Political Participation Strategies
of the Circassian Diaspora in Turkey

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This study is an attempt to summarize the political participation strategies generated by the Circassians in Turkey since the 1970s. In depicting those strategies, the *institutional channelling theory* shall be used. The relevance of this theory in comparison to the class and race/ethnicity theories is that it highlights the importance of the dominant political and legal institutions shaping and limiting the migrants' choice possibilities. The principal strategies explored in this regard are initially the ideological strategies of the *revolutionaries* and *returnists* in the 1970s, then the *minority strategy* carried out in the 1990s as a reaction against the majority nationalism of the 1980s, and finally the *diasporic identity* which has become the principal strategizing tool in the last few years. The article explores both theoretical and practical aspects of the diasporic identity with particular reference to the Circassians in Turkey.

Circassians constitute one of the largest ethnic groups living in Turkey. They were not, hitherto, considered by the majority society to be facing any major obstacle since their arrival in Anatolia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, recent studies carried out in Turkey demonstrate that it is not only the non-Muslims, Kurds and Alevis who were subject to a kind of structural 'outsiderism' with regard to having equal access to political and cultural rights. The common belief in Turkey concerning the Circassians in the country is that they are more privileged than the other ethnic groups. This belief may be correct to a certain extent, but there is not enough scientific data to confirm such a belief. My own qualitative and quantitative research, which I conducted between 2001 and 2003 in various parts of Turkey, predominantly in central Anatolia and Istanbul, indicates that Circassians have also been subject to various exclusionary acts in the nation-building process, the details of which will be given below. Hence, the basic premise of this study

is that Circassians have also been exposed to some acts of discrimination by the Turkish state, and that while having a strong orientation towards their homeland most of the Circassian population in Turkey still feel themselves to be guests. This article will both implicitly and explicitly claim that Circassians have also been subjected to a process of being silenced during the nation-building process, like the non-Muslims and Kurds. The fact that the voices of the Circassians have not been heard so far in the public space reflects to some extent the power of both formal and popular majority nationalisms to which they have been subject.

This article primarily aims to explore the major political participation strategies of the Circassian diasporic groups in contemporary Turkey. These strategies will be mapped out with reference to the *institutional channelling theory*, but not to class and race/ethnicity theories. Although the emphasis shall be on the strategies generated by the Circassians in Turkey since the early 1970s, some of the issues related to the interaction between diasporic Circassian groups and the political establishment of the Republic of Turkey during the early period of the republic will also be mapped out. Political participation strategies developed among the Circassian diasporic groups have, of course, very much to do with the processes of exclusion and/or inclusion policies of the ruling political elite; therefore the general framework of political and legal structures that have shaped those strategies will be discussed as well. Moreover, the history of the Circassian diaspora in Turkey and the Middle East as well as the elaboration of the notion of diaspora will be addressed.

The Circassian Population in Turkey and the Middle East

Once the Russian expansion started in the northern Caucasus in the early nineteenth century, Circassians had to find refuge to save themselves from the Russian atrocities. As the gateway to the resources of Transcaucasia and a springboard to the Middle East, the northern Caucasian lands greatly attracted the Russian state, which was eager to establish a great Asiatic empire including the fertile settled heartland of old Turkistan in Central Asia. The peoples of the northern Caucasus waged a desperate struggle against the Russians with insignificant external support. Pacification of the region occurred only after overwhelming force was used following the humiliations of the Crimean War in 1856 and after the capture of the leader of the greatly weakened *Murid* movement, Imam Shamil in 1859.

The eventual result of the Russian success in the region was a series of refugee waves in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, by boats, carts and on foot, from northern Caucasia to the Ottoman Empire. The Circassians considered Istanbul, then the centre of the Muslim world, to be the safest place

in which to seek refuge. This is how thousands of Circassians began to flee to the Ottoman Empire. The refugees arrived in waves between 1860 and 1865 and, again following the Russian–Turkish war of 1877–78. The number of refugees is a matter of contention with figures ranging from 500,000 to two million [Berkok, 1958; Karpat, 1985, 1990; Jaimoukha, 2001]. It is estimated that approximately 20 per cent of this number died of malnutrition and disease. Those who remained in the Caucasus, between 150,000 and 200,000, were compelled to resettle on the northern plains of the Caucasus where they were easier to control [Jaimoukha, 2001: 69].

The Ottoman government faced immediate problems in integrating its new subjects, along with the Crimean Tatars and Nogai who preceded them and the Muslims from the Balkans who followed. Nevertheless these newcomers constituted a valuable source of human capital for a country that had been ravaged by successive wars, economically impoverished and increasingly overwhelmed by separatist movements in the Balkans, the Middle East and southeast Anatolia. The new human capital primarily served the Ottoman government in two ways: as a source of manpower for the Ottoman army and as a buffer against the separatist powers in the country. The Ottoman government accommodated the refugees in selected places where there had already been centrifugal forces in opposition to the centre, such as the Kurdish, Balkan and Arab nationalists. Therefore, the Circassians were at first considered by the Ottoman political elite to be a kind of balancing instrument and a new stock of military potential for the future of the empire. They were often used as security detachments and pioneers in remote and uncontrollable areas [Dündar, 2001: 130–4]. As a reliable, countervailing force used to interdict and discipline Kurds, Turkmen, Druze, Bedouin and other nomads, they were an asset for the empire from a demographic and military standpoint.

One of the major early destinations of the Circassian diaspora was *Rumelia*, the Balkans. The refugees joined the Crimean Tatars and Nogai who had previously been settled there. The region was economically prosperous and had strategic importance for the Ottomans. As Russia was overwhelmingly propagating Pan-Slavism in the region, security issues gained a vital importance for the Ottoman government. The Circassians were settled in Constance, Varna, Sofia, Pristina, Kosovo, Plevne and surrounding regions [Pinson, 1972]. However, after the Russian–Turkish war of 1877–78 was lost, most of the Circassians remigrated from Rumeli to Anatolia (mostly to the southern Marmara region) and to the Middle East (mainly to the Golan Heights). Recently, some of the remnants of the Circassian diaspora in the Balkans (80 households in Kosovo) were moved to the Adygei Autonomous Republic in the Russian Federation [Atalay, 2001]. Nevertheless there are still some Circassians left in the ex-Yugoslavian territories.

Circassian migration to the Middle East accelerated when there was no land left in Anatolia and Rumeli for settlement. The first Circassian settlement in the region dates back to 1871. These migrants were accommodated in Aleppo and the province of Damascus; subsequently, the newcomers were located around the Golan Heights and Amman. Nevertheless, many of the migrants asked the Ottoman government to send them back either to western Anatolia or to Rumeli due to the poor land and climatic conditions. Although some of the migrants were sent back to the places they wished for, the settlement of Circassians in the region continued. The numbers increased especially after the Russian–Turkish war of 1877–78, with the arrival of two major groups. One group travelled by boat to Turkey's Black Sea ports before going overland to Syria with a stopover in Kayseri (Uzunyayla). The other group was withdrawn from Rumeli due to the ongoing war. Recently, there have been approximately 60,000 Circassians in Jordan (mostly Shapsugh, Chechen and Kabardian), 40,000 in Syria (mostly Abzekh, Kabardian and Abkhaz) and 3,000 in Israel (mostly Shapsugh and Akbhaz). The Circassian population in Jordan enjoys an essentially privileged position, having long been closely connected to the Crown, whereas Syrian–Circassians have had to cope with oppressive Arab nationalism and the Baath regime. Yet, the Circassians in Israel have also been quite privileged in that they could enjoy their culture as freely as possible, and also that the Adygei language is used there as the language of instruction after the sixth grade in primary school.

Circassians migrating to Turkey were predominantly settled in central Anatolia, composing a vertical belt between Samsun (central Black Sea coasts in the north) and Reyhanli-Hatay (Syrian border in the south). There are also various pockets around the southern Marmara and eastern Black Sea regions. Although there are not official figures, it is estimated that there are approximately 2 to 2.5 million Circassians in Turkey (some sources even give exaggerated numbers such as five to seven million). The Circassian diaspora in Turkey is not homogenous, it is rather composed of various tribes (Abkhaz, Shapsugh, Kabardian, Ubikh, Abzekh, Chechen, etc.) who speak different dialects and have diverse cultural identities. Although there is strong ethnic bonding among these tribes vis-à-vis the majority society, there are also strong inter-ethnic boundaries within the diaspora.

Circassians: A Conventional Diaspora in the Age of Globalization

Recently, the notion of diaspora has been extensively used by a wide range of scholars aiming to contribute to the definition of transnational migrants [for example, Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Gilroy, 1994]. The new trend in diaspora studies defines diasporas as exemplary communities of transnational movement. The term 'diaspora' is derived from the Greek

verb *sperio* (to sow, to scatter) and the preposition *dia* (through, apart). For Greeks, the term referred to migration and colonization, whereas for Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians the same term acquired more unfortunate, brutal and traumatic connotations of dispersion through scattering [Cohen, 1997: ix]. Yet, the contemporary notion of diaspora is not limited only to Jewish, Greek, Palestinian and Armenian dispersive experiences; rather it describes a larger domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community and ethnic community [Tölölian, 1991: 5]. The primary difference between old and modern forms of diasporas lies in their changing will to go back to the 'Holy Land', or homeland. In this sense, the old diasporas resemble the story of Ulysses while the new ones have been like that of Abraham. After the Trojan War, Ulysses encountered many problems on the way back to Ithaca. Although he encountered many obstacles during his journey, he was determined to go back home. Conversely, the experience of modern labour diasporas resembles Abraham's biblical journey. In the first part of the Bible, it is written that Abraham, upon the request of God, had to journey with his people to find a new home in the unknown and he never went back to the place he left behind.[1]

William Safran, in his study, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homelands and Return' [1991], draws up a general framework of an ideal type of diaspora. He defines diaspora as 'expatriate minority communities' that are:

1. dispersed from an original centre to at least two peripheral places;
2. maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland;
3. believe they are not fully accepted by their host country;
4. see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right;
5. are committed to the maintenance and restoration of this homeland; and
6. of which the group's consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland [Safran, 1991: 83–4].

Safran's ideal type of 'centred' diaspora, oriented by continuous cultural connections to a source and by a teleology of 'return', is very applicable to the Circassian diaspora. With regard to the first characteristic, the Circassian diaspora has been dispersed through more than one location outside the homeland since the mid-nineteenth century (the Balkans, Anatolia, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Germany, the USA, Holland and even Egypt in earlier times). Circassian subjects in Turkey also maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland (an increasing number of Circassian-based publishing houses in Turkey have published books on Circassian mythology, the history of migration, the role of Circassians during the Turkish independence war and

the reception of Circassians by the 'host' society in Turkey). It could be argued too that Circassians in Turkey have developed a common belief that they are not very well received by the majority society (increasing consciousness of returning to the homeland partly derives from such a perception). Moreover, Circassians have always considered going back to their homeland. The descendants of the first generation say that their ancestors always articulated their will to return to the homeland. The same discourse is still alive, and furthermore there are Circassians who have already returned home. With regard to (5) above, Circassians are conscious of investing in their homeland (the International Circassian Association, which is composed of diaspora and homeland community members, makes calls each year for plans to be drawn up to develop northern Caucasia). Finally, when Circassians in Turkey are asked to identify where 'home' is for them, they usually point to Caucasia (annual trips to return home; listening to Circassian radio broadcasting from Caucasia; sending youngsters to Caucasian universities, et cetera).[2]

Contemporary diaspora discourses are developed on two paramount dimensions: *universalism* and *particularism*. The universalist axis refers to the model of diasporic transnationalism, in the form of a 'third space' [Bhabha, 1990] or 'process of heterogenesis' [Guattari, 1989] or 'third culture' [Featherstone, 1990]. The universalist dimension, which contains the use of all aspects of globalism and transnationalism, refers to diasporic consciousness constituting a post-national identity. Members of post-national diasporic communities can escape the power of the nation-state to reinforce their sense of collective identity. In this new space it is possible to evade the politics of polarity and emerge as 'the others of our selves' [Bhabha, 1988: 22]. This is the cultural space where the quest for knowing and othering the 'Other' becomes irrelevant, and cultures merge together in a way that leads to the construction of syncretic cultural forms.

On the other hand, the particularist axis presents the model of cultural essentialism, or diasporic nationalism. The process of home-seeking, as Clifford suggests, might result in the existence of a kind of diaspora nationalism, which is, in itself, critical of the majority nationalism and an anti-nationalist nationalism [Clifford, 1994: 307]. Diaspora nationalism is a reaction to alienation and structural outsiderism, and shows itself in the form of celebration of the past and authenticity. The resurgence of cultural diasporic nationalism, in the first place, derives from political, social, economic and cultural constraints and restrictions of the 'host' country. As Clifford rightly states, those migrant and/or minority groups that are subject to the rigid incorporation regimes of the majority nation and alienated by the system, and swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West, no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts [Clifford, 1988: 5]. Remaking the past, recovering the past, or developing

a culturalist discourse serves at least a dual purpose for diasporic communities. Firstly, it is a way of coming to terms with the present without being seen to criticize the status quo. The 'glorious' past is, here, handled by the diasporic subject as a strategic tool absorbing the destructiveness of the present, which is defined in terms of exclusion, structural outsiderism, poverty and institutional discrimination. Secondly, it also helps to recuperate a sense of the self that is not dependent on criteria handed down by others – the past is what the diasporic subjects can claim as their own [Ganguly, 1992: 40].

However, the construction of contemporary diasporic consciousness does not merely depend upon the rigid incorporation regimes of the countries of settlement: it also owes a lot to the processes of globalization. The wide networks of communication and transportation between Turkish-Circassians and the Caucasus, for instance, play a crucial role in the formation and maintenance of a diasporic identity among the Circassian population in Turkey. The modern circuitry connects diasporic subjects both to the homeland and to the rest of the world. This is why it becomes much easier for them to live on 'both banks of the river' at the same time, both in diaspora and homeland.

The changing nature of space and time in the age of globalism facilitates the emergence of diasporic consciousness. Globalization, emerging as the rise of communications, transportation, migration, de-monopolization of national legal systems, a new international division of labour, and global culture, empowers minorities against the hegemony of the nation-state, and breaks up conventional power relations between majority and minority. The modern 'communicative circuitry has enabled dispersed populations to converse, interact and even symbolize significant elements of their social and cultural lives' [Gilroy, 1994: 211]. For instance, scheduled flights from Istanbul and Trabzon to Krasnodar (Adygei Autonomous Republic) and scheduled ferryboats to Soçi and Sohum increase the interconnectedness between diaspora and homeland. Circassian radio programmes are easily received in Turkey by the Circassian diaspora. The recruitment of Caucasian folk dance trainers brought from the northern Caucasus is also very common throughout the diaspora. Sending students across the water for the purposes of language learning and university education has become another common practice among the Turkish Circassians. Moreover, the official publication of the International Circassian Association is widely distributed in Turkey by the Circassian ethnic associations. These instruments connecting the diaspora with the homeland contribute to the formation of a diasporic Circassian identity as well as to the construction of a 'globalisation from below' movement [Brecher *et al.*, 1993].

The formation of all sorts of diasporas owes a lot to the exclusionary political and legal system of the receiving societies. A shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, othering, exclusion, outsiderism, repression, assimilation or resistance experienced by immigrant communities may generate

diasporic identities, which happen to essentialize authentic culture and homeland. Thus, culture, ethnicity and tradition turn out to be their principal instruments to make a form of politics, or to shape their political participation strategies. In other words, it is not necessarily the immigrant groups making use of ethnicity as a strategizing tool, but it may also be the legal and political constraints of the majority society leading them to do so.

The 'Young' Turkish Republic: An Imperial Legacy

Turkey is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, housing approximately 50 different Muslim and/or non-Muslim ethnic groups, some of which are Sunni Turks, Alevi Turks, Sunni Kurds, Alevi Kurds, Circassians, Lazis, Armenians, Georgians, Jews, Greeks, Arabs, Assyrians, et cetera. However, leaving aside the last decade of democratization attempts, the Turkish state has far from recognized the ethnically and culturally diverse nature of Turkish society since the foundation of the republic in 1923. Ethnic groups in Turkey have been subject to homogenizing state policies, some of which originate from: the nationalist Turkish history thesis of 1932, placing the Turks at the centre of world civilization; Sun Language Theory (1936), presenting the Turkish language as the mother of all languages in the world; unitarian nationalist education policies (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*, 1924); bans on the use of the mother tongue and of ethnic minority names; discriminatory settlement policies (*Iskân Kanunu*, 1934) vis-à-vis exchange populations and new migrants; implementation of the wealth tax in 1942, particularly against non-Muslims; and the enforced migration of Kurds in the east and south-east of Turkey.

These kinds of assimilationist and/or exclusionist state policies have eventually shaped the ways in which ethnic groups developed their identities. In order to survive in Anatolia, former generations of ethnic groups preferred to assimilate to the mainstream political culture in Turkey, which was dominated by homogeneity, Sunni Islam and Turkishness. The work of Moiz Kohen Tekinalp (a Turkish nationalist of Jewish origin), in his book *Turkification*, (*Türkleştirme*), published in 1928, is illuminating in the sense that he identified the main incorporation strategies for non-Turkish ethnic minorities into the political system. He proposed 10 commandments to the Turkish-Jews for their incorporation in the Turkish nation in the nation-building process:

1. Turkify your names.
2. Speak Turkish.
3. Pray in Turkish in synagogues.
4. Turkify your schools.
5. Send your children to Turkish schools.

6. Get engaged in national issues.
7. Stick together with Turks.
8. Affiliate yourself with the community spirit.
9. Fulfil your duties in the national economy.
10. Be aware of your rights [cited in Landau, 1996].

Although, Tekinalp's commandments may, at first glance, seem to correspond to the non-Muslims in Turkey, there is also strong evidence that these commandments may apply also to some Muslim communities such as Kurds and Circassians [Yıldız, 2001].

Retrospectively speaking, Circassians in Turkey have developed various political participation strategies vis-à-vis the legal and political structure and delimitations. While the Turkish Republic was being built up in the 1920s, the republican political elite was highly engaged with a strong ideology of majority nationalism, which promoted the formation of an ethnically and culturally homogenous nation. The Circassians, then, preferred to incorporate themselves into this nation-state project along with the discourse of a homogenous Turkish nation defined by the republican elite; they abstained from declaring their ethnic identities in public and considered themselves as one of the constituents of the Turkish Republic. The defining distinctiveness of the early periods of the republic was provided by Turkification policies, which sought the dominance of Turkishness and Islam as the defining elements in every walk of life – from the language spoken in the public space to citizenship, national education, trade, the personnel regime of public enterprises, industrial life and even settlement laws. Having an Imperial legacy, many new regulations and laws referred to a set of attempts to homogenize the entire nation without any tolerance with regard to diversity and difference. It is highly probable that the underestimation of ethnic diversity among the Muslim population of the republic occurred because of the preceding Ottoman *Millet* system borrowed by the republican political elite. As is known, the *Millet* system of the Ottoman Empire ignored ethnic differences among Muslims. All Muslims regardless of their other differences belonged to one and the same 'Muslim nation'. Therefore, Circassians were not defined as a separate entity. Hence, Circassians and Kurds, let alone Greeks, Armenians and Jews, were all subject to such assimilationist policies in the nation-building process.

Political Participation Strategies: Institutional Channelling Theory

Throughout the ideological confrontation of the Cold War period, the relations between the Circassian diaspora in Turkey and the northern Caucasus

remained minimal. Circassians developed strong anti-Soviet sentiments due to the propaganda pervading Turkey. The diasporic subjects (especially those inhabiting the northern regions of Turkey) were only able to receive news from their homeland by means of Soviet radio broadcasts in the Adygei language. Nevertheless, in the post-communist era, the northern Caucasus has developed strong links of communication and transportation with the rest of the world. There are, for instance, regular ferryboat trips from Samsun and Trabzon (northern Turkish cities) to Sohum and Soci; and scheduled flights from Istanbul to Maykop and Krasnador (Adygei Autonomous Region). The links between Turkey and the northern Caucasus are not, of course, only limited to ferryboats and flights. There are also strong links in the terrains of culture, education and trade. Thus, northern Caucasia is no longer a place that Circassian diasporic subjects left behind, but rather a land that is often visited by the Circassian diaspora.

Having briefly outlined the recent political changes, I shall now discuss the political participation strategies developed by the Circassians in Turkey since the early 1970s. In explaining these strategies, I will refer to the 'institutional channelling theory' developed by Patrick R. Ireland. Why do migrants withdraw from 'host-society' political life? By which means do they politically mobilize themselves? Patrick Ireland [1994, 2000] has drawn our attention to the legal conditions and political institutions of the receiving counties in mapping out the nature of immigrant political mobilization. He has stated that 'certain immigrant communities have withdrawn voluntarily from host-society political life in the face of institutional indifference and hostility' [1994: 8]. Ireland has formulated the 'institutional channelling theory' as an alternative to the class and race/ethnicity theories, in order to understand immigrant political strategies. While the class analysis claims that the immigrants' class identity ultimately determines the nature of their political participation [Castles and Kosack, 1985; Miles, 1984], the race/ethnicity theory argues that the immigrants' ethnic identity is of fundamental importance and that ethnic politics will endure, at least for the foreseeable future [Rex and Tomlinson, 1979]. However, institutional channelling theory maintains that legal and political institutions shape and limit the migrants' choice possibilities. Included herein are institutions like political parties, parliament, religious organizations, citizenship, judicial bodies and humanitarian institutions that can weaken or strengthen the effects of differences in resources. They have a tendency to act as institutional gatekeepers, controlling access to the venues of political participation available to immigrants or other similar marginal groups. Accordingly, Ireland claims that the reason why migrant groups organize themselves politically along ethnic lines is primarily because 'host-society' institutions have nurtured ethnicity through their policies and practices.

Although the Institutional Channelling Theory was formulated to define the rationale behind the political participation strategies of immigrants in the post-war European context, it is also useful for the analysis of similar processes experienced by immigrant groups prior to the twentieth century. I will argue that Circassians recently have also organized themselves politically in Turkey along ethnic lines principally because the institutional context in which they have found themselves has made them do so. Looking at the Circassians in Turkey through the prism of this theory, one could figure out why Circassians lately have developed an ethnicity-oriented political participation strategy. The legal and political structure that excludes non-Turkish and/or non-Muslim ethnic minorities from political participation may lead these ethnic groups to mobilize themselves along ethnic lines. For instance, as Seteney Shami has stated, in Jordan, where tribal tradition is predominant, Circassians also need to form a tribe in order to incorporate themselves into the political system. The perception that tribalism is the predominant political process in Jordan led, in 1980, to the formation of a Circassian–Chechen Tribal Council [Shami, 1998]. While the dominant political participation strategy took the form of tribalism in Jordan, it simultaneously took the form of minority politics in Turkey in the 1990s - a point to which I will come back shortly. Hence, the prevailing political and legal structure is, by and large, decisive in shaping the ways in which minorities formulate their strategies to incorporate themselves into the system.

The Circassian ethnic revival first became publicly apparent in the 1970s.[3] Due to ideological confrontation and related political changes within the country, Circassians had developed some political organizations along with two opposing dominant formulations: the *Devrimci* (revolutionaries) and the *Dönüşçü* (returnists). The *Devrimcis* argued that the betterment of Circassian rights would be achieved through a socialist revolution in Turkey, while on the contrary the *Dönüşçüs* advocated return to the homeland. They accused the *Devrimcis* of being too naive in believing that a socialist revolution was possible in Turkey. They developed a platform in Turkey by means of Circassian ethnic associations through which rural migrants and young people maintained a strong orientation towards their homeland. The *Dönüşçü*s are still active in Turkey. They have perceived themselves as leftist, although their programme has been essentially Circassian-nationalist [Shami, 1998]. A number of them actually went back to the Caucasus after 1989; some stayed and some returned to Turkey.

The military *coup d'etat* of 1980 silenced the Circassian associations as well as many other civil society organizations. Under the new constitution of 1982 with its metaphysical-theological discourse and a Turkish-Islamic synthesis, Circassians carried on developing two new antithetical political

participation strategies in the 1980s: the discourse of Circassian-Turk and the Circassian nationalist discourse. Right-wing conservative Circassians followed the Turkish nationalist historiography that, by then, had a strong Turkist-Islamic orientation and subsumed northern Caucasians under the category of 'Circassian Turk' or 'Caucasian Turk'. Nevertheless, starting with the 1989 ethnic war in Georgia between the Georgians and the Abkhaz groups and the breakup of the Soviet Union, communal concern arose, ethnic resurgence came into play and national press and media coverage of the Circassian peoples, cultures and histories proliferated. By then, the Circassian difference was hardly ever expressed as an opposition that would directly challenge the hegemonic Turkish majority nationalism. This is the time of the rise of Kurdish nationalist sentiments, which also encouraged the resurgence of other ethnic groups such as Alevis and Circassians. Thus, as opposed to those who were engaged in the Turkish nationalist discourse that considered the Circassians to be of Turkish 'racial' stock, there were also Circassian nationalist intellectuals who challenged this discourse. Yet, neither discourse was embraced by the masses owing to the restrictions imposed to counter the formation of ethnic associations.

Since the early 1990s, with ethnic politics gaining global momentum, Circassians have developed a new form of political participation strategy: *minority politics*. Minority politics becomes visible when formal and popular majority nationalism poses a detrimental challenge to diverse cultural and/or ethnic groups. The 1980s in Turkey was characterized by the ascendance of the ideology of the New Right as well as the formal nationalism. Restrictive nationalist policies in the country caused uproar among various ethnic and cultural groups such as the Kurds, Alevis and Circassians, in a way that brought about a kind of Levinassian *ontological warfare* [Levinas, 1987] between the majority and minorities. Thus, Circassian ethnic associations as well as many other ethnicity-based associations became subject to surveillance by the state. These groups could not raise their voices during the repressive political regime of the 1980s. It was the newly emerging democratic political climate of the 1990s that encouraged such groups to raise their demands. The ways in which Circassians, Kurds, Alevis and Laz raised their voices were also nationalist in nature. Ethnic associations then started to use an ethnic minority discourse in reaction to the previously held formal state nationalism and newly emerging popular Turkish nationalism. Popular Turkish nationalism was again the reaction to the politicization of the Kurdish issue in the country.

Within the context of a relatively more democratic political and legal structure in the 1990s, the Turkish state encouraged the Circassians to establish many different associations, which were mainly mobilized around the idea of an eventual return to the homeland. The ethnic elite emphasized

that their ancestors had been expelled from their homeland and had been tools in the political machinations of the Russian and Ottoman empires; they concluded that a return to the homeland was inevitable [Shami, 1998]. Minority politics is situational and contextual, and is far from being essentialist. A minority strategy develops within a binary relationship with majority society. In this relationship, the minority attempts to negate the prior hegemonic negation of itself through the majority society in a way that reaffirms its minor location. The collective nature of all minority discourses derives from the fact that minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically in many fields of social life, such as in the literary and/or political system.

Diasporic Identity as a Strategizing Tool: The Politics of Recognition by Ethnic Associations

Nowadays it is likely that minority politics is challenged from within the Circassian diaspora itself. The elder generations, as a set of survival strategies, have primarily developed the above-mentioned political participation strategies. Conversely, the new generations have followed different patterns, depending on the changing notions of time and space. This new strategy is constituted by the construction of modern diasporic identity, which is facilitated by contemporary means of transportation and communication, making it easy to live simultaneously on both banks of the same river, 'diaspora' and 'home', or in other words 'here' and 'there'. The rising pace of transportation and communication has eventually transformed the habitats of meaning of the Circassians in diaspora as well as that of many other groups of people. The enhancement of telecommunications and the ease of travel made possible the emergence of alternate cultural forms and multiple identities for the diasporic subjects. Above all, these transnational networks have helped the descendants of the immigrants to dissolve the 'inevitable' binary relationship between minority and majority.

The replacement of minority politics by modern diasporic identity is also reinforced by some other recent social and political developments in Turkey. The last political participation strategy, which is characterized by modern diasporic identity, the main constituents of which I outlined above, needs further analysis with regard to the Circassians in Turkey. Thus, I shall finish by discussing the main actors involved in the production and reproduction of a modern diasporic identity: Circassian ethnic associations.

Having been subjected to forced migration from the northern Caucasus, settled in separate geographical locations, both excluded and included in the process of nation-state building by the political and military elite of the 1920s,

influenced by nationalist and assimilationist Turkish Republican policies after the 1920s, prohibited from using the mother tongue and Circassian names by the Turkish Republic, and subjected to many other exclusionist policies, such factors have eventually shaped the ways in which Circassians have developed their identities. To survive in Anatolia, former generations preferred to incorporate themselves into the Turkish mainstream political culture, which was dominated by homogeneity, Sunni Islam and Turkishness. This choice has partly led to the emergence of a general conflict between Circassians and other non-Turks such as Kurds and Alevis. Furthermore, Circassians have usually been presented by the political elite and professional intellectuals as part of the Turkish heritage, or as some related Turkish tribes. Thus, their state of being different has hitherto been denied. I not only hold the *formal Turkish nationalism* – an ideology implemented by the state since the late 1920s – to be the main reason for giving impetus to the Circassian ethnic resurgence in diaspora, but also would argue that the rising *popular Turkish nationalism* in Turkey, which has been formed spontaneously in opposition to Kurdish nationalism, has also had a remarkable impact.[4] In what follows, I will give some data concerning the ethnic resurgence in the Circassian diaspora in Turkey.

Ethnic resurgence corresponding to the strengthening of the particularist axis of diasporic identity among the Circassians in Turkey has been remarkably visible during the last two decades. These decades have witnessed various initiatives by the Circassians with respect to the politics of identity, difference and recognition. Those were primarily undertaken by ethnic associations in order to raise a popular consciousness within and outside their own community of the need for the construction and articulation of Circassian identity. Furthermore, there has recently been a strong intellectual movement emphasizing the peculiarities of Circassian history and culture. As the Circassians have so far been considered by the majority of Turks to have kinship ties with themselves, efforts by the Circassian elite to express its distinction from Turkish 'racial' stock have become increasingly important. There has been a growing interest among the Circassians in exploring their *pasts, traditions, cultures, languages* and *the processes of migration*, or *of exile*. I intentionally use these terms in their plural forms because there are various Circassian tribes that had to flee to Anatolia in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Circassian ethnic resurgence in Turkey has recently become apparent especially in the urban space. The rise of the number of ethnic associations (*dernek*s) in the urban space is an indicator of this tendency. Ethnic associations provide migrants with a safe haven from capitalist urban life. All associations in every city are alike. Each has similar aims such as organizing language courses, cultural evenings, folk dances and trips to

the homeland. Ethnic associations play an instrumental role in the processes of construction and articulation of Circassian diasporic identity. The first association, *Dost Eli Yardimlasma Dernegi*, was established in 1946 with the collaboration of Azeri Turks. This was the time when Caucasian identity was being underlined by the Circassian elite. During the Cold War period, these associations acquired an anti-Soviet character. Despite having a culturalist discourse, *Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği* (Northern Caucasia Culture Association), which was established in Ankara in 1964, distinguished Circassian identity from the Turkish ethnic legacy. This association contributed to the reification of Circassian culture in diaspora by giving emphasis to the folklorization of culture.

Kültür Derneği (*Kaf-Der*, Caucasian Association), established in 1993 as an umbrella organization, constitutes the largest Circassian associational network in Turkey. *Kaf-Der* has 34 branches in cities throughout the country and its headquarters is located in Ankara. *Kaf-Der* goes beyond traditional culturalist discourse by committing itself to different projects such as the political representation of Circassian diaspora in Turkey and their adaptation to urban life. *Kaf-Der* has a liberal-nationalist discourse and places a special emphasis on Circassian identity. There are two other major associations, founded in 1995, *Kafkas Vakfı* (the Caucasian Foundation) and *Birleçik Kafkasya Derneği* (the United Caucasian Association). These two associations are Islamic-oriented and pursue the idea of establishing an Islamic confederation in the northern Caucasus. They have recently engaged in the Chechen independence movement against the Russian authorities. It should also be noted that these organizations have become more passive of late as the official policy of Turkey towards the Chechen issue has partly shifted at the expense of the Chechen side. Thus, the activities of these associations are under strict supervision by Turkish official bodies. There are approximately 80 different associations throughout the country.

To reiterate, the contemporary ethnic and cultural resurgence among the Circassian diaspora does not necessarily correspond to the essentialist nature of the Circassians living in exile. As stated above, the emphasis on the particularist axis of the diasporic identities may be an indication of the exclusionist character of the host land with regard to access to political rights. When minorities are not permitted by the dominant political and legal structure to use legitimate political institutions such as parliament and political parties to engage in politics, these groups then tend to affiliate with the politics of identity by highlighting their cultural, ethnic and religious particularities.[5]

However, the replacement of minority politics by a modern diasporic identity highlighting the cultural and ethnic element has been reinforced also by some other recent social and political developments in Turkey.

It is apparent that many ethnic minority groups in western Europe have been trying to bypass the nation-states to which they have been subjected by bringing their concerns directly to European Union (EU) bodies. Basques, Corsicans and Catalans, for instance, have taken their demands on a transnational basis to the European Commission to be resolved. Circassians as well as Alevis and Kurds are also engaged in similar political manoeuvres. In fact, they have rational reasons to do so. The European Union has recently declined the use of the minority discourse due to the escalation of the minority problem in Europe. As could be clearly seen in the Accession Partnership text, which maps out the requirements of Turkey in the integration process into the EU, the term 'minority' has been replaced with the term 'cultural diversity' in order to celebrate *unity in diversity*. Circassian associations such as *Kaf-Der* and *Democratic Circassian Platform*[6] have already abandoned minority politics in the face of the currently changing political discourse in the West.

Conclusion

This article has outlined the political participation strategies developed by Circassians in Turkey to incorporate themselves into the mainstream political culture in one way or another since the 1970s. It was stated that the Circassians initially developed diverse strategies associated with various ideological standpoints: universalist and socialist revolutionaries (*devrimciler*) and nationalist and particularist returnists (*dönüşçüler*). Subsequently, minority politics was seen in the 1990s as a reaction to the previous state nationalism resulting from the 1980 military coup and newly emerging popular Turkish nationalism in parallel with the process of politicization of the Kurdish issue. Later on, it was argued that a new strategizing tool started to be used by the Circassians in Turkey in a way that distanced them from reactionary minority politics: diasporic identity regenerated by the contemporary global flows across boundaries between the homeland and hostland. The end of the Cold War, the rise in recent global flows as well as the rise of the postmodern politics of identity have provided the Circassians in diaspora with a number of new strategic tools. Rediscovery of the homeland and of their kin groups in remote diasporas such as in Syria, Jordan and Israel has led them to bypass to some extent the binary opposition between themselves and the Turkish nation-state. Contemporary developments on a global scale have at least brought them some new horizons. Furthermore, the sense of being a member of a 'different' people with historical roots and destinies outside the time/space of the 'host' nation seems to provide them with distinction and pride.

The study of contemporary diaspora cultures may also provide us with the epistemological grounds for understanding that culture is produced and

reproduced in the processes of social interaction, and that it cannot be substantialized and essentialized. Of late, the discourses of culture and ethnicity have been somewhat overused for essentialist, particularist and ethnocentrist purposes. The recent trend has been for culture to be popularly considered to have a substance, essence and a primordial character. Thus, the notion of culture, which was employed at the beginning of the twentieth century in order to tackle the ideology of racism and to promote the idea of relativity, has itself turned out to be a term legitimizing racism and political exclusion. On the contrary, if culture is defined as having no substance and essence, and as being a social construction produced in accordance with a respective time, space and context, then the belief that culture is a domain of struggle can be challenged. Diaspora studies, therefore, are exemplary in the sense that they consider cultures to be produced and reproduced along with the antithetical forces of home−diaspora, here−there, local−global, past−future and particular−universal.

NOTES

1. For further information on the notion of diaspora, see Kaya [2000, 2001].
2. For a detailed account of these regulations and laws, see Aktar [2000], Yıldız [2001] and Bali [1999].
3. The Circassian ethnic resurgence has also recently attracted an academic interest both in Turkey and abroad [Shami, 1995, 1998, 1999; Ertem, 2000; and Toumarkine, 2001]. Seteney Shami is one of the prominent figures here. Her works fit very well into contemporary diaspora studies; and she studies the Circassians in Turkey in comparison to those in the homeland, Jordan and Israel. On the other hand, Gönül Ertem is concerned with the identity formation processes among the Circassian community in Eskisehir (a town in Central Anatolia). Aleaxandre Toumarkine is looking at the Circassian ethnic associations in Turkey. There are also some other works undertaken by Circassian intellectuals, which are either on Circassian culture, forced migration from the homeland, roots of the Circassian language, or on the memoirs from Caucasia [Gökçe 1979; Hızal 1961; Aydemir 1988, 1991; Berkok 1958; Butbay 1990]. There are also some minor academic works touching upon the socio-economic and socio-cultural structure of Circassian villages [Alankuş 1999; Taymaz 1999, 2001; Eser, 1999].
4. The differentiation between 'formal nationalism' and 'informal nationalism' is very well depicted by Thomas Hylland Eriksen [1992]. This differentiation is helpful to show the factors shaping the construction of diaspora discourses among the Circassians. For more information about Turkish nationalism and Turkification of minorities in Turkey, see Aktar [2000]; and for the ultra nationalist movements in Turkey see Özdoğan [2001].
5. According to A. MacIntyre [1971] there are two forms of politics: the politics of those within and the politics of those excluded. Those within tend to employ legitimate political institutions in pursuing their goals, and those excluded use culture to pursue their aims. Hence, he does not place culture in the private space; culture is another type of politics, thus it is inherently located in the public space.
6. The *Democratic Circassian Platform* is a non-governmental organization located in Istanbul. It was established in the year 2000.

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