent Turkish businessmen were in Russia:

Türkiyeliler [Turks in Turkey] were coming to Russia. They were asking help for bureaucratic stuff, asking Ahıska Turks to sign official papers since *Türkiyeliler* did not know Russian. After some time *Türkiyeliler* were running away with no trace. Really! My uncle's son [cousin] hanged himself. He had opened a bakery shop with a *Türkiyeli*....There were many Kurds in the Soviet Union. They would die from hunger but would still give his bread to you, but we did not see any goodness from *Türkiyeliler*. There was this driver called Orhan who had come with his FIAT truck [to Russia from Turkey]. His truck was not working in the snow, and the water tank had split apart. Other mechanics told him that it would take a month to bring the part. Ahıska mechanics helped him. They welded the tank. After a month of his departure, he sent them socks made by his mother. From the patterns of socks, we understand that he was Kurd actually not Turk; because we used to wear wool Kurdish socks in the USSR. They are the best for cold.

Not many Ahıska men are as angry as Abdullah to voice their frustration towards the Turkish government and *Türkiyeliler*, however, many men I know have negative attitudes towards *Türkiyeliler* whether pious Turks in Tucson (which I will explain in the next section) or other Turks they know or have heard of. This negative attitude is not done to create an open hostility with pious Turks living in Tucson, but the tension and certain degree of mistrust is present nonetheless. An important reason seems to be that

pious Turkish men assume a big brother role without helping in any concrete way; they also make moralistic judgments, which Ahıska Turks do not like and disagree with.

Pious Turks

Turkish identity in Turkey is often closely related with Sunni Muslim identity that has been favored by “the secular” modern Turkey as well as the Ottoman Empire¹⁶.

Ahıska Turks and pious Turks in Tucson are both Sunni Muslims and share similar Islamic traditions with many other Sunni Muslims in the world. With that said, the two groups have different sensitivities and habits due to their own histories and different lives in different countries and regions. While some of these environmental differences seem to create a tendency for both groups to hold onto different parts of Islamic tradition,¹⁷ pious Turks' assumed “Islamic authority” position is sometimes criticized and ridiculed.

Although the people I describe as “pious Turks” are mostly recent migrants from Turkey and are part of a larger Islamic piety movement among Muslims of the world, they are not organically connected to the Islamic movements outside of Turkey. Often

¹⁶ Kemal Kirişçi illustrates an interesting example of this favoring in legal migration patterns in Turkey. Kirişçi shows through numbers and policies how ethnicity, race, religion and religious denomination were played out in these patterns. While Sunni Muslim non-Turkish Balkan people are the most welcomed to Turkey, Christian Gagavuz Turks from Greece are refused. Sunni Kurds from Iraq however was accepted unwillingly (2000).

¹⁷ Here I use the term “tradition” in a sense Talal Asad and Alisdair MacIntyre use it. Asad offers research about Islam by conceptualizing Islam as a discursive tradition which has a past, a future and a present: “An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present. Clearly, not everything Muslims say and do belongs to an Islamic discursive tradition. Nor is an Islamic tradition in this sense necessarily imitative of what was done in the past. For even where traditional practices appear to the anthropologist to be imitative of what has gone before, it will be the practitioners' conceptions of what is

called the *Gülen* or *Nur* movement, its leader is Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish former imam and scholar now residing in the U.S. The *Gülen* movement claims to promote tolerance, dialogue, education, reform, science and Islam. The movement has hundreds of schools in Turkey and outside of Turkey in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America. Islamic education is either not a significant part of curriculum or is non-existent. They have significant economic and organizational power and are widely recognized by many mainstream Westerners as promoting peaceful and moderate Islam. They are part of a piety movement trying to clean Islam from superstitions, promoting rigorous learning of Islam from central texts and trying to show that Islam and modern life are perfectly compatible¹⁸. State apparatuses in the “secular” Turkish Republic had certain pressures, limitations and oppressions on various religious groups including the *Gülen* movement. We should keep in mind that this movement is partially formed as a response to these state influences as well as modernist currents. There also seems to be some truth to secularists’ claims that the Gülen movement is attempting to infiltrate Turkish government offices, in order to gain influence.

Gülen’s adherents are provincial middle class Turks from Turkey and have recently come to the U.S. through higher education and/or business channels. Many pious Turks in Tucson are either university graduates or students. Core members in Arizona seems to be organized around Daisy Education Corporation that has K-8, K-10 and K-12

apt performance, and of how the past is related to present practices, that will be crucial for tradition, not the apparent repetition of an old form.

¹⁸ For more information about the Gülen movement, see the work of Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (2003) and Bayram Balci (2003).

level schools in Tucson and Phoenix without any specific statement regarding Turkish culture or Islam. Turkish is offered as a second language besides Spanish at the school.

While both Ahıska Turks and pious Turks are Sunni Muslims, when Islamic tradition and habitual sensibilities of these two groups are confronted, it can create tension. Ahıska Turks and pious Turks in Tucson thus have an ambivalent relationship¹⁹. The relationship seems to be closer and more positive between Ahıska and pious Turk women. They regularly visit each other. Ahıska women hold weekly Qur'an recitation meetings with food often in one of the Ahıska's homes. While my interaction with Ahıska women was rather limited, Ahıska women speak highly of pious Turks and their relationship. They say their relationship helps them to learn Islam²⁰. Ahıska men with whom I spent most of my fieldwork have different views about it. While they also appreciate the ceremonial help of pious Turks at the Qur'an recitations and their effort to

¹⁹ I see a parallel in this conflictual relationship similar to relationship between Turks from Germany and Turks from Turkey. Many of the Turks (and Kurds) who immigrated to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s were from poor rural areas of central and eastern Turkey. Already marginalized economically, socially and linguistically in their own country, their adjustment to German society has proven difficult and is perceived as a "failed transition from rural to urban" among urban Turks from Turkey. Turks from Turkey often think of Turks from Germany as degenerate and unacculturated; this is not because Turks see German culture as low. On the contrary, Turks from Turkey are well aware that they are positioned in 'low' racial categorizations by Germans. However, Turks from Turkey see Turks from Germany's integration as a failure due to their 'un-Istanbulian' Turkish dialect, continuing rural dispositions and their marginal position in Germany. Despite many similarities, Turks from Turkey and Turks from Germany tend to see their differences strengthened over the course of time. During my visits to Germany and Netherlands, when the topic of the relationship between Turks from Germany and Turkey is opened, Turks from Germany bitterly complained about Turks from Turkey. These discussions clearly bring up strong emotions and inflict bodily stress. Some of them saw Turks from Turkey as exploitative, tricky and foxy. There was an almost feeling of "naivety complex" among Turks in Germany and Netherlands I have known despite they were relatively better educated.

²⁰ I heard some Ahıska people call it *İslamca* or *Müslümanca*. Suffix -ca in Turkish makes a nationality into language or it creates adverbs from adjective. ex. *Türk-Türkçe*, *Fransız-Fransızca*, *güzel-güzelce* (beautiful-beautifully). The way some Ahıska Turks use it is more closer to the former version. (ex. "Müslümanca öğretiyorlar" [They are teaching *Müslümanca*])

teach them Islam, this also has created an irritation among Ahıska men. I would describe the dominant tone of this interaction as “cautious friendliness”. While Ahıska Turks are critical of pious Turks among each other, only a few outspoken Ahıska men directly talk to pious Turks.

What pious Turks are trying to teach is often the basic Islamic doctrine that Ahıska Turks claim to already know. This conflictual relationship however continues harmoniously through Islamic activities such as the Quran recitations. While my efforts to formally interview some pious Turks about Ahıska Turks were generally futile, some of them briefly showed their annoyance regarding the protest of these few outspoken Ahıska men. When Ahıska men refer to pious Turks in a rather “neutral” way, they call them *Türkiyeliler*. When they are speaking more “negatively”, they call pious Turks *Fettullahçılar* or *Nurcular*, a slightly derogatory term used in Turkey towards to the group²¹.

During an Ahıska men's barbecue party, İlham (early 40s) said, “*Fettullahçılar* do not like our religion. They are teaching how to do ablutions, or the five pillars of Islam [*İslam'ın beş şartı*]. I already know these. This is an offense to us. Do not teach me what I already know”²². After the barbecue party, I had an appointment with Nusret (mid 20s)

²¹ Suffixes -çı and -cu “produce a noun of profession or habitude”(Watson 2002:193) as I had previously explained about slurs Turks use for Ahıska Turks in Turkey. When used like in *Fettullahçılar* which is not a profession or an habitude, it can create a meaning like follower or adherents or partisan of Fettullah or person who promotes Fettullah's philosophy. Many people in my high school would be considered as part of the movement but they would actually would consider Fethullah Gülen simply as a clever, respected leader and they would not consider themselves as an adherent of him.

²² *Fettullahçılar abdest almayı, dinin şartlarını öğretiyorlar, ha bu bize hakarettir bu. Bildiğim şeyi bana öğretme!*

who works in a Pizzeria and speak very good English. After the interview he offered me Pizza he made and emphasized that there was no pork in it. While we sat, he asked me to pray before eating. After that he explained the reason why he emphasized that there was no pork. He had brought pizza he made to a Qur'an recitation where pious Turks had politely refused to eat it on the basis that they only liked pizza with cheese toppings. He did not believe them and was sure that they had suspected pork was in the pizza. He was offended of the treatment even though he continues to participate in some of the Islamic activities organized by pious Turks. He also added that during Ahıska weddings, pious Turks bring their own food and do not eat the Ahıska food present.

When his father-in-law heard we were talking about Turks, he came over and tried to explain another situation. While Ahıska women were visiting the house of a pious Turk, American men (I do not know whether they were Muslim or not) were also guests in the house, visiting the husband. The wife did not have on a full headscarf and overcoat. As soon as the Ahıska men knocked on the door and the husband checked who they were, he warned his wife and she went out of living room and did not show herself to the Ahıska men even though she apparently was willing to show herself to Americans. The father-in-law was angry at pious Turks. Nusret said, “we are clean (pure) Ottoman Turks, Altay²³ Turks. They are afraid of us”²⁴. Nusret and his father-in-law were ridiculing pious

²³ Nusret was referring to a “pure” Central Asian Turkic identity. The Altay is a chain of mountains in Central Asia and it also gave the name of the Turkic language groups, Altaic.

²⁴ “M: Bizim bunlar evlerine gidiyirki bakıyır misafiri Anglıçanlar gelmişler. Bunların yanında şalvar saç bırakılıy yanlarında geziyir. Bizim oğlanlar ki geliyir misafirliğe, bakıyır Müslüman Türkler geldi Ahıska Türkleri karısı kaçıyır içeri çıkmıyır. Öbürlerin yanında öyle geziyir bizim yanımızda örtünüyür. Niye bizim yanımızda...?”

Turks for their strict religious observance on the surface with double standard towards Ahıska Turks. As referred to in the previous section, Nusret used the term “Ottoman Turk” as a powerful and prideful category in opposition to the image of pious Turks in Tucson that Nusret and his father-in-law present as hypocritical. This however is not a uniform and monolithic image of pious Turks. During the interview, Nusret also presented helpful pious Turks in Tucson and Phoenix. Thus, ambiguous images of “others” were often present during my fieldwork.

Ahıska Turks and pious Turks emphasize different parts of Islamic tradition. While pious Turks recommend Ahıska Turks eat *halal* [lawful according to Islamic tradition] meat, which is prepared according to Islamic rules, this is not a great concern for Ahıska men except during the sacrifice at *Kurban Bayramı* [Sacrifice Feast or Eid – al-Adha]. Because many of them were born and grew up in the Soviet Union and Russia, they did not have many opportunities to choose between *halal* meat and *haram* [unlawful according to Islamic tradition] meat. Some Ahıska men explained that the food bought with *halal* money is more important than how the meat is prepared. And secondly, they can justify eating non-*halal* meat, which is a processed food product, because it is God who makes it *halal*²⁵. This is not a common explanation. I know a few Ahıska Turks that have a closer relationship with pious Turks, and they have intentions to regularly sacrifice cattle on their own by going to a rancharia, however, the rest of the Ahıska people have no intention to do so.

²⁵ “Bu ekmeği yapan Amerikalı ama bunu helal yapan Allah'tır”

When they were doing military service in the Soviet Army, there were thick soups with pork meat in it. Some Ahıska Turks admit that they were eating the soup but not the pork meat. They justified it on the basis that there was no other option to eat, one could starve otherwise. They were not angry about it, and they do not think it was a sin because of the no-choice situation. These explanations are not simply folk beliefs. There are exceptions in Islamic tradition that one can consume unlawful things if it is a necessity:

He has forbidden you to eat dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which any name other than Allah has been invoked; but if someone is compelled by absolute necessity, intending neither to sin nor to transgress, they shall incur no sin. Surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful (Quran 2:173)²⁶.

Some of them also said they invoke the name of Allah before they eat to make it lawful, which is also mentioned in the Qur'an as such: "Do not eat of that meat on which Allah's name has not been pronounced, since that is most surely a transgression" (Qur'an 6:121)²⁷. Ahıska Turks and pious Turks can interpret circumstances and Islamic laws differently like different Islamic schools of law interpret these laws differently (Fareed nd and Taştan nd).

During a *sohbet*²⁸ [discussion, lesson] at an apartment rented by pious Turks, Mahir (30s), a pious Turk *ilahiyatçı* [graduate of an Islamic theology department in a Turkish university], emphasized over and over at the end of the *sohbet* to get *halal* meat

²⁶ Based on the translation of F. Malik

²⁷ Based on the translation of F. Malik

²⁸ *Sohbet* means conversation, talk and chat in Turkish. In this context it is a genre of "religious" meeting that starts with common daily conversations and continues with an Islamic lecture. Sometimes there are questions posed after the lecture.

as much as possible [*mümkün mertebe*]. This is however not a large concern for Ahıska Turks. Some of them consider the *halal* meat at Middle Eastern or World markets not as good or as fresh as in usual grocery stores²⁹. Ahıska Turks prefer to buy from a common grocery chain where they can also use their food stamps as opposed to middle class pious Turks who can afford more expensive meat. Consumption of *halal* meat in this sense is not only a simple religious choice but has economic and aesthetic dimensions. Tucson has three Middle Eastern and World markets that sell frozen *halal* meat whose prices are more expensive than grocery meat. These markets usually do not have discounts. A Muslim in Tucson does not have too many options in this sense. Economic, class and the aesthetic dimension of buying and consuming *halal* meat directly impacts Ahıska religiosity as well as ethnic identity.

At the end of the *sohbet*, Rasim picked up a candy on the table with a little smirk on his face and extended it out to Mahir's face and said, "Look, they cannot make this candy without pork fat, even though they do not say it on the ingredient list". This is interestingly a similar conspiracy I witnessed in Turkey about processed food companies using pork products.

Different approaches to religion can easily be noticed between Ahıska Turks and pious Turks. It seems that this is not just an ethno-cultural difference but points to an urban-rural oriented class difference. It is also related to the degree of studying Islam from canonical sources instead of only simply focusing on the ability of Quran recitation,

²⁹ Naci said, "The meat in the Arabic grocery taste like wood [*Arap marketindeki et tahta gibi*]"

which is the ultimate religious activity among Ahıska Turks. For example, urban pious women's headscarf rules are stricter and usually have multiple layers that are accompanied by a robe that covers the body to fully ensure the body figure is not noticed. This is in accord with widely debated Islamic traditions based on interpretations of the Quran and Sunna [exemplary precedent of the prophet Muhammed]. Almost all pious Turkish women cover their heads and dress in such a loose-fitting in overgarments.

On the other hand, not all Ahıska women wear headscarfs, and they are not strict about it. Those who wear headscarfs usually wear it in a single layer and their heads are not fully covered. At a wedding ceremony it is even more difficult to see a headscarfed woman; most of them have their hair done up. No Ahıska woman that I have seen wears a loose-outergarment. Their dress and headscarf are more similar to a mix of Turkish-Russian rural tradition rather than a strictly observed Islamic one. While Nusret pointed out the prejudice in Turkey towards Ahıska Turks, he gave an example of pious Turk women in Tucson:

Our women do not cover themselves, you know what I mean, how, our women are, everything is rightful thanks to God. These Turkish people of Turkey are covering differently, their head and eyes looks like this, right? [gesturing the form of a headscarf]³⁰

After a two hour conversation with five Ahıska Turks in the parking lot of La Milagro, İlham insisted for us to go to Rasim's house to drink tea. İlham's house had many women guests for the Quran recitation. Only Abdullah joined us. They both claimed that all Turks from and in Turkey in general were corrupt and not very respectful

³⁰ See page 72-73 for the larger part of this quotation. At footnote 43, there is the Turkish transcription.

to one another. Then Abdullah complained about two different pious Turks asking for sacrifice money to be used in Africa at the *Kurban Bayramı* [Sacrifice Feast or Eid –al-Adha] instead of Ahıska Turks buying and sacrificing their own cattle in Arizona. He was convinced that there was some cheating going on and this had nothing to do with a religious oriented charity. He said, “They turned this into a business. These people would not even take care of their own parents if they were dying from hunger, but they are trying to send aid to Africa”³¹. İlham (40s) on the other hand objected to Mahir (the Turkish theology graduate in Tucson) telling Ahıska Turks that using a popular Turkish-Islamic phrase-prayer for a deceased non-Muslim was not appropriate:

Koreans saved us from hunger. Our people say “*Allah rahmet eylesin* [may God bestow mercy]” for their deceased. These *Türkiyeliler* say, “*Allah rahmet eylesin*” cannot be said for non-Muslims.’ Koreans are the most *halal*, one of the most hard-working people. They work very hard. They taught us how to grow rice [back in Uzbekistan]. ... Uygur, Korean, Greek, Iranian people were all living around us... There is no discriminating at us, Muslim vs. non-Muslim”³².

³¹“ İşi biznısa[business] çevirmişler. Bunlar anası babası açından ölse ona bakmaz Afrika'ya yardım gönderecek”.

³² “Koreliler bizi açlıktan kurtarmışlar. Bizimkiler “Allah rahmet eylesin” diyor ölenlerine, bu Türkiyeliler “Müslüman olmayana Allah rahmet eylesin denmez” diyor. Koreliler en helal! En helal, hard job, en çetin milletlerden. Çok çalışırlar, bize pirinç ekmeyi onlar öğretti. Uygur, Kore, Greek, İran milleti hep etrafımızda yaşıyordular ... Müslüman-Gavur yok bizde”. I should also point out that just after İlham finished her sentence, Abdullah said, “I worked five years with Greeks[in Central Asia]. I never see any treachery, but I saw from Armenians” [Beş sene Yunanlarla çalıştım, bir tane hıyanetliğini görmemişim. Ermenilerden gördüm ama]. İlham did not say anything about it. However, several weeks ago İlham was telling me a story. Some mafia was harassing him about his land back in Russia after 1990s and he went to another mafia to get help whose leader was Armenian. He was very helpful to İlham. İlham even sanctified this relation on the basis that they had eaten at the same table. Ahıska Turks assume if you eat food of someone, you can not and should not do treachery to and gossip about the person. For similar account see Tomlinson 2004 :84

Abdullah supported this attitude. He and İlham did not cite any Islamic text to support their use of this phrase-prayer, however, they also did not have a claim about the non-Muslim Koreans and the otherworld. They only insisted on showing their gratitude through this phrase-prayer. However, notice İlham's use of Islamic term *halal* [lawful] for Koreans. It is not only an Arabic-Islamic concept, but it is often used in the Turkish of both Ahıska and Turkey to mean that something is done rightfully. Moreover, considering the context of that conversation was based on the connection between being a good Muslim and being a good person, İlham and Abdullah's critique was going into the gray area between a “good Muslim” and a “good person”. They were undermining the religiosity of pious Turks on the basis that they were not even good people. Here is an excerpt from Mahir about the relationship between the characteristics of a “good Muslim” and a “good person”:

...if we ask people to count the qualities of a good Muslim, everyone would be able to count more or less. Everyone would say a "Muslim does not lie, a Muslim loves people, a Muslim works for both his/her world and afterworld, a Muslim does not harm other people, does not cheat"...etc. Everyone would be able to count these[qualities]. Real Muslimness is real humanity/humanism. When we look around us, [we can see] people we really love. Whether they are Muslim or not, we [can] see "Muslim qualities" [at those we love]. For example, tolerance towards other people and understanding... There are people among Christians who have these qualities. They are not Muslim, but they have good nature, beautiful nature. S/he does not lie, s/he hates lies. S/he hates cheating people. S/he helps them. S/he has a good family life. These are qualities of being a good person. It is not just qualities of being good Muslim, but being a good person. Do these qualities benefit these people? That only God knows. It is between God and them. However, if Muslims do materialize these qualities, like not lying, praying, respecting our prophet, having good family relation, treating his/her children

good, helping his/her Muslim brothers and sisters..etc. When a Muslim does these, s/he gains *sevap*. Nothing for the others[non-Muslims]³³.

Mahir also was wandering in the grey zone for a while and left things to be decided by God; however, he concluded in a sentence later there is no reward for non-Muslims who do good deeds. This quotation shows a difference between the textual oriented and well informed pious Turk “religiosity” and less textual and less rule oriented Ahıska attitude, which has been molded in a multinational environment of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan and Russia without dense Islamic education. We cannot simply declare Ahıska attitude towards non-Muslims as “un-Islamic”. Islamic tradition encourages showing mercy and helping others without considering people's belief³⁴. Nor are Ahıska Turks merely ignorant about Islam. In fact, they know very well the ultimate answer of who would go to heaven and hell according to Islamic tradition, but in their

³³“Aslında herkes şöyle saysın desek Müslüman özellikleri hemen hemen sayar yani herkes. Derki işte “Müslüman yalan konuşmaz”, “Müslüman insanları sever”, “Müslüman hem dünyası için hem ayeti için çalışır”, “Müslüman diğer insanlara zarar vermez, aldatmaz”... Bunları hemen hemen herkes sayar yani. Bir yerde aslında hakiki Müslümanlık gerçek insanlıktır yani. Eeeee böyle çevremizde baktığımız zaman gerçek insan böyle hakaten sevdiğimiz insanlara baktığımız zaman onların üzerlerinde Müslüman olsun veya olması Müslüman vasıflarını görürüz biz. Ne bilim diğer insanlara karşı hoş görülüdür, anlayışlıdır, mesela Hristiyanlar içinde özellikle böyle insanlar var. Müslüman değil ama işte iyi huyları var güzel huyları var. Ondan sonra yalan konuşmaz mesela yalandan nefret eder insana insanı aldatmaktan eeee nefret eder bunlardan hoşlanmaz. Ne biliyim komşusu açken ona yardımda bulunur gene aynı şekilde. Onların ihtiyaçlarını giderir çoluk çocuklarına iyi davranır. Güzel bir aile hayatı vardır. Bunlar iyi bir insan olmanın vasıflarıdır, sadece Müslüman olmanın değil. İyi bir insan olmanın vasıflarıdır özellikleridir. Bu özellikler işte onlara fayda sayla sağlar mı orasını Allah bilir yani. Orası Allah ile kendi aralarında bişey. Ama Müslümanlar bu özelliklerin yerine getirdikleri zaman yani hani az önce saydığım özellikler: yalan konuşmaması, Allah'a ibadet etmesi, peygamber efendimize saygı duyması, aile ilişkilerinin güzel olması, çocuklarına iyi davranması, Müslüman kardeşlerine yardım etmesi bunları Müslüman yaptığı zaman da ona n'apıyor sevap kazandırıyor yani. Diğer insanlara birşey yok ama Müslüman yaptığı zaman bunu n'apıyor sevap kazanıyor

³⁴ “Serve Allah and do not commit shirk (*associate any partner*) with Him, and be good to your parents, kinfolks, orphans, the helpless, near and far neighbors who keep company with you, the travellers in need, and the slaves you own. Allah does not love those who are arrogant and boastful” (Qur'an 4:36)

daily relationships like many Muslims I know in Turkey, being a good person seems to have primacy over being good Muslim. Andrew Shryock observed among Jordanians that being a good host almost seemed to be better than being religiously devout (Personal communication 2009). This is also similar among Ahıska Turks where the most important attribute is being a good family member, and being a good host comes after duties to the family.

Despite doctrinal agreements, however, practices, discourses and perceptions can be very different. While this can be explained with boundary creation as Barth does, segmental, class and historical differences that influenced and continues to impact different lifestyles and habituses of Ahıska Turks and pious Turks can be found at the very base of this conflictual relationship that I previously described as “cautious friendliness”.

Ahıska Language Ideology

Language ideology³⁵ is an important component of any discussion of ethnicity. Its establishment through the interaction of macropolitical and microinteractional elements has been debated and the multiplicity of ideology is emphasized (Gal 1998). Claims about language can have deep social, political and economic meanings (Gal 1998, Schieffelin and Doucet 1994). While Ahıska Turk language ideology accommodate different views, however overall it seems to have recurring and widespread theme.

³⁵ For a summary of variety of concepts of ideology that is also related with language ideology see Woolard 1998

Ahıska Turks claim that they were successful in protecting their Turkish language despite being far from their homeland and Turkish instruction however conceived [Dilimizi ^{korumuşux} dinimizi korumuşhuk]. This is not merely a defensive claim against the heavily imposed Russian language. Ahıska Turks speak Russian quite often among each other and use an extensive amount of Russian words when speaking Turkish.

During a men's barbecue party, the discussion turned into a community housing solution plan in Tucson, which had failed in 2008. Adult Ahıska Turks underlined their basic problem as “being together”. Mehmet said, “What are we gonna do? When the kid goes out of house, s/he will forget Turkish”. The concern over language however does not have a “purist” ideology; Ahıska Turks are proud of their language but are harmonious with the other languages they speak as a result of living in a wide variety of environments.

Linguistic code-switching occurs very often. While they make full Turkish sentences, they can switch it to full Russian sentences and then they can switch it back to Turkish. They also use extensive amounts of borrowed Russian words, a few of which can be seen in various dialogues throughout this paper. Since most of the time the language switch occurred when they spoke to one another, which I was unable to record due to my IRB limitations, I put two examples from www.youtube.com that were written as a comment for wedding videos. I underlined Turkish parts while the rest is in Russian written in the Latin alphabet:

Brunetka5: Canikom Saniya i Yashar aka bahtli olun an koti gunuz boyla olsun
Saniya ban Texasdaki Halidanin Bajisi Nargiza s Philadelphia PA ti ochen
krasivaya bji allah sizi hic ayirmasin her dayim bir olun koti gundada iyi gundada

barabar olun :)³⁶

djana8585: Halima canim & Sharaf Enichta Bahtli olun bir yastuhta kojalin. Ya vas ochen sil'no lublu, ya po vam ochen sil'no soshuchilas izvenite chto mi ne smogli priehat k vam na svad'bu. Ya vam jelau samogo luchego to chto est na svete, i futbol'nyu kamandu³⁷.

When Ahıska Turks speak Turkish, they often use Russian words; however, from my observations, they do not often use Turkish words when they speak Russian. Many Ahıska Turks also admit that when they first met Turks after the fall of the Soviet Union, they could not understand them. However, in a very short period of time they started understanding.

Ahıska Turks' language has certainly evolved and is still changing. Many Ahıska Turks today have access to Turkish TV and movies through satellite dishes or via the internet. They are well aware of modern Turkish, which I referred to as 'Istanbul Turkish.' Class differences between different Turkish dialects in Turkey are not overlooked by Ahıska Turks. Dilarom (early 20s) who is working as a supervisor and speaking impeccable English is very conscious about this difference. She praised my Turkish and said it was not like theirs. On the other hand, an Ahıska man (early 30s)

³⁶ "My darling Saniya and Yashar brother, Congratulations(it be auspicious) and wish your worst day should be like this[wedding]. Saniya I am Nargiza, sister of Halida in Texas. Philadelphia PA. You are very pretty. May God not separate you. May you be together always in the worst day and in the best day" Retrieved at 2009, March 20 from http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=a3UXVvioPI0&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3Da3UXVvioPI0

³⁷ My dear Halime & brother-in-law Sharaf. Congratulations(it [marriage] be auspicious) to you, may you get old on the same pillow together. I love you very much (strongly), I missed you so strongly sorry we couldn't come to your weddings. I wish you the best of what is in the world, and a football team Retrieved at 2009, March 20 from http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=e5HjZQNBRAo&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3De5HjZQNBRAo

working as a taxi driver was surprised with my use of *pisik* [cat], which is often used in rural areas of Turkey instead of using *kedî* which is the mainstream term. He said, “You Turks do not say it *pisik*. What do you say? Hmmm you call it *kedî*”. Upon my explanation that in rural areas they also use *pisik*, he protested, “villagers are speaking *clean* Turkish; you [urbanites] mixed it all up!”³⁸. On the other hand, when I start understanding Russian better and start using it more, Rasim said “you became one of us [Aha sen bizden oldun]” in front of the Turks from Turkey during a Qur'an recitation night at Ramadan.

Ahıska Turkish has been influenced by pious Turks as well as Turkish TV and by the movies they watch. When Zemfira told me “Sabile *kindergardena* gidiyor [Sabile goes to kindergarten]”, Sabile who is 6 and trilingual said: “Okula, okula! [To the school, to the school!]”. Her use of “okul” was surprising because Ahıska Turks uses “mektep” an Arabic word for school that was widely used in Ottoman Turkish and is still used in rural areas in Turkey. “Okul” is a 20th century neologism in Turkish, from the Turkish root oku-, meaning to read or study; okul also sounds similar to the English “school” and French “école”. Just into five minutes of this discussion, a young Ahıska Turk (20) came over. Upon my question of his last name, he said “Mehmedov [son of Mehmed, with Slavic suffix] but we will change it to Mehmedoğlu [son of Mehmet, with Turkish suffix], because we are the son of a Turk. I asked my father, he said OK”. He emphasized his Turkishness and a desire to emphasize that identity. However, it is also reported that

³⁸ “Köyler temiz Türkçe konuşuyor siz karıştırdınız hep”.

Ahıska Turks translate their Turkish names into Slavic ones when they communicate in Russian (Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2007:422, Tomlinson 2004).

These interactions show the existence of the pull and push dynamics between Ahıska Turkish, Istanbul Turkish and Russian. However language dynamics are not limited to only these. While not very often, Ahıska Turks also use English words or sentences when speaking Turkish or Russian. Some of them even show their knowledge of a few Spanish words. Zemfire (40s, housewife) who does not speak either Spanish or English watches Mexican soap operas even though she does not understand them. This does not mean that Ahıska Turks are “happy-going” multiculturalists. Abdullah, for example, is very critical of Mexicans not speaking English. He says, “learning a language is a good activity. We knew [multiple languages]. Even though we were not studying them, we were learning by watching and listening”.

Homeland

Space, place and territory are sites of identification to which ethnicity is deeply connected to. The construction of the nation state in a territorially bound space as an “imagined community” is a relatively recent phenomenon (Anderson, 1983).

“Homeland”³⁹ as a concept makes the connection between “home” as a domestic space

³⁹ Ray differentiates between homeland as “an origin” and home as an everyday life experiences” and “a space of social, economic and political safety” (2004). Aydingül on the other hand makes a distinction between *vatan* [homeland] and *memleket* [country where one grows up] specifically for Ahıska Turks (2007:370).

and as a “national territory” that requires an educated imagination. Ahıska Turks gained this educated imagination as they grew up in the multi-national Soviet Union with many titular nations where Ahıska Turks were excluded. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ahıska Turks were one of the few groups that did not have a “homeland” designated for them to go to in the face of the rising nationalism of the post-Soviet era. The lack of homeland resulted in the Ahıska population being spread out over three continents and in at least eight different countries.

Ahıska Turks have a very heterogeneous view of “homeland” (Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2007). Ambivalent and contrary accounts of “homeland” are often given by the very same person. On the other hand, Siljak claims that the children of exiled or people deported from their ancestral place feel “strongly about the 'homeland'”(Siljak in Pohl 2004:54). I would argue that for an important number of Ahıska people in Tucson, a place called Ahıska [Meskhetia] is still where Ahıska ethnic identity is potentially connected. While most Ahıska Turks in Tucson were born and grew up in Uzbekistan, that country does not hold the potential for a homeland even though Turkey and Russia do on occasion.

Contrary to this view, Ray celebrates Meskhetian Turks' “non-national collectivity” as an “instance of resistance” against dominant national identification and emphasizes Meskhetian Turks' extra-territorial imagination “centered on collectivity” despite territorial and national restrictions (2004). According to Ray, this specific Meskhetian Turk collectivity is “very much informed and shaped by the necessary territoriality that colonialism promoted...” (2004:158). However, Ray asserts that

Meskhethian Turks are more concerned about practical matters of daily life and their kin rather than an international humanitarian discourse of repatriation (2004).

While Ahıska Turks in Tucson speak to the importance of daily life, earning enough to provide for their family, security and proximity to relatives, it is hard for them to find all of these opportunities in one location. Ahıska Turks have relatives in many countries. Lack of rootedness and stability can cause stress and concern, especially since most of them are still talking about moving to other states in the U.S. as well. Most Ahıska Turks are well aware of the capital value that comes with being a refugee in the U.S. and having a Green Card in the U.S. Most can fairly easily provide for their families and the Department of Economic Security gives them extra assistance. However, homeland is still an issue that presents itself regularly but briefly among Ahıska men. Balabeğ (40s) who is working at a grocery chain, living with his wife, two sons and both of his parents, gave a long account of how Ahıska Turks while in Uzbekistan were talking about returning to Georgia from morning to night. After this historical account, we started to talk about the present:

B: People [Ahıska Turks] were always [insisting] “homeland homeland homeland, my place my place, my home”[repeating] these kinds of things... We lived with this dream until this day, we lived with this dream.

U: And now?

B: It still exists now, it exist now too ((lowering and slowing down the voice)) now now, well big... always in its time... Look what will happen to people... Georgia today... Georgia is in conflict... Look at conflict between Russia and Georgia. Now our people are in *proyels* [unknown word] today. Living conditions of Georgia is fifty years forty years backwards. For example, I would go [to Georgia], I would go with my heart. If I take my son to there...get him out of city and take him to there. There is nothing there. What will this kid [my son] do there? There is no school, no job. Moreover, there is opposition [in Georgia to

us]... Moreover today life is forty, fifty years backwards [in Georgia]. This is the situation there.

U: Well did you think about returning to Turkey? ((Balabeğ never been in Turkey))

B: ((slowly with a low tone)) I had thought, I had thought, I had thought to go to Turkey, I had thought, I had thought. If... Turkey is very expensive and I do not have that much of money. I realized that my kids were very young then. I would not be able take care of my family if I had gone alone [to Turkey] as a worker.

U: Well was Russia easier [cheaper] to live?

B: Yes ↑ yes ↑. I got a free land. I cultivated it and I got a house in a certain period of time. That house had its own land too. That kind of house and land are very expensive in Turkey. With that much money[I had], nobody would give me anything in Turkey. Without house and land, I cannot work in Turkey. I cannot leave [home] often for commerce. My parents are old and sick. Look last night I called an ambulance for my dad.

U: Well if all economic conditions of Turkey, Russia, Georgia and the U.S. would be the same, where would you like to go [move]?

B: I would go to Russia now. Why? My daughter is there, my sister is there. 90% of my people are there. 90% of [his] Ahıska people is there.

U: Where would they [Ahıska people in Russia] choose to move? Is Georgia still important from where Ahısk[a people were dep[orted in 1944?

B: [Yes [yes I would say yes ↑. If the economic condition would be favorable, Ahıska people would go [move] to Ahıska.

U: Well you know Ahıska people are constantly talking about visa, passport, moving kind of topics, like “citizenship of this country is like this, you get visa like that, Russia Turkey etc”. In that kind of conversation, does Georgia enter into the picture?

B: I did not understand.

U: You know Ahıska people have relatives in different countries; you all go to different countries. For example everybody [Ahıska Turks] is trying to get a Greencard so they can go to Russia [to visit relatives]. How about Georgia...?

B: It is in [the conversations] but ↓nothing happened. They [Georgians] say “Our economic condition is not good. We cannot handle this problem today. If Ahıska people want to go there, it requires a lot of money”. Zero! There is nothing done to Ahıska in the last 30-40 years. There is not a factory. There is no roads and no jobs. They showed these as excuses. There are also political parties that do not want our Ahıska people. They oppose to us. There are also political parties that favor us: “They should come. They are people of this place. Let them come and live. This people will come whether we will let them or not”. There are such parties too. [They say]”They will come whether we want or not”. There was a movie playing in Uzbekistan. There was architecture and an old man in the movie. The old man approached to the architect and said, “What are you doing

son?”. Architect responded, ”I am doing such and such plan, we will build such and such things here [in Meskhetia]”. The old guy with white mustache said him, “Son, do not do[build] these to here”. Architect asked, “Why should not I?”. Old guy said, “This place had its own people living here. They will come here sooner or later whether one year later, ten years later or fifty years later. Sooner or later those people will come here. Think about that”. That old guy said these to the architect.

U: Who made the movie?

B: Georgians. [the name of the movie] *Raikom Sekretarı*⁴⁰. [interview]

⁴⁰ B: Millet her zaman her zaman vatan vatan vatan yerim yerim yurdum öyle şeyler o hayalla yaşadık bu gününe kadar o hayalla yaşadık

U: Peki şimdi?

B: Şimdi de var ama şimdi de var da şimdi şimdi ha büyük her zaman zamanında bak millet şey olacak bugün günde Georgia Georgia şey alacası, Rusyayla Georgia'nın alacasına bak. Şimdi bizim ha şimdi projelerde oranın yaşam durumu yaşam durumu 50 yıl 40 yıl bir 50 yıl geride. Şimdi misal ben giderim, ben giderim ha can can diye giderim bana şimdi oğullarımı götürsem orıya sonra şehirden al da götür de onda bişey yokki onda onda bu çocuk ne yapacak onda. okul yok iş yok a şimdi zaten orda da karşı böyle hem de hem de oranın gidişatın gendi hayatın gendi böylekü günde diyem ki 40-50 yıl geride. Öyle bir durum şimdi orada.

U: Peki Türkiye'ye dönmeyi düşündünüz mü?

B: Düşünmüştüm düşünmüştüm düşünmüştüm Türkiye'ye gitmey düşünmüştüm düşünmüştüm eğer Türkiye'nin yaşam durumu çok pahalı pahalı yanı bende de o para yok ona göre ben ailem gördüm ki Rusyadan çıkande çocuklar ufak bir işçi bir işçi oluyorum misali hee bir ben kendim ailemin şeyini çıkaramam ki. Ona göre

U: Peki Rusya daha mı kolaydı yaşamak için?

B: Evet evet. Rusya'da benim bedava tarlam bedava aldım yanı Özbekistan parasıyla biraz işledim artı belli sürede ev aldım, evin tarlası var, o ev o tarla Türkiye'de çok bahalı o kadar tarlayla o kadar evle benim Türkiye'de ev kisme vermez. Türkiye'de de tarlasız evsiz malsız ben bir iş göremem. Sürekli bunları bırakıp gideyim ben alverde gezmeye anam babam yaşlı yolmalıyım bak bu gece bu gece babam emergency çağırttım.

U: Peki bütün ekonomik durumlar eşit olsa Türkiye'de Rusya'da Gürcistan'da Amerika'da nereye nereye gitmeyi tercih edersin? [clarifying the question]

B: Şu saatte niye Rusya'ya giderdim? niye giderdim? Kızım orda. Kız kardeşim orda. Milletimin %90'ı orda. Ahıskalıların %90'ı orda

U: Peki onlar nasıl bir seçim yapardı. Gürcistan önemli mi mesela artık Ahıskalıların 1944 de sürüldüğü yer

B:

[evet] [evet]
evet onu diyelim ki evet eğer ekonomik durum öle rahat bir durum olaydı Ahıskalıların Ahıskalıları Ahıskaya giderdi.

U: Peki şimdi mesela öyle bir mesela vize, pasaport, vatandaşlık taşınmayla ilgili hani sürekli Ahıskalıları muhabbet ediyor. Hani "şuranın vatandaşlığı şöyle olur vizesi böyle olur Türkiye Rusya..." Öyle bir tartışmada Gürcistan mesela bu tartışmanın içine hiç giriyomu?

B: Ağnamadım

U: Ahıskalıları hani farklı ülkelerde hepinizin akrabaları var, farklı ülkelere gidiyorsunuz Rusya'ya herkez gitmeye çalışıyor Greencard falan alalım diye Gürcistanla ilgili...?

B: Geçiyor geçiyor da birşeyi olmadı ki onun ana yanı onlarla "ekonomik durumumuz eyi değil, bugün bu meseleyi göremeyiz. Yani ki oraya Ahıskalıları getirecek olsak çok para lazım" zero Ahıskanın 30-40 yıl ne Bir şey yapılmamış fabrika *zavot* [завод: factory for heavy industry] ne yol ne iş öyle bir onları bahane

This long dialogue begins with a continuing dream of Ahıska Turks willing to return back to Georgia. Upon asking about the present, Balabeğ made a turn pointing out that “the present Georgia” is “50 years backwards”. Then Balabeğ made another turn and declared he would go there with enthusiasm [*can can diye giderim*] if it was up to a personal decision. Then immediately he changes again and says that it would not be a good idea to take his sons there. Further into the interview I ask whether he had ever thought about moving to Turkey. He prolonged his answer, repeating the same words [*Düşünmüştüm düşünmüştüm düşünmüştüm Türkiye'ye gitmey düşünmüştüm düşünmüştüm*] that shows that he had seriously thought about going there, but it was not an economically viable option. Further down, upon my theoretical question that erased Balabeğ's economical concern over Georgia, Balabeğ made a turn here in relation to his previous answer about going to Georgia. He preferred to go to Russia because his close relatives are all there. In the next question I asked about whether Georgia was still important for Ahıska Turks. Balabeğ answered “yes” two times before I could fully finish my sentence, which shows an existing particular certainty when we consider it in relation to his previous willingness to go Georgia if it was up to him. In the next question,

etti. Sonra öyle ayrı partiyalar var, bizim misal Ahıskalıları istemeyen partiyalar Gürcü partiyalar var o karşılık yapıyorlar. Bizi isteyen partiyalar da var "Gelsinler gönülleri buranın milletidir gelsin yaşasın gelecek istesek de istemesek de bu millet gelecek" ele diyen partiyalar da var. "Biz istesek istemesek de buraya gelecek". Özbekistan'da bir film oluyor ya orda bir architecture, reikom[minister] orda[filimde] bir Ahıskalı[Aksakallı] geliyor [mimara]"oğlum sen ne yapıyorsun?",

"ben böyle plan atıyorum burda böyle bişey yaparız" ...

Aksakallı diyorki, "oğlum sen bunları burda yapma".

"Niye yapmıyım?"

Aksakallı diyorki "buranın burda yaşayan milleti vardı ergeç bir sene mi geçer on senemi geçer elli sene mi geçer ergeç o millet buraya gelicek sen onu düşün". Aksallı ona bu sözü dedi o sinemada.

U: Kim çekmiş o filmi?

B: Gürcüler çekmişti he Raikom Sekreteri hea[filmin adı]

I asked him to clarify whether Georgia had a place in Ahıska discussions. Balabeğ answered positively but with a lowering tone, which pointed to the lack of political change in Georgia regarding the resettlement of Ahıska Turks. He stated that political parties in Georgia were not in favor of the repatriation of Ahıska Turks. He then immediately stated that there were other political parties claiming that Ahıska Turks would come to Georgia one day whether they [Georgians] wanted them to or not [*istese de istemesek de bu millet gelecek*].

Afterwards Balabeğ started telling me about a Georgian movie he saw in Uzbekistan. In the movie, there was an old mysterious guy telling the architect that s/he should not plan on developing the land because Ahıska people would come back to their land in Georgia one day. During this whole dialogue, Balabeğ made seven turns which should not be confused with indecisiveness. Many Ahıska Turks have different ideas because they have to consider many variables. Overall, Balabeğ pointed to a particular desire about returning back to Georgia one day, but it was far from certain.

Yet, I did not initially come to this conclusion. When I first started my fieldwork, I had the impression that homeland was not important among Ahıska Turks. I had expected laments over Ahıska/Meskhetia and there were many. However, for several months after the war between Russia and Georgia during the summer 2008, I started hearing little rumors without any details from some Ahıska Turks that Saakasvili (the President of Georgia) would let them return back to Ahıska/Meskhetia with the increased American support against Russia.

During a *sohbet* [communion, conversation] at a pious Turk's home setting, Ziya (30s), an Ahıska man made an exaggerated claim and ridiculed the Ahıska Turks: "our people are hopeful "Homeland homeland Georgia!" ((a melodic tone)). Osset and Abhaz screwed Georgia over, nobody say anything anymore. They all forgot"⁴¹. Ziya asserted that the Ahıska Turks who were previously considering Georgia as their homeland were now silent after Georgia's defeat and further instability. Ziya referred to Georgia instead of Ahıska/Meskhetia. Georgia had become a member to the Council of Europe in 1999 on the condition to repatriate Meskhetians within 12 years. Despite legislative changes, this process has not yet begun. Saakasvili had given an impression that he was strong enough to unite the country and had the authority to start repatriation; however the latest events with Russia showed that Georgia is not strong and stable enough to fulfill any such obligation let alone defend itself. On the other hand, the strong American support during the war in summer 2008 also gave hope.

Upon Ziya's provocative statement, both Rasim and Naci immediately objected. The topic shifted to what *vatan* [homeland] is. Here is a small excerpt from the conversation where the pious Turk Bilal (30s) who was born and raised in Turkey is discussing this topic with Rasim and Naci:

Bilal: It is necessary to be peaceful. There is no need for enmity. Georgia will be part of Turkey but not like it will be our land, but will be part of us economically.

Rasim: Cemil says those who do not know history and do not have homeland, will

⁴¹ "Bizimkiler umutlu "Vatan vatan Gürcistan!". La Oset, Abhaz Gürcünün amına koymuş daha kimseden ses çıkmıyır. Hepsı unuttu".

not have the funeral salat [prayers].

Bilal: For a Muslim everywhere is homeland. This does not mean we will give up our homeland but we are in America here, we will work for the good of this place. Here is homeland... everywhere is homeland.

Naci: But I do not say “I am American”, I say “I am Turk”.

Bilal: You know they say “Turkish-American”. It is necessary to be realistic.

Now, returning to Ahıska ... not very realistic. There is poverty, etc⁴².

While Bilal offers a hyphenated American solution of settling, Ahıska Turks who just came to the U.S. several years ago are far from the romantic American image of immigrants (Portes 1996:3). For Ahıska Turks, integration into American society is mostly about learning the language, having a job and guaranteeing one’s legal status. In the mundane routine of daily struggle, *vatan* [homeland] appears as a topic under the larger discussion of moving to another state within the U.S. While nobody has a concrete plan to move to Georgia, they still want to have the right to return back one day. Considering that one of the most vocalized concerns of the Ahıska community is being close to kin spread out in different countries, it seems likely that Georgia, although it has the lowest Ahıska population among these countries, is still the only imaginary meeting point that can theoretically bring Ahıska Turks together and create an excitement among the community.

⁴² Bilal: Barışçı olmak lazım. Düşmanlığa gerek yok. Gürcistan Türkiye'nin parçası olacak ama hani öte taraf bizim toprağımız olacak değil ama ekonomik olarak bizim bir parçamız olacak.

Rasim: Cemiser diyor ya tarih bilmeyenin, *vatanı* olmayanın cenaze namazı kılınmaz!

Bilal: Müslüman için her yer *vatan*. Bu demek değilki *vatan*dan vazgeçelim ama burda Amerika'dayız, buranın iyiliği için çalışcaz. Bura *vatan* her yer *vatan*.

Nuri: Ama demiyim ki “Amerikanım”, “Türküm” deyim

Bilal: Hani diyorlar ya Turkish-American. Realistik olmak lazım. Şimdi Ahıskaya dönmek...pek realist değil,fakirlik vs

However, Uzbekistan has no potential for an Ahıska future and imagination. Although it is the country where Ahıska adults over 30 years old were born and grew up, almost no Ahıska Turks I know consider it their homeland. Many of them claim that they never felt Uzbekistan as a *vatan* [homeland]. Rasim, for example, who is pro-Turkish, is ambivalent towards Uzbeks and started talking bitterly during an interview. He started telling me his former plans in Uzbekistan to develop his house and garden and open a restaurant which is still his dream for the U.S. His romantic description of his plan and beauty of Fergana [Uzbekistan] was in contrast with his previous comments that Ahıska Turks had never perceived Uzbekistan as a homeland. Rasim often points to Turkey as the home for Ahıska Turks. He stated that he wants to go to Turkey for his retirement; however, he is also aware of structural and economic difficulties in Turkey in general and specifically for Ahıska Turks.

Nusret asked me to take my ‘book’ [this thesis] to the President of Turkey to help Ahıska Turks. He was well aware of difficulties Ahıska Turks face and might face in the future:

N: Look Ufuk, you are saying this and that but if we go to Turkey they will discriminate against us in Turkey too. Do not take it to heart [personally] my friend. You are from Turkey, if we go to Turkey they will call us “Gelmenciler”, they will call us... like you know they say “refugee”, fugitive, they will call us “Gelinciler.”

U: They will not like your Turkish if you go to Turkey?

N: They will not like us either. They will say, “What a hairy nation!”. Our women are not covering themselves, you know what I mean, how our women are, everything is rightful thanks to God. These Turkish people of Turkey are covering differently, their head and eyes looks like this, right? [gesturing form of a

headscarf]⁴³

Nusret used the future tense with the terms “Gelmenciler” and “Gelinciler” that I had previously mentioned. Nusret had heard these slur-like terms from his relatives in Turkey and also from other Ahıska Turks in Tucson who also have relatives in Turkey. Opposite to Ahıska Turks in Turkey who see Turkey as their homeland (Aydingün 2007), Ahıska Turks in Tucson do not often see Turkey in such a way. Tomlinson reports a similar attitude among Ahıska Turks in Krasnodar, where most of the Ahıska Turks in Tucson are from (2004).

Throughout this chapter, I demonstrated how Ahıska Turk identity is constructed and positioned in relation to attitudes and policies in Turkey, pious Turks in Tucson, Turkish language and ideas about homeland. Despite the existence of heterogenous voices, there is an ongoing thread that signals awareness of a dramatic difference from Turks. Turkey as a possible option for a homeland with its language and Sunni Muslim population looks more distant to Ahıska Turks than the Soviet Union in the past and Russia. In the next chapter, I present Ahıska Turks’ identification in relation to the Soviet political area.

⁴³ N: Ula bana bak da Ufuk can, ele bele diyirsin de Türkiye'ye gitsek Türkiye'de de bizi ayırırlar gölüğe[gönlüne] almayasın da dostum. Sen Türkiyelik misin de biz ha şimdi gidek bize diyecekler ki "Gelmenciler" diyecekler, ha bu diyirler ya kak[kak:gibi] refüçüüü kaçaklar. "Gelinciler" diyecekler

U: Onlar sizin Türkçenizi beğenmezler Türkiye'ye giderseniz

N: Kendimizi de beğenmeyecekler onlar. Diyecek ki “ne kıllı millet”. Bizim karılar bayanlar örtünüp gezmiyler, yani örtünme nasıl zakonniy[законный :legitimate, rightful] her bişey eyyy[iyi] Allah’ a şükür dogru. Bu Türkiyalıklar başkaça he örtünüp bu böyle başı gözleri görünüyür e?

CHAPTER 4: THE SOVIET SPHERE

The Muslim population of the region of Meskheta has been under Russian and Soviet rule since 1829. Tomlinson argues that “being Soviet is part of being Meskheta Turkish” and she uses Zinovyev's term “homosovieticus” (2002:194). Even though they do not claim to be Soviet people, Ahiska Turks over 30 years old were born and raised under the Soviet regime. They long for Soviet socialism, which is a widely known phenomenon among many former Soviet and socialist peoples (Bloch 2004, Sampson 1999, Tomlinson 2004, Ray 2004). The Soviet Union is often glorified by Ahiska Turks and is presented as better than and encompassing a larger area of life as opposed to the neo-liberal U.S. where limited social services are rendered by loose and intricately connected federal, state and non-state institutions (but not less organized and controlled) (Miller and Rose 2008). In this sense, their longing is connected with the present situation (Ray 2004, Tomlinson 2002). Ray describes it: “the character of Soviet nostalgia is one of longing for the economic security, the freedom to associate with various ethnic groups -- the quasi equality which emerged under that regime and the sense of order, whether or not one agreed with the regime” (2004:170). While Russian dominance is hard to deny (Motyl 1987), Ahiska Turks tend to present it as a “brotherhood/sisterhood” between various Soviet nations and are usually positive towards Russians as well as Uzbeks and Azeris. This of course does not stop them from making opposing value judgments in different times and contexts. Some of these contradictions are rooted in the appropriate Russian and Soviet racial discourses.

The Soviet Identity

Ahıska Turks tend to distinguish Russian imperialism from the Soviet Union.

There is a general sympathy among Ahıska men towards the USSR, especially in relation to the USA, Russia and Turkey. When I ask whether this is simply nostalgia, they refuse it and point to the economic prosperity, leisure time and equality in the Soviet Union. With state subsidies on almost every consumer product and service, it was not hard to provide for basic needs in the USSR (Verdery 1996, Yurchak 2006). They had more holidays compared to the U.S. Plus, their work environment was less controlled. For example, they could tell their boss that they were going out for something job-related and go get a drink instead. Abdullah describes it, “life was sweet in the Soviet period” [Sovyet zamanında hayat tatlıydı].

With regard to equality, it is widely known that the Soviet Union had universal health care and schooling opportunities as well as very high state employment (whose efficiency is widely debated) (Verdery 1996). While basic needs were easily provided for and economic disparity was relatively low, Ahıska men considered the interactions between people to be more democratic. They argued that hierarchies were not very important and a farmer and brain surgeon who did not know each other could easily make jokes and end up at a vodka table⁴⁴. In contrast, they complain that Turks from Turkey are more hierarchical and less accessible. They also think Americans are not as friendly as Russians. By friendliness, they expect an actual guest-host relationship. They were

⁴⁴ İlham said, “Rusyada ağalık azdır, üst rütbeli adamlarla otur dal daşşak küfür et dalga geç beraber muhabbet edebiliyosun”.

visiting each other's houses and going to each other's weddings, which is not the case with the Americans now. The American- Ahıska friendliness does not much exceed the work hours. Relationships with pious Turks are also limited to the religious sphere especially for men.

Discourse of religious repression of the Soviet Union was and is a widespread belief in Turkey as in other parts of the world. As mentioned previously, Sunni Muslim practice is an important component of Ahıska identity. Upon my statement “in Turkey they say Soviets are atheists”, İlham and Abdullah both refused.

İ: Nothing [bad] happened to a mosque in the Soviet period. It always happened to church, because they were the ones that ruling the government. When the Soviet got strong, if there was not a mosque in one village, there would be one in the next. If there was not a mosque, we would pray [salat] in someone's house [together]. We had our *molla* [imam] Nothing [bad] happened to those *mollas*.
A: Communist is an atheist, but in 78 years of the Soviet, I did not forget my language and religion. We used to drink alcohol, we were friendly to a friend, and hostile to an enemy [means no hypocrisy], we did not have anything oblique⁴⁵.

Uluğbek (late 30s) is known to be “molla” among Ahıska Turks. He started going to Friday *salat* after he left Uzbekistan. Here is a dialogue about religion in the Soviet Union:

Uf: Was there an education at schools [in the Soviet period] against religion?

⁴⁵ İ: Sovyetlerde bir tane camiye birşey olmamış. Hep kiliseye olmuş çünkü onlar hükümeti yönetiyor. Sovyetler möhkemlenince, güçlenince bir koyde olmasa yan köyde cami olurdu. Biz de cami olmasa, birinin evinde kılınırdı. Mollamız vardı. Hiç birşey olmamış o mollalara.

A: Komunist Ateisttir ama Sovyetlerde 78 yıl oldu dinimi-dilimi unutmamışım. Alkol de içerdik, dostadost, düşmana-düşmandık, yamuğumuz yoktu.

Ul: Now, at my time there was none. I do not know that kind of stuff, I do not know what happened after me. I have not seen such a thing. hmmm during my military service there was such a thing but I do not know what, I have not heard anything. I have not passed/been in a course against religion, it did not happen.

Uf: But there was no such thing like “religion course”?

Ul: No:::: there was no religion course.

Uf: Do you remember anything regarding religion?

Ul: No:::: there was no course. hmm wife of my second brother... her grandfather was *molla*, her mother was *molla*, she was *molla* herself too. mmm she was teaching to us, they were coming to us to teach [reciting Quran]. She was making [teaching] my sister read Arabic. I started that time, I finished *cüz* [prosody blocks] but after that I was hanging out with friends and give up reading [reciting Quran]. I conformed to guys [friends], they diverted me from the way [religion]. I had learnt until *cüz* later on... but my sister was teaching it, she was going different houses, Quran was recited. Everything would be in accord with the tradition, everything. Our Muslim religion was very strong in our village [Uzbekistan]. Later on we came to Russia [1991], it [religious practice] was the same in Russia. However it was in Uzbekistan, it was the same in Russian. Now we came to the America, it is the same. You saw that day [at Quran recitation] for example *mevlids* [poem recitation for Prophet Mohammed] are organized, it happens such⁴⁶. [interview]

⁴⁶ Uf: Okulda dine karşı eğitim var mıydı?

Ul: Şimdi benim zamanımda yok idi de benden sonra bilmem ben böyle bişey görmedim yani ele bir hmmm... Ben askerluk zamanında öyle bişey bişey çıkmış ama ne çıkmış bilmem ben öle bişey işitmemişimki ee dine karşı bir ders geçiyim ya bişey geçim öle bişey geçmemiş.

Uf: Ama din dersi falan bişey yoktu?

Ul: Yo::: din dersi yoğdu

Uf: Dinle alakalı birşey hatırlıyo musun?

Ul: Yo::: ders birşey olmamış hmmm... İkinci kardaşımın hanımı o onu:: onun dedesi mollaydı onun anası mollaydı ondan sonra aha kardaşımın karısı da mollaydı mmm o işte böyle okutuyor idi öle bize gelirdiler. Ablama Arapça okuturdu ben de o zaman da başladım cüzü bitirdim de sonra oğlanlara uydum sonra bıraktım okumayı okumadım. Gençlere uydum yoldan vurdular gençler de ben cüz açan okudum ondan sonra.. Ama ablam okutirdi ee Ramazan ayında iftarlara gezinirdi Kuran okunurdi hep herbişesi kendi adatinde olurdi herbişesi Müslüman dinimiz çok mökkem [kuvvetli] idi bizim köğümüzde. Ondan sonra Rusya'ya geldik Rusya'da da gene eyle. Nasıl ki ondaydı onda misal için gene Rusya da işte Amerikaya geldik bunda da gene kendin gördün o gün misal için mevlitler oluyir böle işte oluyir.

Uluġbek seems to remember something against religion, but he is not sure what it was. It seems like it was not a part of his life. In the Soviet period, there were no religion classes in the state schools; however, Uluġbek has no such expectation either. He shows his contentment with informal Islamic education and activities. This however does not mean that this was the universal situation in the whole Soviet geography. It varied greatly depending on the proximity to urban or rural space as well as the Western part of the Union (Motyl 1989). Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) had a predominantly Muslim population, and many Ahıska Turks had teachers coming from Muslim traditions especially in rural, provincial areas and outside of the capital. Many Ahıska Turks spoke highly of the tomb of Al-Bukhari in Uzbekistan, describing their visits to it as *hajj* [pilgrimage], and even comparing it with the Ka'ba. Local sensibilities seem not to be disturbed or at least not fully permeated by Soviet policies. While the Soviet Union had clearly erased an expectation for supporting the religious sphere, Uluġbek is content with Islamic practices. He sees an undisturbed continuity from Uzbek SSR to the Russian Federation and now to the U.S. The Soviet Union was not a disturbance or a break for Uluġbek environment's religious practices.

During my fieldwork, Ahıska Turks usually referred to the 1944 deportation in third person plural without specifically stating who the third person referred to. That third person plural appeared to be the Stalin regime, which had deported their parents and grandparents. Defamation of Stalin in the Soviet Union after the mid-1950s also seems to clear the Union from guilt over the deportation. Many Ahıska Turks over 40 among whom I did my fieldwork had experienced the Soviet Union between the 1950s and the

1980s. Many of these Ahıska Turks think back with nostalgia and do not accuse the Soviet Union of any wrong doing up until 1989. Sampson defines this longing as the rise of “structural nostalgia” in Eastern Europe in the face of sudden impoverishment and blatant inequality after the collapse of Soviet Socialism (1999). While Ahıska Turks do not necessarily blame the Soviet Union for their exile, for some of them, blame is placed on Russian imperialism and rarely Russians in general. During my interviews, I pointed out the fact that Russians were usually in a higher social class than many other ethnic groups including Meskhetians, a fact of which they were already well-aware. They seem to be convinced of reality of Soviet anti-nationalism and meritocracy, the “good old days” as if it was something natural for them and for every Soviet citizen. Here is an excerpt from Uluğbek:

I had friends in the military, I had friends. One of them was Uzbek. Whoever you see from Uzbekistan, you recognize him as friend, because he is from your republic. In our time [the Soviet period], during military service, for example, like now, there was no such things, like they say [a tough voice] “You are Russian, you are Uzbek, you are Kazakh!”. There was no such thing [discrimination and nationalism]. In that time, everybody was friend to one another, everybody was brother to one another. When I did my military service, there was no national/ethnic discrimination. Those were very good days. I had Greek friends, Uzbek friends, Russian friends⁴⁷ [interview].

Ahıska Turks had relatively close relationships and interactions with other ethnic groups despite their own strong kinship and ingroup ties. This makes it much more

⁴⁷ “Askerlikte var idi arkadaşım var idi şimdi biri Özbekistan'dan kimi Özbekistan'dan görsen onu arkadaş tanıyorsun çünkü kendi şeyinden çıkıyorsun. Kendi Respublikandan. Bizim zamanımızda askerlik edende misal için şimdiki kimi[gibi] şimdiki zamanda söyleyerler “Ula sen Russun, sen Özbeksin, sen Kazaksın!” o zamanda öyle bişey yok idi. O zamanda herkeşh!! birbirine arkadaş idi, herkeşh birbirine gardaş idi, ben askerlik edende. Millet seçkilik yokh idi o zamanda. Çok iyi zaman idi o zaman işte. Arkadaşlarım Greekler de var idi Özbekler de var idi Ruslar da var idi arkadaşlarım onda”.

difficult for Ahıska Turks to make negative moral judgments about Russians. This can partially be explained by Rampton's observation that:

...in situations where cultural pluralism is acknowledged and accepted, moral judgments are harder to make because people often feel that there are aspects of their peers' knowledge and activities which they are neither equipped nor entitled to judge. Here, exclusion and difference are much more likely to produce uncertainty. In a sense, everyone is a 'stranger' in the polyethnic peer group: everyone is situated (1995:488-489).

This can be a valid evaluation for Ahıska Turks. However this cultural pluralist situatedness does not necessarily stop Ahıska Turks from making race-based and racist comments about different groups, which creates tensions and/or disagreements among the group. Tensions among individuals can be observed through contradictory statements made by the same person in different contexts. This can also be interpreted by Smith's Bakhtinian analysis of contradictory accounts of Maltese people on ethnicity, identity and inequality. Smith attributes this to competing voices of people who have a colonized subjectivity (2004). In this analysis, Smith shows drastic differences between personal experience, public discourse and knowledge voiced by the same person. There is some similarity between the Soviet context and the French colonies. Russians were certainly dominant in the Soviet Union (Barghoorn 1956, Motyl 1987, Verdery 1989); however, Russian domination was more subtle and hidden behind meritocracy in recognition of multitudes of different ethnic groups.

Besides the contradictory accounts given by the same individuals at different times, tensions among Ahıska Turks on certain topics are very clear. While Ahıska Turks explain many things to me and provide valuable insight about their group, they

sometimes see it necessary to erase some differences, similarities and categories. For example, during a meeting with Ahıska men over 40, Rasim accused Russians and targeted them as responsible for atrocities. Kamil on the other hand wanted to soften it: "now we cannot say all Russians are bad. They have good people among them too". İlham who is well-educated and had important posts in the Soviet Union objected to Rasim's point and said "Russians are not bad, they are like all other people but their government is bad". These tensions are common among Ahıska Turks.

Here is another excerpt from Eldar (early 30s) about his experience in Krasnodar (Russia) and comparing Ahıska Turks and Russians:

U: Well were Ahıska people attracting too much attention by working very hard?

E: Turkish people?

U: Yeah

E: Turkish people are like, everybody has five, six, seven children at home. One son works in a bazar 40 km away, other one works in another bazar 30 km away. They all need a car. They have family. He has family, he should see light [afford]. One is going this direction [to work], other is going that direction. Is it necessary to work? Is it necessary to buy a house? ((interferences)) You cannot live in a small place. You got married. After several years, you will have your own kids. You cannot live in the same house [with your parents]. We were working, we were not hiding anything. We needed car, we were buying it. What we gonna do by hiding! When we needed car, we were not asking to borrow other people's car. Their [Russians'] eyes could not stand that. They were telling us "We are native but you are the ones who buy cars"

U: Well natives [Russians] had smaller families?

E: No their family are not small⁴⁸. They are a nation who does not like work.

U: Russians?

E: Yeah, Russians. They do not like work. They were drinking alcohol, spending their day with vodka. They would work for a salary. They would buy [alcohol] with that salary and drink alcohol⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ U: Peki Ahıskahılar daha mı çok çalışıp görünüyodu göze batıyordu?

E: Türk milleti mi?

There are many Ahıska Turks with good stories and appreciation of Russians, Uzbeks, Armenians, Azeri, Korean, Greek and many other nationalities as well as bad stories and racist remarks, which may be supported, refused, adjusted, or softened by the group. Ahıska Turks in Tucson seem to recognize the different experiences of members of the community and seek to mediate these conflicting experiences when disagreement arises.

Soviet Racial Categories and “Kavkaz”

Research on Africans in the Soviet Union by Lemon and Fikes illustrates that the Soviet racial discourse was heavily influenced by Western conceptions of race despite the egalitarian discourse of Soviet Socialism (2002). For Russians, the Caucasus from where Ahıska Turks were deported in 1944 played a similar role as “Africa in the British imaginary” (2002:506). In Russia, *chorny* or *cherny* [чёрный: black] is used as a racial slur to refer to the Caucasians including Ahıska Turks. According to Lemon and Fikes,

U: Hhehe

E: Türk milleti nasıldır, evde 5 tane, 6 tane 7 tane her birinin uşak- çocukları vardır. Biri oğlu çalışıyor öbür bazarda 40 kmettir biri çalışıyor öbür bazarda 30 kmettir her birine araba lazım ahır, onun ailesi var o gün görmelidir. O o tarafa gidiyor, bu bu tarafa gidiyor çalışmak lazım mı, ev almak lazım [interferences] ev almak lazım çalışmak lazım bir yerde sıklıkla yaşanması mı? Sen evlendin sen bir iki yıl geçecek senin çocuğun olacak, çocuğun evelenip büyüyecek, bir evde yaşanması na... Biz çalışıyorduk biz gizletmiyorduk hiçbirsey. Araba lazım araba alıyorduk, gizletip biz ne! Bize araba lazım ise biz kismeye soran olmuyorki “araban ver bene”. Onlar ona gözü kaldırmıyordu. Diyirdi ki “biz yerliyk siz araba alardayız”

U: Peki yerliler küçük bir aile miydi onlar?

E: Aile küçük degül↑ Onlar iş işi sevmeyen birrr millet

U: Ruslar?

E: He Ruslar onlar işi sevmezler, onlar arak içmek gününlen geçirirdi. Ayluğa işlerdi, aylığında alardı arak içerdi.

“in Russia any “swarthy,” “southern,” and “Asian” person might be labeled *chernij*, or “black”” (2002:507). Ahıska Turks consider themselves as *Kavkaz* [Caucasus] people and they are referred to as *chorny* or *cherny* especially by the Russian authorities in the North Caucasus. The usage of racial slurs towards Ahıska Turks intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was internalized by some Ahıska Turks. Koriouchkina and Swerdlow gave an interesting account of an Ahıska woman in the U.S. who was surprised when her boss corrected her for checking off the “black” box in the race section of her job application form (2007:421-422).

Some Ahıska Turks reciprocate this and think of Russians as “white”. Once while selling his produce, İlyas (40s) was asked for help by an older Russian man he did not know. He took the man to the hospital. The old fellow did not have his insurance documents, and the doctor was refusing to treat him. He asked İlyas, “Who are you and why are you helping him?”. İlyas who was worried about the old man got angry and said to the doctor, “Don't you see he is *bely jop* (белый жо́п: white ass] and I am *chorny jop* [чёрный жо́п: black ass⁴⁹]! I do not know the guy. He asked for my help, I brought him here and I am not leaving until you treat him!” Later the doctor liked İlyas for his behavior and they drank vodka in the hospital after the old man's operation. İlyas's effort to normalize and subvert the use of *chorny* for the moment however cannot prevent the larger use of it. Some other Ahıska Turks thinks that *bely* and *chorny* are simple

⁴⁹ According to modern Russian grammar, these phrases should be *belaya jop* [белая жо́па] and *chornaya jop* [чёрная жо́па]. A Russian speaker told me that Ahıska Turks do not speak Russian in accord with acknowledged grammatical rules.

categories of identification, having nothing to do with degradation, discrimination and racism.

Ahıska Turks did not mention this use of *chorny* until I asked them after reading the article of Lemon and Fikes. After I asked this use, their response was a reflection of its obviousness. While Koriouchkina and Swerdlow describe the whitening of Ahıska Turks as “a higher level of social acceptance within the construction of racial categories compared to their status in Krasnodar [Russia]” (2007), it is necessary to mention that it is not only Ahıska Turks but the whole Caucasian people are categorized and referred as *chorny*. It is also not just in Krasnodar but also in many other administrative districts in the Northern Caucasus.

Many Caucasian people as well as other people that had experienced the violence of Russification have a history of resistance against the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Grant 2005, Khodarkovsky 2002, Reynolds 2008)⁵⁰. There is a romantic *Kavkaz* identity that can be described as an umbrella identity encompassing other Caucasian ethnic groups. These groups have similar dance and music traditions that unite them despite extraordinarily deep and complex linguistic⁵¹, ethnic and religious differences. Idealized *Kavkaz* identity can be described as being in opposition to Russian authority, which can be seen as divisional, outsider and oppressive. Russian literature seems to contribute to the construction of this romantic identity (Personal communication Hill, see Grant 2005 and Layton 1994). According to Ahıska Turks, *Kavkaz* identity includes

⁵⁰ For violence of Russification see Motyl 1987, 1989, Bilinsky 1981, Pipes 1974

Kalmyk, Chechen, Ingush, Dagestan, Kabardin, Balkar, Karachay, Circassian, Abkhasian, Ossetin, Azeri, Georgian, Adjar and Armenian nations. It is hard to claim that there is much harmony and solidarity among most of these groups. Internationally, there are some well-known conflicts between the Osset, Adjar and Abkhaz nations with Georgia; in addition, Azeris and Armenians have an ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabagh region. There are micro and macro solidarities when Russia enters the picture however.

During *Kurban Bayramı* [Sacrifice Feast or Eid –al-Adha] İbrahim, a taxi driver in his late 20s asked me if I knew of the *Bozkurt* [Grey Wolf]. I knew that it is used as a symbol by ultra-nationalist Turks in Turkey. İbrahim claimed that it was originally a Caucasian symbol:

Caucasian people are all *Bozkurt*, because we never accepted the assimilation of the Russians. *Bozkurt* never obeys, he is by himself, and he goes on his own way. *Bozkurt* allows you to act together with your people, and you do not obey imperialists when they tell you to change your religion and language. Look at Tatars (a Turkic group), tczar Ivan Grozny converted them to Christianity, they are not *Bozkurt*⁵².

İbrahim clearly excluded Tatars who obeyed and conformed to Russians and made it explicit that this is unacceptable for people who identify themselves with the *Bozkurt* [Grey Wolf].

⁵¹ See Comrie 2008 for linguistic diversity in Caucasus

⁵² Grey Wolf (*borz*) is also a symbol of Chechen resistance, self-perception and masculinity (Gammer 2006). It is hard to find publications showing Kavkaz romantic spirit and grey wolf as a symbol of whole Caucasus. Historiographies on Caucasus are more focused violent resistance to Russian rule with biases and stereotypes almost presenting North Caucasians as violent by nature (Reynolds 2008).

After İlyas's story of helping the elderly Russian man, I started to ask specific questions regarding different states and people to understand *Kavkaz* solidarity. They described solidarity more on a personal level than on the larger geopolitical scale. After a somewhat theoretical discussion, Abdullah gave an example:

In Moscow, if two Russians start making fun or bully a *Kavkaz*, other *Kavkaz* people do not care whether they are from the same republic or not, they back up that person. They [other *Kavkaz* person] would even lie and claim that he is from their village and they help him. In the real political level, it is different. Armenia is always attached to Russia, but we would do solidarity again. *Kavkaz* people never bow to anyone, but he helps his *Kavkaz* brother⁵³.

While Nurkhonum was explaining mistreatment in Uzbek schools, she stated that she had never seen such discrimination from Russians back in Uzbekistan. Naci stated that Russians were very nice in the Soviet times; however, Russians changed after they went to Russia in the Post-Soviet period:

Russians are respectful when they are in a foreign country, they speak language of the country -Uzbek, Turkish- but in Russia they are like dogs. Russians who got good manners in Uzbekistan were ruined once they went to Russia. They are ruined like Nazis⁵⁴.

⁵³ Moskova'da iki Rus bir Kafkas'la dalga geçsin, bunu duyan diğer Kafkaslar baska bir republikten olsun olmasın o kişiye arka çıkarlar, yalan da söyleyim benim köyümden der adama yardım ederler. Politik düzeyde is ayrıdır. Ermenistan hep Rus'a bağlıdır ama biz yine de solidarite yaparız. Kafkaslar boyun eğmez ama kendi Kafkas kardeşine yardım eder

⁵⁴ Ruslar yabancı memlekette respect ederler, oranın dilini konuşurlar, Özbekçe, Türkçe konuşurlar ama Rusyada it gibiler. Özbekistanda terbiye gören Ruslar Rusyaya gidince bozuluyor, Nazi gibi onlar da bozuldu.

As can be seen from various examples, Ahıska Turks have a variety of views on different ethnic groups depending on their personal experience and in relation to the political situation.

Egalitarian but also Superior: Uzbeks and Azeris

Ahıska Turks perceive themselves as more advanced than indigenous groups of Central Asia in cultural and economic terms, and sometimes even at religious practice. They believe that Central Asians had already started forgetting their language and religion when Ahıska Turks were deported there. As mentioned before, Ahıska Turks are proud of themselves for protecting their traditions, language and religion in exile. Considering the similarity of languages of Central Asia with Turkish, there are even accounts that Ahıska Turks were praised by natives for speaking the Turkic languages of Central Asia better than natives (see Devrisheva 2006:113). Attitudes of Ahıska Turks usually range from being egalitarian to considering themselves superior to others, which can go to descriptions of how “hierarchically lower” native populations compare to Ahıska Turks. Guldeste (70s), an Ahıska woman said:

When we came to Uzbekistan, it was all desert. Uzbeks did not know much about agriculture. In a very short period of time we turned Uzbekistan into heaven. Uzbeks did not even know how to make roofs. They learned it from us. Now, they deported us; see what happened to Uzbekistan? They do not have anything.

Khazanov claims that is based on the dichotomy of European vs. Asian and settled vs. nomadic:

Considering themselves as more advanced, [Ahıska] tended to look down upon the indigenous population of Central Asia, particularly because, denied avenues of social advancement, they had concentrated their efforts on the economic sphere, and soon became more prosperous⁵⁵ than their Uzbek, or Kazakh neighbors. "We"- "they" opposition began to reveal itself in very specific opposites with negative connotations: "European" (i.e. Meskhetian Turk) - "Asian" (i.e. Central Asian population), "europeoid"- "mongoloid," "sedentary"- "nomadic" (the last two opposites were revealed in a particularly clear way in Kirgizia and Kazakhstan) (Khazanov 1992:8).

Similar to Khazanov, Aydıngün reports that “although they considered themselves superior to the local nationalities, they were not perceived and treated as such by the locals. To be Turks or Turkified and of a deported nationality was sufficient for them to be discriminated against in public life” (Aydıngün 2002b). Many Ahıska Turks in Tucson do not often mention the discrimination that they were subjected to before the 1989 Fergana events. There are rather few accounts about Uzbeks making fun of Ahıska Turks by saying “you came by hanging on train. When are you going to go back?”⁵⁶ Discrimination in Uzbekistan with regard to status, high posts and education are stated by some Ahıska Turks, however, it is not widely spoken about by those in Tucson⁵⁷. They usually prefer either discourse of equality or superiority over the native populations.

Ahıska Turks in Tucson often associate prosperity of where they lived to their presence, and see a connection between their departure and the decline of that place. Some think it is God's punishment that both Uzbekistan and Georgia are in a very bad economic situation. Koriouchkina and Swerdlow describes this attitude of Ahıska Turks'

⁵⁵ Aydıngül gives a similar account referring it as “achievement complex” (2002b:193)

⁵⁶ “Her vakit yüzümüze karşı “*poiste* [поезд: train]”asıp geldiniz, ne zaman gidacaksınız?” deyirdiler”.

⁵⁷ see Tomlinson 2002:39 footnote 28

as “defensive and compensatory” and “comforting” since many Ahıska Turks had to move out, lost properties, belongings and had to start a new life (2007:427) It is also interesting to note that Pohl argues somewhat in line with the Ahıska Turk's idea that they helped to develop Central Asia. Pohl points out that Ahıska Turks together with the Crimean Tatars and the Volga Germans were “proven to be a valuable and irreplaceable permanent work force in Kazakhstan and Central Asia” (2004:38). Pohl continues:

Unlike the largely peaceful Russian-Germans, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks, the Chechens and other North Caucasians had been a source of constant unrest in the region. The Soviet regime rewarded the hard work and law-abiding nature of the Russian-Germans, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks with continued exile and denial of their national rights (2004:39).

Mistreatment of Ahıska Turks in these countries can be interpreted as an indication of other continuing policy problems that created social and economic unrest in these countries. Over time, the Fergana events drove many skilled non-Uzbek nationals abroad. In Georgia's efforts to create a “Georgian nation state”, they refused to accept Ahıska Turks. Georgia's efforts to expel non-Georgians resulted in Tbilisi's losing control of 30% of their territory. In this sense, Ahıska Turks' defensive, compensatory and comforting ideas are not imaginary and not simply “psychological”. They reflect the poor governmentality of respective states. As Ahıska Turks watch on the news or hear from their relatives, neighbors or other Ahıska Turks about the situation of these countries, their sense of “righteousness” and community justice seems to be supported and strengthened with the news of economic and social despair of the countries from where Ahıska Turks were deported.

While I did not see any trace of European vs. Asian or settled vs. nomadic dichotomies, there is certainly a sense of superiority but there is also a discourse of brotherhood/sisterhood and equality. People have varied feelings and ideas regarding Uzbeks ranging from negative to positive. The most common positive view is in regard to Uzbek's hospitality, food and love of comfort. Uzbeks are usually appreciated for being Sunni Muslim like Ahıska Turks. Some elderly Ahıska Turks highly appreciate some of the Uzbek people's help when they first came to Uzbekistan. Here is an excerpt from Mekhriddin (70s):

What days I have seen? Is it called “day”⁵⁸?!!!!... I did not die, well I am even surprised that I did not die. Two of my siblings 4-5 years old died in front of my eyes from hunger. We had come to Uzbekistan in 1947. Two of my brothers and one of my sister died, they were dying, s/he was opening her/his mouth like that. How was I saved? Three of my siblings died and three of us were left. There was an Uzbek, he was taking care of cattle in the village..... He was bringing me *ayran*⁵⁹ every morning. He was telling me "Do not die, this *ayran* will keep you alive". Every morning he was giving me *ayran*. Maybe because of this I am alive. First God and next him, the Uzbek. There were, there were good Uzbeks. Later on, when the Soviet Union fell apart, you know the thing [nationalism] appeared, otherwise Uzbeks are also very good. They had old guys, they were telling me "Do not go. I will hide you in my house". I said "uncle how can I not go? My brother is leaving, my sister is leaving, all of my uncles are leaving. What I am going to do here alone? Thus I said I am going. Later we came, scattered, and went. There were Uzbeks, good ones. They love me so much⁶⁰. [interview]

⁵⁸ In Turkish *gün* [day] has a relatively positive meaning. Mekriddin, I think, is trying to say that he had such horrible days that he can not even refer them as “day” anymore, because they do not worthy of the word.

⁵⁹ *Ayran* is a drink consist of yogurt, water and salt

⁶⁰ “Ne günler gördüm he gün müdür he gün midiydi:: İşi ben ney ben ölmemişim ben he hele şaşıyım niye ölmedim ben? İki tene kardaşım var ha gözümün önünde:: dört beş yaşında acından öldüler. Özbekistan geldukki:: bu 47inci yılıydı 47inci yıl iş kardaşımdır bir bacım ha o küçüğü böyle[eliylen boy gösteriyor] o üçülen yerde ben yerde öldiler kendi öliyidi. Ha böyle ağzını açeyidi. Ben bilmem nasıl kurtuldum ölmedim hele kafa işlemiyki nasıl ben nası kaldım ölmedim. Kardaşım benim ablam bir üçümüz kaldık nasıl kaldık bilmiyrim. O üçü öldi de biz üçümüz kaldık.Acından. Bir Özbek var idi Özbek. O::

Negative comments about Uzbeks usually refer to their fear of Turks and their uncivilized ways:

Yaşar: Uzbeks are proper Muslims like us, but if there is no water, after the toilet, they would have ablution from mud and adobe. There is no Uzbek in the city. They have not seen the world. Russians tell them, “We taught you how to pee while standing” ” [i.e. not squatting like a bumpkin].

Naci: Before we came there, [we heard] they were living worse than gypsies. There was no *seki* [couch]

Yaşar: They would plaster cow shit on the floor instead of concrete. There are no pots and pans at home. They do the fire outside and cook there. When it is cold, they bring embers and put in a pot in the middle of the house and they sit under covers like that. An Uzbek does not know *patalok* [an agricultural device], s/he takes mud, mix it with straw makes adobe house; there was no furniture. S/he did not know how to set a chair. There is no door, no window. That is their culture and civilization⁶¹.

köyün şeysine bakıyirdi nahırı malını görütüp otar getirişdu akşama gelende eve bu Eşalo::: deyp gapiy gapiy[kapı] gezerdi. Kimisi o inegin sağnı ayra::n belki bir kaşy(kaşık) birisine sü::t gelip bişey yemek yapıyise hele a bu gader(kadar) çorba su verirdu onlar ona sü::dü ayra::nı:: çorba hep birde katardı içine bir içine to[o] kaba dökerdi. Getürürdü ne deym iki litre yarım üç litre oliyir idi hep köy yığılıp [inaudiable] o da köyün malını bakıyirdi 80-90 cema[tin] malını bakıyirdi götürüp onlar götürüyirdi. Gene ondan her Allah ın günü bir istikan(bardak) süd veriyirdi ayran veriyirdi. Diydi "ölmeyesin bu ayran seni saklar" diyirdi Özbek adam. Bir istikan ayran içiyirdim ben her sabahı getirip bir istikan ayran veriyirdi bene. Ona ki ben ondan hiç ölmedim. O kaldı de bene. "O ayrande peynir var bişi var o seni tutar" diyirdi "ölmessin" diyirdi o sağa kaldı de bende. Özbek gurtardı, evel Allah sonra o. Var idi Üzbek'in iyiler var idi. O sondaki ha bu:: sel birinci parçalandı onda bu şey çıktı de o nasıl birlikte öyle iyişdukki Özbegın şeyleri var idi adamlar. "Oğ::lum" bana deyirdi "Gitme ben seni saklarım seni evde saklarım ben ölem ölüm sana birşey olmaz" deyirdi. Deyirdim ki "Amca:: nasıl gitmeyem? Gardaşım gedi::r, ablam gedi::r, bütün dayılarım emmiler hep gedi::r. Bir ben burda galsam ben ne yapayım ondan sonra ben. Bir ben burda galsam ne olur" dedim. Ona göre ben de gedim diyirdim de işte sonra gelduk da dağılduk da gettukh. Özbekler vardı eyiler. Öyle seviyirdi ki öyle haz ediyirlerdi beni ki".

⁶¹ T: Özbekler has Müslüman bizim gibi, ama su yoksa çamurdan, kerpiçten abdest alıyo tuvaletten sonra. Özbek şehirde yok dünya görmemiş. Ruslaar onlara diyo “Ayakta işemeyi biz öğrettik”.

N: Biz gelmeden önce çingeneden beter yaşıyorlarmış. Seki yokmuş.

T: İnegin ahlatından yere beton yerine sürerlermiş. Tencere evde yok. Dışarda ateşi pişirüp yemek yapıyolar. Soğuk olunca hele kozunu eve getirip orta yere bir kabın içine koyup yorgana sarınıp oturuy ha böyle[el-kol hareketiyle gösteriyor]. Özbek patalok bilmez, çamuru alır samanla karıştırıp kerpiç ev yapar mobilya yoktu. Sandalye kurmayı bilmezdi. Pencere yok, kapı yok. Bunların kültürü, civilizasyonu böyle.

İsmail (late 20s) is from a relatively better off family. Both his parents are *teknikum* [10-13 or 14th grade] graduates. His wife is a supervisor in an international company, and she speaks impeccable English. İsmail works in the loading department of a grocery chain. He did not go to school after 10th grade because of the deportation and turmoil of the post-Soviet era. Upon my questions on school memories, he also described the differences between Russian and Uzbek schools:

U: Do you remember your first day at the school?

İ: School...yes I know. We had studied in a Russian school. There was the Uzbek school but we were not going to an Uzbek school.

U: Why?

İ: Russian school was upward [mobility] for us. What is a Russian school? You go to Russia, it is all Russian. There was no Uzbek language in Russia.

U: Did your parents register you in Russian school?

İ: No...Me? We were little; my parents would register us; our minds would not work to know which one to register. In the Russian school there was a lot of science. There was no science in the Uzbek schools. What was in the Uzbek school? It would teach you ax and shovel. In the Russian school there was chemistry, mathematic, etc.

U: Was the education in Uzbek school very limited?

İ: In Uzbek school, how can I say, an educated man would never come out of an Uzbek school. There were no educated people [among Uzbeks] who would go to university, to an institute [of higher education]. They [Uzbeks] would go out of school, would take pickaxe in hand and go to stack cotton. Because of that our fathers said, "We have been sacrificed. At least our kids should not be sacrificed". That is why they put us in a Russian school.

U: Well then most Uzbeks were going to Uzbek schools?

İ: There were almost no Uzbeks in Russian schools, very few.

U: There were few Uzbeks in Russian school?

İ: Few besides us. [Uzbeks] hardly know their own language, how could they know Russian language?⁶²

⁶² U: Okuldaki ilk gününü hatırlıyor musun?

İ: Okulu: he::: biliyorum okulda uRus mektebinde okumuşukh. Özbek mektebi var di o Uzbek mektebini almyorduk

U: Niye?

İ: Bize çıkış idi uRus mektebi he:: uRus mektebi ne::, uRussetlere gider isin uRus, Rasya'ya çıkacan uRu::s. Özbek dili yok ki Rasya'da.

U: Okula annen baban Rus mektebine mi yazdi seni?

A similar ambivalent and heterogeneous position towards Azeri people is also prevalent among Ahıska Turks. Many Ahıska Turks were welcomed by Azeri authorities after the 1960s. A significant number of Ahıska Turks in Tucson came to Azerbaijan at least once after they were run out of Uzbekistan. Some of them lived there for several months and others for several years; they left Azerbaijan due to economic hardship and/or war with Armenia in the 1990s.

The proximity of Azeri and Turkish languages is emphasized. Sectarian difference (that Azeris are Shi'ite) is never mentioned during my fieldwork. People also recognize the welcome of the Azeri government and people. At the very beginning of a *sohbet*, Ziya started recalling how they had been driven out of Kabardin-Balkar Autonomous Republic (Russia) from his brother's house by the police:

We went out of Uzbekistan and came to Nal'chik [capital of the Kabardin-Balkar]. My brother said, "Thanks to Uzbeks who kicked you out, you came!" [laughs] In the evening police came to the house. They said, "Either leave on your wish, or we will force you out of Kabardin-Balkar". My father said [to my brother], "Son we shall go. We do not want to make further trouble for you. We will find a place

İ: Yokh:: beni mi? biz küçük iduk anam babam yazacağ idu onu, bizim aklımız işlemeyurdi ki bu ne yazmak lazım. uRus mektebinde [anlasılmıyor] çoğ idi bilim çoğ idi. Özbek mektebinde bilim yoğ idi. Özbek mektebinde ne:: Balta öğretirdi lapatka [kürek] öğretirdi. URus mektebinde kimyası varidi matematiki var idi.

U: Özbek mektebi çok mu sınırlıydı eğitim orda?

İ: Özbek mektebinde nasıl desem, onda bir ehhe okumlu insanlar çıkmaz idi hiçbir vakit. Okumlu insan yoğ idiki geçsin universitet geçsin institut. Onlar okuştan çıkaridi eline ketmen [kazma] alırdı giderdi pammuğu çatmaya. Onun için de babalarımız demişlerdir ki "biz ki kıyılmışukğ çocuklarımız hiç olmassa kıyılmassın" onun için uRus mektebine vermiştir.

U: Peki Özbeklerin çoğu Özbek okuluna mı gönderiyodu?

İ: Özbek yok hesabıdi. Az çok az idi uRus mektebinde.

U: Rus mektebinde Özbek çok mu azdı?

İ: A::z ço:k birden[bizden] az idi. O kendi dilini ancak biliyor idi onlar, işte bu uRuz dilini nereden bilecekti.

to stay”. With yellow buses they brought us to the train station. Two thousand Ahıska people were present there. “Where should we go, where should we go?”. One side is Uzbekistan other side is Azerbaijan. We decided to go Baku [the Azeri capital]. Azeris were so hospitable! Nobody [else did what they did]. They took us to places with their own money. We first came to Saatli. Mirsat [his other brother] was laying in the mud [for pleasure]. After we molded mud bricks in Haçmaz for 2 months [as work], we went to Krasnodar”⁶³.

Five minutes after Ziya's story, a Turkish guy (from Turkey) in the *sohbet* started telling his first experience in Russia after the fall of the USSR. He told me how fraudulent many Turkic people in Russia were towards Turks from Turkey⁶⁴. Nusret made a comment on it, “Azeri people are foxy. They mix milk with water [*Azeri milleti tilki, süte su katıyor*]”. Naci, another Ahıska Turk, immediately responded, “If our people did not do the same, how would we come here” [*Bizimkiler onu yapmasa biz nasıl buralara gelirdük!*] in the sense that stealing from state and being less than upright in one's business dealings was almost a norm in the socialist period and immediately after its collapse (see Verdery 1996, Yurchak 2006 and Gal 2005). Not much later Halid (late 30s) started telling a story about when he worked in a Turkish construction firm in Moscow, which had employed Ahıska Turks and Azeris:

⁶³ “Biz şimdi Özbekistandan çıktık Nalçık'a geldik, Kardeşim “Saolasınız ki Özbekler kovdu da geldiniz!” [kahkahalar] Akşam oldu bir baktık *militsiya* [милиция: police] evin önüne geldi. “Ya kendi istengizlen çıkhn gedin ya kuvvet yoluyla biz size göndeririz”. Babam dedi “oğlum biz gidakh senin başına da bela açmayakh. Kalacak bir yer buluruk”. Sarı ahtabüslerle bizi *vagzala* [вагзал: train station] getirdiler i::ki:: bin Ahıskalı. Nereye gidek nereye gidek bir yanımız Özbek bir yanımız Azerbaycan. Dedik ki Bakü'ye gidak. Azeriler öyle kömek ettiler ki!!! Kimse etmedi onlar etti. Kendi paralarıyla kendileri götürdüler bizi. Önce Saatli'ye gittik, Mirsat balçıkta yatıyo::r. Sonra Haçmaz da iki ay kerpiç döküp Krasnodar'a gittik”.

⁶⁴ During a Quran recitation meeting, this Turkish man told me where he was from in Turkey upon my question. I told him a little story: My parents had some fraudulent home sale from people of the same town but our new neighbours that were also from the same town had told us that owner of the house was from a specific part of the town. People of that part of the town was considered fraudulent and not trustworthy by rest of population. Upon I told this story to him, this Turkish man was not happy and was a little reactive.

At a lunch break, we got together with Azeris and started discussing which people are more ‘devilish’ [meaning here foxy, cunning]. We had a friend called Gülali, a witty person. He told a joke “When God created people, s/he created hundred devils. Ninty nine of them settled in Azerbaijan and one of them was traveling the world all day long and coming to Azerbaijan to go to bed”⁶⁵.

These heterogeneous attitudes may depend on general discourse about Azeri and Uzbek people as well as different experiences of Ahıska Turks. Azeri people, for example, have a bad reputation in the USSR and also in Turkey for being lazy and unreliable. These discourses also cannot be separated from categories of hierarchies, which can often be in correlation with the level of economic development and perceived power of states to which these nationals belong. In an earlier quotation, İsmail showed this attitude with his reference to Uzbek and Russian schools.

In this chapter, I illustrated how the Soviet social, political and economic contexts influenced Ahıska Turk identity formation. Ahıska Turks generally long for the Soviet Union and the multicultural Soviet context, which is celebrated for its “brotherhood/sisterhood” approach and lack of “nationalism” in the presence of many recognized nations. I also pointed to an existing Russian-derived race discourse coming from the imperial imagination of the Caucasus. Ahıska Turks as a Caucasian people are defined as ‘black’ by Russians. However, this does not position Ahıska Turks as ‘black’ and thereby diametrically opposed to Russians. They sometimes take part in racial discourse against Uzbeks and Azeris as well, ascribing to themselves ‘white’ status.

⁶⁵ “Allah insan oğlunu yaratınca yüz de şeytan yaratmış, doksan dokuzu Azerbaycan'a yerleşmiş, bir tanesi de gün boyu dünyayı dolayıp gece yatmağa Azerbaycan'a gelirmiş”

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I have examined Ahıska Turkish identity by focusing on the concept of “ethnicity” and its circumference. Various adjacent topics that emerged during my fieldwork have been included here because they are all connected and make up a portion of this complex identity. While I have shown different and heterogeneous voices of Ahıska Turks, there are certain elements that seem to achieve a degree of coherence on their own.

The first chapter focused on the genealogy and meaning of the concept of ethnicity, Ahıska ethnic identification and the relevant problem of naming that has ideological connections. There is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the concept of ethnicity, and its meaning has altered drastically over time indicating its historical influences. Neither the concept itself nor Ahıska ethnic identity is fixed; they are both dynamic and embedded in power relations and the histories of expulsion and violence.

In order to illustrate the problem of naming, which is usually not a concern for many ethnic groups, I have extensively used academic literature on Ahıska Turks as well as my own fieldwork data. Both modes of information have shown the large degree of variation, which is understandable due to the multiple deportations of the group and the different backgrounds of each individual researcher. I have also pointed out that this heterogeneity is not unique to Ahıska Turks in and of itself; however, its content needs focused attention.

Since ethnicity is a relational category, other ethnic identities provide an important reference. Ahıska ethnic identity has been and is still being constructed in relation to other ethnic groups that are subjected to the forces of the nation state. However, as Connolly points out, "... the nation has become a form that can be promised to some only because it is denied violently to others" (2000:87). While different components of ethnic identities have been emphasized and held privileged positions for their bearers, others' ethnic identities can become a burden on certain people. Speaking the dominant language and holding its cultural norms gives access to resources and provides the ability to associate with some parts of dominant identities. However, my analysis shows that Ahıska Turks are neither completely accepted into the Turkish political and cultural sphere nor to the Post-Soviet/Russian one; they are going back and forth between center(s) and margin(s). An effort to declare autonomy of Ahıska identity independent from institutions especially state, however, will not change their semi-marginal position.

In the second chapter, different pieces of Ahıska identity are brought together in relation to the Turkish political and cultural sphere. An unusual identification of Ahıska Turks with the Ottoman Empire indicates a need for identity affirmation and authenticity that puts Turkish identity in an awkward position. While I do not think the association with the Ottomans started in opposition to modern Turks, by drawing a certain legacy and power from a world empire that was rival to the Russians, I believe Ahıska Turks have been trying to show their superiority to the native populations of Central Asia as well as a

certain degree of equality with the Russians. Its manifestations during my fieldwork were mostly directed towards pious Turks who are influential especially in religious traditions.

Although both Ahıska Turks and pious Turks share a similar Sunni Islamic tradition and a distinguishably different but common Turkish language, different lifestyles, cultures, Islamic interpretations and class positions ensure a degree of tension especially between Ahıska and pious Turk men. Since the most common activities between the two groups are religious-titled ones and pious Turks are most often mentioned with their religious side, Islamic tradition and practice occupied an important part of my field data. As we saw, dietary laws, being a good person and a good Muslim are often debated. While pious Turks are clearly more textual based, this does not give them full authority in the eyes of Ahıska Turks. By having less textual authority, Ahıska Turks largely base their argument on the criteria of being a good person, which is closely related to the criteria of being a good Muslim. However, this does not mean that Ahıska Turks are ignorant about Islam or that they do not follow the Islamic tradition. While they are aware that some of their practices (e.g. drinking alcohol) are not in accord with Islamic tradition, some other practices can be in agreement with their own interpretation, which is not necessarily divergent.

In the second half of the second chapter, I analyzed Ahıska language and concepts of homeland. Despite the fact that Russian is often spoken and borrowed Russian words are a usual part of Ahıska Turkish, they proudly claim that they have preserved their language (Turkish). This claim does not prevent Ahıska Turks from promoting learning other languages. Learning the official language of the Soviet Union, native language of

Uzbekistan, and the language of Islam were part of Ahıska life. An underlying reason behind the pride of knowing one's mother tongue is also connected with an assertion of a certain degree of strength. Despite being far from their homeland and having no formal instructions of it, ability to continue to speak their mother tongue, according to Ahıska Turks, shows the insistent nature and stamina of their community.

Then I analyzed what homeland means for Ahıska Turks and what place they consider their homeland. Despite Ray's assumption that daily life, practical matters and kin networks are more important than homeland, I showed that homeland is still a subject surfacing during Ahıska discussions. The lack of homeland is still felt among many Ahıska people in Tucson. My own fieldwork indicates that Georgia has a prominent potential for a future homeland, at least among those residing in Tucson.

The last chapter examined Ahıska identity in relation to "The Soviet political sphere". Ahıska Turks are former Soviet citizens, and many still have a longing for the Soviet life. The reality of their deportations or their own religious limitations, both of which could be easily ascribed to their experiences in the Soviet Union do not prevent this positive connection and identification. Despite the longing and permeated discourse of brotherhood/sisterhood, this also does not prevent Ahıska Turks from making racist comments about different ethnic groups at times. This discussion cannot be analyzed without considering existing nationalist policies and racial discourses in the Soviet Union and Russia. Discourse of brotherhood/sisterhood and racial differentiation existed hand in hand in the Soviet/Russian political and cultural sphere. "Black" as an ethno-racial category existed for groups of people in relation to Russian or Slavic people. On the other

hand, the fact of being discriminated against has not prevented Ahıska Turks from negative, positive and totalistic racial comments about Turks, Americans, Russians, Uzbeks, Azeris, Koreans, Greek, Armenians and many other groups. I concluded the third chapter with views of Ahıska Turks towards Azeris and Uzbeks, about which I had a relatively large amount of data.

As shown throughout this thesis, Ahıska Turks have had diverse experiences that have not been centrally mediated and presented to the larger community in various countries. The group did not have any prominent central organization and any significant state support for the community on the basis of their ethnicity. They are trying to mediate differences through personal and group contacts. They recognize variations but usually are not shy to assert their opinions that can challenge the experiences of others. Overall, there is a certain coherent pattern of Ahıska identity that depends on a specific history of displacement, dispersion and lack of recognition. Various states are important actors in this history. It is to a large extent due to what these states did and did not do that a large Ahıska population ended up in the United States.

While Ahıska people are trying to live together as a community, their motto is “I eat his/her flesh but I do not throw the bones out [*Etini yerim ama kemiğini dışarı atmam*]”. This means they can treat each other poorly however they would not expose each other’s bad to outside of the community. As the group had and has a harmonious but also conflictual relationship with different nationals, they do not spare each other from a similar type of relationship. Naci asked me why I was not hanging out with *Türkiyeliler*, by which he meant pious Turks. I joked, “Turks generally run away from

each other”. Naci’s response was: “We lived sixty years together in the Soviet Union with peace, but now we are also running from each other”. I suspect that this harmonious and conflictual relationship is not a new phenomenon for the group.

As Ahıska people try to establish their networks in the US, different dynamics will continue to play themselves out. A limited number of studies indicate that in some places Ahıska Turks have a closer relationship with former Soviet citizens. In some other states or regions, like the East coast of the U.S. where the Turkish community is more established, Ahıska Turks are better organized. For further research, more Ahıska communities should be carefully analyzed with consideration of the larger history of the group in a given locale. We cannot simply believe that Ahıska Turks and many other refugees are simply starting a “new life”. Violence has permeated and in many ways left its mark on the lives of Ahıska Turks, which has largely impacted the way they have shaped their identity.

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