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**RETURN MIGRATION TO THE CAUCASUS:
THE ADYGE-ABKHAZ DIASPORA(S),
TRANSNATIONALISM AND LIFE AFTER
RETURN**

Jade Cemre Erciyes

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
the University of Sussex for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in MIGRATION STUDIES**

**SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES
*UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX***

Brighton, UK, January 2014

DECLARATION

I HEREBY DECLARE THAT THIS THESIS HAS NOT BEEN SUBMITTED,
EITHER IN THE SAME OR DIFFERENT FORM,
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SIGNATURE: JADE CEMRE ERCIYES

For all those who are searching for their belonging in the Caucasian mountains...

and

in memory of the ones who found it there...

DEGUF SABAHAHAT BAYBAS LUGON

8 April 1934 – 27 January 2012



2 October 2011, on our way from Abkhazia to Adygeya, **Deguf Sabahat** is telling about what she learned as a child – the three things that makes a person Adyge: *Kheku* (the homeland), *Khabze* (the etiquette) and the *Bze* (language). Sabahat was not only an Adyge by her deep connection to her ancestral homeland, etiquette and language, but she was also the symbol of a transnational life that awaits a whole new generation of Adyge-Abkhaz people, living between her homes in Turkey, Switzerland, Adygeya and Abkhazia, in between modernity and traditions, in complete freedom of soul and body, travelling far and beyond but always finding parts of herself in the Caucasian mountains.

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PhD Migration Studies

Abstract

This thesis investigates the dual transnationalism of ancestral return migrants, that is to say people “returning” to the territory where their ancestors had once migrated from. Dispersed from their homeland in the second half of the 19th century, the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora has been involved in a variety of transnational practices in relation to their homeland in the Caucasus; and some, with considerable effort, have been settling there especially in the last two decades. The transnational involvement of this diaspora, most of whom live today in Turkey, is motivated by their search for belonging. Many who go back and forth between Turkey and the Caucasus are involved in transnational diaspora associations and take an active role in the formation of a transnational ethno-political-cultural environment for new generations growing up in the diaspora. The majority of those who have “return migrated” to their homeland in the Caucasus, in this study to two republics, Adygeya (an autonomous republic under the Russian Federation) and Abkhazia (a republic with contested independence), develop new transnational links to their diaspora communities in Turkey.

This thesis is the product of a multi-sited, multi-method research project that combines theories related to transnationalism, diaspora and return, as well as migrant adaptation. Using life-history interviews, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, fieldwork for the research took place in rural diaspora settlements and urban diaspora organisations in Turkey as well as in the Caucasus, thereby enabling the researcher to study both ends of the migration route. Existing studies on ancestral return migration focus on pull and push factors, which hitherto have focused on sending and receiving countries separately. This thesis argues that their dual transnationalism, both in the diaspora (in Turkey) looking back towards the diasporic homeland, and after return looking back towards the diaspora, turns them into the “diaspora of their diaspora”.

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Jade Cemre Erciyes, March 2014

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It was in 2005 and I was trying to arrange my fieldwork in Adygeya for my master's thesis when I met Sosruqo (pseudonym) in one of the North-Caucasian associations in Turkey. He had just come back from a visit to the Caucasus, which he believed was his only true "home", a place where he aspired to have relocated many years ago but things had not worked out. Showing me photos of the city he had been to and of the "returnees" living there, he started talking about return as the only survival option for the Circassian people. In the following two years, I heard him repeat phrases like "*at least turn your faces towards the Caucasus*" or "*try to put a foot in the homeland*" in his conversations, especially with the young people he encountered in ethnic organisations or in ethnic events. At first, I found his dream utopian and unrealistic, and interpreted it as a personal desire more than a wider socio-political discourse. That year he introduced me to many others – ethnic Adyge, Abkhaz, Ubykh or Ossetians – who had dreamed, or tried to at some point in their lives, or were planning to return to the Caucasus, their ancestral homeland.

This shared dream, or the myth of return, had widely existed and was widely discussed in the Cherkess diaspora (see Appendix B1) for many generations. Actual return, on the other hand, had been realised by only a small group of people and mainly after the 1990s, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, under which the not-well-known Caucasian homeland existed. Upon my first arrival in Adygeya in 2005, I was surprised at the high level of satisfaction of the return migrants, who had resettled in a homeland that was in economic and political transition, that visibly had scarce resources and services especially for the migrants, where the Adyge ethnic population was in a minority, and where there was no freedom of speech or a strong ethno-cultural existence. In the following years, I met many others around Turkey and the Caucasus, *who had turned their faces towards the Caucasus*, were travelling back and forth, or as Sosruqo had suggested, *had one foot in the homeland*.

This thesis is the product of a multi-method, multi-sited ethnographic research on certain aspects of return migration to the Caucasus, specifically to the Republic of Adygeya (a federal subject of the Russian Federation) and Abkhazia (a state with a contested independence). The central dual research question of this study derives from the increasing numbers of Adyge-Abkhaz people with "one foot in the homeland":

Which are the dynamics that lead to the decision for return migration to the Caucasus, and what is the effect of these dynamics and return migratory projects on the lives of returnees?

This double question is set within a wider theoretical remit. Understanding the limitations and hybrid conceptualisation of terms such as “diaspora” and “return migration”, my study unites the existing theories and work on diasporas, return migration and transnationalism to create, within a specific regional context, a thorough understanding of a social phenomenon that is based on the conscious choice of individuals but which has wider connections to multiple societies, settings and localities beyond national borders.

The fieldwork for this study took place in Turkey and in Adygeya and Abkhazia in the Caucasus. In Turkey the first phases of fieldwork took place in Istanbul and Ankara in the urban context, and in rural Adyge-Abkhaz villages within the province of Bursa – İnegöl district, and the province of Samsun. These were self-funded research trips. The last phase of the field work, that facilitated the completion of this study, was covered by a MireKoc Graduate Student Research Grant and included field visits to Adygeya and Abkhazia in the Caucasus, as well as to the provinces of Sivas, Sakarya and Antalya in Turkey. These further visits were important in discussing the preliminary findings with the wider diaspora and return migrant community, and for completing the analysis and writing process.

Before listing the detailed research questions which frame the thesis, let me elaborate a bit more on the relevance of this research, as an independent study in its own right. The Caucasus is a region widely neglected by researchers, especially in terms of studies related to human mobility. Though the dissolution of the Soviet Union drew some academic interest to the Caucasus and to the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora during the last two decades, there are still no in-depth studies on the region or its peoples. There is not a well-developed literature that refers to the peoples that are central to the interest of this study, and the labelling of the peoples and places involved has also been problematic (see Appendices B1- B4). “Defining a collective identity, however, is by no means easy – either for researchers, or for the individuals concerned” (Ben-Rafael, 2013: 6). Though the Adyge and Abkhaz people are occasionally known by other names, as part of a single diaspora group – Cherkess or North Caucasian – in this study, in order not to take part in the ongoing political debates about such diasporic labelling, I prefer to use their self-designated names in their homelands. However, the narratives collected show that the Adyge-Abkhaz share a common diasporic experience, as well as similar return migratory processes and post-return experiences. The only clear

difference comes in relation to the different political status of the two homeland republics of Adygeya and Abkhazia.

Abkhazia and Adygeya are located on opposite sides of the Caucasus mountain range. Adygeya is a republic under the Russian Federation while Abkhazia is an independent republic with an internationally disputed status. Facing different political realities, Adygeya and Abkhazia share a common history and ethno-cultural similarities. They also share a common fact that both the Adyge and Abkhaz are only a minority in the ancestral homelands, as their settlements and territories were populated by other ethnic peoples settled there during the Tsarist and Soviet times. To address their demographic problems, the return of the ethnic peoples from the diaspora plays a vital role and both republics have policies to promote ancestral return migration. However, their different political realities are also reflected in the way the return policies are framed. Abkhazia has its own regulations on return migration of ethnic Abkhaz to the country and a State Committee of Repatriation having an equal status to a Ministry in the political system. In Adygeya, on the other hand, immigration is regulated by the Russian Federal Laws. The more detailed background picture on these cases will be drawn in Chapter 2. In this introductory chapter, I set out to accomplish three things: first, a setting out of the research questions that operationalise the thesis; second, a description of the theoretical framework that structures the thesis; and third an overview of the thesis.

1.1 Research Questions

From the double central research question this study tries to answer, three primary research questions emerge and many related questions which are nested within each primary question. Although the three primary questions remained as the backbone of my research, related questions have changed as the research progressed and new findings and perspectives were discovered.

The primary research question is **the influence of transnational practices in the diaspora on return migration**. Parallel to the more holistic theoretical approach to transnationalism, *the political, economic, social and cultural transnational practices the Abkhaz and Adyge (Circassians) carry out in the diaspora* are investigated. It is also important to consider *the role of different levels of involvement in transnational practices in making the decision to return (or not to return)* to answer the primary research question.

The second research question this study tries to answer is **the dynamics that influence the return migration decision of Abkhaz and Adyge (Circassians)**. Forming the backbone

that leads to the formation of the second empirical chapter in this thesis, this study seeks to understand *the role of political factors* (eg. the political status of the homeland, international actors, homeland policies of return); *economic factors* (eg. job and business opportunities, life standards/quality of life); *social factors* (eg. the role of family place of residence in the diaspora); and *cultural factors* (eg. the role of *Adyge khabze/apsuaara*, the traditional value system, religion, ethnic/national identity) *in the decision to return-migrate*.

To explore the dual-transnationalism of the Adyge-Abkhaz returnees, the last key research question is **the variety of transnational practices return migrants engage in their daily lives**. The related research questions here are *the role of diasporic transnational practices in the lives of return migrants in the ancestral homeland, the changes and continuation of the transnational practices from the diaspora, and how new practices relate to adaptation of the returnees*. The new questions that emerged during the fieldwork have to do with issues of *belonging*, focusing on both ends of the return migration: *the diasporic belonging and its influence on transnationalism of diasporans and the decision to return-migrate and the post-return belonging to the homeland and the diaspora and the influence on transnationalism of returnees*.

1.2 The Framework: Dual Transnationalism

The theoretical debates that migration studies engage with are numerous and wide ranging. Yet, in a recent article on contemporary migration theories, Piché (2013) argues that there is a lack of major theoretical developments in the field of migration studies since the 2000s. He suggests a combined “analytical framework which sees migration as a multifactorial and multidimensional phenomenon and which incorporates its three main ingredients: origin and destination; micro, meso, macro and global analysis levels; and economic, social and political dimensions” (Piché, 2013: 157). This thesis is about the transnationalism of the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey and their ancestral return migration to the Caucasus. To study the central dual research question, which focuses on the transnational dynamics before and after return migration, this study makes use of theories of transnationalism, diaspora and return. In order to study the transnationalism of the return migrants after their settlement in the ancestral homeland, it is also important to look at the theories related to migrant adaptation. In line with Piché’s suggestion, this study developed a research methodology to collect data in relation to migration or transnational mobility in both the diaspora and the homeland; at the individual

and family level; and explicitly tried to identify the economic, social and political dimensions of the return migratory process.

This section explains the theoretical and the analytical framework that my study incorporates and reviews the terminological discussions that migration scholars have been dealing with for a long time. The study of dual transnationalism in relation to return migration gives a thorough and more nuanced understanding of the return migration process. This approach moves the discussions on pull and push factors, which hitherto have focused on sending and receiving countries separately, one step further, introducing the transnationalism of practices at both ends of the return migration route. By this epistemological distinction between diaspora and transnationalism, and return and transnationalism, debates on how transnational identity and behaviour dissolve diasporas and return are challenged. The two-ended transnational approach helps identify the difference and overlap between these processes. Below, in the first sub-section, the focus is on the wide range of discussions on transnationalism. However, in the section that follows, which focuses on the diaspora, as well as in the section about return and return migration, the interception of theoretical discussions related to transnationalism is also discussed. To better understand the role of transnationalism in post-return processes I touch upon the literature on migrant adaptation and the ongoing debates about return migrants' integration in the Caucasus. In this section I also mention the recent theoretical debates about transnationalism and adaptation / integration / assimilation.

As mentioned before, there is not a wide range of academic works focusing on the recent migration dynamics in the Caucasus, the North-Caucasian diaspora in Turkey and their relation to the ancestral homeland. This is one of the respects in which my thesis breaks new ground. In all the following sections, I integrate the existing literature on the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora and return and discuss it in relation to recent theoretical debates. The more detailed background picture on these cases will be drawn in Chapter 2. This study not only introduces a new case to existing discussions, but also makes use of the benefits of having access to both ends of the return processes (diaspora and homeland) through multi-sited fieldwork. Drawing on the frameworks provided by a wide range of literature (as suggested by Piché 2013), this study looks at a specific type of international migration as a multifactorial and multidimensional phenomenon. Though not ignoring the cross-cutting themes that affect the return migration processes, such as (but not limited to) gender, age, generation, family structure, urban-rural connections, previous migration experience, socio-cultural and political affiliations, my study, in order not to try to cover too much ground, does not take these as

separate theoretical discussions but keeps these as part of the analytical discussions where they emerge from the data.

1.2.1 Transnationalism

Transnationalism, as a research framework or a perspective on international migration, has been used and criticised by social scientists since the early 1990s. Amongst others, Vertovec (2009, 2010) effectively summarises and explains what is new about the transnationalism framework in migration studies, what are the key criticisms, and what are the formulated typologies by theorists. The two key problems that researchers using the transnational perspective are criticised for and should avoid are “conceptual conflation and overuse” and “suggesting all migrants engage in transnationalism” (Vertovec, 2009: 17). In this section I will first try to explain my use of transnationalism as a framework for this study. Second, it is important to note that, though the return migrants in my study have varying degrees of transnational engagement, I do not intend to suggest that every return migrant is engaged in transnational activities or networks. For this reason, in Chapter 6, I quote from the accounts of two return migrants about how they are different from the “other” returnees who are either involved in two or more communities, or have a desire to be so.

Guarnizo and Smith (1998: 27) argue that studies of transnationalism confuse the conceptualisation of how transnational relations take place with the effects of transnational practices. In my study of the dual transnationalism of the Adyge-Abkhaz return migrants, I have focused on conscious decisions of involvement in practices beyond national borders, involvement in transnational networks, and developing new transnational links to create a new form of diasporic belonging and as a survival strategy after return migration. This kind of approach to transnationalism is based on a more holistic understanding, including a variety of migrants’ practices that do not require physical involvement in multiple places beyond national borders, such as dreaming on the one hand, or on the other hand “technologically-mediated practices of information and communication, including ... tools for navigating a new environment” (Lingel *et al.* 2014: 1). Vertovec (1999) lists six conceptual premises that different meanings of transnationalism have been grounded upon: social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural production, avenue of capital, site of political engagement and (re)construction of locality. My understanding of transnationalism gives scope to address all the different conceptual premises that focus on economic, cultural, social or political aspects separately and uses the transnational framework to analyse migration in relation to

other practices that are taking place beyond national borders. To quote Erik Olsson (2011: 15):

The transnational approach is principally interested in the processes of migration and tries to broaden our understanding of migration as an event by not only focusing on migrants and their movement in space but also including the many other phenomena and structures of social networks, such as community formation, social institutions, cultural practices, state policy and law, economic activities and transactions, and above all how these are transnationally located.

The transnational approach moves this research further than previous studies, which hitherto focused on either the Adyge or the North-Caucasian diaspora and homeland relations. Moreover, this gives the researcher freedom to look at the changing self-identification of peoples and places without falling into methodological ethno-nationalism.

1.2.2 Diaspora

As discussed in the introduction, using the term “diaspora” to refer to the Adyge and Abkhaz living around the world is problematic. Understanding the limitations and hybrid conceptualisation of the terminology, I give below the classical definitions of diaspora and the critics of that conceptualisation, and then discuss the transnationalism of the diaspora. Cohen (2008) argues that there are four phases of diaspora studies: the classical definition from the 1960s and 1970s; the expanded form of diaspora in the 1980s, which ignored the homeland connection; the mid-1990s social constructionists’ critiques of the very inclusive definition of the second phase; and the fourth, consolidated phase where the inclusiveness and its critiques have been balanced by the importance of attachment to place. The more recent debates on diaspora focus on the problematically wide usage of the term as a descriptive typological tool or a social condition (Anthias, 1998); as “designating a collectivity”, “a condition”, “a process” or “a field of inquiry” (Brubaker, 2005). Vertovec (1997) differentiates three meanings of diaspora, as “social form, type of consciousness, and mode of cultural production”. In this study I consider Sökefeld’s (2006: 267) critique that “there can be no diaspora community without a consciousness of diaspora, in other words without an idea of shared identity, of common belonging to that group”. Although, as argued by the Adyge-Abkhaz living in Turkey and agreed by the majority of scholars working with this group, they are a victim diaspora (details of their victimisation through exile are given in Chapter 2), they also have discursive constructions of themselves as a diaspora which is a relatively ignored aspect in studies to this day.

1.2.2.1 Classical Definitions and Critiques

Brubaker (2005: 5) identifies three core criteria that are widely used to define a group as diaspora: “dispersion, homeland orientation and boundary-maintenance”. According to Safran (1991: 83-84), a “classical diaspora” forms when ancestors were dispersed, the people retain a collective memory about their homeland, many feel partly alienated from their host societies, many believe in an eventual return, they try to maintain and restore their homeland, and they continue to relate to the homeland. Cohen further develops the list of Safran and suggests the term “victim diaspora” for diasporas that have a historical experience of enslavement, exile and displacement (Cohen, 2008). Though there are other definitions of diaspora including non-dispersed groups such as ethnic communities living in different adjacent states, or non-victim groups such as trade diasporas, as a “descriptive typological tool” the definitions of classical and victim diasporas suggested by Cohen and Safran are frequently used to refer to the Adyge and Abkhaz living outside of their homeland.

Many researchers working on the Adyge and Abkhaz diaspora (or Circassian diaspora) agree with this definition of a classical or victim diaspora (Shami, 1998, 2000, Bram, 1999, Kaya, 2004, 2005b, Vardania, 2007). There are some counter-arguments to these approaches. Gül (2008) argues that Circassians in Turkey live as diasporas but their high levels of participation (integration) in the social and political structures in their host country and their feelings of high concern for their host country (fatherland as referred by Gül in contrast to motherland referring to the homeland) limit their diasporic characteristics. Jaimoukha (2004) writes about a similar integration and cultural assimilation of the Jordanian Circassians. If they are assimilated or “acculturated” (Van Hear, 1998: 55), then according to the third criterion suggested by Brubaker (2005: 5), they do not preserve “a distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society”.

Still it must be considered that “(t)here has been and continues to be variety within the diaspora, including the ways in which the homeland is conceived and individuals and communities act on those ideas” (Pattie, 2005: 49). Increasingly the Adyge-Abkhaz living in Turkey, like other diasporas, “proudly maintain their ethno-national identity, retain their homeland citizenship [or living permits], openly identify as members of diaspora organisations, and are not reluctant to act publicly on behalf of their homelands and dispersed co-ethnics” (Sheffer, 2003: 3). Tölölyan (1996) and Brubaker (2005) argue that “putative diasporas”, including assimilated ethnic descendants as part of diasporas, can still have practical political and cultural projects in the diasporic centre. The political activists of the

Adyge and Abkhaz had started defining themselves as a diaspora and referring to their “huge numbers” dispersed in different nation states away from their homeland in the 1970s. They continue to “construct and disseminate numerous representations of what they are, what their diasporic experience feels like and what it means or should mean” (Tölölyan, 2003: 56). Taking into account this diversity, in this study, the term diaspora will be used to refer to all descendants of Adyge and Abkhaz deported from their homelands in the 19th and early 20th century.

1.2.2.2 Transnationalism of the Diaspora

Sökefeld (2006: 267) suggests “defining diasporas as *imagined transnational communities*, as imaginations of community that unite segments of people that live in territorially separated locations” [italics in the original]. The Adyge-Abkhaz people today live in their majority outside of the Caucasus. Despite the variety of territorial units in the ancestral homeland today, they imagine themselves as belonging to the Caucasus in general and feel a connection to the wider diaspora around the world. To keep the connections and to advocate the interests of their people living in other nation states, the Adyge and Abkhaz have established separate international associations, namely the International Circassian Association (CIA), and the International Association of Abkhaz-Abazin People (ABAZA), after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, guided by the territorial divisions in the homeland. John Colarusso, a linguist, wrote about the establishment of and the prospects for return of the Adyge to their homeland in 1991 in his article about the third meeting (first Congress) of the CIA that took place in the North Caucasus the same year. With this meeting, the right of repatriation of Circassians to the North-West Caucasus had gained official recognition by the authorities. The return of the Adyge and Abkhaz people was accepted as the priority of the Association and it was hoped that the “immigrants” would be of different backgrounds, bringing expertise in trade, manufacture, science and agriculture to the relatively sparsely populated and economically deprived region (Colarusso, 1991). These aspired prospects were not met in terms of development impact for the region; however, these institutions are a good example of how the Adyge and Abkhaz were guided to imagine their communities as separate by homeland-oriented politics. Olsson (2012: 178) argues that “when diasporic associations or organisations mediate and distribute services, they include the transnational context as a resource in creating a ‘structure of opportunity’ rather than restricting themselves to a national arena”. In this respect, the diasporic members of both associations pushed for the involvement

of Abkhaz-Abaza people (and the association ABAZA) in the CIA, arguing for the united cause of both peoples in the wider diaspora.

“When considering return, migrants weigh both sets of ties – links with people and institutions” (Byron and Condon, 1996: 100). The Adyge-Abkhaz commit to a form of homeland-bound diasporic identity but, as I have a network of over a 1000 friends of Adyge-Abkhaz origin on Facebook, my recent observation of their status updates and shares shows that they frequently point to their many identities, such as gender or local belonging, along with their ethnodiasporic identity¹. Tölölyan (2012: 11) captures this important point nicely in the following quote:

They desire and aspire to... multiple and flexible identities that they can configure as needed – they want to select from each and all those elements of which they can be proud and whose claims and obligations they are prepared to honour. They are at home in... while retaining their feeling for the homeland of their ancestors and the more tightly defined and homeland-oriented diaspora of their elders. They have already abandoned exilic nationalism for diasporic transnationalism.

In this study, I distinguish between the *transnational diasporic experiences of return*, such as paying regular visits to the ancestral homeland, being involved in homeland politics, having business connections in the homeland etc., and “*ethnic return migration*” (Tsuda, 2009c, 2009d, 2010), that is the “reterritorialization in the homeland of past generations” (Markowitz, 2004). Taking into consideration different arguments and terminologies, *return migration* is used in this study to refer to the resettlement of ethnic Adyge and Abkhaz in their ancestral homeland in the Caucasus. I insist on using the return migration formulation since the process of migration is perceived as a “return” by the actors themselves, irrespective of its ancestral or generational nature.

1.2.3 Return

Migration, specifically return migration, is a multi-disciplinary research field. Scholars across different disciplines have studied cases of return migration since the 1960s. However, “it was in the 1980s that stimulating scientific debate among scholars took place on the return

¹ Cerkesh Haklari Insyatifi [Cherkess Rights Initiative] (<http://www.cerkeshaklari.com/>), Cerkesh Solu [Cherkess Leftists] (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/%C3%87erkesh-Solu/208278959234011>), Muhafazakar Cerkeshler Platformu [Conservative Cherkess’ Platform] (<https://www.facebook.com/MuhafazakarCerkeshPlatformu>), Cerkesh Kadinlari Teavun Cemiyeti [Cherkess Women Solidarity Association] (<http://www.cerkeshkadinlari.org/>), Bursa Kafkasli Anneler Grubu [The Collective of Caucasian Mothers in Bursa] (no website but referred at: <http://cerkeshkadinlari.org/index.php/bursada-erkesh-annelerin-muhtesem-projesi/>) are some of the new groups that focus on a specific political stance or are targeting women only.

phenomenon and its impact on origin countries” (Cassarino, 2004: 254). Theories on return migration have focused on many different types of return ranging from international return, return of IDPs (internally displaced persons) or refugees, voluntary return, forced repatriation, the return of the second generation, and ancestral return migration, and others. The thematic focus of research has varied from motivations for return, expectations, return migratory projects, the economy and politics of return, temporality of returns (seasonal, occasional, etc) to post-return experiences (integration, belonging, home, political activism, identity, economics, culture, development, etc.).

When discussing “return” I realise that this term is problematic. First of all, can we refer to the process of resettling in the ancestral homeland as return migration? The subjects of this study have not migrated to their host countries but their ancestors did, more than 100 years ago, and so one view is they are emigrants to their ancestral homeland, not “real” returnees (cf. Bovenkerk, 1974: 19). However, I reiterate the appropriateness of the use of the term “return” in this case because my research participants used precisely this word.

King (2000: 42) identifies five epistemologies for the theoretical understanding of return migration: functionalist models, behavioural models, the Marxist perspective, a general systems framework and the transnational communities perspective. The transnational perspective brings to the return migration research field a new understanding in the sense that return is not necessarily seen as permanent or the end of the diaspora cycle. Transnational approaches to return migration research have been focused on the “hybrid identities of migrants and on their cross-border mobility” (Cassarino, 2004: 265). My adoption of this perspective incorporates the study of transnationalism in both the diaspora and the homeland, with a focus on the motivations and migratory projects of returnees and post-return experiences.

According to Oxfeld and Long (2004: 4), “return encompasses but is broader than return migration”. They argue that return can be imagined or provisional as well as a physical repatriation, and point out that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive or sequential groupings. “Return to homeland of the forefathers” (Roll, 2003: 272) is a process that is rooted in personal histories and it is rather an individual economic and/or political choice. Throughout history, migrants have thought, dreamt and even planned their homecoming. Some diasporic descendants recently found that they can actually return home again as a result of political changes, increased communication and cheaper transportation opportunities. Later generations of diasporic people “can uproot themselves” and become “transmigrants”

(Tsuda, 2009c) dwelling in dual (or more) localities (Vertovec, 2001), getting involved in transnational networks that make them part of a “transnational migration circuit” (Stefánsson, 2004: 7).

Return migration theory suggests that return can be due to different pull and push factors. “Clearly the set of +’s and –’s at both origin and destination is differently defined for every migrant or prospective migrant” (Lee, 1966: 50). Potter and Conway (2005: 284), in their study of Caribbean return migration (which includes second-generation return), list many pull factors such as the “climate, returning to family roots, and the availability of opportunities” and also “the chance to improve standards of living and quality of life”. Pattie (2005) in her study of Armenian return migration to Soviet Armenia refers especially to patriotic motives. In the case of the return of elderly Bosniacs, their wish to die in the native soil emerges as an important factor (Stefánsson, 2004). Tsuda (2010), in his study of Japanese-Brazilian return migration, focuses on the economic pull factors but also explains how these change into social reasons to stay with the families of return migrants moving to Japan. When he analyses other ethnic return migration cases from around the world, Tsuda (2009c: 3) argues that “most ethnic return migration has been primarily a response to economic pressures” but also due to “ethnic ties to ancestral homelands, a nostalgic desire to rediscover ethnic roots, and the efforts of homeland governments to actively encourage their diasporic descendants living abroad to return”. Christou (2006: 158), in her study of second-generation Greek-American return migration, writes about cultural and natural pull factors in the homeland (family, language, religion, landscape) as well as “material support systems that created the starting point”.

Clearly, then, different case studies focus on different motivations in the dichotomy of push and pull factors. The transnational perspective, in the analysis of motivations for return, takes the discussion on push and pull factors one step further, approaching them as a whole, taking them out of the dichotomy of sending and receiving states or societies, and understanding the motivations as dynamic processes.

1.2.3.1 Transnationalism and Return

This study is on ancestral return migration and focuses on return motivations, projects and post-return experiences, all within a transnational perspective. “Transnationalism constitutes an attempt to formulate a theoretical and conceptual framework aimed at a better understanding of the strong social and economic links between migrants’ host and origin

countries” (Cassarino, 2004: 261). Adopting a transnational approach gives way to a more holistic study of return migration in relation to diasporic mobility. I understand transnational practices in the diaspora as “a form of return” (Black and King, 2004: 80), and I aim to identify the influence of these practices in the decision of return migration and in the return migratory projects (Oxfeld and Long, 2004). My study also aims to investigate the role of transnational practices in post-return experiences.

De Bree, Davids and De Haas’s (2010: 506) research on Dutch-Moroccan return migrants identifies many economic, political, social and cultural practices that show that return migration is a “complex matter in which migrants negotiate transnationally rooted forms of belonging”. The way the return migrants identify themselves and their livelihoods on the basis of networks, discourses and institutions stretching beyond the state borders is similar to transmigrants and diasporas (Hansen, 2013: 156). The existing scholarly works on the Adyge-Abkhaz return migrants have focused on issues of socio-cultural adaptation of the Kosovan Adyge (Sokolova, 2007, 2008, Panesh, 2009), the decision-making and change of discourse (Bram, 1999), and the journeys of return migration (Shami, 1998, 2000), but there is no literature on how they identify themselves or how they connect to the places they come from as they negotiate their belonging in the ancestral homeland. Studies on the return of diasporas show that “many maintain the wish to live part of the year in the ‘host’ country and part of the year in the home country. They want to ‘come and go’ between the two countries, because both localities have acquired personal meanings and significance in their lives” (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006: 1362)

1.2.4 Post-Return Processes

Theories relating to migrant experiences in host societies use a variety of terms to refer to the cultural, social, psychological, economic and political changes that happen in migrants’ lives. The widely debated concepts of assimilation (Alba and Nee, 1997, Morawska, 2004, Kivisto, 2005, Haller *et al.*, 2011), integration (Vertovec and Cohen, 1999, Vermeulen and Penninx, 2000, Diminescu, 2008), adaptation, adjustment, absorption or acculturation (Berry, 1997, Remennick, 2003), though sometimes used interchangeably or in relation to one another, are used with caution as the empirical experience is not uniform or fixed. “Distinct paths exist, some of which lead to... integration into the mainstream” (Haller *et al.*, 2011: 755), while some lead there only after a time period or generation. In this study, I use the term *adaptation*, as it is the direct translation of the term in Turkish and Russian (as well as Circassian and

Abkhazian) that refers to the social, cultural, linguistic and psychological processes that return migrants deal with in their everyday lives. The Adyge and Abkhaz return migration discourse includes a huge debate about individuals' adaptation into the life in the homeland (discussed in Chapter 6). However, this must be approached with caution as ancestral return migration waves are rather recent in the Caucasus; only about 20 years of time has elapsed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, not enough to draw conclusions. Therefore my theoretical reflections are mainly limited to the narratives of the return migrants themselves and their individual evaluations of having problems of adaptation or not.

There are many empirical studies on the role of pre-return practices and background of returnees on post-return experiences. Potter and Conway (2005) in their study of Caribbean return migration argue that the different backgrounds of the returnees, for example coming from a metropolitan context, or the extent of transnational networks, whether the family is with them etc., influence the level of adjustment to the homeland. In the Caribbean, young return migrants can get frustrated by poorer facilities, power cuts, water shortages, loss of gendered gains and competition for men (in the case of female returnees), being the "other", and cultural differences. Nevertheless, on balance, other "pull" factors, such as climate, quality of life, family ties and economic opportunities, tend to hold sway. Comparing ex-Soviet return migrants' political participation in Israel and in Germany, Klekowski von Koppenfels (2003) argues that the biggest difference is that Jews return to a new state and with new expectations; whereas *Aussiedler* in Germany are returning "home".

Tsuda (2009c: 3) writes that "diasporic homecomings are often ambivalent, if not negative experiences for many ethnic return migrants". Many countries provide assistance to return migrants to repatriate and for the post-settlement integration period in order to decrease the negative experiences of migration. The return migrants who receive such assistance are seen as "privileged immigrants" (Tinguy, 2003), since they are provided with solutions to important problems like support for transport costs, temporary or indefinite accommodation, language training, payment of allowances, and citizenship.

Chirikba (2006) argues that in the case of Turkish-Abkhaz returnees the problems of integration after return migration are due to the "romantic" and "idealised" image of the homeland and lack of knowledge of the Russian language which is the primary tool of communication. Lack of Russian language was also the main problem of return migrants in Adygeya in my first visit there in 2005, but they were also frustrated by the post-Soviet

bureaucracy, low living standards and socio-cultural differences. More evidence on these issues will be presented later in this thesis.

1.2.5 Dual Transnationalism

The experience of return migration for second and subsequent generations can be argued to take the form and character essentially of a new migration. They are not “real” returnees as they have never lived in their homelands, but new immigrants settling in a new place. King and Christou (2011) argue that ancestral return reverses the diasporic scattering and returnees are likely to develop a reversed transnationalism by being involved in new transnational links to their country of birth, changing the direction of their transnational involvement. The dual transnationalism framework, on the other hand, does not look at the transnational links to the countries of birth as the reverse of transnational links to the homeland, but more holistically as a component of the transnationalism of the return migrants. With this approach the pre-return transnational involvement in the diaspora and the post-return transnational practices, which are mostly new in nature, are seen as the part of the return process.

To clarify this framework in the light of the previously outlined theoretical debates about transnationalism, diaspora and return, let me state my understanding and use of each term again. My preference to talk about a diaspora and return derive precisely from the fact that the Adyge-Abkhaz living in Turkey for five generations call themselves a “diaspora” and refer to the migration to settle in the ancestral homeland as “return”. I differentiate between *return* and *return migration*. Return is not a resettlement, but anything that ranges from virtual return (see Chapter 5) to return visits (see Chapter 6). It is what Sosruqo called (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) “*turning one’s face towards the Caucasus*” or “*putting a foot in the homeland*”.

Previous studies also argue that diaspora communities’ continuing ties to a homeland become part of return migratory processes (Oxford and Long, 2004: 4). These transnational ties help the creation and re-creation of diasporic identities according to changing images (and realities) of the homeland, while supporting return migratory projects. When diaspora communities return to their homelands, the same process is observed the other way around. They continue their cultural, physical, economic ties to their countries of birth. Studying, via a multi-method, multi-sited research project, both ends of transnationalism, of the diaspora and the return migrants, I look at the dual transnationalism that is being involved in transnational activities that facilitate the decision to return-migrate and post-return migration adaptation

processes. As discussed above, the Adyge-Abkhaz return migrants' adjustment to life in the ancestral homeland is referred as adaptation, as this is how they refer to it.

Morawska (2004), in her study of migrant adaptation in host states and transnationalism, lists a variety of factors that shape a migrant's assimilation and transnationalism. Besides the factors related to sending and receiving countries and individual characteristics, she lists a variety of external and intragroup conditions in the place of settlement. Most of these conditions do not have a strong influence on ancestral return migrants' adaptation or transnationalism, as they are not the "other" in the ethnic (or racial) sense, as in Morawska's cases. Still, the returnees are seen as migrants and the native perceptions and behaviour constitute an important factor in the ongoing transnationalism of the returnees. Two of the intragroup factors suggested by Morawska (2004: 1399) that relate to Adyge and Abkhaz return migrants are residential concentration and collective mentality. The residential concentration is a crucial factor, as both Adygeya and Abkhazia are small republics and return migrants are settled in the cities and in specific rural settlements with high concentration (both as part of the state settlement policies and through individual choices). The collective mentality is even more important than settling in proximity to each other, as the majority of return migrants have connections to diaspora organisations (associations) or their close-knit rural communities before their migration (further discussed in Chapter 5), and they tend to keep these networks and protect their diasporic collective memories, somehow becoming "the diaspora of their diaspora" (see Chapter 6). However, they develop a new homeland-oriented understanding of the diaspora, what it is and what it should be, which creates the image that they have highly integrated (or assimilated) into the homeland mentality, which is argued to be pro-Russian (see Chapter 6). In this sense, through the collective mentality and constant contact with other returnees (and visitors from the diaspora), "through literal and imaginative identification and interaction with multiple places" (Oeppen 2013: 276), the return migrants develop a sense of belonging and of differentiation from the homelands simultaneously.

1.3 Overview of the Thesis

Including this introductory chapter, the thesis is formed of seven chapters. Below is a brief description of these chapters and the way they interconnect and contribute to achieving the objectives of the study.

Chapter 2, which details the background on Adyge-Abkhaz history and exile, focuses on the Caucasus as a region, followed by the formation of the diaspora through exile. The history details the Abkhaz Kingdom and Circassia as the core historical political units that shape current diaspora and homeland politics. This historical introduction is followed by a section on the 100 years wars, which displaced the Adyge-Abkhaz of North-West Caucasus and ended with the exile of the people in the second half of the 19th century. It might be expected to continue with the historical milestones of the Caucasian homeland; however, I prefer a diaspora-centred historical context, focusing on the current republics of Abkhazia and Adygeya – following their rediscovery by the diaspora in Turkey towards the end of the 20th century. In this regard section 2.3 focuses on the history of the diaspora, from life after the exile under the Ottoman Empire, to Turkish Republican period ethnic organisations in the cities. This sub-section ends with the first visits to the Caucasian homeland in the 1970s, which constituted the core of the “returnist” movement, and current return migratory processes. The last section of Chapter 2 is about the current political situation in the Republics of Adygeya and Abkhazia, with special emphasis on the laws and regulations on return.

Chapter 3 is about the methodology of this study and the fieldwork context. After a short introduction on the context of the multiple methods used, the chapter details the logic behind the choice of the six field sites, the two homeland republics, and two urban and two rural field sites in Turkey. Section 3.2 details the strategic use of “participant portrayals” in this study and the typology that influenced the choice of some of the life-history narratives as portrayals among the 48 such cases. The section on positionality discusses my self-questioning and changing position during the fieldwork in relation to the data collected. These discussions are collected under five subheadings: the first one giving the background on my self-critique as the researcher, followed by discussions in relation to ethnicity, place, gender, and finally my professional and student identity. This chapter ends with a discussion on the politics of translation, as the interviews were conducted in a variety of languages including Turkish, Abkhazian and Circassian, as well as some terms in Russian and English.

Chapter 4 is the first of a set of three empirical chapters and focuses on the *Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora*. Four portrayals are introduced at the beginning of this chapter: Tameris and Maze are mother-daughter portrayals from the diaspora; Janset is a transmigrant who dwells in Adygeya and Turkey; and Azamad is a return migrant living in Abkhazia. However, theirs are not the only narratives used to discuss the issues in relation to the diaspora that lead to return migration and the subsequent transnationalism of the diaspora, which are further

discussed in Chapter 7. Here, the Turkish policies of assimilation and repression of ethnic peoples and how these have created a problem of belonging to Turkey are discussed through the narratives of especially the rural Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora members whom I interviewed. In section 4.4 the focus is on the role of the ethno-cultural diaspora organisations, or as they are widely known in relation to the Adyge-Abkhaz, “the associations”. The people who grow up in the associations have a significantly different, urban-ethnic understanding and their networks lead them to get involved in transnational mobility between the Caucasus and Turkey more than those raised up at a distance from other ethnic peoples. The last section of this chapter is about the banal flaggings of ethnic identity in the diaspora and how those who are aware of this banality turn their faces to the Caucasian homeland and put a foot in the homeland at the first opportunity.

Chapter 5 is the second empirical chapter and focuses on the *return journey*. In this chapter four new portrayals are introduced: Sine was a return migrant in Abkhazia, now living in the diaspora; Mafe is a returnee in Adygeya; Jan and Setenay are husband-wife portrayals from the diaspora. The return journey is approached with a focus on the first visit (and follow-up visits) to establish the connection to the homeland. Section 5.3 is about the political and legal dimensions of the return journey, in relation to the host and neighbouring states. Section 5.4 is about the decision-making process and the traumas that come with this decision, such as leaving behind family. There is also a sub-section on virtual return, that focuses on the role of the internet in creating a new form of transnational belonging and return.

Chapter 6 is the last of the empirical chapters and focuses on the *post-return processes* and the *transnationalism of return migrants*. In this chapter, two more portrayals are introduced: Nartan is an ex-student return migrant in Adygeya, and Abriskil is dwelling in Abkhazia and Turkey. The post-return and transnationalism of return migrants is discussed under three headings, transnationalism after return migration, adaptation, and belonging. Transnationalism is discussed under the time-period typology. In section 6.4 the focus is on the myth of adaptation and key problems of adaptation. The question of belonging to the homeland is approached under three titles parallel to the involvement in transnational processes and activities as return migrants: political, ethno-cultural and social.

The last chapter is the Conclusion, and here I revisit all the research questions this study deals with. The main results are summarised. Then follow brief discussions on the limitations of my study and some suggested areas for future research.

Following the References there are six appendices that include the following information:

Appendix A- Maps

Figure 1- Map of the Caucasus

Figure 2- Map of Turkey and the North Caucasian villages

Figure 3- Map of Field Sites in Turkey – Bursa province

Figure 4- Map of Field Sites in Turkey – Samsun province

Appendix B- Terminology

B1. Labelling the people: The Cherkess, Adyge, Abkhaz and others

B2. Place names and their use in this study

B3. Glossary

Appendix C- Types of return migratory projects

Appendix D- The life history narratives and their return typologies

Appendix E- The number of semi-structured interviews conducted by field site

Appendix F- Photographs

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

To better interpret the narratives of return migrants and the diaspora, it is important to understand the social and political context within which their transnationalism was shaped, and the historical milestones that pave the way for their mobility or “stay” decisions. Hence, in this chapter I will try to draw a picture of the context that creates the unity and differences in the narratives of Adyge and Abkhaz people. First, I will focus on the Caucasus as a region, followed by the formation of the diaspora through exile. It might be expected to continue with the historical milestones of the Caucasian homeland; however, I prefer a diaspora-centred historical context, focusing on the current republics of Abkhazia and Adygeya – following their rediscovery by the diaspora in Turkey towards the end of the 20th century.

It must be understood that giving a historical background on a relatively less studied region in relation to a recently appearing process is not easy. As stated before the problem starts with the choice and use of labelling of places and peoples (see Appendix B4). Historical accounts on the Caucasus region and the Adyge-Abkhaz people are scarce, contradictory and politically ethno-centric. Still, here I try to combine a variety of historical accounts and academic works in English, French, Turkish, Russian, Circassian and Abkhazian in relation to ancestral return and diaspora. In the introductory chapter I cited works on the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora and in this chapter I continue this by referencing recent historical studies.

It is important to remember that the Adyge-Abkhaz return, especially from Turkey, is relatively a new phenomenon that started with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990. The studies that focus on migration in the post-Soviet space have no mention of this increasing mobility of the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora (see Pilkington and Flynn, 1999, Münz and Ohliger, 2003, Atabaki and Mehendale, 2005). In this sense, the focus on the background of the region and in particular the Adyge-Abkhaz people is very crucial. The central interest of this chapter is to explain the dispersion and diasporic experience of them in a historical perspective.

2.2 Caucasian History

Adyge and Abkhaz are among the autochthonous people of the Caucasus, which is famous for its ethnic and language diversity. Due to its strategic position in between different cultures throughout history, the people of the Caucasus had contact with a lot of different peoples². Most of the current knowledge of the historical Caucasus is based on 17th, 18th and 19th century travellers' notes and letters, which usually attribute different ancient affiliations to different groups, thereby complicating the terminology even more (see Appendices B for the terminology and discussion on the labelling).

The people of the Caucasus had lived within the influence of and as part of powerful rulers, including Meot (6th century BC), Kingdom of Bosphorus (5th century BC), Sarmatians (4th century BC), Alans (1st century AD), Huns (4th century AD), Byzantian (from 4th century AD) and Arabs (7th century AD). The "Abkhaz Kingdom" had statehood between the 8th and 11th centuries.

[The] Tatar-Mongolian invasion interrupted for a long period the development of peoples and states of the Northern Caucasus by undermining their economic base. The devastating punitive expeditions of Golden Horde khans and later the aggressive campaigns of Timur to the Northern Caucasus resulted in considerable ruin of Northern Caucasus territories, and as a consequence the ethnic borders established by the beginning of the 13th century changed. (Nabatchikov, 2012).

From the 17th century onwards the Caucasus saw the Russian and Ottoman rule and wars. The region known today as the homeland of the Abkhaz people, "maintained a certain autonomy, owing to the protection afforded to its people by her dense forests and difficult terrain" (Kortepeter, 1966: 104) even under the Ottoman rule. The region that has been home to different ethnic groups – mainly the Adyge – of the North-West Caucasus was generally known as Circassia or Cherkessia (also Tcherkessia or Cherkesses) in the accounts of 18th-19th century travellers (such as Bronevsky, 1823, de Marigny, 1829, Potocki, 1829, Han-Girey, 1978 [1836], Longworth, 1840, de Montpéroux, 1843, Ditson, 1850, Norman, 1902, Pearson, 1970 [1859]) but even these accounts have contradictory information and details about the region. Having given this very brief and general introduction to the complex history of the region, the following sections are on the Abkhaz Kingdom, Circassia, the Hundred Year Wars and the exile of the Adyge-Abkhaz people.

² It is mostly argued that the multi-linguality and multi-ethnic structure of the region is due to this history of interaction with people belonging to different ethnic groups, speaking different languages, practising different religions settled in the region and sometimes integrated with other groups to form new peoples.

2.2.1 Abkhaz Kingdom

The Apsilians (referred to by Pliny in the 1st century AD) and Abazgians (referred to by Arrian in the 2nd century AD) are argued to be the ancestors of Abkhaz, living in the territory of current Abkhazia. In the 6th century Abkhazia was introduced to Christianity. With the pressures coming from Byzantines in the 8th century, Leon II – Abkhaz leader – united the Abkhaz lands with the Kingdom of Egrisi/Laz (current Mengrelia) to become the King of the Abkhazians. The Abkhaz Kingdom lasted for over 300 years. Abkhazia came to be referred to as a free entity from the 16th century but was invaded by the Ottoman Empire in 1578, which got control of the ports, and Islam was introduced to Abkhazia in this century. The Ottomans stayed in control of the forts and ports for a period of 300 years; however, Evliya Chelebi, a Turkish traveller, who travelled the Caucasus “noted that [in Abkhazia] many of the villagers lived in the mountains beyond the control of the Ottoman soldiers” (Kortepeter, 1972: 9). The existence of a Kingdom with the name Abkhaz in history is an important source for claims of statehood of the current Abkhaz state; besides it is used as a historical “truth” for being different from the Circassians/Cherkess in the diaspora.

2.2.2 Circassia/Cherkessia

One of the earliest accounts of Circassians is from a 10th century traveller, Abul-Hassan Ali Al-Masudi. He describes them as:

... a tribe which is well ordered... fair skin and light complexion and comelier men and women... It is plain that if the peoples speaking their tongue unite, then neither the Alans nor any other people whatever can attempt anything against them. Their name is Persian and means “pride”. (Traho, 1991: 7)

Italian cartographers Agnese (1550), Gastaldi (1551), Ruscelli (1572) and Ghisolfi (16th century), and a cartographer from Belgium, Ortelius (1570), have mapped a place called Circassia (Circassi) just to the north east of the Pontus Euxinus (Black Sea), neighbouring Mengrelia, Tartacossa and Alania along the Caucasian mountains. These are the earliest works referring to the coastal line and mountainous region as Circassia. In later maps (18th century) we see Kabarda and Abassas or Abasgia (current Abkhazia) being drawn separately, though there are not clear border lines between any of these regions. In the most general sense (19th century understanding was also like this), Circassia was the name of the region from Anapa (in the current Russian Federation the city of Novorossiysk) to the Bzyb river (current Bzyp, Gagra *rayon* of Abkhazia) within which some Abkhaz speaking tribes, the Ubykhs,

many Adyge speaking tribes, and also Turkish speaking tribes (Karachai and Balkar) were living.³

2.2.3 Hundred Year Wars

Smeets (1995) claims that there was never a place called Circassia in history and that Circassians were never united under a single rule. Up until the 16th century the North-West Caucasus was mainly inhabited by “tribal clanic societies” and suddenly became the “object of a major international conflict” between Ivan the Terrible on the one side and the Ottomans and Crimeans (Turks) on the other (Broxup and Avtorkhanov, 1992: 2). The regional situation was relatively calm in the 17th century but Russia, with the pretext of the Islamisation of the region, started infiltrating from Terek in 1763. This marks the start of the hundred year Caucasian wars, according to the North-Caucasians. The people of the North Caucasus fought with the Russians during the following 100 years until a majority of their population were deported from their lands.

In the spring of 1800 the Emperor let the Cossacks raid Circassia, after which some Adyge tribes faced raids, during which their crops were burned and their cattle and people stolen by Cossacks (Richmond, 2008: 56). The end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century were marked by repeated clashes between the Russian military forces and the mountaineers. The Ottomans, seeing they could not hold out any more, gave up the forts one by one to the Russians. In 1812 with the Bucherest Treaty, Abkhazia up to the river Bzyb was given to Russian control but Circassia and the Abkhaz remained unconquered (see Allen and Muratoff, 1953: 17-30). Circassia was unconquered but surrounded by Russian forts both North and South, and some Adyge feudal rulers – but not their subjects – were already in cooperation with Russians, in the East as well. The only communication with the Ottoman Empire was through the sea, until the ports were taken under control and forts were built in the following decades. In the 1830s a plague hit the region and many people died. Besides, long-term clashes had already decreased their population. In 1828 when Russia got full control of Anapa fort, the Circassians were pushed into the mountainous regions and all their communications were cut.

³ Today, the Patriots of Cherkessia movement argue that Cherkessia was the name given to the state of Adyge tribes, including Ubykh and *Ahcypsy* as Adyge, but excluding Abkhaz and Turkic tribes living in the same region as part of the nation of Cherkessia. They perceive that Cherkess can only be used to refer to Adyge and not to any other North Caucasian diaspora.

It was in this period that Imam Shamil and the Murids were showing a strong hold in Eastern Caucasus (today's Dagestan and Ingushetia) but, despite the support of the Ottomans to increase Shamil's influence and the campaign for Islam to unite the tribes of the West Caucasus, this did not find a lot of support. In 1834, a Russian civil servant, Platon Zubov, proposed a pacification plan of the Caucasus through trade with Christian missionaries, deportation of the people to inner Russia and their replacement by Russian population, and finally their conversion to Christianity (Broxup and Avtorkhanov, 1992: 9-10). Transfer of the population was realised in the following decades. In 1837 Adler and in 1838 Tuapse and Sochi [the places located today in between Abkhazia and Adygeya] came under full Russian control. In 1839-1840, Russian Cossacks who were being settled in the region and were serving as part of the Russian military as mostly irregular forces, burned the agricultural fields, and drew the cattle to the Russian side of the line. In response, the tribes began to unite and attack the Russian forts; however, this only increased the Russian aggression in the region (Allen and Muratoff, 1953: 50). The Russians were fighting constantly in several regions of the Caucasus, in the east Shamil's Murids were fighting to the death; in central Caucasus, the Adyge (Kabardians) were fighting against their own nobles together with their democratic neighbours, to gain rights on their tribal lands; in the west the democratic⁴ Adyge tribes were fighting for their own lands where Cossacks were being settled; in Abkhazia mountaineers were living away from the control of Russians but holding the mountain passageways to the North Caucasus. Pearson noted "every rock [in the Caucasian mountains] that the soldiers see is a fortress which they must storm or which is likely to be held against them on their return" (Pearson, 1970 [1859]: 130-131).

When Shamil was captured in 1859, the hopes of the tribes were already down, since the promises of travellers like Bell and Longworth for diplomatic support from Britain had failed. The Ottoman Empire was breaking apart – it could no longer give military support – and they had lost a lot of people in the clashes of the last 100 years; also many were sold as slaves in this period. It was especially that year when mass deportation of the people of Circassia started; to ensure that people would leave, the Russian soldiers would "swoop down upon the folds and drive off all the cattle, leaving the inhabitants to escape and rouse the country" (Pearson, 1970 [1859]: 131). In 1861, a delegation of a unified Circassian Assembly

⁴ "With Russian incursion becoming an increasingly clear threat many Circassians realized that the termination of class hostility was necessary to resist ultimate conquest by the Russians" (Richmond 2008: 55). They established parliaments of elders (*khase*). Since it was not easy to deal with these tribes as they did not have nobles to convince, their process of colonisation had to be different and harsher, making Russia take extreme politics of isolation and suffering against them.

met with Tsar Alexandre II in Kuban, but their demand not to be exiled was rejected (Polovinkina, 1999). They were either to leave for other parts of the Russian Empire, and thus die from the harsh climate conditions that they were not used to, as had happened with earlier deportations⁵, or they would get on the ships and leave for the Ottoman Empire.

2.2.4 Exile

Emigration (Aydemir, 1988, Henze, 1990, Bice, 1991, Habiçoğlu, 1993, Çiçek, 2009, Berber 2011), *muhadrstva* (Dzidaria, 1982, Aydemir, 1991, Hewitt, 1993, Hewitt, 1999, Vardania, 2007, Gurgulia, 2010), exodus (Kreindler *et al.*, 1995, Rosser-Owen, 2007), deportation (Colarusso and Richmond 2008, Achugba, 2010), exile/big exile (Bjedug and Taymaz, 1995, Berzeg, 1996, Şaşmaz, 1999, Bram, 1999, Karpat, 2001) or genocide (Kasumov and Kasumov, 1991, Shenfield, 1999, Aslan, 2006, Zhemukhov, 2012, Richmond, 2013) – all these terms have been used (sometimes interchangeably) to refer to the 19th century movement and suffering of the Caucasian people, and which had a traumatic impact on the people of Circassia and completely changed the population of the region. According to official Russian statistics, from 1858 till 1866, 500,000 people were sent to the Ottoman Empire, being settled in different parts from the politically unstable Balkans to Anatolia and the Middle East (Kasumov and Kasumov, 1991, Kумыkov, 1994).

In a discussion about the lack of information on those families or tribes who chose to migrate to the lands in inner Russia, Perit, a returnee (male in his 40s), relates what he remembers from his childhood:

Nobody chose to go there. It was like hell for our people. I remember the elderly of my family, talking about Siberia in such a manner as if it was hell.

Those who had a choice, chose to leave for the Ottoman Empire. The last year of the war in Circassia (1863-1864) was the hardest and people were deported from their homes directly to the ships that were being paid on the number of people they took on board. Families were separated, children being taken away, also the elderly and those who were ill and not allowed to get on the ships were forced to leave for other parts of the Russian Empire. Many ships sank since they were overloaded for more money. The lands emptied of the mountaineers were given over to Cossacks, Greeks, Bulgarians and other people of the Tsarist

⁵ There is a reference to the effect of earlier deportations in a newspaper article from 1999 by Dceref, the Director of the Secret Archives in Kabardey-Balkar, who refers to this period's returnee settlement policies, of which I have come across a summary translation in Turkish translated from the summary in Circassian (Dceref, B. (1999) *Caucasus Foundation Bulletin*).

Russia. In Abkhazia, the Abkhaz were not allowed to settle in the coastal areas, or in fertile lands, but everyone else was. It was in this period that a systematic resettlement of Mengrelian and Georgian population was taking place in this area.

On 21 May 1864, the Russo-Caucasian (also known as Russian-Circassian) War was officially announced to have ended and a celebration parade was organised in the terrain of Kbaada (today Krasnaya Polyanna where the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics will take place). The deportations continued throughout the year. Just 13 years after this, in 1877, the land between river Bzyb and Samyrzakan (current Abkhazian-Georgian borderland) also fell under full Russian control. This was after a landing of *muhadzys*⁶ in the Abkhazian ports, uniting with the local mountaineers. The Russians feared the Turks would land large numbers of Cherkess refugees and so they retreated, only to unite with the Russian forces in neighbouring regions and win over the region totally (Allen and Muratoff, 1953, p. 126).⁷ It was in this period, seeing the risk of having the Abkhaz near the cities, that the villages that were at close distance to the sea ports were emptied and the inhabitants put on ships, again to be sent to the Ottoman Empire.

Shebzuhov (1990: 94) argues that the events of the 19th century were not only the fault of Tsarist Russia, but also of “mountaineers, England, Turkey, nobles (feudal rulers) and clergy”. To fully understand the processes of the time, scholars need to work on the archival documents of Russian and Ottoman Empires, as well as the British records.⁸

The number of Abkhaz and Adyge deported and scattered across the Ottoman Empire is not known, but is estimated to be more than a million, many of whom died on the way or just after their arrival due to disease and starvation (Shenfield, 1999, Jaimoukha, 2004). It is estimated that all of the Ubykh, 90 per cent of the Adyge, and 60 per cent of the Abkhaz population left for the Ottoman Empire (see Wesselink, 1996: 30).

On 10 June the Russian consul in Trabzon, General Kartsev wrote a letter to Moscow explaining the situation: the Batum consul had reported that there were about 6000 Cherkess and 7 was the death rate per day. Out of 249,000 people who arrived in Trabzon, 19,000 were dead; at the moment 63,290 Cherkess were there and of those 180-250 were dying daily. Of the 110,000 people that had arrived to Samsun, the death rate was 200 people per day.

⁶ The name given to those who had migrated to the Ottoman Empire in the Russian literature and some Turkish and Arabic resources – means migrant in Ottoman Turkish.

⁷ See also Dzidaria (1982) for further details of the events of 1876-77 in Abkhazia.

⁸ With the partial opening of the Ottoman Archives for scholars, there are many recent works on the existence of the Ottoman Empire in the Caucasus and its role in the events of 19th century. See Köremezli (2004), Bilge (2012).

4,650 of the people from Samsun were transferred through Trabzon to Istanbul and Varna, 40-60 had died daily. Since the beginning of May 1864, 30,000 of those who had arrived in Trabzon died. (Elmesov, 1991: 211, my translation).

Kushabiev (2007: 58) reports that, according to official Russian statistics, more than 150,000 Circassians were settled in the Balkans by 1876. They were settled “along Tuna River to Serbian-Ottoman border and in Dobruca (current Romania) in order to set a line of defence” (Arslan, 2008: 11). However, when the Serbians revolted against the Ottoman rule in 1876, they had to live through another war between the Ottoman Empire and the Russians, who supported the Serbians (Demirel, 2010: 137-138). Together with the rest of the Muslim population, who were put under severe pressures by the non-Muslim rulers of the region (Austria-Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria), the majority of the Adyge and Abkhaz were forced to move, one more time, resettling in Anatolia⁹ or the Middle East (Arslan, 2008: 11) [see Figure 2, Appendix A].

2.3 Diaspora

The Ottoman Empire settlement policy, for the Adyge-Abkhaz emigrants, aimed to divide ethnic groups and control religious minorities that could rebel against the Empire (Kushabiev, 2007, Doğan, 2009b). The official statistics in 1935 record that 25,000 Circassians, including the Abkhaz and other immigrants from the Caucasus (cf. 36,390 in 1904 cited in Baderhan, 2001) were living in Syria and 9,000 were living in Transjordan. By the beginning of the 1930s there were two Circassian villages in Palestine with a total population of 900 people. Today, about 3 million Adyge, Abkhaz and Ubykh, live in the diaspora, the majority living in Turkey. Doğan (2009b: 45-47) gives the following estimates about the current population of Circassians (including Abkhaz and other groups) in places other than Turkey: 60,000 in Jordan, 40,000 in Syria (cf. 80,000 in Zhemukhov, 2010), 3,000 in Israel, unknown but relatively small number in Iraq, 10,000 in New Jersey (USA), 1,000 in the Netherlands and 15,000 in Germany. The people who remained in the ex-Yugoslavian villages in Kosovo were returned to Adygeya during the time of the conflict in 1998-1999 by a special decree of the Russian Federation. Adyge and Abkhaz living in Europe and the USA have mainly migrated to these places in the 20th century for economic or political reasons.

⁹ İnegöl Abkhaz that I interviewed are among those who were first settled in the Balkans, after 12-13 years there, they had to migrate to Anatolia, settling in various places and in the end in their current villages.

2.3.1 Life in the Ottoman Empire and the Young Republic of Turkey

The first generation of immigrants had thought of their settlement in the Ottoman Empire as temporary and aimed to return to their homeland at the first possible opportunity.¹⁰ However, some of the immigrants, especially those with existing economic and social ties with Istanbul, “became part of the political apparatus and elite” (Doğan, 2009b: 37) from the early years. Till the 1920s “Circassians were well accepted in state mechanisms such as the palace, the bureaucracy and the military and the Ottoman state’s foreign policy that identified Tsarist Russia as an expansionist force... was in harmony with Circassian interests in the Caucasus” (Doğan, 2009b: 42). Even though for the second generation the homeland was still defined as “Caucasia” and defeating Russia to *return home* was as strong an ideal as it had been for their parents, they were deeply involved in the events and politics of the time in their host countries. The weakening of the Ottoman Empire divided the diaspora ideologically (pro- and against the Istanbul government) and the collapse of the Empire divided them spatially, cutting their communication links with borders. After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, Circassians were not listed as minorities but as part of the main population of Turkey, which limited their rights such as speaking their language and opening their own schools. Despite their population reaching 3 million in Turkey, their dispersed settlements resulted in different experiences of assimilation, acculturation, adaptation and urbanisation.

In other countries where the diaspora lives, the experiences were different from Turkey. “Circassians live in two respectively close-knit societies in Israel - Kfar Kama and Rihania, and are fully accepted Israeli citizens. In 1948 the leaders of the community requested that Circassian young men were conscripted by the State as proof of their allegiance to Israel” (Carman, 2001). They had been “privileged in terms of enjoying their cultural rights... having right for language education” (Kaya, 2004: 224). “In Jordan, Circassians are largely a middle class urban community with favourable representation in government bureaucracy, parliament and the military” (Shami, 1995: 83). In Syria on the other hand, Circassians had to deal with Arab nationalism (Kaya, 2004) and they did not have a school nor as high social status as the diaspora in Jordan or Israel.

¹⁰ There is no available data on the number of people who managed to return to their homeland from the first or second generations, at least this information is not open to scholars. However, there are some accounts of return in family histories and some scholars who had access to the secret resources refer to return or attempts to return.

2.3.2 First and Second-Generation Attempts to Return

The returnees to the North-West Caucasus before the Bolshevik revolution were not allowed to settle down in the Caucasus, but were sent to inner Russia, where the climate was not suitable for their settlement. They were forced to settle at long distance to each other, together with Russian populations, to ensure their assimilation. Though most of the *muhadzys* who had landed in Abkhazia in 1877 were arrested and deported with the majority of Abkhazia's population, it is possible that some of them managed to settle in the Caucasus or were sent to other parts of Russia instead of the Ottoman Empire.

Argun (2004) writes about a ship full of people who wanted to return to Abkhazia in 1880 but were not allowed, and who settled in the Georgian-Ottoman border zone when the ship sank. From the time of the Bolshevik revolution till the end of the conflict between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, travelling to Abkhazia was easier compared to Tsarist times. Some people, many with small or young children, managed to return to their homeland at this time. Unfortunately, there is no record of the number who managed to come this way. Family histories in the diaspora have a memory of people getting on the road but no news came back from many, since it was a time of unease in the Ottoman Lands as well. Family histories of some people in the Caucasus also tell such stories. The autobiography of the Abkhaz-Soviet ethnographer and writer Dmitry Gulia (1973) tells of the exile of his family to the Ottoman Empire and their subsequent return migration in those years.

In 1925, a group of Abkhaz from Greek Macedonia applied to the Soviet authorities to be returned to their ancestral land. All available documents related to this appeal were collected in a booklet by Sagaria. The work of Sagaria (1996) starts with an explanation that, at the time of her study, the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict broke out and many archive documents were burnt, together with the archives of the Abkhaz Institute. A list of names of 147 families who were ready to repatriate immediately in 1925, is given in the booklet together with other documents with a secret file cover from 1929 "About the Repatriation of 750 Abkhaz from Greek Macedonia to Abkhazia". Though the Soviet bodies were positive, at first, about the return of Abkhaz to their homeland, the process was complicated and efforts to return ended with the down-grading of Abkhazia's status to ASSR (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1931 and with the murder of the Abkhaz leader Nester Lakoba who was working for their return.

2.3.3 Diasporisation: Urbanisation and the “Dernek”

When the Circassian elite in the Ottoman Empire realised that, to protect the Circassian identity and unity away from the homeland, they needed to have some kind of institutionalisation, they decided to unite around an officially registered association (*cemiyet*). The Circassian Union and Mutual Aid Association (*Çerkes İttihad ve Teavün Cemiyeti*) is the first of these, established in Istanbul in 1908 at the house of Gazi Mehmet Pasha – the son of the Caucasian hero Imam Shamil – with over a hundred highly educated people of Adyge, Abkhaz and Ubykh descent. In a declaration published in 1908, the statement was:

The greatest calamity the Circassians ever had was the fact they had been expelled from their homeland and two reasons were shown for this calamity. One of the reasons is the lack of education in the Caucasus and insufficient union between the tribes... Today, we are not able to write in Circassian language, the members of our community fluent in Circassian are diminishing... If you have problem in providing teachers and books for the schools opened and to be opened, our society is ready to provide you with any aid you need and just let us know when your are in need!... Just work! Because be sure that those who depended on their servants did not benefit from such way of living as much as thought.... breed high amounts of horses for the army... Only in this way, our nation can earn honor and reputation in the eye of the Ottoman people! (Arslan, 2008: 38-43)

The above quotation from the declaration of the Circassian association shows they were trying to strengthen their position in the Ottoman Empire, but as a diaspora, educated in their native language but working for the strength of the host nation. The efforts of the society gave results with the development of the Adyge and Abkhaz Latin script alphabets that were sent to the Caucasus, and the publishing of the *Guaze journal* (first weekly then fortnightly) where both daily problems and information on the Caucasus were included.

During World War I, the Society dealt closely with Caucasian politics and aimed to support the establishment of an independent Islamic United Caucasus state. For this reason, the North Caucasus Society (*Şimâlî Kafkas Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi*) was founded in 1918 in İstanbul and some members were involved in trying to convince foreign country representatives in Istanbul to recognise the Caucasian Mountain Republic¹¹, while others were trying to calm down the rebellion of Adyge-Abkhaz in Marmara region at this period (Arslan,

¹¹ There was a state established in the Caucasus in 1917 which lasted till 1920; it was called the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus (MRNC) but also known as the Mountain Republic or the Republic of the Mountaineers. It included all the tribes from the Caspian till the Kuban plain and in 1918, just after the recognition of a Georgian state by Soviet Russia, “the union of Abkhazia with the Mountaineers Republic was proclaimed” (Allen and Muratoff, 1953: 480).

2008: 49). The North Caucasus Society was closed down in 1919, while the Circassian Union and Mutual Aid Society continued to work till 1923 (see Arslan, 2008 for detailed analysis of these associations).

Arslan translates some pieces on return from the 4 May 1911 issue of *Guaze* journal:

The only solution for them [is] to return to their homeland Caucasia, with which land, water, [and] weather they have been familiar since the creation of the world... [...] If it has been analysed, there is nothing more unreasonable than this emigration! Because it does not depend on a logical and acceptable reason. If the reason is a religious one, it is still invalid since the purest and sincerest practice of Islam can be found in Circassian land today. Secondly, it does not depend on wealth since they do not live in wealth in Turkey. On the contrary, the wealth is more abundant and common in Circassian land. Thirdly, it does not depend on sect or political problems. Since the revolution in Russia, in fact there is not such a problem for Circassians and also freedom is tend to be much more in there. To sum up, there is nothing left to make us prefer Turkey to Caucasia! (2008: 105-107).

An Adyge from Kabardey – Pac'e Bechmirza, who had visited Anatolia in this period – seeing the suffering of the people, called everyone to return back to the homeland, and wrote many poems about the suffering of those who had migrated to the Ottoman Empire. The *Guaze* journal focused especially on recent migration from the Caucasus, due to religious reasons. Kasumov and Kasumov (1991: 183) explain that the Muslim population of the Caucasus was left with no choice other than to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire, since especially at the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century, the believers were treated as Ottoman spies or Islamic missionaries, who were arrested and deported.

It was in 1919 that a women's association was established in Istanbul with the support of the establishers of the previous two societies, named as Circassian Women's Support Association (*Çerkes Kadınları Teâvün Cemiyeti*). This association organised charity events to establish an orphanage and to open the School for Circassian Girls (*Çerkes Kız Numune Mektebi*). Arslan (2008: 190), in her study of the association, notes that they were ahead of their time in the sense that their events were open to both men and women.¹² Though the school was named as a school for girls, education was given to both boys and girls for the first time in a Muslim school. About 150 children of Circassian descent were educated primarily in Circassian with the Latin alphabet and taking courses on Caucasian History, as well as

¹² A behavioural difference which repeats itself in all diaspora organisations to date.

Turkish, English and science. There was also a Cherkess kindergarten¹³ (for further details on this school see Arslan, 2008: 191-199).

It is apparent that the Circassian elite of the first and second-generation migrants in the Ottoman Empire aimed to create a unified diasporic Cherkess [including all North Caucasian tribes] identity, through education. The Turkish Independence War, unfortunately, divided different tribes as supporters of the Sultan or the revolutionary forces. The accounts of the rebellions of the Adyge and Abkhaz, the actions of the Cherkess Ethem and the active role North Caucasian immigrants played in the Turkish Independence War have all been analysed in detail by Ünal (1996). Though I will not get into the details of this period, during my interviews in Samsun – where Ethem was from – I frequently listened to family histories related to him and the Turkish Independence War. Besides, as Ethem is frequently referred as the “traitor” in history books, I will discuss how this has influenced the self-identification of many return migrants and diasporics in Chapter 4.3.

During the first years of the young Turkish Republic there were many social and stability problems. Besides, the migrants were not there to stay, still looking for ways to return back to their homes, waiting for news of those who had gone. To settle their relations with their local neighbours and to be able to survive, “former generations preferred to incorporate themselves into the Turkish mainstream political culture, which was dominated by homogeneity” (Kaya, 2004: 234). The homogenising Turkish state policies included “unitarian nationalist education policies;... bans on the use of the mother tongue and ethnic minority names” (Kaya, 2004: 228) and other limitations on the enjoyment of cultural rights. It must be clearly understood that this was true for those with already established connections to urban areas, or those who lived in the proximity of the cities. Mass migration “to the cities in the 1960s and 70s also deprived a new generation of knowledge of their historical languages” (Besler [Beslency], 2005), of their traditional culture, and instead imposed a strong hold of national identity. However, Kaya (2004: 225) argues that “Circassian subjects in Turkey... maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland” since the first generation.

The first diaspora association of the Turkish Republican era was opened in 1946, together with a group of Crimean Tatars and Azeri, bearing a name without any reference to

¹³ Only in 2013 there opened another one in Turkey with the new regulations on minority languages (See “Adana Cherkess Association Caucasus Kindergarten is starting the term” news article [Accessed in October 2013] at: <http://www.kafkasakademi.com/haberler/adana-cerkes-dernegi-kafkas-anaokulu-ders-basi-yapiyor-228.html>)

the Caucasus – the Society of the Hand of Friendship (*Dosteli Yardımlaşma Derneği*), founded in Istanbul “to help refugees who had arrived in Turkey from the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War” (Besleney, 2014: 106). It was in 1951, also in Istanbul, that another diaspora organisation was established by the relatively recent political emigrants of the Mountainous Republic era, the North Caucasian Turkish Culture and Solidarity Association (*Kuzey Kafkasyalılar Türk Kültür ve Yardım Derneği*). In 1952, this was renamed as the Caucasian Cultural Association of Istanbul (*İstanbul Kafkas Kültür Derneği*) and in 1961 the North Caucasian Cultural Association of Ankara (*Ankara Kuzey Kafkas Kültür Derneği or AKKKD*) was established. It was in 1964, in a district where there were many Adyge-Abkhaz settlements, that an association named Düzce Caucasian Turks Solidarity Association was established. Two years after this, the Sakarya North Caucasian Association was established, followed by a flourishing of Caucasian associations in different regions of Turkey, some with the aim to unite all North-Caucasus or “united Caucasianism” at the heart, and some with “Diasporism” (terminology suggested by Besleney, 2014).

2.3.4 Third and Fourth-Generations “Returnist” Movement

Kaya (2004: 225) suggests that “Circassians 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)”. Miyazawa (2004: 67) recites some Circassians of Uzunyayla region recalling their ancestors “died dreaming of going back to the Caucasus”. Doğan (2009b) argues that the ideal of “return to the homeland” was a myth recreated in 1970s as part of the urban diaspora politics. Besleney, on the other hand, explains the role of İzzet Aydemir, who was the first activist of the Republican era to have visited the Caucasus in 1969:

His conventional career enabled him to gain the respect of the older generation, who let him become a member of the board and later chairman of the AKKKD in the 1960s and 1970s. By acting as a mediator between the supporters of the status quo and the young revolutionaries in this transitional period, he enabled the latter to dominate AKKKD in the following decade and paved the way for Returnism to take root, flourish and eventually become the official doctrine of [the North Caucasian associations]... in the decades to come. (Besleney, 2014:133)

The “returnists” were advocating return to the homeland, compared to the “leftists” who supported the idea of making a revolution in Turkey to gain cultural rights. On the right-wing political ideologies of the diaspora, there were the United Caucasianists; and Islamic activism

promoted by the Caucasian Trust through non-Circassian people (for detailed analysis of the political ideologies of different diaspora activism see Besleney, 2014). It was mainly in the publications *Kafkas*, *Kamçı* and *Yamçı*, diaspora journals of the 1970s mainly written and edited by the returnists of the time, that ideas of return, exile, assimilation in the diaspora and return migration were repeatedly announced together with accounts of the first visits to the Soviet Caucasus by the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora association leaders. Return was being argued as the only solution to increasing assimilation in the urban context.

2.3.5 First Visits to the Homeland (1970s)

Though Aydemir was the first to visit the homeland, the first official representatives were invited to the Soviet Caucasus in the mid 1970s. In 1975, a group of elderly activists visited Abkhazia for the first time. They managed to establish the first official contacts between Soviet Abkhaz and the diaspora in Turkey. In the group were Ömer Beygua, Orhan Aşamba, Raif Abgnba, İrfan Atönba, Burhan Bediya and Tengiz Bganba. Though the group was met with thousands of people in the capital of Abkhazia, the group was not permitted to freely go around their homeland. The Soviet authorities had very strict time frames for each visit, and their communications were minimised by control. A well-known instance of this control occurred when, during a school visit, Ömer Beygua asked a question to an Abkhaz student about daily life, and the reply was cut immediately. Another event that an Abkhazia-born relative of Beygua told me, during my fieldwork, was when they wanted to host their relatives in their house in the village, at first they were not given permission. However, through influential Abkhaz party members they were allowed to organise a dinner. The guests were brought after dark making sure that they could not see the rural settlements, and were brought back to their accommodation after one hour, being removed from their chairs in the middle of a conversation about family histories. Despite these strict controls, the accounts of this journey in the publications were very positive.

It was in 1976 that a Syrian-Adyge return migrant, who was educated in Turkey, arranged invitations for diaspora representatives from the Ankara association. In 1977, a group of young diaspora representatives went to Nalchyk (capital of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic), Cherkessk (capital of the Karachai-Cherkess Republic) and Maykop (capital of the Republic of Adygeya). Recounts of this journey also found a prominent place in the diaspora publications of the time, turning the Caucasian homeland into a real place that can be dreamed about and even visited. Though their visit was also realised under strict controls and hard

conditions, their narratives were based on facts they had learned about the homeland through talks with writers, poets and scholars; and on the possible ways of return and settling in the Caucasus.

These visits increased communication with the Soviet authorities and applications for return were being accepted by the Russian Consulate in Ankara. There are no official statistics but it is said that about 300 people applied to be repatriated to the Caucasus. The applications were being processed till the 1980 *coup d'état* in Turkey, with which all associations were closed, and many returnists and leftists were arrested. The next decade did not see any back and forth movement but the diaspora was still meeting in unofficial places for cultural and social activities. Still, it was only in 1989, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, that the diaspora really started to know about the homeland. This time, with freedom of movement and the more liberal politics in Turkey, some to see with their own eyes, some to return-migrate, they started visiting their homeland. Hansen (2012: 104) also argues that the Circassian diaspora in Turkey has been “becoming organised beyond Turkey” – mainly in the homeland Caucasus – contributing to Circassian mobilisation which “is multidimensional;... not just ethnic, but also, *inter alia*, cultural, indigenous and minority rights-oriented” [italics in the original].

2.4 Adygeya

As previously mentioned, after the evacuation of Circassia, the *Russification* and *Christianisation* of the region had started, leading to further migrations to the Ottoman Empire. After many years of poverty, the Circassians met the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution with hope, finding ground to establish a united Mountaineers Republic uniting Chechen, Ingush, Daghestani, Circassian [Adyge], Ossetian people among others (Traho, 1991: 52).

Staying in between attacks of the Red and White armies, the Mountaineers Republic suffered a few more years, till it accepted Bolshevik rule in 1921. The new political situation broke the links between West and East Adyge and further with the Eastern Caucasus. As part of Stalin's divide-and-rule policy, the Caucasus was divided into as many regions of different governance as the rest of the Union. The Adygeya Autonomous Republic was established to the north of the Caucasian mountains, in the Terek plain, in part of the historical lands of Western Circassia.

2.4.1 Borders and People

The Adyge were divided under different administrative units of the Russian Federation. There are four villages in the Republic of North Ossetia and Stavropol *Krai*; three villages in Uspensk *Rayon* of Krasnodar *Krai*; 14 villages are situated in the previously Shapsugh National *Rayon*, now divided among Lazarevsk and Tuapse *rayons*; and 40 villages in the Republic of Adygeya. The Eastern Adyge live in Karachai-Cherkess and Kabardino-Balkaria Republics, while the Abaza have a *rayon* in Karachai-Cherkess. The ethnic composition and administrative structure was very hard for the diaspora, especially in the early years. However, recent developments in communication technologies and the increase of information through the internet, have also increased the understanding of the fact that the Caucasus is a reality with its divisions and separations.

Today there are 107,048 Adyge living in the Republic of Adygeya (The ethnic composition of regions of the Russian Federation, 2010), while at least 10 to 30 times more live in the diaspora. The population in Adygeya, though “Russified” in some senses, have managed to have language rights and protect their cultural etiquette (*khabze*) more freely than the Abkhaz (see below). Still, making up only a minority of the total population, and lacking proper urbanisation, education and politicisation opportunities through the Soviet times, the Adyge have a serious demographic problem and carry the risk of total assimilation and extinction. Efforts to unite with other Adyge regions through land exchange in the earlier years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not give any result. Return migration seems to be the only way to change the situation.

2.4.2 Laws and Regulations on Return

The Law of Repatriation to the Republic of Adygeya is regulated by the Laws of the Russian Federation about Foreigners. Though the Law on Repatriation gives the right to repatriate to all descendants of previous or current subjects of Russia (including Adyge, Abaza, Abkhaz, Ubykh, and all other North Caucasian people), the people who repatriate to the Republic of Adygeya have to go through the procedures that any other foreigner does, and even stricter rules apply for their further processes. For example, the quota on the number of *foreigners* who can settle in Adygeya in 2009 was 1500, and in 2010 was decreased to 500, and in 2011 to 350. In 2012 and 2013 there were talks about the quota being already filled by June, especially due to return migration of Syrian-Adyge after the distress in Syria.

The procedures to settle in the Russian Federation (RF) require that a person has to apply for a temporary living permit (*разрешение на временное проживание*) before coming to the RF, or if after coming they have to go back and wait for the answer from the RF before settling. The application process requires lots of documents with official stamps from the State of residence; then official translations made within the Russian Federation with notaries stamp; and the form of application to be filled in Russian without any mistakes.

After the application, a response is given within 3 months and if your application is accepted, you are supposed to go to Adygeya within 5 months; and then every 6 months you need to update your documents for 2 years. If you have done everything necessary, you are allowed to apply for a residence permit (*вид на жительство*) which will be given according to the validity of your passport. The residence permit lets the bearer have the right to work in the RF, settle in the RF, and to own property within the RF (it is not limited to Adygeya as is the temporary living permit). You still need to come to the RF at least once a year in order not to lose your residence permit.

The application for citizenship, by Law permitted after 5 years of residence in the RF, is not possible for ethnic Adyge. No return migrant, who did not have first-degree relatives with RF citizenship or who did not get married to a citizen of the RF, was given citizenship after 1995. Most returnees have told narratives of not being allowed to apply “*since it will be rejected by Moscow*” and were told to go and get married to a citizen as soon as possible. These strict regulations, that only give the bearer a temporary document to connect to the Circassian homeland, have not been very helpful in the return migratory processes [see Chapter 5.4].

2.5 Abkhazia

Abkhazia is an independent republic, located on the eastern Black Sea coast to the south of the Caucasus mountain range. However, because of the ethnic and cultural closeness of the indigenous populations of Abkhazia and the North-West Caucasus they are usually accepted as part of the North-West rather than Trans-Caucasia.

2.5.1 Borders and People

I previously mentioned that Abkhazia had joined the Mountain Republic in 1918. With the joining of the Mountaineers to the Soviet Union, this unity came to an end. Abkhazia joined the SU as a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in 1921, but it was downgraded to an ASSR

within the Georgian SSR by Stalin in 1931. Mass protests were held by the Abkhaz in defence of their statehood in 1931, 1957, 1967, 1978 and 1989 (Chirikba 2010). Between 1937 and 1953, many policies were set to limit the Abkhaz ethnic existence. These included the study of Abkhaz with Georgian scripts at first and as of the 1940s the closing of Abkhaz schools completely; forced settlement of Georgian and Mengrelian population in Abkhazia; and even the killing of the political and cultural elite. After the deaths of Stalin and Beria, “their language and culture were halted and to a degree reversed by the reopening of schools, re-entry of Abkhaz into local politics and the re-emergence of radio broadcasting and publishing in Abkhaz, all was not well in comparison with the other regions of Soviet Georgia” (Hewitt, 1993: 282).

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, tensions increased between Georgians and Abkhazians. During the first years after the dissolution, lots of diasporans visited their homeland but mostly felt that what they found was a Russified Abkhaz population, surrounded by hostile Georgians. In 1992 a war between Georgia and Abkhazia broke out. This changed all communications between the diaspora and Abkhazia. Volunteers from the diaspora, of Adyge, Abkhaz and Ubykh descent, united and went to fight in the war against “imperialist” Georgia which was trying to ethnically cleanse Abkhazia from the native population – the Abkhaz. More on this later.

One year after the end of the war, in 1994, “by adopting its new constitution,... Abkhazia [was declared] a sovereign democratic state” (Chirikba 2010). In August 2008, another conflict in the region, which is known as the 5-Day War, ended with the recognition of the status of Abkhazia [and South Ossetia] as independent states by Russia and later by Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, Vanuatu and Tuvalu. Abkhazia maintains relations with the Abkhaz and Adyge diasporas as an independent state which also influences return migratory processes.

2.5.2 Laws and Regulations on Return

The Abkhazian State Committee of Repatriation (*Государственный Комитет Республики Абхазия по Пенампуаццу*), also known as the *demografia*, was established in 1993, in the war-torn Abkhazia. The Committee regulates the processes related to diaspora and repatriates.

According to Article 1 of the Law on Repatriates of Abkhazia:

Repatriates (compatriots) [also referred as *repatriants* by the returnees] are ethnic Abkhaz (Abaza), direct descendants of refugees who left the historical

homeland of the Abkhaz (Abaza) as a result of Russian-Caucasian and Russian-Turkish wars and other events of the 19th century, who received, according to this Law, the right to return to the Republic of Abkhazia. (*Constitutional Law of the Republic of Abkhazia about Repatriates*, 5 June 1998 [updated 08.05.2011])

Being an independent post-war state, with a clear demographic problem (Abkhaz making up only about 20% of the Republic's population, just like the Adyge), the Laws of Abkhazia have been made to give freedom to return and claim the right for citizenship, which was given to all descendants of the exiles (refugees). Article 5 of the same law states that to acquire the status of repatriate:

written document, vested by governmental or national and cultural organs of the Abkhaz community in the country of residence, or written documents from 2-3 repatriates or emigrant of that country who are now citizens of the RA, who confirm Abkhaz ethnical origin of the person who applies for acquisition of the status of a repatriate, his origin from direct ancestries, who were forced to leave historical territory of Abkhazia. All documents have to be submitted in Abkhaz and Russian languages. In case the original document is in some third language, to the copy of this document must be attached officially exemplification in Abkhaz and Russian. (*Constitutional Law of the Republic of Abkhazia about Repatriates*, 5 June 1998 [updated 08.05.2011], translated by Kh.Vozba)

Despite the complexity of gaining the status of repatriate and citizen in the RF, in Abkhazia until recently it was an easy and flexible procedure to acquire both rights [even citizenship is a natural birthright and requires only proof of Abkhaz descendants]. However, due to various reasons, but mainly due to the flow of non-Abkhaz North Caucasian people who tried to apply to acquire citizenship (and presumably the discomfort of the RF or because of the fear of discomforting the RF by Abkhazian authorities), the procedures have been tightened since the recognition of Abkhazia's independence.

For those who are natural citizens of Abkhazia and acquire the repatriate status, Article 2 of the Law on Repatriation defines their rights as follows:

People, who have received the status of a repatriate, have:

- the right of preserving their mother-tongue, culture and traditions;
- the right of restoring of their Abkhaz last name;
- the right of education in their mother-tongue;
- the right to take part in the cultural life of the RA;
- the right of receiving education;
- the right to work in the profession acquired in the country of previous residency;
- the right to freely leave the RA;

-the right of freedom of movement and choice of the place of residence on the territory of the RA, this right can be limited by a Law of the RA;

...

-the right to address to governmental bodies of RA with a petition for assistance in registration of citizenship of the RA;

Repatriates, who permanently live in the RA on a legal basis, according to laws of the RA, have the following rights:

- a right for health protection, medical care, social welfare, education and rest taking into account the legislation of RA. (*Constitutional Law of the Republic of Abkhazia about Repatriates*, 5 June 1998 [updated 08.05.2011])

In Chapter 6, when I discuss the post-return migration processes, I will refer back to this law, since though returnees are protected by law, the narratives show that they were not always aware of their rights, or not able to make use of them. Especially with some wrong political actions, returnees were not allowed to obtain Abkhazian international travel passports with their ancestral surnames, which they could use in their travels through or to Russia. This has had some impact in discussions of “belonging” in their narratives.

Another important issue that was frequently raised with this Law is that it does not give the right of repatriation to other North Caucasian ethnicities except the Ubykh who are allowed to get Abkhazian citizenship, because of the fact that they do not have a homeland (the Ubykh lands are part of the Sochi city and Krasnodar *rayon*). I have recorded narratives of concern especially about mixed families, and complaints about this Law and the problems it creates for people who see themselves as “returnees” to the “only independent state of the Caucasus”, but find themselves being treated as “foreigners”. Despite these concerns, Abkhazia has a more flexible relationship with the diaspora than does Adygeya. Still Turkey and Russia, as well as Georgia, create pressures in terms of mobility of people who want to visit or live in Abkhazia (see Chapter 5.4).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to summarise relevant aspects of the historical geography of the Caucasus and the dispersion of the Adyge-Abkhaz people, as well as their experiences in the diaspora and the conditions (laws and regulations) that shape their return migration. This chapter is a simplified version of my previous efforts; as mentioned a few times before, the complicated labelling of these people and places makes it very difficult to relate the history of dispersion in simple and straightforward terms. The Adyge and Abkhaz people were among the peoples of the Caucasus that have been labelled differently, but the borders of their “homeland republics” today were mainly defined during the Soviet period, nearly 70 years

after their exile to the Ottoman Lands. The events of the 19th century that ended with their (and other North Caucasian peoples, mainly the Ubykh) deportation from the Caucasus were described by Marx as:

The extraordinary step which the Russians have now taken in Caucasia and to which Europe turns an eye of idiotic equanimity, almost forces them to close their eyes to what is happening on the other side, and makes the possibility for this easier. These two affairs: the crushing of the Polish uprising and the overcoming of Caucasia, I consider the most serious European event since 1815. (Marx and Engels in Traho, 1991: 32)

No matter what importance others have given to these events, it has changed the ethnographic picture totally in the Caucasus, and dispersed the natives of this region around the world. Distributed around 50 countries, with a majority of their population in Turkey, the Abkhaz, Adyge and Ubykh (or the people of Circassia and Abkhazia) found ways to reconnect with their homeland throughout history. Still, their dispersion continued in the 20th century, for religious and political reasons. To continue their ethno-cultural existence in their diasporic homes, the Adyge-Abkhaz and other North-Caucasian peoples united under the “dernek” - associations. During the Ottoman Empire these had open claims for return and in the Republican period some continued these claims especially with the *returnist* movement.

Today, the Republic of Adygeya of the Russian Federation and the independent Republic of Abkhazia face serious demographic problems, with their national identities, languages and existence as autochthonous Caucasian ethnic communities being challenged by global processes. Return migration of ethnic peoples is a crucial topic of interest for both of the Republics. In this sense the study of the Adyge-Abkhaz peoples and their return mobility requires a through field work in both the diaspora and the homeland, as the dispersion and diasporisation is as important as the homeland structures and geo-political and geo-historical realities of the region.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will first touch upon the methods used in this study, after which I will explain the reasoning behind my choice of fieldwork sites, discuss my own positionality and outline some caveats of my research. Also, I will detail the context of return migration and justify my choice of using participant portrayals within this context. This study has employed a multi-method, multi-sited ethnographic approach focused on two field sites in the homeland (Adygeya and Abkhazia), and two urban (Istanbul and Ankara) and two rural (Samsun and Bursa) field sites in the diaspora in Turkey.

In Chapter 1, I set out the research questions that I aim to answer through my in-depth empirical study. To answer these questions, qualitative methods are better suited than quantitative methods. The primary research tools that I used were semi-structured in-depth interviews, life-history interviews, and participant observation. However, sometimes the boundaries between these methods were blurred and one method would transform into another. I participated as much as possible in the everyday lives of the people I was interviewing and this supported the transformation of the methods as well. The communication with families and societies that the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora and returnees are part of was a methodological choice to study their transnationalism.

Portes *et al.* (1999) suggest to take individuals and families as the unit of analysis as a research methodology for the study of transnational migration. Thus, for my study, the focus should be on the returnees and their families who have returned with them or stayed behind. Kivisto (2001: 561), on the other hand, argues that “the corporate life within which individuals and families are embedded” should also be studied while investigating “transnationalism from below” (immigration). In the case of return migrants, there are three communities these people are embedded into: the local community in the homeland, the community of the return migrants (who frequently identify themselves or are identified by others as the diaspora in the homeland), and the diaspora. I recognise that there are wider global and even geopolitical forces shaping the everyday lives of return migrants; however, these were not my main focus in this study. Werbner (2002: 121) argues that “the social formation of a diaspora is a predictable process which replicates itself transnationally”. My

target was to examine at the individual level the degree of involvement of return migrants and diasporic people in transnational activities. At the community level I tried to examine the transnationalism of both the diaspora and returnees. With this thorough examination at both individual and community level, the return migration process could be better understood.

The study of these multiple levels in multiple settings required the use of a combination of ethnographic methods. The key method I decided to use was the life-history technique, also known as the life story or life narrative, which “is an account of one person’s life in his or her own words” (Plummer, 2001: 18). The technique usually requires multiple interviews with the informant as well as support interviews with friends and families; and the collection of documents such as photographs, official documents, etc. An important benefit of this technique, in the study of migration, is it gives a historical perspective and helps us study “life in times and places to which we have little other access” (Eastmond, 2007: 249). Through the use of this technique in my study, detailed accounts and narratives of return migrants’ lives before, during and after return migration were collected.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to gather a broad range of information from a larger number of cases by asking them questions face-to-face. Some advantages of semi-structured interviews are that they “allow the researchers to deal more explicitly with the presuppositions they bring to the interview” (Flick, 2006: 160). They give flexibility and spontaneity; and one can observe non-verbal behaviours (Bailey, 1987). This method was used to understand multiple subject positions that both the return migrants and the diasporans define for themselves and others define for them (Buckley, 2008)

I had targeted to make 15 life-history interviews in Adygeya and 15 in Abkhazia, and as many in-depth interviews as possible in the diaspora. However, during the fieldwork, especially when interviewing those who are frequently travelling back and forth between the Caucasus and Turkey, the in-depth interview method naturally evolved into life-history interviews. As those transnational diasporans were also returnees, dwelling in both the homeland and the diaspora, I could have met them just as easily in the Caucasus (as indeed happened with some transnational diasporics). After finishing the fieldwork, I had collected 26 life-history interviews in the Caucasus, but with the life-history interviews from the diaspora the total number reached was 48 [see Appendix D for a list].

The in-depth interviews were primarily conducted with people involved in transnational activities between the diaspora and the Caucasus (who either planned to return-migrate or had

chosen not to) but also with some returnees, who did not want to give a full life-history interview; or those active in the diaspora associations and all Adyge, Abkhaz and Ubykh participants living in rural settlements. Through semi-structured interviews with families of returnees, the subjective understanding and reflection of the return experience can also be studied. For this reason, there was a plan to interview the families of return migrants as well, but the majority of the families that I met in the diaspora were not keen to answer questions about their relatives, either because they found it very traumatic or they were afraid to say something different from what their relatives had said. Also some return migrants asked me not to interview their relatives because “*they don’t understand*”. One interviewee (M40s) even told me “*if you tell my mother I am a return migrant, and that I am not going back, she will die. She thinks I am here just temporarily*”. Still, semi-structured interviews were the most suitable technique to find out about involvement in transnational practices at the individual level, so I interviewed as many people as possible especially in rural field sites. Combining the diaspora and the homeland, I completed over 100 such interviews [see Appendix E for a distribution]. In addition to these, however, participant observation was more useful in identifying different kinds of transnational practices involved at the community level.

The methodology of participant observation is concerned with the documentation of “everyday activities of societies” (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002: 144). Ordinary events and everyday activities are observed in their natural settings. The researcher observes, listens to conversations, asks questions to clarify observations or to have an inner perspective, writing down all these observations and conversations in as much detail as can be noted or recalled. Participant observation gives information on cross-border networks and a variety of transnational activities the people are involved in, and different return migratory projects. This technique was used both in the diaspora and the homeland, not only to identify practices or experiences that may not be thought of or apparent at the first instance, but also to clarify the concepts identified during interviews. As mentioned before, I tried to participate as much as possible in the everyday activities of return migrants in the homeland and tried to spend as much time as possible in the diaspora associations and with at least one of the rural communities that I could stay with.

Each technique used in social research will have its own caveats. In general for ethnographic research, validity and generalisability of the data are widely debated issues. This is a subjective and qualitative research project and the data collected was not approached as

absolute truth but as narratives that “are not transparent renditions of reality” but call instead for our interpretation (Eastmond, 2007: 252). In both the interviews and participant observation, the researcher has an interactive role, influencing to some extent the data collected. The interaction between the respondent or the “observed” person and the researcher is one of a power relation. To overcome any problem related to my role as a researcher, I tried to make sure all the people in my field sites were sufficiently informed about the details of the study and my role as a researcher. Besides, my own knowledge of the traditional values and power relations in the society was very helpful in overcoming many of the difficulties that arose because of my presence in sensitive settings during my fieldwork. These are further discussed in the section on positionality.

3.2 Choice of Field Sites

As described in detail in Chapter 2, the dispersion of the Adyge and Abkhaz people was not a one-off event and was not a straightforward move from one place to another. They were forced to migrate from their homes in the Caucasian homeland, and were forced to settle in different parts of the Ottoman Empire, some being displaced a second time, due to a change of rule or other political pressures. Today they are living in different countries, but mainly in Turkey. The choice of Turkey and Turkish return migrants as the focus of this study was mainly due to practical reasons. Doing a comparative study encompassing Israel, Jordan and Syria was not possible, first of all due to financial and time limits, but also due to my lack of knowledge of the Arabic language which would have been essential for the interviews and to explore and understand the context in those cases. The exclusion of the far diaspora in Europe and USA was more of a strategic choice since the majority of that diaspora is either first-generation migrants from the Soviet Union or Russia, or secondary migrants from Turkey.

3.2.1 Choice of Field Sites in the Caucasian “Homeland”

The choice of Adygeya and Abkhazia was also related to financial and time limits, and also to some strategic reasons. Karachai-Cherkess, though historically part of Circassia and the homeland of some Adyge and Abkhaz groups, is not a popular destination for return migrants from Turkey. This is because it is economically less developed and less accessible. Besides, the Adyge-Abkhaz population there is very low compared to the other two North-West Caucasian Republics. Kabardino-Balkaria, on the other hand, has received return migration from the 1970s onwards from Jordan and Syria through student exchange agreements, and from Turkey since 1989, especially due to the active mobilisation of the *Rodina (homeland)*

association in Nalchyk. However, due to increased political pressures from the Russian Federation because of the claimed *Vahabist* activities in the region, since 2005 life has not only turned out to be tough for return migrants but also it has become very hard to conduct any academic research in the area without having problems with the Russian internal affairs. Though there are a few returnees who settled under other settlements in the North-West Caucasus, since the early 1970s Adygeya was promoted as a target destination for the diaspora. The reason stated by the promoters was that Adygeya was the only place that carries the name “Adyge” which is the ethnic name that includes all 12 sub-ethnic groups (referred to by the people as *tribes*) that originated from the North-West Caucasus. Even so, in Adygeya, the Adyge makes up only 22% of the population. Return-migrating there is argued to help the survival of the Adyge people and language. Abkhazia, on the other hand, especially since recognition by Russia and increased security in the region, has become a popular return destination for all North Caucasian diaspora from Turkey, but still the majority of returnees are ethnic Abkhaz.

3.2.2 Choice of Field Sites in Turkey

The choice of field sites in Turkey was likewise circumscribed by the time and financial limits. The first round of fieldwork, between 2011 and June 2012, was conducted by my own means. However, winning the MireKoc Research Student Grant in 2012, I had a chance to visit rural areas that were less accessible on my first visit due to transportation constraints. The preliminary choice of rural field sites was based on my own observations from Adygeya and Abkhazia. I chose the district of İnegöl in Bursa province, within which there were seven Abkhaz villages, all of which had direct contacts with the homeland since the *perestroika* period in the Soviet Union. During the 1992-1993 war there were many volunteers and four of the seven *diasporan war martyrs* were from the İnegöl region. Besides, a majority of return migrants settled in Abkhazia were from the villages in this region. My first choice of field site for Adyge settlements in Turkey was the villages within the province of Sakarya. However, once in the field, I came across an article written by a returnee about the places of origin in Turkey of the return migrants in Adygeya. This report listed Samsun province, Reyhanlı district (Hatay province) and Antalya province, as the three places of origin in Turkey for the majority of the return migrants in Adygeya. Since Samsun was densely populated by Adyge

(claims are there are over 100 North Caucasian origin villages in this province¹⁴) I chose it as my second field site.

The choice of metropolitan field sites was also based on my prior knowledge of the diaspora in Turkey. Ankara and Istanbul have been the first, second or third step of the migration to the homeland for many returnees. Besides, with the increased urbanisation of Turkey in the 1970s, many people migrated to Ankara and Istanbul for education or work purposes, thereby isolating the villages. Adyge and Abkhaz were also among those who left their villages, usually first to the local districts for primary education, then to the central districts or cities for high school education, and later to the mega-cities of Ankara and Istanbul, or other “big cities” such as Bursa, Samsun, Sakarya, Kayseri, Eskişehir for higher education or employment. The diaspora associations established in Istanbul and Ankara not only took active roles in the formation of an urban diaspora identity since the early 1970s, but also were active in diaspora politics and homeland relations, as well as in the formation of a transnational diaspora which constantly travels back and forth to the homeland. In short, the selection of the two cities (Istanbul and Ankara) and two provinces (Bursa for the Abkhaz diaspora and Samsun for the Adyge diaspora) in Turkey as key field sites is mainly due to their role as key sources for transnational return to the Caucasus.

3.2.2.1 Ankara

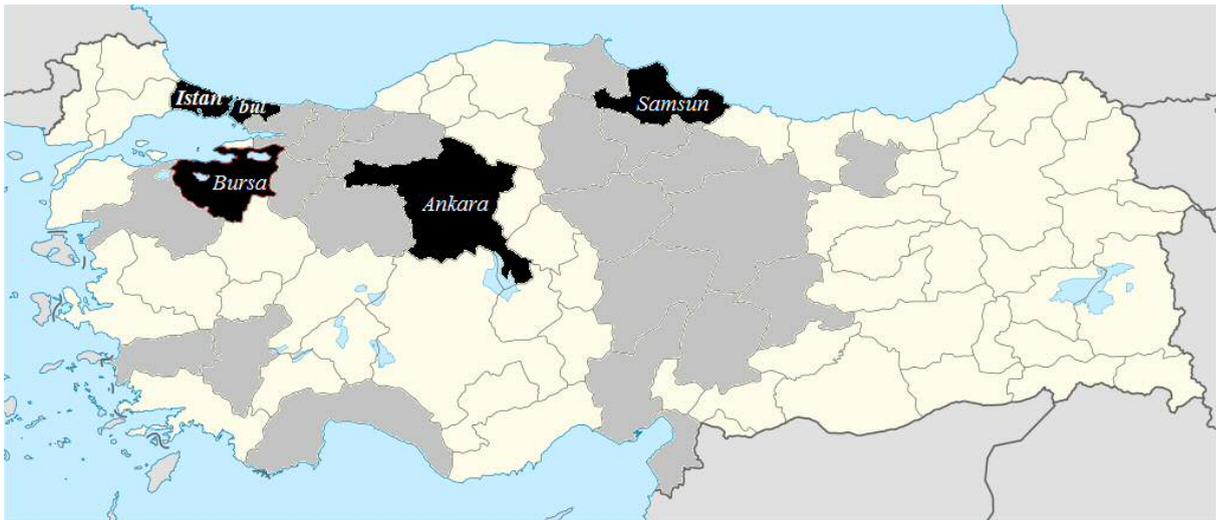
The Ankara North Caucasian Association was established by Adyge-Abkhaz migrants mainly from the Uzunyayla region. There are also a few Adyge villages in Ankara province, but the Adyge population living in these villages first came in contact with the local association when they migrated to the city for education and work purposes (like other ethnic migrants) and then brought back the people from the association to meet others. Nowadays, every year the association organises a picnic-festival in one of these Adyge villages that hosts many people who are living in the province, the majority of attendees being students in the 18 universities that are located in this city.

3.2.2.2 Istanbul

There were many Adyge-Abkhaz who had settled in Istanbul since Ottoman times, due to their close relations with the rulers. The first diaspora association and publications, as well as

¹⁴ See for example this webpage that lists all diaspora settlements by province, which names 117 settlements in the Samsun province: http://www.circassiancenter.com/cc-turkiye/turizm/cerkes_koyleri/samsun.htm

the first and only Circassian school, had all started in Istanbul. The first diaspora association in Republican Turkey was also established in Istanbul in 1946 (see section 2.3.3). Istanbul is a huge metropolitan city that has 44 universities, many industrial zones, economic and trade centres, private and public enterprises. Not surprisingly, it constantly receives new migration. Today there are at least 14 Adyge, Abkhaz and North Caucasian associations in the province that host a variety of cultural and political events for the urban diaspora



Map 1 Provinces of Turkey with Cherkess villages (grey areas) and selected key field work sites (in black and province names written)

Source of the base map: Wikipedia

3.2.2.3 Bursa (İnegöl)

Bursa province is located in the South Marmara region and, with its population reaching 3 million, is the fourth largest metropolitan centre in Turkey. Throughout its history Bursa has been home for migrants, with Turks, Armenians and Jews as the earliest settlers. Part of the North Caucasian migrants settled in the region for its proximity to the Ottoman capital were temporarily located there as refugees at their arrival (Kaplanoğlu, 2003). The Abkhaz of İnegöl (and possibly some of the Adyge population), on the other hand, came to the region after their 12-13 year-long first settlement in the Balkans.

3.2.2.4 Samsun

The province of Samsun is one of the densely most populated provinces in the Black Sea region of Turkey. The main means of livelihood is agriculture but there is animal husbandry and some industry. The province saw a huge out-migration in the 1950s to industrial cities for

work, but at the same time received migration from rural areas. There were historically over 100 Adyge, Abkhaz and Ubykh villages (vast majority Circassian-speaking) in this province besides many other settlements in surrounding areas in close proximity to Samsun but administratively part of neighbouring provinces. Today, many of these villages have been isolated and there are only a few villages in the nine districts that are inhabited by a Cherkess population. Of these nine districts I have been to four district centres where there is a settled diaspora population. I have also been to 14 villages connected to six districts.

3.3 Portrayals

The above-mentioned techniques were used to gather data to confront the three primary research questions this study aimed to answer. I made use of all the techniques described above, but the core data comes from the 48 life-history interviews (see Appendix D for a list). A difficulty in trying to give voice to so many people, not to mention all the in-depth interview and observation data as well, was to say the least, problematic. “[T]he multivoiced text... does not ensure all voices are equal” (Johnson *et al.*, 2004: 240). In an attempt “to present a biographically focused analysis of...the main research themes” following Christou and King (2014), inspired in turn by the work of Goodson *et al.* (2010), I decided to use portrayals in the presentation of the data. However, different from Christou and King, who chose six key portrayals for all the chapters of their forthcoming book on Greek diasporic return, I decided to introduce new portrayals in each chapter, constructing the final arguments on transnationalism and return in Chapter 7 around the different biographies of 10 people, four males and six females. To decrease the chances of their identification in such a relatively small community, instead of giving their exact ages I have chosen to indicate if they were in their 20s, 30s, 40s etc. For each portrayal (and all other people referred in this study), to honour their ethnic identities, I have chosen an Adyge or an Abkhaz name as a pseudonym. Within the text, these details are integrated after the name of the person in parenthesis. For instance, for a male informant with the pseudonym Nartan in his 30s this would be given as: *Nartan (M30s)*.

Selection of the portrayals was not a one-off and easy process. As the writing developed and chapters started to form, some other life-history interviews looked more suitable in terms of the density of their narratives about the themes covered throughout the three empirical chapters. I tried to choose a variety of portrayals that have different return migration projects, which I will explain shortly, but not all typologies are represented as portrayals. I have also

decided not to choose certain key interviews as portrayals because they were too readily identifiable in their biographies due to their peculiar migration histories. The selected portrayals' occupations, marital status and their number of children are also not given in detail to make sure they are not identifiable. Readers might find especially Chapter 4 on the diaspora fragmented, but this happens due to my wish to give voice to the rural interviews and the non-returnee aspect of the return migration process to the Caucasus.

3.3.1 Return Migratory Projects

When I first started the field work I had listed from my *a priori* knowledge and conceptualisation some 16 different return migratory projects (see Appendix C for a list). Consequently, I tried to interview returnees from each group. However, there were people who fell into multiple groups, or people from some groups who did not agree to be part of a research project. Despite the fact that there are differences in the migratory projects of the people I have interviewed, the following typology, first of the return migration period, and second of the type of return, is helpful to understand the variety of return projects in the Caucasus. This is not a list that definitively summarises return migration to the Caucasus, but rather it aids our understanding of the variety of projects of return in the region.

Time-wise, there are three clear periods of return:

Early returnees: This group comprises those who return-migrated just before or after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, up to 1995 which marks a special political change both in Abkhazia and Adygeya. In Abkhazia, it was the year direct transportation stopped due to the enforced embargo. In Adygeya, that is the last year that a returnee was given Russian Federation citizenship due to the change of office in Moscow, where President Yeltsin's open policies were replaced by increasing pressures and limitations on the region. Among the portrayals chosen for this period group, in Chapter 4, there is Azamad (M40s, Abkhazia); in Chapter 5, Mafe (F30s, Adygeya); and in Chapter 6, Nartan (M30s, Adygeya), and Abriskil (M50s, Abkhazia).

Stagnation period returnees: The economic and political stagnation of the Caucasus, and the special policies towards Adygeya and Abkhazia, created a relative stagnation in return migration, as well as back and forth movement from the diaspora. Still, there were some who settled in their ancestral homeland during this period. I did not get the chance to interview many who return-migrated in this period and those who were interviewed are identifiable by their peculiar migration stories. For this reason, though I make use of some of their narrative

extracts throughout the study, I do not have any portrayals who migrated to the Caucasus in this period.

Recent returnees: The 21st century saw an increase in the number of people who return-migrated to their homelands. There was also increased mobility due to the lifting of the embargo enforced upon Abkhazia by Russia, and an end of the post-dissolution economic stagnation in the region. In Chapter 4, Tameris (F50s, diaspora) and Maze (F20s, diaspora), Janset (F20s, diaspora but interviewed in Adygeya); and in Chapter 5, Sine (F30s, diaspora), Jan (M40s, diaspora) and Setenay (F30s, diaspora) can all be counted among recent returnees.

In terms of type of return:

Students: The student returnees are those who have come to study in the Caucasus and stayed to live there after the completion of their studies. In both Adygeya and Abkhazia there is a relative paucity of returnees among students due to various reasons, but mainly lack of job opportunities. Two of the key portrayals in this study are students who came to study in the Caucasus in the early 1990s. The first is Azamad (M40s, Abkhazia), the second Nartan (M30s, Adygeya). Both came to study as a step to settle down after finishing their studies. Student returnees can also be counted as solo migrants (the next category) but their experiences of the homeland clearly differ from those who return-migrate at later stages in their lives. The former students have more local friends, and not only among the ethnic Adyge and Abkhaz; they also have better access to employment and social life due to their knowledge of Russian and familiarity with the everyday life of ordinary citizens which they got to know through their education.

Solo migrants: A majority of the returnees are solo migrants who return-migrate by themselves. They vary among themselves a lot, including both single women and single men. We can also count among solo migrants those men who leave behind their families through divorce, young men who come to marry in the homeland, businessmen or professionals, workers who come for a job and stay after the work is finished, children of idealist families who cannot return-migrate for various reasons, retirees, and others who somehow remain alone in their decision to return. Of the portrayals, Sine's efforts to settle in her Abkhaz homeland were as a solo migrant but her father was in constant contact with Abkhazia even before her. Azamad (M40s) and Nartan (M30s), the student returnees, both are married now and have their relatives coming back and forth from Turkey, but they started their journeys alone. Abriskil (M50s), one of the portrayals I will introduce in Chapter 6, is mobile between

Abkhazia and Turkey on his own, travelling and leaving behind his wife and children. Despite the fact that he has a family in Turkey, his journey to the homeland is a solo one.

Family returnees: There are not many returnees who come together with their families, though the numbers are increasing. They are relatively less represented in the selected portrayals as the family stories make them identifiable. Family return usually follows the decision of one of the family members: when they migrate for political ideals, career or educational prospects, the rest of the family follow. Mafe (F30s), one of the key portrayals introduced in Chapter 5, is a returnee who moved to Adygeya with her family at an early life phase.

Transnational returnees: Those who do not settle completely in their homeland but prefer to be mobile between their two (or more) homes in the diaspora and homeland are in this group. Those who go back and forth for economic (trade), political, cultural and social reasons (*associationists*), are the key interest group for this study. Of the portrayals Maze (F20s) and Tameris (F50s), Janset (F20s), Abriskil (M50s), Jan (M40), Setenay (F30) and Sine (F30s) are all transnational returnees who have settled homes in Turkey (at least at the time of the interviews) but frequently travel to the Caucasus. We will read their narratives further about the constant move back and forth between Turkey and the Caucasus.

Return to escape: Besides these four types there are other types of return migration to the Caucasus which are not very widespread. Return migration to escape something, such as a political or family conflict, or an act that could bring shame to family, or possible imprisonment; also failure in business or studies; divorce; losing a family member or any other reason that would create the need to move away can lead some Adyge and Abkhaz to return-migrate to their homelands. Though this is a type of return that is highly discussed in the homeland communities, especially about migration during the stagnation period, this is a very elusive phenomenon to research as guilt and shame are topics which are very hard to discuss in the Caucasian culture. Some in the diaspora have referred to this type of migration limiting the future of return for those who want to return for the ideal of the homeland. Naur (M80s, rural İnegöl), when talking about those who return to the Caucasus, says that: *“Those who cannot make ends meet here are the ones that went there”*. The below quote from the diaspora is also about how this kind of return migration is perceived:

My nephew went there. I guess he went there because he did not have another option. They don't say very good things about there, not that they are telling bad things. It is meaningless to go there without a job, without the means to live. (Emef 70s, rural Samsun).

Returnees on the move: There are some second-time returnees, those who had tried to settle in the Caucasus during the early periods, but then had to leave during the stagnation period, for economic or family reasons; and then return-migrated a second time more recently with the change of conditions. In Abkhazia, especially those who fought in the 1992-93 war but who could not stay there in the stagnation period are some of these people. Also included are children who had returned with their families, went for work or studies in Turkey, and then came back since they could not adapt to life there. Apsuana (F30s) is one of those who tried her life chances in Turkey:

I was working here. A friend had a guest from Turkey.... He said he needed someone who can speak Turkish and Russian to work in his touristic shop there. (I had not found a life partner in Abkhazia). I told my father I will go to Turkey. Maybe I could find someone that I can marry there, live there... So I packed up, left for Turkey to not to return. Worked there all through the summer... I missed my parents, I missed my life in Abkhazia so I came back... The following summer I went again. Again saying if it is in my destiny I will stay there, but I couldn't find anything to connect me there. I spent some time with my relatives, worked for a while and came back.

In the quote below Gushef (F20s), who had lived for a while in Adygeya but then spent the majority of her life in Turkey, explains the place of the homeland in her life:

I finished school in Turkey... I always thought of return. I couldn't adapt to anything. School years had passed somehow, friends, jokes, other stuff passed. But when one finishes the university and jumps into the real life, one sees the truth all together. Falls into the emptiness. I couldn't adapt to the work places that I was working. Always, I had in mind returning back. Without that I wasn't able to breathe. I always said to my mom, if I will not see Adygeya even once, I will not be able to adapt to any work I start. It wasn't destined... I had to work. When I quit one job I came here. First for a holiday. Then we decided as a family and I stayed here.

There is also another type of return migratory project, and that is when a returnee to Adygeya or Abkhazia, or to another one of the North Caucasian Republics, relocates within the Caucasus. This can be due to family reunion, marriage, education or employment opportunities that appeared in the new place, or due to loss of one of these in the previous residence. For a majority who moved in the stagnation period it was the conflict in Abkhazia that created a security and economic threat and dislocated them:

Before we came here, my aunt and her husband had moved to Abkhazia. When we came here they also moved to Adygeya. They couldn't adapt to post-war conditions there so they moved here. We all came together in a short time. (Disheps F30s)

In the recent years it is the economic opportunities in Abkhazia that attracts return migrants from other North Caucasian Republics.

3.4 Positionality

The topic of positionality is a widely discussed issue in social research, especially in ethnic research and migration studies. The position of the researcher is identified by one's lived experiences as well as one's age, gender and "where one stands in relation to 'the other'" (Merriam *et al.*, 2001: 411). As the researcher repositions oneself she invents and relates identities and her self gets blurred (Clifford, 1988: 10). I had a complex positionality in all of my field sites, for various reasons. Below I try to explain them under the headings of ethnicity, gender, place-related identity, educational and professional identity.

3.4.1 Questioning of the self

From the day I first arrived in Abkhazia in 2006, before I had officially signed up to do a PhD, I clearly mentioned my interest in doing research on return migration and that I would be there for at least a year, learning Abkhazian and improving my Russian. Some people were very prejudiced from the first moment and felt no need to hide their reactions. Interestingly, after doing research about the Caucasus for seven years and living there on and off for five years, during my fieldwork I still faced similar reactions from people, sometimes to my face and sometimes the gossip of their questionings coming from friends who know me well.

During the years I spent developing my languages and academic trustworthiness in the region, I tried to note down everything I came across about return migrants and return migration processes. My first idea was to do a survey on return migration, mainly because of my quantitative research background. Unfortunately, the people I was interviewing generally had a low education and felt uncomfortable answering structured questions. On the 17th questionnaire interview I was making, somewhere towards the middle, the interviewee asked me "Did you answer these questions yourself because you are also a returnee?". My answer was that I did not see myself as a returnee but as a visiting researcher who is there for a temporary period. He argued back to me:

You are experiencing the processes any returnee would live, your experience also counts. Besides, maybe if you answer these questions you would realise that they don't make sense in the form you structured them because some experiences wouldn't go into these classifications and you cannot get the feel of the migratory process. Your own experience will help to understand it better. But of course you have got to understand that the process was different at different time periods. (Ashemez, M40s; field notes from 2007)

I told him I tried to catch this sense with some pre-conditioned questions but when later I filled in one of the questionnaires, I realised surveys were not enough to understand the ancestral return migratory projects or experiences. After the recognition in 2008, return was gaining speed, with constantly increasing numbers of people settling partly or totally in the country. That was when I felt the need to develop my academic understanding of the situation from a different perspective; I came across an article in the *Forced Migration List* (King and Christou, 2008) and started my PhD at the University of Sussex in 2010.

My own autobiography was made up of a mix of childhood memories of my grandfather's guests from the Caucasus and the diaspora around Turkey; how he had given me the flag of Adyge identity to carry in his name when he realised my interest; my experience of the diaspora as a young academician; as well as the experience of the Caucasus as a young, single, half-Adyge, western-style educated, woman researcher.

Kondo (2001: 199), a Japanese American doing fieldwork in Japan, argues that her "ambiguous insider/outsider position in the field may have made the issue of identity and threat to coherent selfhood especially acute". My own understanding of who I am, where I am from and where I am at home had changed during the pre-PhD years when I was constantly travelling back and forth between Turkey and the Caucasus, for academic, social, family, cultural and financial reasons. However, after developing my knowledge on the theories of transnationalism, belonging, home and identity, and embarking on a non-stop journey for the fieldwork where I listened to the narratives of young women who were living through a constant questioning of belonging, I found myself feeling the same way. During fieldwork, no matter how I identified myself or was identified by others, I felt that there was something wrong and I was always trying to explain further; most of the time trying to emphasise my researcher identity in contrast or in connection to my ethnic, place-related and gender identities.

3.4.2 Ethnicity

I did not have an ethnic identity in my childhood. It was in 1993, when “our siblings” had arrived from the Caucasus, that we went to my grandfather’s village and hosted them in my grandfather’s home. There my father told me that “I was a full Adyge as he had Cherkess roots” and that I should stick to this identity and develop my knowledge of the Circassian language and culture. It was a time when we were all bombarded with information about the “homeland”, the history of the “exile” from the homeland and everyday life back there. It was interesting for a while, but for me it did not really go further than claiming a salient Cherkess identity at selected situations. In my third year at the university I took an elective course on Ethnicity and Migration in Eurasia which changed my perception on the Cherkess ethnic community in Turkey, as I read through academic texts about the Circassian exile. My further elective courses and ensuing academic career were shaped by this interest. I did not see myself as an Adyge or a Cherkess [Ertem (2000: 52-55) refers to a similar situation among the Cherkess despite her only Cherkess relative being a great-grandmother], but as I developed my involvement in the diaspora organisations to meet with new people, they started labelling me as a Cherkess, introducing me as the granddaughter of a well-known diaspora *elderly*, from Adapazarı (Sakarya, a city I had never stayed in for more than a couple of days), and someone who would go to the Caucasus soon.

Other diasporas are luckier to have hyphenated identities in their languages such as Greek-Americans, Brazilian-Japanese, and so on. The Cherkess diaspora do not have this kind of hyphenated self-identification, and though some define themselves differently, the diaspora discourse suggests you are either a Turk or a Cherkess, and if you are a Cherkess you are not only Adyge, Abkhaz, Ubykh or other but you are identified with your tribe and family line name as in the traditional way. In time it started feeling very natural to call myself with my grandfather’s family line name. During the fieldwork in 2011-12 my ethnic identity was already known through intense communication in the closed diasporic community by a majority of the people I met in the urban areas. In the rural areas I was planning to carefully choose how to explain who I was to the people I would meet. Nothing went as planned.

In my first rural field site in İnegöl, I was introduced by the administrator of one of the urban diaspora associations as an Adyge who spoke Abkhazian and was living in Abkhazia. The fieldwork failed to progress as I anticipated, as the local association administrators were told I was not an Adyge, nor an Abkhaz, but a Turkish spy! The second time I went to İnegöl

after the New Year's break I took, I was introduced to an Abkhaz who lived in the village, as a researcher who wanted to stay in an Abkhaz village. This entrance, despite the fact that my hosts were hesitant about who was going to turn up on their doorstep, was a much more productive fieldwork in a very short time.

In Samsun, I had decided to start the fieldwork in the Alaçam district as a Turkish colleague from Sussex was at her home there and she had wholeheartedly invited me to stay with her family during my time in Samsun. Her father drove us to one of the two villages in the district to show me around. My introduction was shaped by the surprising coincidence of coming across a group of TV documentary makers visiting the village. I directly introduced myself to all the villagers at once who were at the village square for the shooting. After explaining my researcher identity, I explained I was an Adyge from Abkhazia and the Turkish documentary maker jumped on the conversation about how lucky he was and introduced me in the shooting as a researcher. As dancing traditional dances and understanding the native languages are accepted as important markers of identity, my ethnic identity never came into question after this show was on TV.

Once, as I was doing fieldwork in Adapazarı, on hearing an Adyge painter was opening an exhibition in Bursa I made a day trip to the province. In the exhibition I distributed copies of my information sheet to let the locals know of my forthcoming fieldwork there. One of the local associations administrators whom I had met before in Abkhazia, reading through my text accused me of separating between the Abkhaz and Adyge identities, though I had worked hard to write an explanation that would not put me on any side in this discussion. (These issues are further explained in Appendix B on Labelling). The woman administrator and her brother told me: *“you are going to come to our house now and we will explain you everything you should know”*. When I said that I am going back to Adapazarı that evening, they accused me of not being a proper researcher:

- How can you make a research in one day?

Me: I am not doing research in one day, my fieldwork in this province is scheduled for the winter. This was just a chance I could use to come and meet a few people.

- You have to come and stay tonight in my house. If you don't you are not a good researcher!

Me: I am sorry but I have got to leave.

[...]

- You are a separatist! You and those people there (pointing to a group from the Inegöl Adyge Association, who were joking about me five minutes ago, being impartial about this identity issue “as I was an academic who wanted to be equally distanced to all groups”). You are all separatists. You don’t know anything, you are never going to be a proper researcher.

Me: Sorry but I really have got to leave now. (I left the building).

That was the moment when I realised that doing this fieldwork is more personal than it has ever been for me. I decided to re-write my information sheet leaving out all controversial labelling, though this also created some questioning and the need for extra clarification in the rural field sites.

3.4.3 Place

My second host in Inegöl had kindly told me before I left the field that he was afraid who would come, but was happy that it had turned out to be me: a good Cherkess girl who *lived in Abkhazia*. My good deeds were that I had made myself at home from the first day, as being the youngest in the house I had felt a social obligation to help with everything to not to give this nice family extra effort with my presence. But it was impossible, as learning someone *from Abkhazia* had arrived, all the villagers were coming to visit, sitting with us for many hours in the cold winter evenings. Through my hosts and their neighbours in the village, I had a chance to visit neighbouring villages as well, again being introduced as the “sister” who came *from Abkhazia*. In this case the first question would always be: “they all say different things, so you tell me, how is life there?” As I needed to find out their knowledge before giving them any information about life in the Caucasus, I would always return back the question: “first tell me what you know about Abkhazia”. This would sometimes be complicated as I would need to cut in the natural flow of the conversation to detail the context of my research, take permission for recording and get a signature or a verbal permission for the interview.

In Samsun, the fact that I was living in Abkhazia was problematic in the sense that the Adyge were accusing me of being in a country which did not accept “us the Adyge” as citizens. Once, in one of the local associations, I was pushed into a long and disturbing conversation by a group of young diaspora Adyge who were angry towards Abkhazia. Their language was as if I was the representative of the Abkhaz state, or even more so, as if I was the Abkhaz state who had refused them citizenship. As they made it impossible for me to

change the conversation, I told them to apply to the court if they have concerns and that I was not the application point for complaints about Abkhazia. I later regretted giving any response but that definitely changed the topic.

In some interviews, the place where I was from in Turkey influenced the way people would explain their thoughts. For all the interviewees I was identified with my grandfather's village in Adapazarı (Sakarya), in the North Marmara region, in the west of Turkey. For those from eastern Turkey, this was an important difference. In a village in İnegöl, the interviewee was telling me how things were similar in *my* region:

Here when a fight begins with an outsider, when some shouting is heard all will run to the main road. I guess it must be the same in your region, this unity among one's own ethnic group. (Zaur M40s, rural İnegöl)

A return migrant from eastern Turkey always compared his own experiences with those from big cities, including Sakarya in the list not because it is among the big cities but because it is where I am from:

But in Istanbul, Adana or Sakarya, when Cherkess Ethem is described as a traitor, they don't know who is Cherkess in the class, who is not. (Nesren M50s)

The fact that I was doing my PhD in the UK was also an issue of interest among some interviewees. For example, an interviewee in a village in İnegöl made a surprising claim in our long interview in Abkhazian:

The Queen of England, in origin she is Abkhaz. Did you know that? I knew. I searched for it a lot. Like all royal families around the world, the Queens' family is also of Abkhaz origin. (Ktuv, M70s)

Despite his extreme imagination, this interviewee was similar to those who were trying to make a connection to UK because I was studying there. I would frequently be asked about Abkhaz and Adyge friends and relatives who were settled or studying in the UK. I was also given a variety of phone numbers and names to find, though I never had the chance to meet many of them since most were living far away from Brighton. People would also ask if there was a local association there, and hearing there was not would ask how many of the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora were living there.

3.4.4 Gender

The gendered dimensions of positionality in fieldwork crosscuts with the above-mentioned concerns in many aspects. Setenay Shami (1988: 124-125) explains how she was accepted as a daughter of the community during her fieldwork among the Circassian diaspora in Jordan and how in the end she was accepted as a man to get over the repeated “where she should sit at the meetings” problem:

As a woman, I was worthy of respect and should be sitting with the most important people, i.e., at the head of the room, facing the main entrance... As a young Circassian [Adyge], if I were following tradition and proper manners, I should be standing, preferably by the door. At one meeting, the problem was solved by one of the more outspoken members who, tired of different people motioning me to different chairs, said: “Until the end of her research, we will treat Setenay as a man.”

Since I was not involved in such serious meetings and also the diaspora organisations in Turkey have left behind such strict norms in meetings and other events, the fact that I was a woman was made evident to me in all my field sites, in relation to care and worry, which I will explain below.

Setenay Nil Doğan (2009b: 23), who is another woman researcher of Cherkess origin, has also focused a lot on her gendered experience of doing fieldwork among the diaspora activists in Turkey:

Gender has been another significant variable in my research experience. As a result of the traditional limitations of the Circassian culture and my gender as the interviewer, women were more comfortable during the interviews in terms of talking about the personal while men were more constrained. Unlike male interviewees, they also asked me a lot of personal questions... I was received and treated as a “daughter” of the community.

Like Doğan, despite my initial experience that the Cherkess women always refused to be interviewed, the women who agreed to an interview talked about the deepest insights of fear, anxiety and worries in relation to return migration. While writing, I also realised that many women had given me hints of their discomfort of the “men who behave inappropriately, betraying and breaking up their families”, telling about their (and others in the diaspora) gendered perception of return. A majority of the male interviewees on the other hand, told everything at once and said there is nothing else to tell. I had to ask them direct questions to make them talk about their emotions and detailed stories.

Ertem is the third woman who details her research experience among the Cherkess diaspora. As a Turkish woman with a Cherkess great-grandmother she was frequently introduced during her fieldwork as a Cherkess “guest girl” from abroad. She explains her gendered experience as: “My scholarly presence as a woman was respected as long as I constrained myself to male political paradigms and discourses” (Ertem, 2000: 56). Like Ertem, my own mobility and scholarly presence in the diaspora posed a challenge to the patriarchal political discourses, especially in relation to identity politics. Ertem concludes the discussion on her positionality with how her “guest girl” stance was part of her native privilege as she adopted this role in her lengthy fieldwork and made herself more at home among the Cherkess.

Young female guests have a special position among the Cherkess. They are insiders when accepted as guests. They are always on call, however, and always in demand to be entertained, pampered and courted as insiders may not always, at all stages of their lives or in various hierarchical social circles... The fact that I was a female visitor from overseas, educated and adult, also considerably increased my verbal mobility. (Ertem, 2000: 65-66).

Before living among the closed Adyge and Abkhaz communities in the Caucasus, I thought that being a woman in the Cherkess culture was a powerful thing; as Shami explains, they were required to be treated with respect, given the best place to sit etc. However, being a woman researcher, who had read a good deal about gendered experiences of field research, helped me see that the women are not as empowered as they look in these societies. I had faced constant “protective” reactions from men, who were also frequently intervening into my personal life. As a settled academic, this was less frequent and I did not take the protective questioning personally, but as a social obligation I believed they felt. However, the mobility that came with the fieldwork created a more disturbing situation as the questioning was more about my mobility as a single woman.

In one of the districts in Samsun, I asked someone working at the guest house I was staying at about an address. He asked me whom I was looking for, saying he was also from that neighbourhood. I asked him if he was a Cherkess, as that was an old Cherkess village, but he said he had many Cherkess friends, and called an Adyge friend to ask about the lady I was looking for. The friend who was at work, jumped in his car and came to the guesthouse in 5 minutes. Later he explained to me:

That elderly lady is our “duty”. I had to know who wanted to see her before telling where she lives. It could have been anyone. Right? Had to know you had good intentions. Now that I have seen you, talked with you and know that you are a friend of her grandchildren, you are a nice lady, I can take you to her.

From that day onwards, till I left the province of Samsun, and even after my fieldwork was over, he checked on me every day to make sure I was not having any problems. His reaction was not disturbing, as a few others who had shown interest, it was merely a social obligation as I was the guest woman researcher.

At some point I myself felt the need to ask a friend in Adygeya to check on me regularly, as I started to feel a few men I had asked for an interview took my interest in their migration story as a personal interest, or as a colleague had put it: *“because I was so much on the move, I was so free, that they read it as I was available”*. During fieldwork, I heard from many different men, *“how I was the girl to marry”* and a few times that, *“I should marry them”*; that, *“we should go away from the eyes of the people to talk comfortably”*, and a few even tried coming on to me during a pre-interview chatting. At such situations, I reminded them that I knew their wives, daughters, nieces or other women from their families and, according to the seriousness of the situation, I avoided the second or third interview or interviewing them at all.

In Abkhazia during a visit to a returnee restaurant, I met an elderly man, who was reduced to tears on hearing of my research project because he had gotten emotional “for the things I was doing for the Adyge-Abkhaz nation as a young lonely woman”. He called me “my daughter” a few times during our conversation. A while later, when he added me on Facebook, he apologised for calling me his child:

When we met the first time, I felt very emotional, very impressed by what you are doing. I thought you are very young to do such things. I called you child, I called you daughter. But maybe you see this as an insult. Because I see that now, you are much older than I thought. I shouldn’t have called you child.

Among the families that hosted me when I was called the sister or the daughter of the family, I felt at home and comfortable, and after the above-mentioned few occasions, even safe. So my experience among the Cherkess diaspora is no different than Shami, Ertem and Doğan as a woman researcher. I also looked at the researches of a few men who had done fieldwork among the Adyge-Abkhaz; however, not even the anthropologists that used the participant observation field method, refer to their positionality during the fieldwork.

3.4.5 Professional and student

Having been involved in many research projects, I felt professionally the hardest was doing life histories and in-depth interviews among the Adyge and Abkhaz who frequently uttered phrases like: “you are one of us”, “who lives here and there”, “who can understand”, “who knows better” or “who should know better” and so on. All this positioning and the above-mentioned gendered, ethnic and place-related connectedness constituted a big challenge to my professional identity. I felt many times that I was losing control of the degree and costs of participation. The frequent reminder emails from my supervisors of taking field notes was very helpful to evoke the feeling of being in the field for me, and that I was more than a friend listening to the life stories of the people who were the subject of this study. In fact, I always carried a notebook and a pen in my side pocket, taking it out wherever I came across a returnee. One day, I had given myself a break, leaving without my notebook. That day a returnee who had arrived a few days before was introduced to me at a friend’s restaurant in Adygeya. Somebody had given him a copy of my information sheet, so the moment we met he started talking about his problems on arrival, saying as a researcher this should be interesting for me. That moment I just took a piece of napkin and started writing down what he was saying. That made a point in everybody’s mind and I realised this was being talked about in a farewell meeting to a returnee who was leaving his family in Adygeya to go and work in Turkey. I was taken there by my host family and knew everybody except a recent returnee family. I was not introduced as everybody thought I had met them before. When they started talking about their adaptation problems to life in Adygeya, the person leaving who was very agitated for the fact that he had not found a job in his homeland, told them with an angry voice:

Be careful what you are saying. She is a researcher. She may not have a notebook at this very moment, but she is recording it in her mind. And she will use it in her research.

I just smiled and explained the topic of my study and interest of my research. The returnee man responded back saying:

I don’t think these problems should be hidden. If I had known better it would have been easier for me and my kids to adapt to life here.

The fact that my researcher identity was raised by someone else had been beneficial for me as I had thought that it was just going to be a farewell saying for five minutes (that was what I

was told) which turned out to be a crowded discussion on return for two hours. Still that conversation was not recorded or used as direct data, but it certainly helped me come up with a few sub-questions on post-return adaptation processes.

In the rural diaspora context, telling people that one is a researcher is usually not understood as an academic profession, but as a state profession. I preferred to use the words PhD student or research student to identify myself in the rural context for this reason. This usually brought up the question: “*How much longer are you going to study?*” at some point in the interview. Again a gendered question, as at my age it was supposed that I should have been getting ready for marriage, being settled down, preferably at a close distance to my mother who also would need caring for. Saying that I was a research student had also its caveats - I was often asked about my finances (*are you dependent on your family?*) or if I was asked to make this study by some teacher (this question was often coming when I asked them to sign the consent form telling them I am obliged to do this before we start the interview).

My mobility and connection to so many places, and my fluency in many languages, brought to the fore the question of the true nature of my academic interests. Were they pure, or was I also carrying out espionage for Turkey, Russia, Britain or any other country – even Israel, which is a place that I have never been. Setenay Nil Doğan (2009b: 21), in her study of diaspora nationalism, has also written about the *myth of MIT* (Turkish National Intelligence Organisation) in detail. In relation to her positionality as a researcher she explains:

What shaped his [one interviewee’s] expectations from me whom he never met before was the myth of MIT (National Intelligence Organisation) which was prevalent in every interview in different forms and levels... the basic idea included in the myth is that any Circassian can be a member, collaborator, agent or something of MIT or other mechanisms of surveillance. Therefore, without knowing me in person... [they see] the possibility that I might be something else than a PhD student. As a Circassian and as a researcher specialized in “Political Science,” my research was suspect. The myth of MIT was so dominant in the interviews that I sometimes caught myself thinking whether or not I interviewed any of these “collaborators.”

One of the portrayals, Abrek (M30s), frequently reminded me in our encounters that I could be working for any country, yet my work would still do good for the Abkhaz people.

3.5 Politics of Writing and Translation

As Kondo (2001: 189) states, an understanding she reached when researching among her (partially) own Japanese community, “collective identities... no longer seem.. to be fixed

essences, but rather strategic assertions, which inevitably suppress differences, tensions and contradictions within.” The Cherkess (or the Adyge or the Abkhaz) cultural code of behaviour requires everyone to act according to strict norms as members of the community, and avoid to show their individual identities. Though there are some differences in male and female identities, there is a supposed collective identity of the return migrants and according to the localities in the diaspora. In interviews the interviewees “try to be, or avoid being someone they think the researcher [I] believes they are” (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002: 147). In this regard, I am aware of the role that my own positionality, which I discussed in detail above, has created in specific narratives of identities and events. Besides the constant negotiation of power between me and the interviewees, there was also the necessity to be aware of socially constructed narratives, stories that “circulate culturally, providing a means of making sense of [the social] world, and also providing the materials with which people construct personal narratives as a means of constructing personal identities” (Lawler, 2002: 242). I tried to identify the socially constructed stories and the personal story telling of the interviewees through observation and 3rd (or 4th) person story telling (*gossip* which I was always told that was not a gossip but mere information, so that I know the *truth*); that is, through “triangulation” (Denzin, 1988). Whenever I had a prior knowledge I rephrased the question to the interviewee to give them the chance to re-narrate their story, and when this was not possible or did not happen, I tried to integrate this in my writing. However, the writing process is the part of research when the power is merely with the researcher, and I am the one who chooses and relates the stories, making use of the accounts of the people and putting them in a specific “order” (Hastrup, 1992: 122). I tried to construct the writing in a dialogue, where “I” and my experiences are interwoven with the narratives in the “present tense” (Hastrup, 1992: 128, Johnson *et al.*, 2004: 238).

As mentioned before, the fragmentation of biographic narratives was attempted to be overcome with the use of the portrayals. However, there was also the problem of having multiple field sites which made it hard to have an in-depth “understanding of the different localities, as well as to be able to contextualise the often fragmented information that one gets” (Mazzucato, 2008: 215). The similarities of the narratives of return migrants in Adygeya and Abkhazia, as well as the rural Adyge and Abkhaz made it easier to tell the processes but not to get into the details of the local differences. In the urban interviews this was a bit harder as most participants were migrants from a rural area or small provinces and it was not always easy to explain these in detail for each person. Instead of using place names while referring to

an interviewee, I tried to identify if it was a rural or an urban interview; or if the person was of rural or urban background, unless one specifically chose to identify a place in relation to or by its difference from other diaspora localities.

In terms of the politics of translation, it was a problem that my English was not rich enough to translate all the terms referred to by a variety of interviewees. Besides, I had to distance myself from the study and my own position as an urban-raised woman, fluent in multiple languages, and who is much more used to talking for long hours in a structure (something that comes with teaching) and while translating I had to “discriminate on the terrain of the original” (Spivak, 1993: 189). I tried to avoid correcting half or broken sentences in the narratives, if they could somehow be translated without the loss of meaning. That way, I could also keep the tone of the narration; however, this was the hardest with translation from Turkish (not with Circassian and Abkhazian as I was afraid of). Since when I translated the excerpts on two different sections of the dissertation, they somehow varied, so at the end of the writing process I put all the original transcripts and their translations together to read them isolated from the text separated by the particular interviewee and tried to keep the reflection of the tone in all quotes. Whenever I was not so confident about my translation, I asked my mother, who is an experienced English to Turkish translator, to translate a piece without knowledge of the profile of the person, just by his or her tone in a selected, short quote from a long narrative. This way I could see how the translation would differ without the context and I could try to find a balance between these two translations, choosing the best that gives the tone and character of the interviewee.

3.6 Conclusion

The gendered experience of fieldwork among the Adyge and Abkhaz was a challenging one as I had to fight to get my freedom of movement in my host homes, the freedom to talk with someone alone, while I had to make sure I did not disrespect my kind hosts who had taken me into their homes without expecting anything in return. Despite all overtures, my ability to leave the field and come back at another time when I was ready to get around the worries of sincere interests or gossips and espionage, gave me the space to conduct a variety of interviews and observe a variety of events that would not have been possible at one of the visits, or in rented rooms away from the diaspora and returnees. Retreating from comfort and personal space, I created this chance to observe everyday transnationalism and conduct a

variety of interviews. As a complete outsider it would have been even harder to get into the everyday lives of the return migrants and into their homes.

The mobility that has become part of my researcher identity and my positionality was also influential in structuring the chapters of this thesis. The empirical chapters, just like the second chapter, follow the diaspora – return – homeland sequence. This is not only parallel to how the process is lived by the return migrants themselves (diaspora – imagined and virtual return – decision to migrate – actual migration – post-return migration experiences) but also parallel to my experience of being from Turkey, first visit to the Caucasus and *settlement*. The next three empirical chapters follow this sequence of routes, each starting with an introduction of the topics to be covered and some portrayals.

CHAPTER 4

DIASPORA

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned before, I distinguish between the *transnational diasporic experiences of return* and *return migration*. But to analyse both of these processes, first it is important to understand the historical formations of identity in the diaspora which shape the current processes of return and return migration. In Chapter 2, I gave the historical background on how the Adyge, Abkhaz and Ubykh diaspora came to exist in Turkey and other countries. In Chapter 3, in detailing the selection of the rural and urban field sites in Turkey, I mentioned the main regional differences in the historically 400 settlements of Cherkess villages in Turkey and how they migrated to big cities in the 1950s (see Adaman and Kaya, 2012). In this chapter, I identify some commonalities and differences in the narratives from both the rural and the urban field sites in the diaspora, and the diaspora narratives of the return migrants. As argued before, there is diversity within the diaspora and even though some of the interviewees are of the same generation, their diasporic experiences have been influenced by a variety of factors. One of the most important outside factors is the influence of the ethnic composition of the place of residence of the interviewee. Those who are from closed communities, where they have little access to other ethnic peoples, have protected their distinct ethnic identity, through language and codes of behaviour in their everyday lives. In mixed communities, where there is (or are) constant interaction and conflict with other strong ethnic identity(ies), the issue of belonging to Turkey is most questioned, diasporic identity is mentioned frequently, and being involved in transnational diasporic activities in relation to the homeland (such as touristic visits, business, contact with relatives, hosting people from the homeland), are most observed.

The tension between the “traitor” identity¹⁵ and the superiority of the ethnic identity has shaken the grounds of belonging *here* – Turkey – and has created a desire to know more about and return *there* – the ancestral homeland. The Adyge and Abkhaz in the diaspora have passed the “ethnic package” (Christou and King, 2014), including the language in those who are in their 40s and over; but for younger generations the cultural code of behaviour is the basis of the package. There are not many pronouncements of superiority of Adyge-Abkhaz

¹⁵ Traitor is the direct translation of the word “*hain*” which was used in school books to refer to Cherkess Ethem, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

culture highlighted in the *diaspora* narratives collected, but a frequent repetition of “being different” due to the ethnic package they have received from older generations. The associations also appear as places where ethno-cultural values are repeatedly pronounced, and they become the “home” or the “school” that the young diasporans grow up within a close-knit community among ethnic peoples. This is directly related to the intellectuals and leaders of diaspora groups who “believe that the loss of culture is a step toward disappearance of group identity” (Aydingün and Aydingün, 2007: 117) and the associations have been places where they have tried to give younger generations an “ethnic package” making those places familiar everyday environments.

4.2 Portrayals

In this chapter, we will first meet Maze and Tameris, an Adyge mother and daughter from Ankara; then Janset, a recent university graduate from Istanbul whom I met in Adygeya; and then Azamad, a returnee from Abkhazia. Though the three Adyge women interviewees can be counted as diaspora interviews, their experience of the homeland and constant back and forth movement reflects the recent transnationalism of the diaspora, especially for women who find it more challenging to settle permanently in the homeland communities. Azamad, the Abkhaz returnee man, on the other hand, gives in-depth account of his childhood and early youth, and of his questioning of life in the diaspora.

4.2.1 Maze and Tameris

Maze, in her mid 20s, is an Adyge born in a metropolitan city in Turkey. At the time of our interview, she had been to the Caucasus only once, but was already planning further visits. She hardly understands her mother tongue. Tameris, Maze’s mother, is an Adyge in her early 50s from an Eastern Anatolian Adyge village. She frequently visits the North-West Caucasus, mainly in relation to her role in a diaspora organisation. Tameris and Maze’s narratives show the different experiences of two generations in Turkey, as the Adyge and Abkhaz migrate from closed-community rural villages to urban areas where they need to integrate with other ethnic groups. Being the third generation in the diaspora, Tameris grew up in the 1950s in an Adyge village under a strong traditional code of behaviour – *khabze*. When I ask her about her own childhood, she directly compares it to the current generation, who – she claims – do not know how to behave and are living in an identity crisis, and argues that her own generation was the last one lucky enough to grow up in the village. She says that in the village

they used to speak their native language. Tameris has taken an active role in the diaspora organisations since her early 20s, the time that she moved to the city. She says:

I have always thought of return. Not because I have felt like a second-class citizen here, or anything. I just always wanted to be in my homeland, where my language was spoken, to live in *khabze*.

Maze on the other hand, explains that she has developed defence mechanisms to deal with all the humiliation she lived through since high school, and also in her job in a nationalist state institution, mainly because of her name, which reveals her ethnic origin. She clearly states that she has always been proud of her name and identity, but recounts several occasions where she felt the need to defend herself.

In the Caucasus I feel belonging... When at the airport they told us to wait and that Russian citizens would pass first, I felt angry. That place was mine! It was very hard to wait.

Maze thinks that she will one day settle in the Caucasus, and work in her field of education comfortably, when she has the necessary language skills. Tameris too wishes that her daughter will one day settle in the Caucasus. But for herself, she does not say anything. She just says it is not realistic to expect 3 million diasporans to return-migrate.

Tameris and Maze were included to portray two generations of women in rural and then in urban settings in the diaspora. Their narratives are rich in details on how identity, language and culture was transferred between generations, and how imagined return is realised through constant back and forth movement between the Caucasian homeland and Turkey by both generations.

The interview with Tameris was arranged through a phone conversation with Maze, who was recommended to me by one of my old students, whom I had met by chance. Finding out about my PhD research, this Turkish sociologist recalled her childhood friend Maze, who was an adamant Cherkess. Maze suggested I should meet her mother, who had visited the Caucasus many times, and we decided to meet together at a local association social centre. Maze was late but Tameris had arrived so, introducing myself, I started talking to her. At first, despite the fact that I had explained my project to Maze in detail, she was very hesitant to give an interview. She had things to do and did not have much time. However, when she saw that other people at the association were well informed about my research and one interviewee even said he had given me an interview many months ago, she agreed to be

interviewed but refused to be recorded. We decided to make the interview in a silent corner in the exhibition hall, but lots of people who were late for the exhibition were coming there after work so we were interrupted occasionally. Towards the middle of the interview Maze arrived and Tameris asked me to continue the interview with Maze. However, she frequently popped up to add a few more things, either to her own words or to justify her daughter's words.

4.2.2 Janset

As the first question one has to answer after stating the Adyge family name is which part of Turkey one is from, Janset starts her narrative with an explanation of how "her father is from a North-Eastern Anatolian Adyge village" that does not exist any more, so she does not really feel a connection to any diaspora village like other Adyge-Abkhaz people do. In her early twenties, she was born in a small town, where they were living for her father's employment but settled in a metropolitan city from early childhood. She feels some connection to her mother's Adyge village in Eastern Anatolia, where she used to spend summers. After graduating from the university she spent half a year in a European country. She says she feels she has an issue of belonging, and that she does not even belong to the metropolitan city where she spent most of her life because she just cannot find herself there.

Her father was a diaspora activist, taking an active role in diaspora organisations, writing in diaspora publications, and had troubles from an early age due to his strong ethnic identity. Janset had spent the majority of her childhood in the association, dancing in the ensemble, taking part in children's activities there, as her father was working. When her father left the association because of ideological disputes, her connection was interrupted as well. She explains:

When I started high school I forgot my Cherkessness... My whole community was made of Turks. Like this, I won the university exam... I was all the time looking for something... Where do I belong?... In the university all my community was Cherkess... I felt much more comfortable, more belonging this way.

[...]

I heard that friends from the university Caucasian group had plans to come to the Caucasus, apply for the living permit... I didn't have much information... I wanted to be among them... Our aim was not to settle, to return here. At least not mine.

[...]

Remember I was telling I don't feel belonging to any village, maybe we could form our own village here, like our village is here. If we have children in the future we could bring them here, get over this broken link, that's how we think we will build and continue our lives, let's say.

Janset's portrayal is typical of the new generation, who want to have direct connection with their homeland and people – both in the homeland and the diaspora – but who do not talk about return migration. Instead she travels back and forth frequently, as her living permit requires this. Through her story we will find out about the transnationalism of the Adyge-Abkhaz in the diaspora and how they establish their identities and linkages through the association and other diaspora organisations, as well as through the newly established transnational links with their homeland. During her narrative we will also hear about the perspective of the young women and how they see return.

We met Janset in Maykop where she visited my host, with her friend Nart, whom I knew from the Caucasian Lessons Series organised by Bilgi University and a diaspora organisation in Istanbul in 2005. Both Janset and Nart were interested in my research and wanted to contribute by any means they could. They asked to go out and have something to eat after their visit, and have a proper chat. I agreed and the three of us went to a restaurant. They both asked to be interviewed there and together, which I felt hesitant at first but, on the promise that we would meet again in Turkey, since they were leaving quite soon, we started a joyful conversation. Both Janset and Nart seemed very comfortable during the interview, both making sure they did not intervene in each other's conversation.

4.2.3 Azamad

Are we Abkhaz, are we Turk? If we are Abkhaz why do we live here, why are we not in our own country? If we are Turks, why do we speak another language? Why do we have a different life-style? Why don't we look like those who call themselves Turks? When we are 15-16 years old, these questions go around in our minds, and at school they say everyone is Turk.

Born in a village in western Turkey, Azamad's narrative starts with how he found out his own ethnic identity through a Turkish nationalist text he was asked to read by political activists in his school. His self-questioning of identity continues with the questioning of the homeland, and he tells how they found out about the homeland through the visits of the first visitors from there to the diaspora. Despite the fact that there were visitors from the diaspora community to the homeland before those visits, he states that due to the lack of communication among generations in the diaspora – as required by the traditional code of behaviour of the Abkhaz –

apswara – they had not learned anything from those elderly people who visited Abkhazia in the late 1970s.

Though Azamad was born in a village and went to high school in another district, the only mobility in his narrative is about Abkhazia. His story of return is similar to those who make use of the first opportunity and he was among one of the early returnees to Abkhazia; he started university there, stayed there during the war and made a home there after the war. His memories of earlier years include in-depth narratives of the communications between the locals and the diaspora in the pre-war times, the war time, and hardships of the post-war era. He says that sometimes he feels like he is 1000 years old (he is in his 40s) because “*I have lived through so much, in such a short time, it doesn’t stop passing from in front of my eyes, Soviet glasnost and perestroika opening Abkhazia to us (late 1980s),... Abkhazia’s independence being recognised (2008)...*”

Azamad was chosen as a portrayal because of his very rich narrative of diaspora socialisation in a rural setting and a rural-urban education migration history as well as a intense narrative on the journey to the homeland and life after return migration.

4.3 “How Happy I am NOT to be a Turk” but an *Adygeneukh* (Half-Adyge)

They needed a shepherd in the village. He (indicating his younger brother) was a wrestler, *pehlivan*. He went to Bursa for that reason. My father kept me here. I was not a successful student. The teacher would say get up and tell, I couldn’t tell. The teacher called my father and said: “You are not going to talk in Circassian at home, if you want him to study.”... My Turkish was very bad till 2nd-3rd year of primary school. Since I had a lot of difficulty, I never tried to teach the children [Circassian]. Sometimes I talk with *yenge* [it means sister-in-law or uncle’s wife, but used informally to refer to one’s own wife in this case] for them not to understand, but they do understand.

[...]

A boy that I know who now lives in Adygeya, he takes an Ubykh boy, with the nickname Cherkess from our village, to his mother. Cherkess says “I do understand most of what you say in Circassian but I cannot speak the language”. She calls him, “then you are an *Adygeneukh*” [half-Adyge]. He doesn’t understand. Comes to the village and asks his uncle. Finds out – you understand don’t you? – [I nod] and he feels really ashamed. (Timaf, M60s, Rural Samsun 2012)

Regardless of where they have been living, in rural or urban settlements, the Adyge and Abkhaz in Turkey had their ethno-political socialisation and ethnic identification at early ages

as they faced others and otherness. The diasporic upbringing in the family was identified with repeated mentioning of differences and belonging to another place, speaking another language, and having a different cultural code of behaviour. Similar ethnic-upbringing and the role of it in the decision of return have been discussed by other scholars, e.g. the Greek-American diaspora (Christou and King, 2014), the German-Turks (King and Kılınç, 2013), or the Japanese-Brazilians (Tsuda, 2003). For the Adyge-Abkhaz growing up in the villages, self-identification started with schooling, where they were faced with the difficulties of learning the Turkish language and had to deal with teachers' pressures to make them accept a Turkish identity. In the cities, the self-identification of otherness started with attendance at kindergarten or in the streets when the children played with other children; that was when they realised their differences. In their narratives, regardless of their place of residence in early childhood, a majority of the Adyge and Abkhaz whom I interviewed, recall their first questioning of identity and belonging to Turkey as occurring before adolescence. This relates strongly to the Turkish Republic's national policy which promoted "unity in history, culture, the fatherland, language and ideals" through school textbooks and education (Ince, 2012: 123).

The basis of these nationality policies in schooling – that exists even today – were supported by the principles and revolutionary laws of the early Republican period. These included the 1928 Hat Law, which prohibited the Adyge and Abkhaz from wearing their national *bashlyk* and *kalpakh*; the 1934 Clothing Law, which prohibited them from wearing their national *cherkeska* (see photo 1 and 10 in Appendix F); and the 1934 Family Name Law during which they were forced to take Turkish surnames. There were also local-level prohibitions, as well as campaigns and informal pressures that made it very hard for the first and second generations to continue speaking their languages and having a salient ethnic identity. One of the biggest campaigns of the early-Republican era that had its effects until the early 1990s was the "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" (*Vatandaş, Türkçe Konuş!*) campaign. What started as a student campaign in Istanbul "generated a mass reaction against minorities for their language differences. As part of the campaign, posters were hung on walls, bulletins were distributed on the streets and public declarations were made advocating that Turkish be spoken by Turkish citizens" (Toktas, 2005: 400). Cagaptay (2004: 95) argues that "British diplomatic correspondence from 1934 noted that Arabs, Circassians, Cretan Muslims, and Kurds in the country were being targeted for not speaking Turkish" which contrasted with the arguments that this campaign was aimed at the non-Muslim minorities. A generation of

Adyge and Abkhaz suffered as children through the school system, which forced them to speak Turkish, and as a result they avoided speaking their native languages with their next generations. A generation grew up to become *Adygeneukh/half* – able to understand but not to speak their ethnic languages, knowing who they are but not able to place it into the context of their everyday lives.

We were less aware compared to our children. We learned everything at the association. I was just a kid, there was a poem in the text book at school. In the poem there was a line that said “passed over the Kaf-Mountain”. I came home and asked my father. I was 8 years old. Is there a place called Kaf Mountain? My father said, that’s where we came from, from the Kaf-Mountain that you read in that poem. The next day I went to school and said, that’s where we came from, the Kaf-mountain in the poem. (Dane, F50s, Adyge)

Above, Dane’s narrative of how she found her roots through a poem, cuts off when she comes to the reaction of the teacher to her words. Instead, she goes on talking about her cousins who were frequently punished by the teachers for using Circassian words as they talked, or even having a Circassian accent in Turkish. The punishment was to carry firewood to school from the village that was 1.5 km away. Dane was from a village in western Turkey. Zaur (M50s, Abkhaz), who was born in a village in eastern Turkey, also mentions a similar pressure from the teachers:

I was born in the village. I am Abkhaz. I know Abkhazian. Because we were born in the village and we stayed in the village for a while. Despite the fact that all our teachers forbade us to speak the Cherkess language, that is Abkhazian, because they didn’t speak any other language in the village we spoke [our mother language]. God protect, we did speak I can say, that is how I know [my language]. Because we got out of the village very early.

The parents of Adyge-Abkhaz students were called into the schools and given strict advice not to speak with the children in another language. The fear that the children would not succeed to go on with high school education led to voluntary language assimilation. A generation suffered through this language conflict in primary education and other nationalisation policies. The most repeated and, even today, highly debated nationalisation project at the primary school level is the student pledge that is read by all students every school morning before entering school since 1933. The pledge starts with the words “I am a Turk, honest and hardworking” and ends with the words “How happy is the one who says I am a Turk!”. Though there are legal and social efforts against this pledge, the State argues that “the ‘Turk’ and ‘Turkish’ in the pledge refer to a civic form of identity, rather than an

ethnicity; hence, no racism, no discrimination, can be claimed to be at work” (quotes as in the original; Polat, 2011: 81); the experiences of Adyge and Abkhaz, like other ethnic minorities in Turkey, have been reactive. Starting from our last portrayal, Azamad (M40s), who remembers the hardships of learning the language, tells us about how he questioned his Turkishness through the student pledge:

A question mark appears in my mind all the time. If I am a Turk, why do I use another language? When I was just a little kid that was the question in my mind. Now you go to school, the first day you put your step, till that day; until we went to school we didn't know Turkish. Neither I knew nor my brothers knew. In our environment Turkish was not spoken. When we went to school, completely different language, some people say “you are gonna learn this language”, then you ask “what is this, why do I learn this”. Then you have the “I am a Turk, honest”. Now it may feel like an insult, because there has been some force [*me to zori*] about it. Then it didn't feel like an insult but we had the question mark in our minds, if I am Abkhaz why do I say I am a Turk, and as I said before why do I speak Abkhazian? In addition, we had the Turkish villages around our village, we all the time throw them stones and they threw stones at us. Just when we were little kids there was a difference, you grow up with the difference, you ask why is there a difference?

When I asked Maze and Tameris, the mother and daughter portrayals, Tameris said that she has never felt discriminated in the Turkish society. However, Maze had a lot to say about the impact of what I will call *Cherkess Ethem the “traitor” syndrome*¹⁶, inculcated into Turkish high school history books:

I had some fights here from time to time. As I grew older the student pledge sounded offensive to me, it was disturbing... from time to time in certain environments, in history lessons starting at secondary school, this Cherkess Ethem matter became, ehm, something that made me take out my nails. You have a Cherkess name, and the whole class knows that you are Cherkess. I always carried my name with pride, but when something like that happens in class, they turn their heads and look at you, those eyes, it's very disturbing... You develop a mechanism of defence. You ask yourself, why do I have to recite this student pledge? Won't I be honest and hardworking if I don't recite it? You develop a defence mechanism against everything.

Similar reactions were widely mentioned by my interviewees both in the Caucasus and the diaspora, about the student pledge and the Cherkess Ethem the traitor syndrome, as well as pressures to identify oneself as Turkish, speaking Turkish, being a citizen of Turkey. Since

¹⁶ Ethem Bey fought alongside Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the Turkish Independence War but they fell apart at some point. The Adyge-Abkhaz claim that Ethem was a traitor to his own people, as he killed many Adyge-Abkhaz leaders who were pro-Ottoman, in the name of the Mustafa Kemal government. My preference to call it a syndrome comes from the ongoing reference to Ethem as a Cherkess and a traitor – not removing either.

(F30s), another young female portrayal that will be introduced in the next chapter, who also talks about the student pledge, recalls another event that she experienced in high school about the Turkish national anthem and how this made her think of herself as non-Turkish:

I remember that even when I was at the primary school I questioned the students' pledge. Then something happened... I must have been at secondary school. It was a Friday afternoon and we had gathered for the national anthem. I was at the front of the row. The anthem had just started when a friend pulled my bag. I turned and told him to behave... When the anthem was over, someone grabbed my arm and pulled me, her eyes were like fire. It was an English teacher. "You are so disrespectful," she said. She was so frustrated that she was about to cry. "What do you think you are doing?" she said, "why don't you stand to attention during the national anthem?" I was so off base that I couldn't even explain what had happened. She was so angry, she wouldn't listen anyway. I felt so offended for I had not done anything wrong; "it isn't even my anthem," I thought. Her attitude had led me to think that way. Of course one should never be disrespectful to a national anthem whatever nation it belongs to, but she shouldn't have shown such a reaction.

Despite a wide range of discrimination and feeling secondary citizens or not feeling a sense of belonging, there are also examples when people narrate a completely opposite process, like a non-ethnic teacher or a religious person¹⁷ integrating into the village population by learning the language of the locals. During my fieldwork, when I was on a bus in Ankara reading an article on return published in a diaspora journal, the lady sitting next to me turned and asked if I was a Cherkess. She greeted me in Circassian and told me her story:

I was a teacher in a remote Adyge village (in eastern Turkey) in the 70s. The first day I came, I didn't know of their ethnic origin. They all came to greet me, brought me food and staples, house things, everything I would need. They were very nice to me. They were talking in Circassian. I asked them what language it is. They explained to me. I learned how to thank that day "*thawupsao*". Right? And I learned Circassian and I stayed there for many years, I was very happy. They later told me in the city that the previous teacher had left because life was very hard in that village and nobody had helped him. But later I found out he was pushing the villagers to talk in Turkish, but instead I learned Circassian so they respected me. If I was to live there, I needed to respect and integrate. I kept contact with some of my students who came to study here in Ankara but lost them later. But I really loved it there. And they took care of me very well.

¹⁷ Until recently, two key civil servants were present in almost every village in rural Turkey: the primary school teacher and the *imam*, the religious state representative who runs the religious services. For this reason, the school and the mosque were the two places where Turkish national identification and the values of the Turkish Republic were promoted. Frey (1968: 957) suggests that in rural Turkey, residents belonging to a linguistic minority and living in an isolated village were less likely to be Turkish nationalists. His study also suggest that the schools play "a pronounced role in increasing [Turkish] national identification".

Making me note down her contact for possible students of hers I might meet from that village during my fieldwork, she rushed off the bus as we came to her stop. Her words were confirmed by Neris (F50s), whom I met in Bursa, who was from the same region where this teacher worked in the 1970s:

Our people had migrated by the overland route; they all came together and settled. That's why their language, traditions, their *khabze* stayed. There was a teacher. The teacher was a Turk, but spoke Circassian. No teacher had the guts to give those who spoke in Circassian a punishment! They would all learn Circassian by the time they left. They (our people) were loyal to their language and *khabze*. They still speak their language so well.

Another example is about a teacher who teaches high school history with the argument that it is biased and politicized:

I watched a documentary about Cherkess Ethem on TV... I gathered the documents [referred to in the documentary] and went to speak with the teacher. He had also read them. He said "let's first present what the book says. You can then make a presentation on what is said here." The next lesson he presented what was said in the course book, then he called me to make my presentation to the class. The students asked why was it written like that in the book. He said, "During the first years of the Republic, the political conjuncture demanded to write history this way; this will be changed in time." (Kanbot M20s)

Above I have related the narratives of a couple of people on three things that made Adyge and Abkhaz question their belonging to Turkey before adolescence: firstly, pressures to learn and speak the Turkish language; secondly, the student pledge on which there are currently discussions of annulment (as of October 2013); and thirdly Cherkess Ethem the traitor syndrome, which names a Turkish independence war veteran as a traitor to the Turkish state identifying him as an ethnic Cherkess. As noted in a footnote before, Ethem is also regarded as a "traitor" to the Cherkess people because – as recent works on his life history argue – he had killed his own ethnic people in the name of the Turkish state (Şener, 1990). In February 2013, there was a huge debate in the Turkish media and diaspora about Cherkess Ethem, due to a photo of him and Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, being published with a distortion of Ethem's and his men's faces, on an official military website of archival photos. The event got attention through an Adyge journalist working in the Turkish media who "tweeted" about it and led to many short news (see for example an interview with Kaya from 4 March 2013 published in a Turkish Newspaper – *Akşam* – who states that the Cherkess want "*restitution of grace to Cherkess Ethem, in quotation marks to Ethem Bey*") and increased the popularity of publications on Ethem which especially the Cherkess diaspora

had been publishing since their early years of diaspora activism (such as Ethem, 1962, Kutay, 1977, Şener, 1990, Uğurlu, 2006 and others). Azamad, when he recalls his high school years and how he was clearly identified as an Abkhaz by everyone, makes an analysis of the above-mentioned discrimination discourse and finds a good benefit in it in terms of ethnic awareness during his upbringing:

[At high school] if a hundred people knew my name 1100 knew my nickname – the Abkhaz [Abaza]. Most of those wouldn't even know my name. Right after you get there [the high school] it is understood that you are not Turkish, but something else. They start calling you with that [ethnic] nickname. Most of the nicknames are like that, Abkhaz, Cherkess, this or that. So you keep that in mind all through. Then in history lessons, especially towards the last year, you start discussing, arguing things with the history teacher about the rebellions, about Cherkess Ethem, so again you are positioned as different from others. At least 80% of our people have somehow found themselves in this discussion. Apart from those who are completely detached or those who don't want to get into an argument with a teacher, even people who seem "unconcerned" have somehow entered into an argument on this issue. None of them would accept this. This is important. You try to melt people in a pot, but the mistakes that are made help them find their identity. We must thank Turkey's wrong policies.

This questioning of belonging due to Turkey's nationalisation policies, has created a dream for the Adyge-Abkhaz to go to where they *belong*, to the Caucasus, to *Kheku* (homeland in Circassian), to *Apsny* (Abkhazia in Abkhazian) or to the *Kaf-mountains* (the way Caucasian mountains are referred to in the literature about this region in Turkish language). From early times, in the diaspora, even when they were not aware of the possibility of return, the Adyge and Abkhaz were dreaming of a return because they did not see themselves as part of the Turkish nation. We will see below in a longer excerpt from Azamad, about how his imagining of the homeland developed as he grew up and his knowledge increased:

You can guess what it was like during our childhood. In general a close community living in villages. From the moment you are born until you die you are in this life style we call *apsuaraa*. You speak Abkhazian, you live your customs. Relations with other communities are limited. When we started school, we realised that there was another language, that there are communities other than ours, we learned these by living them. Once we went out of the village, we were faced with this truth. Of course those were the times when political movements were trying to convince others of what they believe in, in a very strong way, sometimes through street fights. It was those conflicts that helped me to find my own Apsua identity. Someone gave me a book to read, a novel by a Turkish nationalist author, which was about Turkish history. There was a Cherkess woman in that book. He had used everything that is negative in

the community on that character. When that woman gives birth to a baby the midwife says, “These are like duck eggs put under a hen. They can never become Turks, whatever we do. The ducklings once they get out from under the hen, they run to the water, quacking... These are like that, they will never become Turks. Like ducklings when they see water, it happens... their real identity surges out.” We forgot how to speak Turkish!

Despite my suggestion to talk in Abkhazian, he goes on in Turkish explaining his self-realisation of difference:

In the middle of the night, something in me broke up. Am I a duck, I asked myself. It was 2 or 3 a.m. There were people around, with whom we had discussed this matter. I went and woke them up. I said, “we are all living an identity crisis. Are we Abkhaz or Turks? If we are Abkhaz, why are we living here, why are we not in our own country? If we are Turks, why are we speaking a different language? Why is our life-style different? Why don’t we look like those who name themselves Turks?” We were 15-16 years old. These questions kept coming to our minds.

Azamad’s awareness came with his education and self-assessment of a Turkish nationalist book as a non-Turk. However, the majority of the diaspora came to this awareness in the diaspora associations, which helped the ethno-cultural-political socialisation of children in urban settings. The fourth sub-section of this chapter will focus on the diaspora organisations’ role in helping the creation of a knowledge-based image of the Caucasus.

4.4 “*Associationists*”: Ethnic Upbringing and the *Dernek* as “Home”

The *dernek* [diaspora associations] are our first schools. There we learn to dance, we meet our people, choose our partners, learn our folkloric culture. (Gupse F40s)

Intragroup interaction is an important element in the formation of a salient identity. In their rural settlements, where the Adyge and the Abkhaz lived in close-knit communities, with only their ethnic kin, they had strong group interaction. After rural to urban migration, people did not have as many chances to interact with their group members. Thus, they filled this gap in their everyday lives with diaspora associations. The community organisations of migrants and diasporas have been given attention in a variety of case studies before, especially on the role of diaspora/migrant organisations in ethnic group solidarity; nevertheless, their role on return migration has not been given much attention. The extant literature has usually focused on immigrant adaptation to host states or on the diaspora-development nexus, that “act as civil society institutions that provide solutions to people’s everyday needs, provide an arena for

social gatherings, or function as mediators of political engagement” (Olsson, 2012). The Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora associations, through cultural activities (mainly dancing but also music and others), help the creation of a sense of belonging and “togetherness” via a feeling of enjoyment. The community-wide celebrations, dancing nights, and *muhabbet* (communication) communes were common practice in the associations, like in many other migrant groups – see for example the Garifuna in the USA, who had annual celebrations “to foster ethnic transnational ties by Garifuna music, dance, ethnic foods, and speakers” (Matthei and Smith, 1998). The Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora associations, as stated in Chapter 2.3.3, played an active role in nurturing a diasporic “collective memory” since the earlier generations through journal and newspaper publications, language schools, music and dance ensembles, cultural and sports events, etc. (see photos 12, 14, 15 and 16 in Appendix F). A similar example that nurtures collective memory is accounted by Olsen (2004: 6) for the Japanese Nikkei in Latin America. In this section, the focus is on the role of diaspora associations in nurturing a collective (social) memory, which I will call ethnic upbringing, or, using a term which one interviewee suggested: the *associationists* (*dernekçigiller*).

These people are those who claim they *grew up in the diaspora associations* or *found their identities in the associations*, spending all their free time in these places as youngsters. Also, there are those who return to their ethnic communities at later ages, usually after retirement or a trauma in their lives, again to *find themselves*. Spending a lot of time in the association meant that one was part of a close-knit community, that expected from them a commitment to traditional codes of behaviour and also to the community, being part of cultural and political activities, taking responsibilities and the like. However, it must be noted that there are also many in the diaspora who *never made their way to the associations*, and yet who still have a collective diasporic identity but differentiate themselves from the *associationists*. Especially in recent years in Turkey, the diaspora civil society organisations have undergone a division “between the politically- and culturally-oriented organisations” (Hansen, 2012: 111). This creates a deeper separation between those who grew up in the associations, those who are current members, and those who differentiate themselves from that as they have different socio-political-cultural interest in relation their Cherkess (or Adyge-Abkhaz) identities.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 (see section 2.3.3), the North-Caucasian émigrés (1st generation) in the Ottoman Empire were the first to establish an organisation to unite in the diaspora, inform the community about events in the Caucasus, and facilitate the establishment

of an independent state there. In different publications of the late 19th and early 20th century, the diasporic writers repeat their belief in *absolute return*. As establishment of the first diaspora organisation of the Republican era dates back to the 1940s, and the rest to the early 1960s mainly by the middle-aged and elderly of the diaspora community, none of the people I interviewed recall those first days of the establishments. However, they recall the 1970s, 80s and 90s, the three most significant decades in Adyge-Abkhaz return. The 1970s were marked with the diaspora community putting one foot in the Soviet-homeland and creating a more realistic image of return in the diaspora (section 2.3.5). In a very short period, it became impossible even to imagine return after the *coup d'état* of 1980 in Turkey, as Azamad (M40s), who had lived through that period as a young diaspora Abkhaz who was involved in the community in his region, recalls below. The 1990s, on the other hand, were marked with the fall of the Iron Curtain and again with the possibility of return migrating to the homeland. In these three decades, the diaspora organisations took important roles to keep the diaspora united, giving the urban Adyge and Abkhaz (and other North-Caucasian diaspora) a space to be themselves among people like themselves. In the associations, the homeland and the diaspora were created and re-created, imagined and re-imagined, connected and re-connected, till it was realised, by which time it was created again in a different way (see Miyazawa, 2009) about how the experience of the homeland challenged traditional knowledge in a diaspora rural community).

Below is an excerpt from Azamad's (M40s) long and emotional narrative which gives a detailed analysis on the diaspora associations through time and their role in relating to the homeland:

The relations with Abkhazia started in the 1970s. After the *coup d'état* of September 12, 1980, all the associations were closed. People found themselves in a tempest of fear. Those who had books, ABCs in their homes, had to somehow get rid of them. Even if a piece of paper in Cyrillic alphabet was found, you could be considered a communist, find yourself in jail, and stay there for months before you are taken to a court. During that time you would lose your job. It was a risk our people could not take. So these conditions postponed the process for a long time. Otherwise our relations with Abkhazia would have developed in the 80s, not in the 90s. I remember that at the end of the 70s, beginning of the 80s there were songs, poems, even theatres in Abkhazian in the associations. There was a big group of young people. I mean, I was very young then, but I remember them going to weddings in groups of hundreds of people. We all looked at them with awe. That group could have done a lot more, but with the *coup d'état* of September 12 [he makes a gesture of cutting] all this ended, that movement was drowned. It didn't have the

chance to develop further. Otherwise relations with Abkhazia and Adygeya would have gained importance earlier.

As mentioned before (section 2.3.4), there was a political division within the diaspora organisations. Those who were called the *returnists* believed that absolute return to the homeland was the only solution to assimilation. Elbruz (M50s), who was a *returnist* in the 1970s, tells his experience of the associations:

When we moved to Istanbul, I heard about associations but my father wouldn't let me go there, because there was communism there... When I started high school we moved to Uskudar... Baglarbasi association – you know it is the oldest association, is also there. That association was like a school for me. I was very happy there. I changed... Actually there isn't much I remember from those days, except dancing celebrations. We were especially keen on Saturday evenings, because after the communion there would be some dancing, and fun. When there were some events, there would be panels, discussions on them. Generally, as my father had said, leftists were in the majority in the association. And those were the times, the years 1977-1980 was when there was an acute polarisation in the society. That [political] polarisation is still not completely over. For a lot of people, both in the right wing and in the left wing the same attitudes persist.

Me: Was the political polarisation parallel to the Turkish contemporary political division, I mean was it a right-left polarisation?

Elbruz: Yes, but also there was this thing, *returnists* and stayers, returnists and revolutionists, or they were also called the democrats. There were two groups, the *returnist* group, and the revolutionary group. I was among the returnist group, then. Because I come from a traditional family, it was very hard to be leftist, or communist. But we entered the university, both in the university and in the association... I went through many phases.

Twice in this excerpt from a long and rich interview, Elbruz talks about the association being like a school, which taught him a lot of things, made him happy, shaped who he is and influenced his political orientation. “*I can say, I grew up in the association*” is a sentence repeated by many young transnational Adyge and Abkhaz that I had the chance to talk to during my fieldwork. I continue with the narrative of one of the young portrayals, Maze (F20s), whose mother Tameris (F50s) had been actively involved in a diaspora organisation for over 30 years. In this long excerpt she tells about her *associationist* upbringing, then her reactive flight from this and then her coming back:

I was in the children's dance ensemble [of the association] for five years. Then I was sort of in-between, too old for the children group, too young for the adult dance group. I took a break from dancing for a few years. Then I started again. I thought that people in the association would open their arms to welcome me.

This happens to newcomers to the association, you expect someone to open arms and say, “Welcome! Come here, come on!”, though no one here is a guest, it belongs to us all. I guess I was expecting that. I was angry when it didn’t happen. Aaah! I said to myself, I already have a lot of friends out there, I don’t need that. I was 16 or 17. I was angry. I said things like, it is not important to be Cherkess, what is important is to be a world citizen, to be human... I made speeches like that. I admit it. (laughs)... My mother started to work at the women’s committee. She said “if you don’t come, I cannot ask other people to bring their children. There are many projects and we need young people. You must come.”... There are in fact very few people, who are not in the dance ensemble but who visit the association regularly like me. Because the dance ensemble connects you to the association. You are there every Saturday and Sunday... If you come to the association you deal with something. You wouldn’t just sit there. Getting so connected to, to be fond of the association even though I was not in the dance ensemble, I guess I was lucky.

Maze’s narrative is full of “confessions” which derives from the fact that her current belief is that it is a necessity to take an active part in the diaspora organisation at all ages and argue for the superiority of one’s own culture. Despite the fact that at some point Maze was reactive to the association, her mother Tameris says her own children did not become reactive to the associations but other *returnists’* children did become so, because their parents had put all their time and efforts into the associations and into their ideals [neglecting their own children]:

I am an active member of the association since my 20s. Something that comes with coming to the city from the village... I worked in the women’s commissions, I took a role in the administration... Those who come to the association miss their people, those who have village roots, rural roots. That’s why those of rural background come to the association... Today’s youth come in search of their identity, that’s what I think. We were looking for people. Of course among them there are those who search for their culture, who want to live their culture. There will be those coming saying we are assimilating. We learned sentences like “beware, we are assimilating” in the association... The children of returnists in our time stayed out, as a reaction. We didn’t have a situation that would create a reaction. When I was in the association my partner took care of the children. We didn’t neglect the children... My partner is a good Cherkess, knows the language well. He is ready to do anything for *Cherkessness*. His face was always towards the homeland... He didn’t have *associationism*. A good balance within the family... He recovered the space. If he didn’t look at it as good, it wouldn’t have worked out. Most of my time passed in the association... There has been a time that I was angry at the association and didn’t come at all, but then again...

Both narratives of Maze and her mother Tameris somehow relate to care. Maze says she expected the people in the association to wait for her with open arms. Tameris, on the other

hand, says that her children had their father to give them care at home. Their narratives are also talk about being “angry” towards the associations, as if the associations are “beings”. Janset (F20s), another one of the young portrayals, was also reactive to her upbringing in the association due to her father’s involvement, so that when she started high school she had lost all her community/ethnic group identity:

[My father] when he was young, had struggled for some causes... [He had some problems] in corresponding in Circassian with Cyrillic letters with a relative... He had responsibilities at the association... When I was a kid I was always at the association. When I started high school, I forgot my Cherkessness... It was a Turkish environment... For years I nearly forgot that I was Cherkess, but I had a lot of conflicts as I lived this life. I had a lot of problems in my relations with my friends. I was in a sort of duality. I mean what I saw at home was different from the attitudes among friends. I had problems adapting to either. I couldn’t identify myself with either. There was always a problem of belonging. The first year at the university I didn’t have any contacts with the association. But I was in search of something... What kind of people do I feel good with... I thought... where do I belong?... I found the Caucasian society of the university on the web. That’s where I belong. All my friends were Cherkess... I belonged to that society more than any other new member from the moment I joined them... I don’t see any of my university friends. I don’t see my high school friends either... All my friends now are Cherkess, it was half my choice, half a spontaneous process. I feel more comfortable like this, I feel that I belong.

As before, Janset’s narrative is about belonging and she relates feeling good to being among the diaspora in the associations or diaspora society in her university. Another young woman I met in Samsun when she was visiting her father was even reactive to me being in their neighbourhood when I was first introduced to her in their garden. Later, she explained to me that this was all because her father *put the diaspora before his family* and she had suffered from this all through her childhood. Despite her *associationist* upbringing she had not found a place to herself within the diaspora community but she showed interest in the academic works on the subject of diaspora and return as our conversation developed throughout the days. Sine (F30s), cited before and who will be introduced in Chapter 5, another young woman growing up in a relatively small town in a traditional environment, talks about those days and how the association became part of her life only when she started university:

There [in that town] relations among relatives are very strong... Since the elderly of the family were living in that house, many relatives visited them, I mean constantly. When I was at secondary school, I remember I was quite distressed with that. Every evening there were people who came for a chat. I was a kid then. I remember thinking “ohh not again”. Of course, now I miss

that, I really miss those people. There were very interesting topics discussed, they had fun. Besides, there were a lot of Cherkess among my friends, during my secondary school and high school years, and especially when I was at the university – that's an advantage of living in a place with a dense Cherkess population.. I had visited the association several times during my high school years, but I became an active participant when I was at university...An instructor had come from the Caucasus...A youth commission was founded and we studied *khabze*... I just remembered that... I had some duties at the youth commission, but since it was a short-term thing, I mean it was a passing fancy, as long as I remember, it didn't last long. It is classical of the associations; young people are somehow given duties in the activities... I joined the dance ensemble's practice once. I was late for the second session, and the trainer made a hell of it... I was disappointed, I dropped it... Oh I wish I had continued... [Me: Did you continue to go to the association?] Yeah. Then, the year I graduated from the university, we went to Abkhazia with my father... It was a trip organised by the association.

We will get to know more about Sine in the next chapter as her narrative was focused around her back and forth moment and life divided between her two homes – in Turkey and Abkhazia. Of rural background, Tameris (F50s), an active member of a diaspora association today, had migrated to the city by herself to study, and said she needed the association environment to be among her people. In Samsun, a majority of the people who had lived in one of the districts or in a rural area had never been to an association because they believed the associations were not *traditional* environments but *communist homes* where women behaved in untraditional ways. In a village that I visited in Samsun, one of the few young people I met who live partly in their village home and partly in the city, Kanshao (M30s), told me proudly how they treat the unconventional *associationists* in their village. They would for example, ask the girls, who refuse to wear skirts which would be given to them by the locals [instead of jeans or trousers], to leave the dancing circle; or the boys who smoke at visible places to leave the village.

This rural-urban separation is described by a few people, such as Alkhas (M50s), a return migrant in Abkhazia, who explains why those from the rural background did not feel a connection to the associations because of the elitist administrations of these institutions:

Abkhazia has always been in my mind. But let me say this: What people in Istanbul think is very different from that of the closed communities that we call villages. For example, there has always been a conflict of ideas between the associations and the villages. I'm sure you have experienced that as well. Their point of view and the associations' point of view have always been in conflict, and this goes on... It's a long process to overcome this conflict and there are a lot of people who can't do it. Today in almost every city of Turkey – except Izmit – there are different associations for the Adyge and the Abkhaz. What

does that mean? It means that the people still couldn't get over some things. They still don't have a healthy way of thinking. Today a lot of people over their 50s still call themselves Adyge and Abaza. Maybe they are university graduates, executives in a public office or private sector... but I don't think they understand the Cherkess concept... When you say Cherkess only the Ossetians are not included. We are branches of a tree... the Ubykh, the Adyge, the Abkhaz¹⁸.

In Alkhas' narrative what I want to point out is that he refers to differences in education, occupation and ideals. As Alkhas had migrated to the city to work at the age of 12 and had not continued his education, being a blue-collar worker all his life, he focuses on the fact that those in the associations are the ones who have had high education, those who have become executives – though he does not name it explicitly, what he defines is a class difference. At another interview in Istanbul, off the record, somebody also of low-education, working-class background told me:

You need money to be part of the associations since they will ask from you this money and that money, for solidarity, for taking part in an activity, for anything. If you don't give, you cannot be part of it. It is for rich people, for executives and professionals. Not for people who work with their hands. I cannot go to an association after working with my hands all day. Look at them. [Shows his greasy hands]. Who will shake my hand?

The *associationists* would argue that this was in fact not the situation, but those who did not have direct access to the associations in the early years of their upbringing believed this class difference existed due to their rural working-class upbringing. Those who had grown up in the associations were of different (sub-)ethnic groups; spoke different languages; came from families of different backgrounds, both rural and urban; had different political ideals; belonged to different economic classes; had lived through a different migration experience and different inter-ethnic interactions with other groups living in Turkey. However, they had found that they had a similar code of behaviour (*khabze*), that is “a set of guidelines for structuring social relationships” (Fugita and O'brien, 1991: 27; referring to the key elements of the Japanese culture), and this was at the centre of their togetherness at the associations. Even the “returnists” and the “stayers” grew up to be of different political thought, and while a majority of the returnists kept their dream to return, many did not manage to realise that.

Today in Turkey there are about 100 diaspora organisations, ranging from village-level associations to urban associations as well as district associations, university societies, sub-

¹⁸ Though this micro-identity discussion is a highly debated topic in the diaspora and the Caucasus, as it does not relate directly to return migration, I do not include it in this study.

ethnic group associations, united Caucasian associations, Caucasian dance troupes, music bands and many others. One of the directors of a village association argued that “today, there is no young soul left in the villages and as the associations had to unite those in the city in the 1960s-1990s, today they have to unite their children at least in the summers, so that they get to know each other, their brothers and sisters, remember who they are, wherever they live”. In the urban diaspora organisations, after huge identity debates on how to define oneself due to increased communication with the homeland, which brought up new (Soviet) terminologies of self-identification, new organisations, groups and divisions formed. However, a majority of the old organisations decided to stay out of these debates and today focus more on socio-cultural activities than on political ones to protect and nurture a collective diaspora memory. There are some groups which have political concerns at their heart and some try to gain basic ethno-cultural and language rights in Turkey; some focus on homeland politics, while some others put at the centre anti-Russian political activism against Russia’s regional policies (This is what Hansen (2012: 111) refers as the “polarisation of Circassian organizations”). During my fieldwork, I heard many people say things like “*politics are dividing the diaspora and this is to the benefit of others*”. The only thing that brings people of different upbringing, political ideals and socio-economic backgrounds together is their relation with the homeland. Many of the returnees did not identify with any political group but always imagined being in the homeland as children. From early ages, many had questioned their belonging “here” [Turkey]. Also a new generation that grew up in an era of communication, constantly experiencing homeland through the Internet and other resources, established links and put a foot in the homeland. Still many others flag a salient ethnic identity as Abkhaz or Adyge or Cherkess but have no connection, neither to the wider diaspora nor to the homeland. This leads us to the next section.

4.5 From Banal Flaggings to Transnationalism: From Phone Melodies to Return

In Samsun, in a village of the Çarşamba district, I was introduced to “someone who frequently travelled to the Caucasus”. He invited us to his home and as we were walking through the garden I noticed car stickers on the post-box of a traditionally dressed couple, something of a kind you can get in nearly all the diaspora associations. When I said I would like to photograph the stickered post-box, the response was:

That is all we are left of. We have all become sticker Cherkess!

A few days later in a village in Kavak, when there was a phone ringing with a famous Adyge tune, one of the elderly people sitting at the table said something about his wish to dance whenever he hears the tunes and that it was everywhere now. A younger villager turned and said:

We are all phone melody Cherkess!

These banal flaggings, using Billig's (1995) term, of ethnic identity were given attention by many others from the diaspora during my field work. In mid-2012 a Facebook discussion was started by a post of a Cherkess who was suggesting all the diaspora to use traditional tunes in their mobile phones, saying that her daughter got a job just because she had one. Below the post lots of people started discussing whether this kind of representation of ethnicity was the right way to protect one's identity, the right way of being Cherkess, or was it in the end meaningless, even culturally degrading, if it is used just to flag oneself as different, to have an economic gain from it, etc.

In district centres where there is a high population of Adyge-Abkhaz, there is not a feeling of necessity to flag or hide oneself, as everyone knows each other. In İnegöl, there is a clear division of business among ethnic groups. In Samsun district centres, you can recognise the ownership of most businesses from their ethnic names or from the calendars with ethnic figures put up inside the shops. In big cities, people are less likely to flag themselves with such symbols, but it is still common for many to use ethnic phone melodies or wear jacket pins with flags of Adygeya or Abkhazia or traditionally dressed figures. Those from rural areas have a different experience of their identity in everyday life compared to those in big cities who work in multi-ethnic environments. In the rural context – as a returnee in Adygeya, Nesren (M50s) explains – there was an ethnic structure that everybody knew already:

I would prefer that the system practices oppression, but it doesn't do that...It has conceived us as one of their own. This was on purpose... That story, that story of Cherkess Ethem in school books, that also is on purpose. So that people are ashamed of their identity. We, for example, we reacted when Cherkess Ethem was named "traitor", we could argue with the teacher. Why? Because our Adyge identity was known. We lived there [Reyhanlı, Hatay, Turkey] as Adyge. It is a question of the ethnic structure. There are Arabs, Turkmen, and Adyge. But in Istanbul, Adana or Sakarya when Cherkess Ethem is called a traitor, it is not known who is a Cherkess, who is not. The teacher wouldn't know. Unless you show a reaction. One is ashamed,... so does not show a reaction. But in Reyhanlı you are already known. You show your reaction. My Adyge identity is already known. That's why I have to show my reaction.

As explained in the methodology chapter, despite the fact that I have made use of different networks to reach different Adyge and Abkhaz in the urban context, this study lacks the voice of those living in urban settlements, who do identify themselves as belonging to these ethnic groups but completely stay away from the diaspora organisations and do not have any connection to the homeland. However, both in the rural and urban areas where I have done fieldwork, this awareness about the banality of the flagging of ethnic identity is argued to be linked to relations with the motherland, in other words with transnationalism. Especially, the development of the Internet and telecommunication technologies in Turkey (and the Caucasus) has resulted in transnational virtual friendships, where the Adyge and Abkhaz from the diaspora find themselves ethnic kin, speaking-partners to practice their ethnic languages (or Russian), first-hand knowledge about the everyday life in the Caucasus, possible hosts for a future visit, job opportunities and even boys find possible partners for marriage in the homeland. This era has brought light to the Caucasian homeland for the diaspora.

The darkness, as recalled by a return migrant as the childhood image of the Caucasus, dissolved for many after their first visit to the homeland, but before many could travel back and forth, it was dissolved by the “visitors” who were bringing information from the homeland. The information varied a lot – both positive and negative – but was helpful to strengthen the image of the homeland with lots of questions that could be answered with a visit. In Bursa, a mother of a returnee asked me, as a researcher, how do I see life in the Caucasus, as her son always told positive things, but friends who visited recently talked very negatively. In the end she responded to her questions herself: “Everybody sees it by their own perception I guess. Am I right? The best is to go there and see for myself. Right? I want to go and see my son anyway, and then I will have my own opinion.”

Returnees, tourists and return migrants especially with increased back and forth movement of more people in the recent years, have more contradictory and variable accounts of the homeland. Many more who are eager to learn more first establish virtual links through the internet, and then perhaps plan and realise a visit to the homeland to have their own opinion. In the rural diaspora, on the other hand, the Caucasian homeland is still far far away, in the darkness, an unknown. In Samsun, in an Abkhaz village, the villagers were making jokes that they knew more about Germany compared to Abkhazia due to those who had worked there and retired back to the village. Where there were those who had settled in their Caucasian homelands, who frequently visited the villages of their birthplace, the knowledge

about the homeland was wider. Studies of return touristic visits to the homeland (Stephenson, 2002, Duval, 2003, Wagner, 2008, Tsuda, 2009b, King *et al.*, 2011, Ruting, 2012, Bhandari, 2013, Kaftanoglu and Timothy, 2013) argue that these visits unite the dispersed kin and help them reconnect with their roots. In the case of the Adyge and Abkhaz, the summer visits of the return migrants from the homeland into their villages and districts in Turkey, were a way to unite with the kin, who were dispersed in the urban and rural areas in Turkey, and have had some impact on creating a chain of ancestral return migration. Though returnees who visited their old urban homes and diaspora associations complained that “*nobody was interested in what we had to say when we visited Turkey*” (Sinef, F30s), in the village it was different. For example, in a village in Samsun, an elderly couple showed me ethnic presents (flag, traditional *bashlyk*, *kalpakh*, and musical instruments) that were carried from Adygeya every year by their nephew who lived there. Emef (M80s) and his wife Nefin (F70s) also explained to me they had some videos of the homeland and they had shown them to everyone from the village, when their nephew was visiting:

My nephew, when he came here, showed a video that he shot. Just like here, all forests. The boy who also went there to live, my nephew took him [to Adygeya], he had asked [when watching the video before settling there] we see all the beauty, all its forests. Isn't there any work place there? (Emef, M80s)

This short excerpt from the interview that took place in Circassian is important to direct attention one more time to generational differences, this time about the image of the homeland and return. While the older folk were happy to have a taste and vision of their homeland, the young generation was more interested in real life and their own opportunities to live there. The use of media for different forms of romanticised perception or imagination in the older and younger generations in the diaspora has been dealt by other studies before. For example, in his study of the Hmong diaspora's use of videos and DVDs, Lee (2006) states that the elderly are different from the younger generations as they do not have a similar longing for the homeland. He further argues that videos produce “borderless virtual communities” reminding the viewers who they were, who they are and who they can be in a collective, making “them feel that they are in touch with other Hmong people with whom they feel belonged” (Lee, 2006: 24-26). Kolar-Panov (1996: 291) also argues that videos are influential in the “formation, (re)invention or (re)negotiation, not only of individual cultural identity, but also in the formation of collective attitudes, values and aspirations, constantly reshaping and transforming the collective consciousness of cultural groups”. In this sense, the virtual media (in the form of videos, documentaries and pictures) play an important role in the

imagination of the homeland and the reproduction of diasporic identities, but does not necessarily directly motivate return. Instead, it helps to keep alive the nostalgic, mythic and mystic image of the homeland for the elderly who enjoy this virtual connection.

Going back to one of the key portrayals introduced in this chapter, Azamad (M40s) who had explained how his awareness of not belonging to Turkey had increased with his knowledge of Abkhazia, I want to get back to how the banal flaggings were transformed into transnational relations in the lives of the returnees. In the excerpt below, Azamad explains how his imagination of the homeland developed through people travelling back and forth, though he had little access to early visitors to the homeland due to the generational distance:

I started talking about these topics with anyone I met, especially the older folk, and in the end received information about our people's identity. After that something started forming in my mind, a desire started forming inside me, to see, to know the current situation in Abkhazia; it was impossible in those periods of course. There were very few people who went to Abkhazia from Turkey and came back. And they were above a certain age. In Turkey, communication between the elderly and the youth is deeply broken, you know that. They didn't bring us together, and didn't say we have been to our homeland and came back, we saw such a scene, there the situation is like this and that; no, they couldn't transfer to us any information. And we didn't have the base to go and ask them something... Whenever guests started to come from Abkhazia to Turkey, we started seeing them even just from a distance, we had maybe only for a very short time the chance to talk with them, only after that the place called Abkhazia, and that there are our people living there, came to reality. Because the thing that was told to us before was "there is no place left called Abkhazia, all our people were exiled, not a single living thing that belonged to us was left in those lands"; that was how we knew it... Small crumbs and pieces came together and in our minds and hearts, the image of Abkhazia formed... As we developed contacts with those that came and went from Abkhazia, we got their addresses, we got ABCs from them. We learned how to write in Abkhazian by ourselves. After with the letters they sent us, with small books, we developed ourselves in this field further. Only after that, there, the loosening up of the Soviets, the Gorbachov period, *perestroika*, *glasnost* period, those relations escalated.

So not only the back and forth movement of the diaspora, but also the mobility of the homeland Abkhaz and Adyge was influential in the diasporic identification and imagining of the homeland. In İnegöl, which is one of the first areas that established links with the homeland, Levan (M50s) explains how he was sent by his family to evaluate the conditions of return before the Abkhazian war. His father was dreaming of return to the homeland with all his family but Levan had not found the conditions suitable:

When we were young, there were no foreigners in the village, only our people. We tried to practice well our customs, our tradition, the way we saw from our old folk. And those who didn't were criticised, mostly by our elderly. Our motherland Caucasia was very far away, far away because of the regime there. It was far away in terms of distance as well. I mean, that was what I thought, I thought it was a long distance away, but in fact it is quite close... When the system there fell down, comings and goings started. After the war a group was going and I joined them. But I don't count that visit... We couldn't go around because of the security system. It was in fact my family who had sent me there. My elders were living then and they said go and see. If you say we can live there, then we'll all go. That's why I went. As I have told you, it is close by. But I saw this there. There was someone there, a relative. The day we were to return he came to the hotel... He asked me what I thought. I said that I could not find anything that I had been dreaming of. I had dreamed such things, concerning tradition, customs, and language. That they were much better than we were, much more advanced, practising everything. I thought that even things that we had forgotten were still living there. When I said these things, he sat down and explained to me the reasons. Then I was convinced. I was convinced; I understood that they were under great distress.

Many studies (Gmelch, 1992, Kim, 2009, Tsuda, 2009b) have argued that the "imagined homelands" (Clifford, 1997) are not found with return migration, parallel to Levan's narrative. Diasporas have romanticised dreams of an ideal homeland, where all the traditions are lived as in the old days, without any change in time. In the homeland, I have heard many complaints from the migrants such as this one: "they come from the diaspora thinking everyone goes around on horses and *cherkeska* (traditional dress) but then complain that the city is not a metropolitan city" (Sas, F30s). As I was walking to the city centre on the Republic Day of Adygeya in 2011, the sight of young boys in traditional clothes on horses (see photo 1 in Appendix F) as part of the celebrations reminded me of this repeated complaint. For those who came on that very day, *the imagined homeland* would indeed seem as it was imagined. Many try to visit the homeland on these special occasions, such as festivals or national celebrations as well as ethnic organisations' meetings, to see some traditional events, to be part of a bigger dynamic, where the ethnic identity is at the centre of everyday life. Despite the fact that it is harder to find cheap accommodation and cheap flights during these periods, many prefer to take the journey together, for safety and language reasons. I will get back to the narratives of those first journeys in the next chapter but here I would like to bring to attention the transnationalisation of the diaspora (Vertovec and Cohen, 1999, Bernal, 2006, Bauböck and Faist, 2010, Faist, 2010, Tölölyan, 2010) through such journeys and how people start to be involved in two *homes* at once. Maze (F20s) and Tameris (F50s), the mother and daughter portrayals, both visited the Caucasus on such special

occasions. Tameris explains her first visit was as part of a transnational art project, when they visited Adygeya for an exhibition:

I took handicrafts for an exhibition in Maykop. At first, I didn't have time because of working intensively, but then I was very much impressed. Once I was there, I thought, I could have come before. Now once you are on the plane, in two hours you are there. You don't think like that, you think of it as a big thing in your mind... Now I will go back and forth and take many people with me... I had some disappointments, such as on the 5th of October [Republican Day of Adygeya], they made the speeches in Russian [not in Circassian]. I was there to listen and was ready to get emotional. I couldn't understand a thing. I didn't feel the emotions.

Despite her disappointment in not finding what she expected in her homeland – the emotions that would have appeared with the hearing of the ethnic language – Tameris sent her daughter without a second thought when she had an invitation to attend an event and for a job meeting in the Caucasus:

If my daughter wants to live in Caucasia, that's her most natural right. Would I really want it? Yes. Well, that's what my tongue says, but of course in my heart I want her to be here with me. Some time ago there was a job offer. We discussed that a lot at home. We sent her there. That was her first time abroad. If it was Britain, I wouldn't have sent her. But it was Caucasia. It is like your own home. I had thought that my daughter should go and see for herself. At home we don't exaggerate this issue. It would be good to go and see... but it is not a necessity. It is like, what it should be, what is most natural..

Janset (F20s), the other young woman portrayal, explains how at first a friend, who had been there before, was influential in their decision to come and apply for a residence permit in Adygeya and how it felt like an end-point (a radical thought) to dream of coming to the homeland when you do not have someone to connect you there:

The development of our relation to here [Adygeya]... is definitely influenced by the start of the plane route Krasnodar-Istanbul-Krasnodar, with a cheap price campaign, making the inaccessible accessible. Besides that, before we came here, a friend of ours, I think 6 months ago, came here and applied for a living permit; because of the courage it gave us, we came like this. The most important thing is, we are going to the inaccessible, but we didn't know what we would face there, who we would meet. The people who met us here hosted us... their interest, care and because they told us things (their stories) we got very connected to here. If they had not taken us like a family, if people like them had not helped us, I think we would have come here somehow, look around and go back.

I finish with another extract from the narrative of Tameris, who takes an active role in the return projects of her local diaspora organisation. She argues that establishment of transnational links and frequent visits will naturally lead to return migration:

I want to go there for good, too. But more, I want everyone here to turn their faces to the homeland. You say “come on, let’s go” but it is not that easy to go as to say it. There is a need to prepare the infrastructure. There is a necessity to help those who want to settle. Come on let’s return, is not real. Since I have been involved in the homeland group in the association, I am making realistic projects, such as taking students. We have organised a very professional trade trip taking lots of diaspora business firms to meet with the firms from there. We are organising a trip for the 5th of October celebrations with a wide range of people’s attendance. It is important to open the road for the young generation, teaching them the culture and the languages that will connect them to the homeland.

4.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored diasporic community consciousness, and how individual experiences especially during childhood and youth have been influential in the identity formation of the Adyge-Abkhaz in Turkey. The narratives of the returnees and diasporas circulated around three key topics: the questioning of belonging to the places/country of birth; the associations and close-knit rural communities; and the banal flagging that leads to the first journeys to the homeland.

Both in rural and the urban settlements, the Adyge and Abkhaz experienced their ethno-political socialisation and ethnic identification at early ages. In the urban context, the feeling of otherness was created by the first encounter with the other as a child. A majority of the participants in this study reflected upon how, as children, they had faced the Turkish nationalisation policies through school books and the student pledge. They had problems with discriminatory teachers for speaking their ethnic languages, and the new generation grew up without knowing the languages. Today, in the young diaspora, who are younger than 40, it is rare to come across someone who knows the Circassian or Abkhazian languages. Those who grew up in multi-ethnic communities felt the challenges and benefits of their ethnic identity in their everyday life before adolescence, growing up with a salient ethnic identity. In the close-knit rural communities it was the ethnic etiquette reflected in everyday practices. With increased rural-urban migration, the challenges of identity increased for the Adyge and Abkhaz. “(C)onceptualisation of diaspora – similar to the conceptualisation of other kinds of identity groups – should put equal emphasis on the institutions and agents that produce the

kind of consciousness in question” (Sökefeld and Schwalgin, 2000: 28). The establishment of the diaspora associations created a group of Adyge-Abkhaz who grew up, shaped their thoughts, became part of a community, and got involved in a variety of political, social and cultural activities in these places. My study, using a direct translation of a made-up word by a transnational diaspora member in Turkish, has referred to them as the *associationists*.

It must be remembered that the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora, like the Jews or the Armenians, have “a continuum of ethnicity ranging from assimilationism to intense ethno-political mobilisation” (Safran, 1991: 84) and many are highly integrated into Turkish society despite their salient ethnic identities. Still, many of those took active part in diaspora organisations, and imagined or planned to return-migrate, and some did return, usually after retirement.

Kasinitz *et al.* (2002: 111) in their study of return to Caribbean found out that “those who belong to ethnic organizations” and those “working with other ethnic groups” were “more likely to exhibit strong transnational practices”. The *associationists* had established links with the homeland at early ages, first through guests who came from the homeland, and then joining groups (mainly of dance ensembles) that visit the homeland. Some of the *associationists* whose families had the mythical image of the homeland, or who were among the *returnists* of the 1970s and 1980s cadres in the associations, return-migrated to their homeland as soon as the doors were opened. The late 1990s saw a stagnation period in terms of relations with the homeland. Nevertheless, as the theory on transnationalism suggests, with cheaper and increased transportation and communication technologies, the Caucasian homeland became much more accessible for the diaspora. In terms of “work” as stated before, at the district level where ethnic identity mattered in everyday life, businesses divided between different ethnicities (such as in İnegöl) and ethnic community support is sought frequently, the Adyge-Abkhaz had a stronger community consciousness and deeper and more emotional questioning of belonging to the diasporic “home”.

Living in the diaspora, today, a majority of Adyge and Abkhaz who either have a dream to settle down in the homeland one day, or who have plans to have at least a foot there for the rest of their lives, are involved in a variety of activities that connect them to their ancestral homes. These include being involved in economic activities with partners here and there; political activities such as involvement in ethnic organisations that have links in the homeland; through cultural visits such as musical, art or dance festivals that diaspora groups perform; and also visits to friends and relatives who have settled there, or were found with the

back and forth movement, or through the internet. The next chapter looks at the journey to the ancestral homeland, taking the issue from diaspora transnationalism to transnational mobility.

CHAPTER 5

RETURN MIGRATION: FIRST FOOT IN THE HOMELAND

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, through the narratives of returnees and those who have been to the Caucasus at least once, I analyse the role of the journey of return. The feeling of belonging to the homeland from the first visit, the negative experiences of the journeys including the gendered aspects of return migration, as well as the feeling of being in-between that the journeys create, are some of the topics that will be covered in this chapter. The homeland bureaucracy of citizenship and living permits, and how the diaspora deals with these, are also going to be covered.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the development of information technologies has been influential in increasing knowledge about the Caucasus and in connecting the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora to their homeland. The relation between diaspora and communication technologies has been studied widely. For example, in her study of the Eritrean diaspora's use of "cyberspace" Bernal (2006: 175) argues that it helps "in creating community" by "constructing a shared national and virtual history". Wenjing's (2005) research on diasporas and the internet suggests that electronic communities providing imagined connections motivate attachment to the homeland. "Transnational migrants create new outlets for social interaction" through new ICT, suggests Panagakos and Horst's (2006) paper that analyses a variety of research on diasporas and use of communication technologies (from watching satellite TV to internet). Here, continuing from the last chapter, I will talk about the *imagined return* (Oxfeld and Long, 2004) of the 20th century vs. the *virtual return* (Hanafi, 2008) of the 21st century. It is obvious that "the impact of new media is to allow universal virtual access to the homeland when physical access is unattainable" (Hanafi, 2008: 152) and "new media (like the Internet) facilitate the connectivity of the diaspora with the place of origin and the concept of the homeland, so that virtual returns may be as significant as real ones" (Hanafi, 2008: 131). For the Adyge and Abkhaz, there are several things that limit access to the historical homeland. These are directly connected with the international regional politics and local conditions. As mentioned before in Chapter 2, there is a clear accessibility difference between Abkhazia and Adygeya, the latter being regulated by the laws of the Russian Federation and the former having a contested independent status. Though both

international and local politics are important factors in making the homeland unattainable, there are also borders in people's minds limiting their desire to visit the ancestral homeland. These are usually based on misinformation and prejudices.

In a village in Inegöl, where I had a chance to interview an elderly father and his son, the son disagrees with the "truth about religion in the homeland" that his father states. Miyazawa (2009) writes about the challenging role of those who have first-hand knowledge of the Caucasus. However, this time the challenge does not come from direct experience of the homeland, but from politicised knowledge of a more conservative young generation. The following conversation is between Naur (M80s), Batal (M30s) and me with the focus on the topic of religious difference in the Abkhaz homeland:

Naur: I don't really know how they live there. Those who go back and forth talk highly. But there is no Muslimhood in Abkhazia. Our ancestors who came from there, they learned it here. The Democratic Party was established and they brought Islam to our people. We were children and I remember they were reading the Quran in secrecy. They didn't know how to read and write in the Caucasus. Our grandfathers came as children, they didn't know anything.

Batal: They were Muslims there. Everybody was in fear of their lives. They didn't have time to deal with religion.

Naur: No they were not Muslims there. There was no religion there... We have nothing to learn from going to Abkhazia now. Those who went are away from religion. Those who cannot make ends meet here are the ones that went there.

Me: What would you say if your son would go there?

Naur: He will go, see, and come back. What will he learn from there by living there? We are believers of Islam, we know our religion. Our village is one of the earliest that became devoted [Muslims]... There they live with the help of Russia. The Soviets help them for everything. [...]

Batal: We have lived here all our lives, we have seen the life here... If Islam would spread there, that would be to their benefit. Politics in relation to the strong neighbour Russia is right. But why does Turkey support the politics of Georgia? I have been interested about the Caucasus since I learned reading and writing.

In a private conversation soon after this discussion, Batal adds "*Our people have always been Muslims. Father doesn't remember well*". In the diaspora, there is a widespread belief that the communists have exiled the Circassians. As explained in Chapter 2, this is partly true since the deportation of the people from the Caucasus lasted till after the Bolshevik revolution, and during Stalin's time many who could run away made their way to the Turkish

Republic to join their ethnic communities living in the diaspora. The *big exile*, on the other hand, took place long before the communist regime; but in both the homeland and the diaspora, after the third generation there was a strong disinformation policy about the reasons and conditions of this migration. In the diaspora, the North Caucasian émigrés were said to have run away from the communists because they were Muslims; while the Soviet education argued that those who believed that the Ottoman lands provided higher productivity (and welfare) left for the diaspora. Throughout my research I have listened to a variety of such arguments that are not consistent with historically known facts. However, in the above case it is important to note that the older interviewee is more aware of the history, while the younger, though he has been following recent developments in the region, is unaware of the history. Also, the above interactive exchange points out the religious differences among those who stayed in the homeland and those who are in the diaspora, the former being Christians or *different* Muslims, the latter being strong Muslims. So in this regard religion come forward as a border in Adyge-Abkhaz communities' more conservative members. Moving beyond these borders increases with internet use and direct communication with the homeland communities.

5.2 Portrayals

In this section I introduce a few more portrayals to join the previous returnees from Abkhazia (Azamad) and the three women from the diaspora (Maze, Tameris and Janset). Here we will get to know Sine, Setenay and Jan – who are transnational migrants who frequently travel back and forth; and Mafè who is a returnee from Adygeya. Jan and Setenay were selected as they each have a separate life history narrative that takes and connects them to the Caucasian homeland. Sine was selected as she was a solo returnee to Abkhazia at some point, while now she has a more mobile life in between the Caucasus and Turkey. Mafè is a daughter of a returnee family, who was taken along at the age of 18, though she explains this as part of a long-term plan.

5.2.1 Sine

In her early 30s, Sine is an Abkhaz who grew up in a small town in Eastern Turkey. She spends time in Abkhazia occasionally, sometimes staying there for many months with friends and relatives. She speaks Abkhazian and Russian, and has higher education. Her field of education, however, has not been very useful in finding a job in Abkhazia, so during her time there, she has worked in some other fields, which led her to continue her education in a field

that will increase her chances of getting employment there, or in her own words “for Abkhazia”.

Abkhazia is at the centre of my life. But going there to stay, I cannot see it in the next few years. A few things need to be clarified in my life. And some things need to settle down in Abkhazia.

Despite the fact that she does not live in Abkhazia at the moment, she says that there is no day in her life that is without Abkhazia. She follows the news, is closely interested in national and international politics, keeps social and cultural contacts with people she knows from her time there, has been involved in trade between Turkey and Abkhazia, and spends all her holidays there. She calls her hosts there “my closest family” when she recalls her time in Abkhazia.

Sine’s constant movement between her family, education/employment and homeland is an example of the transnational Adyge-Abkhaz youth, divided between their dreams and economic realities, as well as their real and adopted families.

I knew Sine for many years and we had occasionally met both in Abkhazia and Turkey, keeping in touch through the internet most of the time. She was interested in my research from its early phases and I had let her know that I was coming to her place of residence some time before. Sending her a message was in my mind, but she saw me in the street by chance. She agreed to be interviewed in a few days and I first met with her in a restaurant but some of her friends were also there so we agreed to meet at another time. Next time we met in a cafe-pub, where we spent many hours talking. At one point in our talk I realised that the place had become crowded and we were shouting to make sure the other was able to hear.

5.2.2 Mafe

Mafe (F30s) had return-migrated with her family and built her life in Adygeya. She too has higher education, a job that she likes, a husband and children, and spends a lot of time on voluntary work for the diaspora and return migrants. She was not asked if she wanted to return-migrate by her family, but she does not have any complaints about that. Later in her narrative we will hear in detail how she thinks of this migration as a very bold act by her father, but here she relates how, as a child, she always knew she was going to migrate to the Caucasus:

We always knew that we would come to the Caucasus one day. I don’t even remember when it was first discussed. My father always had this wish and desire. We always knew that if the conditions permitted, we would one day live

in the Caucasus. We grew up with this consciousness. I don't even remember when it first started. I guess that was how we were raised.

Mafe's narrative reminds us of Azamad's (M40s, early returnee portrayal from Abkhazia), as she always makes the comparison of recent return migration and return in the early period; her narrative is rich in analyses of the current situation in the diaspora and in the homeland. She compares the somehow traumatic experience of the journeys in the early years between the homeland and the diaspora, to her holiday visits in the recent years. As her life and age permit, she develops a new kind of transnationalism, from the homeland towards the diaspora. This we will further see in the next chapter, but here, in this one, she reflects upon the idealistic decision of her family to return-migrate.

I met Mafe initially in 2005, during my master's research in Adygeya. Our second meeting was in 2008 at the airport as I travelled between Abkhazia and Turkey through the Krasnodar airport near Adygeya. We kept in constant contact through the internet during the coming years. When I went to Adygeya for my field work, she was happy to help me with my research, as she thought this study was important and also because she wanted to help me as a friend. Mafe did not hesitate to be interviewed in the first possible instant and occasionally came with propositions and stories which were of interest to my study. She also suggested to me to talk with many people, telling the peculiarities of their return experiences which she had observed through the years.

5.2.3 Jan and Setenay

Jan (M40s) and Setenay (F30s) are a transnational returnee couple who have lived in Adygeya for a while. Today, they live with their children in a metropolitan city in Turkey. Jan can be counted among the associationists who were discussed in Chapter 4. He had spent a lot of time as a young student in one of the associations where his returnist ideals were shaped. Setenay, on the other hand, explains that, as she was from a big family, she had never felt the need of the association. But her village connections helped her develop her knowledge of the traditional culture and learn the ethnic code of behaviour.

Jan visited the Caucasus for the first time in the early period, as one of the young dancers of the association's dance ensemble. Travelling around the Caucasus, he liked it very much. Setenay went for the first time with Jan in the early 2000s. Like Sine, when they went there, they thought that they could live there. However, because of private reasons they came

back to Turkey. Their current approach is a more transnational one, spending their holidays there, taking friends and relatives to the Caucasus. They have a foot in the homeland:

The people we can call the ideological leaders [in Adygeya], they all told us: “turn your faces towards the homeland, there is only one Adygeya for the Adyge. Remember that. Come for the summer holidays. Bring along your acquaintances.” We didn’t do it because they told us, but because we also wanted to. (Jan M40s)

One doesn’t need to go [to the homeland] every year, at least every two years, every three years. If you put a foot there, children [occasionally] living/growing up there, will at least not feel strangers, will develop a connection, a different perspective than a 18-20 year old who is critical in the first instance. It will have a place in their memory. (Setenay F30s)

Jan and Setenay, who I knew from Adygeya, Abkhazia and Turkey, wanted to be interviewed together. They both had a lot of things to contribute to the study of return migration to the Caucasus, as they had “lived it” in different aspects. They have family, close friends and many memories of a life both in Abkhazia and Adygeya, giving them a stronger understanding of the transnationalism of the new generation, and themselves. However, at some point in his account Jan admits that he questions the fact that they are building sacred spaces for their children in between the diaspora and the homeland.

5.3 Going into a Fairy Tale: The first Journey to the Ancestral Homeland

It has been argued that “the transnational ethnic ties that channel diasporic return migrants to their ethnic homelands are based on an imagined, nostalgic ethnic affinity to an ancestral country that most have never visited” (Tsuda, 2009d: 25). The first visits back are very much influenced by this imagination and the good experiences of the homeland during those first visits trigger the decision to return permanently. However, “(m)any migrants later discovered... that perceptions of home acquired during these short holiday visits could be deceptive” especially those acquired over the festive atmosphere (Gmelch, 1992: 287).

Memories of first journeys to the ancestral homeland stay in the minds of people in detail. The Adyge-Abkhaz remember the interwoven realities of the hardships and beauty of those first steps in the homeland. For a majority of the people, the first step to the homeland is imagined and re-imagined during childhood years through tales of the far-away home in the Caucasian mountains. Azamad (M40s) told before about the generational gap that limited his personal access to those who have been to the homeland, and also how information on the homeland increased as people started travelling back and forth. The associations were also

influential in the imagined first steps in the homeland, as they made frequent organisations in the diaspora to invite dancers, singers, academicians and politicians from the homeland and with tours to the Caucasian homeland that they organised for cultural and socio-political events. The narratives below are in most cases summarised versions of the original longer accounts. Even those who have made this journey in the early 1990s said they remembered every detail of that first journey. I start with Azamad's organisation of his first journey and the decision to realise his dream to return-migrate:

We were going to the association at that time... It was a matter of a trainer, a teacher being invited from Abkhazia. There it was planned to organise a dance ensemble and their invitation to Abkhazia. The teacher stayed in Turkey for 6 months. It was a really big ensemble, at that time, of 70-80 people. That ensemble was invited to Abkhazia. And at that time it was real hard to get a visa, to come and go. [Me: which year was that?] It was in 1990. [Calls to his wife: Was it 90? Wife: Yes 90, in summer.] Year 1990, we came with two buses to Abkhazia... That ensemble gave concerts in Abkhazia, in Karachai-Cherkess, in Adygeya, in Kabardey. The ensemble travelled around those regions and went back. Now think, till that time only the elderly were coming back and forth. Only in that ensemble there were around 70 young people aged between 18-20, a young group of that size coming to their homeland and giving concerts in different places, not only in the capital. Including the villages in a wide geography...

When I asked Azamad if he remembered the details of that first journey, he tells a very emotional story of those days which felt like a "fairy tale" for him:

When I think about that journey now, it was already like a fairy tale. I don't remember anyone sleeping from the moment we were *en route*... [My father got sick and I was thinking not to come] he said to me "my life was spent serving my society. Personal things cannot be considered. I will not give my blessing to you if you don't go. You will go", he said. He knew how much I wanted to see Abkhazia, I wanted to come... Otherwise I may not have come... Time here passed like a fairy tale. We came without sleeping at all... With the information we had from the maps before, we were finding the way by ourselves from our minds. Because there, there was nothing written other than in Georgian, you cannot read, understand. In the end... from the photos we had seen before, we understood that was the border bridge, and I remember it as it is today. We woke anyone who was sleeping, two buses shouting in joy, already the buses had Abkhazian flags, Adyge flags... People were looking at us in surprise: who are these people, what kind of a thing is this?

In the above quote, clearly, the homeland imagined through maps and photos is found. It is also important to note that a father on his death-bed asks his son to leave for the homeland as this is a social responsibility he has towards the 60-70 people that were

expecting him to make this journey. Azamad next touches upon the lack of communication between the homeland and the diaspora, and then continues with what he sees as possibly a *unique* communication between the people in the homeland and the diaspora when they meet face-to-face:

At the central square, in that big area people had come together to wait for the ensemble. And a few times they were told that they arrived, they didn't arrive, this happened that happened, etc. There wasn't phone communication like today at that time. It was under very hard conditions. There was something called telex. If you can you communicate with telex, or you don't communicate. For that reason, and since they were receiving very different news, they are coming, going, they are dispersed then come together again, even like that there was an incredible community that met the ensemble at their arrival. It is not important who knows who. Whoever meets another, they hug. They are on one side happy, on the other side they are crying. What an interesting thing this is. I don't know if in any other nation something like this was lived through, but now they are playing music because of joy, dancing national dances, those men, dancing with joy and at the same time tears flow from their eyes. [His eyes are also full of tears, he looks away].

The experience of the first step in the homeland is compared to an unforgettable flavour by Azamad further on in his narrative:

They were interesting times. Really, to have lived that period, even now when one remembers, it is as if you eat a really delicious food and the taste stays in your mouth, even after years you feel the taste when you remember. It doesn't tell exactly [the full story] but I can say something like that. Really, I feel very lucky to have lived through those periods. I mean, those of our people who have not lived that moment, that period, I think it's a big loss. They missed a lot. Both the people here, the way they hugged their brothers and sisters who came from the diaspora, to approach with so much love. I don't believe any of that was fake, I don't think they were done just to be done. There was no need for that. Also, the way those that came from Turkey hugged their [ethnic] siblings here with so much sincerity. There is nothing to describe that. I, if I say this in my own name, I still live the same feeling in Abkhazia. [silence falls for a while]. That love, that warmth. [silence]. It made me emotional. [He sniffs].

This "love" and "warmth" was sought by many in recent years, as the excitement of the early welcomes have faded away. In the early period, anyone who came from the diaspora would have been met with a banquet thrown by their extended families (similar to Vietnamese or Chinese returnees referred by Oxfeld and Long, 2004: 9). Still, the recent visitors to the homeland (or those who dream of visiting) had very strong feelings of this mobility, and they talk about sacred feelings. Tameris (F50s), for example, the mother portrayal that was

introduced in the previous chapter, explains the familiarity of the homeland and how she felt at home in her first visit:

The first time I went to Maykop, it was for a project. I was very impressed. Before I didn't have the chance for I was working hard. When I went there, "I could have easily come earlier," I thought. Take a plane and you are there in two hours. You don't realise that, it seems difficult. I now have friends there. I go more often, take more people there with me... When I first went there, I was very disappointed about language. They will also lose the language, like we did here.[...] I had this advantage of having a lot of close friends there. Friends I knew from my association work of 30 years ago. It was like going to a Cherkess village. The moment you arrive there you feel as if you are from there, there is something that surrounds you. I feel like a stranger even when I visit another city. However in Maykop I feel like I know every corner. These are things that you experience, not to explain. I didn't feel out of place even though it was very different.

Later she compares her first visit to the homeland to being a pilgrim:

You can't find there a lot of things that you find in a metropolis: places to eat, shopping malls, vitality, hotels. The routines of households are different. But different from what we experience here, not different from their [our] culture. For example, the way they treat a guest is different, but the culture of treating a guest is the same. If you go to Reyhanlı, Eskişehir, Samsun you see that the way the Cherkess arrange their homes, their gardens are similar. Here, I found the same style, the attitude, the ideas are the same. It's easy to find what I experienced in my youth. [...] When I was flying back, like the pilgrims, I was planning when I would return there.

Similarly, in a conversation in an Adyge village (Samsun), while talking about those who constantly travel back and forth from their community, Timaf (M60s) also compares going to the homeland to going to Mecca for pilgrimage:

We have a friend who goes back and forth all the time. There is also another person; he also goes to Adygeya all the time. Who else is going? From one of the smaller families, one boy lives in Adygeya; he said he found their relatives there.

Me: Are you curious about the Caucasus?

Timaf: [indicating the younger Adyge from the neighbouring village] He says let's go as pilgrims to Mecca, I say let's go to the Caucasus [saying in jest, followed by lots of laughs and jokes]. (M60s)

Alkhas (M50s), a returnee in Abkhazia, also compared the return migration to the homeland to going like a pilgrim, but from another perspective:

When coming here, when leaving your home, you leave people behind. They stay there, you come here. They were sad, ill at ease. But I felt something inside, I don't know how to explain, it was like... people who go on the pilgrimage to Mecca, they have this strength inside, they feel this joy...

The visit to the homeland is seen as a spiritual experience by the elderly, but the younger returnees also refer to the familiarity of the places that they have never been. Tameris's daughter Maze (F20s), and Sine (F30s) who had decided to settle in the homeland during her first visit, both refer to such a feeling. First below, a long excerpt from Maze where she explains the homey feeling of that first journey, during an international Adyge assembly meeting that she was selected as a representative from the diaspora:

Caucasia had always been in my life but I must have not been aware of it... When I flew to the Caucasus friends came to the airport to pick me up. When we arrived in the square at the city centre, I sighed and said "Oh I have missed it so much." I wasn't aware of what I was saying, it just slipped out. A place I had never been before, but you take a deep breath and feel good... that's how I felt. I really felt that I had missed it. Obviously, someone can miss a place that she has never seen before or feel that one belongs there. It felt strange. Later I went to a European country. I understood that it wasn't a question of leaving your place, going somewhere alone, because I felt distressed in Europe. It was more luxurious... much more freedom, I was always with strangers, had a lot of fun... [Europe] had to be much better, but I was bored there and wanted to come back. But in the Caucasus it was not like that. One felt part of it. Nevertheless, you have this feeling of being in-between. You are there, you feel happy, but on the other hand, all your family, friends, loved-ones are here. There is this feeling that something is missing, is incomplete... I felt that I belonged there.

Maze's narrative is surrounded with a detailed questioning of belonging here and there. The feeling of going home is also repeated by Sine, one of the new portrayals who we met in this chapter. Sine went to Abkhazia for the first time in her early 20s, as a recent university graduate:

During university years, you start visiting the association and your interest increases. On the other hand, there are stories that your father tells. You see the passion in his eyes. You are more and more curious. I wanted to go there for some years; at last I could. You know what, Cemre, it was not at all like going to a touristic excursion, or to vacation. I felt like I was going home.

Sine not only explains the feeling of going home, but also the role of the ethnic upbringing and the role of associations in her decision to return. There were some who had come to the Caucasus for the first time, directly to settle. Both narratives below are from two early-period

family returnees, that of Mafè (F30s) in Adygeya who is one of the portrayals introduced in this chapter, and later that of Amra (F70s) who I interviewed in her family home in Abkhazia:

Me: Can you tell a bit more about your coming here? How did you leave your life there?

Mafè: We did that very simply, we sold all we had. We had a car that my father had bought with his retirement gratuity. Father sold that to use the money for the travel expenses. We loaded all our furniture in a lorry. Mother had a workshop. We loaded all the machines from the workshop as well. We said goodbye to all the people we knew. They all came to the bus station to see us off. We took the boat and came here. There wasn't much that was thought over, inquired or discussed. We took a simple decision to come and we came. Nothing before or after. We didn't have long discussions on it. My father was a very bold person. I now think it over. The Russia of twenty years ago, the Soviet Union had just collapsed. There were bread queues. Shops were empty. Coming to such a country from urban Turkey, together with his extended family, without a job, without any perspective, it is something that takes courage. Thinking it over now, I tell my father as well, I tell him that he was very bold. I ask myself, could I take my children and go to a country that I don't know anything about? I don't think so. One has to have a strong ideological background in order to take such a step. My father never complained, never said anything when faced with problems...

Amra's (F70s) first journey to settle in post-war Abkhazia was also thought about vaguely by her family but she was receptive to the possible conditions they would face in a post-war state, though she now thinks she was not well prepared despite all the preparations that had not lasted for long:

We went to the *Demographia*. The president [of *Demographia*] said for now you sit in the hotel. We will get rid of this crowd, then we will look for a home for you. Second day, my local relatives had heard of me, they found me... Then they found this house, brought us here, settled us in. I had bought from there [Turkey] many many things, sugar, I don't know, forgot now. Sugar I had gotten, tea I had gotten, tea pot, ceramic tea pot... But I came here, I never thought of bringing a cooker. Where will I make the tea? I light up a fire in the garden, it doesn't work... I asked somebody from Turkey who works at the *Demographia*, where am I gonna find a cooker. There is no Abkhazian word, I don't know the Russian word.

The above narratives are crucial in terms of their gendered perspective. Mafè's narrative about moving to the unknown and the courage it required, and that as a mother she would not have done it, is a feeling repeated by a few other women. In fact, over the years, I have heard many stories about mothers, who, having seen the hardships of life in the homeland or not finding the education or health infrastructure good enough, had re-returned with their children

to where they had come from, or to their parents' home in Turkey; sometimes getting a divorce and sometimes dragging their husbands along, too. It is noteworthy that Amra's narrative of not being receptive enough about the conditions of the homeland is not a complaint, but is about not being ready enough for the unexpected due to lack of language and knowledge of the local everyday life, which was the case especially in the early and stagnation period. Back in 2007, I had observed a (then) recent returnee family who had lived through considerable hardship in their move to Abkhazia. When I subsequently asked to talk with them in 2011 about their first arrival, they told me the story of that move as if it was a very normal process:

When we got on the road there was no ship going so we waited in the car for three days. Our things would be transferred to Abkhazia and we travelled to Sochi from Trabzon with the ship¹⁹. We were on our own. A boy from here came to meet us at the port. We first stayed in a hotel of a return migrant, then we were moved to the guest house of the Committee of Repatriation, then we moved to the houses. You already know the rest... Our stuff arrived one week later. Thankfully they were all broken, as I didn't have a place to put them. At first I went crazy, a hell a lot of money we spent [to bring them], one gets sad of course, they all fell apart. I wish these [showing the sofas we sit on] would have also fallen apart. I would have new ones. (Dijan, F40s)

When I reminded her in detail how she had reacted to the breaking of some of her furniture as they were unloading it from the ship, she just said "*all that is behind, I don't remember those days any more*". Though Dijan was keen not to be reminded of that hardship, in the next section we will hear more women talking about the hardship of the journeys they had to make both because of the conditions of the time but also due to the political/legal limitations of mobility.

5.4 Political and Legal Dimensions of the Return Journey

"Transnational practices generated by the diaspora will presumably be affected by national policy and by states acting across national borders" (Olsson, 2012: 179). One of the research questions this study tries to answer is: "Are political factors important in the decision to return?". In this section, through the narratives of journeys to the homeland, I try to answer part of this question. Before, in Section 4.3, the role of Turkish policies towards non-Turkic groups and how this had created a feeling of not-belonging to *here* (Turkey) and feelings of

¹⁹ The direct ship to Abkhazia does not accept people as this journey is a contested journey and regarded as illegal by Georgia. The cargo ships to Abkhazia take a long route along the Russian coasts to not to be taken in by Georgian forces though occasionally this happens. So those who want to travel by sea, take a ship to Sochi, Russia – a cargo ferry that accepts human passengers – and then take the road to the Abkhazian border.

connectedness to the homeland was discussed. However, this connectedness to the homeland is not always easily constructed. In Chapter 2, I tried to explain how the Adyge and Abkhaz reconnected with their Soviet and post-Soviet homeland after the 1970s. I had also mentioned that Adygeya and Abkhazia are two Republics that have different political realities. Yet the ideological heritage of the Soviet Union is alive in both: “(t)he idea of ethnically based nations... The Universal conceptions of republican membership or the idea of the “melting-pot” are not popular in any of the Soviet successor states” (Vishnevsky, 2003: 172). In this sense the return of the ethnic peoples is very crucial for the Adyge-Abkhaz to continue their nation/statehood. But, Adygeya does not have the freedom to call upon its diaspora to return-migrate as it is ruled by the laws and regulations of the Russian Federation (RF), where “the way migration is framed at the official or state level has impacted upon local-level migrant resettlement” (Flynn *et al.*, 2003: 184). So how is migration framed in RF? Initially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, RF “demonstrated a fairly liberal and humanitarian approach” where “all ethnic groups with a cultural and historical link to Russia were ‘diasporised’ through a growing reference to the Russian-speaking minorities in the former republics as ‘compatriots’ (*sootchestvenniki*)” (Flynn, 2007: 464-465). I already stated that after 1995 no Adyge return migrants received citizenship as migrants. This is due to amendments to the law which changed the definitions of migration and brought in provisions to control and regulate migration flows.

Below there will be excerpts from the narrative of Janset (F20s), the transnational portrayal, who has applied to get a living permit in Adygeya and where she would complain about not knowing the rules that are frequently changing during the process (with possibly arbitrary applications). However, I would first like to start with a quote from a conversation in a return migrant’s restaurant where a recent returnee complained to me when he found out I was working on “return migration”:

Live an identity crisis all your life in Turkey, come here, bring documents from Turkey to prove you are an Adyge. We have been trying to prove who we are for 200 years. How can an institution decide who we are? We don’t suffer this much in Turkey. (Kuban, M50s)

Maze (F20s) and Sine (F30s), who earlier told of their *journey home*, will later narrate how hard it was to reach that *home*; but both had also felt that they were respected by their homeland administrations. Before relating their journey home, I would first like to focus on a *journey of going out of the homeland*. Mafe (F30s) and Jane (F40s), two women, remembered

the hardships of going back and forth when I asked them about their first journeys. Mafé was going to Turkey to visit relatives every summer, while Jane was going to Abkhazia every year to visit the half of the family living there. Mafé's long narrative is about the challenging journey that they needed to make every year:

Every year at least once we went [to Turkey]. Taking the Sochi route. [Laughs]. We have lots of memories there as well. Even yesterday, we were talking with a friend, about those adventures; going to Turkey was such a big adventure for us. We reached there in one week sometimes. It was a problem to travel to Sochi from here. It was hard to get to the train station [outside of Adygeya]. Catching that train and travelling to Sochi, waiting for that ship in Sochi for days, sleeping in parks. Getting on the ship, the ship wouldn't take off for days. On the ship, we were caught up with a storm in the open sea. How to say, reaching to Trabzon [a city in Turkey], then from Trabzon taking other buses to go to other cities, for days, 5 days, 6 days, 7 days... We could reach Turkey through very hard journeys. For that reason, going to Turkey was a big event. Now everything is cheaper. Now if you decide tonight, the next day you can be in Istanbul. There is plane each and every day for affordable prices. For that reason... now "return" is different. There were lots of people who couldn't go to their mother's, father's funerals. For example, we didn't have passports. The living permit required visas. We were waiting for weeks to get that visa... People couldn't catch their mother's, father's funerals, they didn't even learn about it. They knew that it was not possible to come, so they thought it was best not to tell, to not make that person suffer. Even there wasn't the phone... We had a life like in the medieval ages. How to tell you? Others must have told already but we had to register three days before to make a phone call. We had to wait till mornings for three days, for that call to be connected for example. We lived through all these things. I don't know when life was like that in Turkey, maybe... 50-60 years ago. As if when we came here, history, time was rewound [back].

Below is another narrative about a journey a woman had to make due to document problems. Jane's (F40s) narrative is about an illegal route she had to take. She was questioned for a whole day because of a problem in her Abkhazian documents by the Russian border police and the internal security team at the Abkhazia-Russia border crossing in the late 1990s, when crossing of non-Abkhazian citizens and males were prohibited due to the embargo. At the end of the day, when the Russian border police agreed to let her go, she had already missed her plane so she had to go back to Abkhazia. In the end, because she was afraid to make the same border crossing again, she decided to take the direct cargo ship to Turkey:

I went from here with the cargo ship out of necessity. As the Russian border police had stopped me and questioned me all day, all because my Soviet-Abkhazian passport had expired... I was afraid to go back from that border, I had already missed my plane so I went back to Abkhazia and went with the

ship... But it was going to Istanbul. I went in 4 days. But Cemre, I was destroyed by vomiting. Already the Ritza ship [catamaran] was making me seasick as I went back and forth, that time I was coming and going in a state of coma. And 4 days... They let some acquaintances know. They waited with a car. I said, if you want, an ambulance can also wait, I was coming in a very bad state. But since we were illegal, there were also 5-6 men. Since I was the only woman, they had given me the captain's cabin. Eem, the ship's firm had a fishing boat. From the ship we would jump to the boat. The boat is down. The ship is up. The men jumped one by one. I am looking. How am I going to jump? They threw my backpack, caught down there. They hold my hands, hanging me down. They hold from my feet down there... We got stuck, like the refugees I mean. Like you enter illegally, smuggled. They said, if the coastguards catch you, tell them you are on an excursion. Now, I mean, among so many men, at an unearthly hour, I went for an excursion, in the sea, can you think of such a situation, if that happens? It would have been terrible... that was, a weird thing, like a scalded cat. Besides I was in a really bad situation... I slept for two days.

I now continue with the narratives of Sine and Maze, the two young portrayals that I mentioned above; "a journey home" that was actually discomfortingly not to home, due again to Russian border controls. However, the arrival of the Republican administrators to meet them at the border changed their experience:

We went to Sochi with the Catamaran... Passing the border was very hard. There [she laughs] I had understood how hard it was to go to Abkhazia in that first visit. We waited like 7-8 hours... Everyone was sitting on their luggage, some had fallen asleep... [As the time went on] weird laughs are heard... Somebody from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [of Abkhazia] came... It is the middle of the night. That I had thought weird as well to be honest. Why they are coming I had said, right? We were just a standard group. Since I had not seen anything like that in Turkey. Later, somehow they managed to solve the issue. I was in Abkhazia as the sun was rising. (Sine F20s)

They told us to run for the passport control when we got off the plane, but we were two traditional Cherkess girls, we thought these people are older and we should let them pass through that single door first. When we got inside we understood why they had said to run, but in the end we were in a passport control queue, but the Russian border police said Russian citizens should pass first. We were very angry. This is my homeland, and that Russian at the border control is putting me at the back. But then they called us to the front when somebody [from the Republic administration] said that we were guests [of the National Adyge Assembly taking place]. I felt like, "you see?". (Maze F20s)

The interventions by the Adyge and Abkhaz authorities create a feeling of belonging for both Maze and Sine. However, those who wish to live in the Caucasus have to go through very

different procedures according to where they wish to settle. Let us first get to know the procedures to get a living permit for Adygeya²⁰ through the long account of Janset (F20s):

I heard that a few friends from the University Caucasian society had plans to come to the Caucasus, and apply for a residence permit... We came to Maykop... We learned what is a living permit, who can get it, for example that year they had increased the quotas [we found out]... If that quota was not filled, they might have taken that back. [...] We were told that we had to check in every six months, accomplish some procedures... We came back that winter, and did whatever was necessary. Giving blood, this and that, deposited some money, did some payments, etc. etc...It was very difficult. Since we didn't know the procedure then, since those who informed us didn't know it well either. Because rules change so often, constantly new things are added. They didn't explain everything clearly to us, and we didn't expect them to do so... After two visits they told us that it would now be enough to come once a year, it will be easy from now on, you'll get your citizenships in five years, this and that. Since we were told these things, we told our friends the same. Because they kept asking us.. Then we found out that it was not so, that we have to come every six months, and once they even asked for a new blood test, more money, another time they asked for an income statement, depositing money to a bank. I mean, we were faced with things that challenged us both financially and emotionally. But since we were acting with readiness and were keen on it, and most of us had the means... we could afford it. My family supported me on this; I mean they supported me financially, though my mother didn't want me to go to the Caucasus at all.. my father supported me but wouldn't do much about it, not a word of advice or anything. [...] We got our living permit (VNJ). When that happened everything settled down better. We observed one more time what kind of a process we are in.

As Janset explains, the application procedure for living permits in Adygeya, which is part of the Russian Federation, is very complicated, unclear, constantly changing and financially challenging.

Those who come to Adygeya and apply for a living permit after their arrival, cannot start working without their temporary living permit. When one gets the living permit, there is a need to make at least an entry-exit to the RF every 6 months, and provide necessary documents whenever they are asked for. To be able to apply for RF citizenship, one must not have been out of the RF for more than 3 months a year, for the last 5 years of residence. Besides, one has to renounce any other nationalities one has. So for this new generation of transnational returnees, it is very hard to get citizenship, if not impossible.

Many who have applied for a living permit from Turkey, like Janset, have done it with the idea that one day they will not even have the chance to apply for it, if the quota levels will

²⁰ These have already been explained before in Chapter 2.

be decreased. Tyj İlkey Ülker, who was killed in a car accident in Adygeya in March 2013 when he was making his regular visit for the living permit, was one of such young people who wanted to have a work permit and living permit for the future, as he was planning to settle in his ancestral homeland at the first possibility. After his funeral, one of his close friends wrote on Facebook, *“It was the place but not the time”*. For İlkey’s funeral in Adygeya there came over 30 people from the diaspora, who had either a living permit or had been there before. One of those people told me that *“if more people had the documentation (passports) ready, we would have come in a bigger group”*. However, there were also discussions about the burial of İlkey in Adygeya. In the meeting of local Adyge youth with those who came from the diaspora for the funeral, a returnee told everyone that *“this was not a question to be discussed as İlkey’s father had said that the funeral would be in the homeland the moment he had found out about the death of his son.... Because that was what İlkey would have wanted.”* Some time after İlkey’s funeral, someone related that his father had said: *“in one day they give you a place to be buried, while it requires a lifetime to get documents to live there”*, recalling their inability to apply for citizenship in the early 1990s since they had colour photos instead of the required black and white ones which were impossible to make as the local photographer was closed during their stay. In the memorial ceremony in Turkey, İlkey’s father’s closing words after the religious readings were that:

Today in Syria, our people are being dislocated and they are having trouble to return-migrate to our homeland. In the future, we may also be forced to leave Turkey. To not to fall in to the same position, go and get living permits from the Caucasus before it is too late.

Having the proper documentation would have influenced the decision to return for many, and also affected the experience of return migration. Especially for those settled return migrants, getting citizenship is always an issue. Perit (M40s) and Gufit (M40s) both complained around the same time about their inability to apply for citizenship, which on paper they had acquired the right. Perit was even shown the application of Gufit when he went to the office to hand in his application:

That woman there showed me Gufit’s application and said “he gave it to me by force, but if I send it to Moscow, it will return for sure. Why should I? You boys should better get married!”. That’s what they tell us, go and get married to a local woman and then you can apply for the citizenship. But then, you got to wait another 3 years to be able to apply. I met the requirements of citizenship many years ago. So did Gufit. But they just tell us to go and get married.

When I asked them if they have any interest in getting married, both Gufit and Perit answered “*if there is someone suitable, but not just for documents*”. There are not many women who have met the requirements to apply for citizenship like these two male solo return migrants. Early returnees and first-degree relatives of citizens have immediate right to citizenship of the RF. Those who came as families are also suffering from rejections and problems within the citizenship application office; even their locally-born children are not given citizenship, despite the fact that they know no other place as their home country.

In conjunction with this case, I would like to give a quote about the Crimean Tatars who have lived through similar processes in Ukraine and how their experience has changed with increased legal pressures for migrants:

Although there is a collective connection to the homeland, the experiences of Crimean Tatar returnees differ. The very first waves of returnees... were able to obtain citizenship.... the majority of the returnees remained as noncitizens, ineligible for employment, social services, and the Ukrainian internal residency permits (*propiska*) needed for housing and basic services, such as electricity, gas, and sewage.... Because dual citizenship was not allowed in Ukraine, the returnees had to first renounce their exile citizenship, a lengthy and costly process, and then apply for Ukrainian citizenship. (Izmirli, 2012: 234)

In the case of Abkhazia, all ethnic Abkhaz and Ubykh who can prove their patriarchal ancestry have the right to citizenship. However, according to the law, quoted in section 2.5.2, the ancestry does not have to be from the father’s side. But many with Abkhaz kin from the mother’s side, and women who are married to Abkhaz but are themselves of different ethnic origin, had trouble getting the right to citizenship. When one young girl whose mother is Abkhaz came to study in Abkhazia, she was told that her mother had to come and claim her right for citizenship:

I could hardly study here, and my mother was hardly making ends meet. For me, she made the journey and got her passport but then they told me to wait. I asked if I can get a living permit but nobody knows about it. My mother’s name is recorded for our application for a place of residence that *Demographia* is going to give. But I don’t have the right to anything if it is given. My mother has to come here every time. (Amza F20s)

In Abkhazia, claiming citizenship is relatively easy, though claiming your rights as a return migrant is not so easy. When someone is given a “return migrant” status and an identity card, they have a variety of rights to claim for five years in the legislation, but for a life-time in practice. Nevertheless, a majority do not claim their rights, beyond the right for a place of

residence (house or flat) because that is the most crucial thing; to build a life in the Caucasus. A book published recently in Turkish by a return migrant who was a lawyer in Turkey tries to identify all the legal problems returnees (and their families) can encounter in relation to laws and regulations of three countries: Abkhazia, Russia and Turkey. Based on the possibility that a returnee can be (or can try to be) citizens of all of these three states, he tries to answer the possible problems returnees could face under nine titles: Status of return migrants in Abkhazia; Citizenship; Family Laws (Marriage, Divorce, Children); Social Security (Retirement and Health Care); Military Service; Studentship and Education Regulations; Laws of Succession; Criminal Law; and Property Law (Baba (Papba), 2013). Baba (Papba) identifies legal hardship for legal partners of non-Abkhaz ethnic origin to become citizens of Abkhazia and suggests a change in the regulations identifying this as a legal problem and even an “objectionable” situation (especially for those legal partners who are not entitled to any property or social security rights without the official citizenship) (2013: 68).

Unlike the example of the Black Jews who overstay their tourist visas in the homeland of Israel and became illegal (Markowitz and Stefansson, 2004), the Adyge who settle in Abkhazia are not rejected the right to live in the country, as there is no proper registration procedure for migrants. For the diasporic Adyge settling in Abkhazia, the problems have usually occurred when they wanted to leave for a visit to Turkey before 2008, as they needed a Russian visa and there was no Consular Service in the unrecognised republic those days. However, the recognition of Abkhazia in 2008 resulted in the opening of a Russian Consulate which was able to issue visas to Turkish citizens. For those who lack valid passports the travel is still a problem as there is a necessity to give the passport to someone to take to the Turkish embassy to extend the passport; however, with the new regulations in force that require fingerprint taking for passports and the requirement for the personal owner of the passport to be there, the mobility is still limited for those non-Abkhazian citizens settling in Abkhazia if they did not come with long-term passports. The many years of embargo that Abkhazia has been put under have been very influential in limiting the back and forth movement of the diaspora, and are still influential in the experience of return. Today, one of the biggest campaigns²¹ in the diaspora in Turkey aims to convince the Turkish state to give permission for direct sea-transportation to Abkhazia, which Turkey does not agree due to the political

²¹ See for example the Change campaign: <http://www.change.org/tr/...>; the advertisement of the campaign on an Association webpage: http://www.kafkasfederasyonu.org/haber/demekler/2008/251108_imza_kampanyasi.htm; and the “Turkey! Recognise Republic of Abkhazia” Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/apsnyabhazyaa/?fref=ts>

stand on the side of Georgia's territorial integrity. And yet, Georgia takes in and applies criminal charges to ships that travel between Turkey and Abkhazia, which are mainly cargo vessels. The "legislative state frameworks, alongside the working of markets which enable or disable the creation of ongoing relationships" (Kalra *et al.*, 2005: 18) define the processes of return to the Caucasus from Turkey.

In this regard, as the local legal-political context that has been the focus above, there are other legal-political realities that influence decisions of return migration and experiences of return visits or settlement in the homeland. These are global and international-regional dynamics. Though not many return migrants refer to such processes, in the diaspora, especially by young anti-Russian diaspora groups' members, the regional politics has been brought up frequently in a variety of discussions, mainly relating to not visiting the homeland.

When one does not have a place to stay, or a prospect to earn enough income for basic sustainability; when there are severe problems for social, health and civil security; it is very hard to decide to settle in such a place even though it is the homeland. So besides the state level and regional legal and political limitations of return (such as not being able to gain the necessary documentation or citizenship), physical and everyday problems of settling in the homeland are influential in the decision of return migration. In the next section, I focus on the decision-making narratives to return-migrate, or to become transnational returnees creating "*sacred spaces between the diaspora and the homeland*" (Jan, M40s).

5.5 Decision to Return

"The general intention may last an indefinable time; taking the actual decision in practice may also be prolonged, but is shorter" (Amit and Riss, 2013: 64). The decision to return is not an easy one to take. For many it takes years to make the actual move. The diaspora who imagine return do not usually decide to return at once, even when the conditions permit. However, those who are dreaming of return establish their reasoning on realistic grounds through the internet technologies of recent years. Amit and Riss (2013: 64) state that the Jewish diaspora's recent "(i)nfornation-gathering was mainly through personal ties in different social networks and with the help of Jewish organisations (mostly online)". This is mainly due to the fact that they have access to variety of knowledge about their homeland, which they have never been to, through the internet. The Adyge-Abkhaz further establish connections with their relatives and ethnic kin through the internet, which eases their planning to return-migrate. Yet, even with those who use virtual resources to know and plan, an actual visit to

the homeland helps with the decision process. Sine (F20s), one of the transnational portrayals, had decided she could live in Abkhazia on the third day she was there for a tourist visit, and found support from her father:

The year that I graduated from the university I went to Abkhazia with my father. It was an excursion organised by the association. I think it was the third day that I said I can stay here. [laughs] I guess my father was expecting something like that. Before, when I suggested going abroad for my master's degree, he would just mumble and let it pass. When I said that I could stay and study here, he said "of course you can, my daughter". Encouraging me, praising me... In a week we started to look for a place to stay, to obtain a visa... It was very difficult to get a visa. You had to get permission from Russia, you know the procedure. I could go 7-8 months later.

The wife and husband portrayals of this chapter, Setenay and Jan, had also decided to settle in Adygeya during their first visit as a couple. However, Jan cannot simplify his decision to return to this visit only. He interrupts his wife's story and explains the background of his decision to return-migrate, connecting it to his associationist background and his time among the returnists of the early 1990s:

Setenay: Since I didn't have any relation with the association, I had no idea about return before I got married... Then we decided to go there for a vacation and to see the place, so we went. It seemed reasonable. I mean, we could live here, we thought.

Jan: When I went to the association [during my university years] this return topic was discussed... It was narrated in a very natural way.... My first contact with Caucasia was through the association... We went by boats, just like the boat stories of our ancestors we used to listen to... it was very emotional... Then we went up to Adygeya by bus, went to Kabardey... There were few people who had settled in Abkhazia at that time. It was when we went up to Adygeya that we understood what return means... There was a group of returnees. There were students at the university... But we were disappointed... too much alcohol was consumed there. We saw that the Cherkessness there didn't really correspond with our understanding of *khabze*. When I look back now, that seems a juvenile and very arrogant approach. When we were there, we didn't appreciate the value of being in our motherland. But when we came back, we were affected. I remember clearly... we were very excited, we felt we should go there, do something, if we can't do anything else – like every young person from Turkey – let's go and open a guesthouse or a café there... I remember we talked about those things... A year later I had the chance to go there again. This time the festival was in Adygeya...and there was war in Abkhazia, but we managed to pass the border to Abkhazia despite all hardship... It was very emotional. It was on this second trip that I understood Caucasia, Adygeya, Abkhazia. Things settled down.

In the 2000s, the development of mass communication and people going back and forth motivated Jan to go back to Adygeya. He says “It was not as in the 1990s, with that feeling of let’s go back to our motherland, let’s go there, whatever happens; rather it was, if we want to do something, why not in Adygeya? If we can do it, let’s do it in our motherland. So the decision to go was gradually taken.” Janset (F20s), the young transnational returnee woman who had stated that people were always talking to her about absolute return that she did not plan when she applied for a living permit in Adygeya, towards the end of her interview started talking about her return:

The idea was not to settle here. At least it was not so for me... The way they talked to us was as if we would return... The subject always came to returning... We couldn’t tell them that that is not our intention... We talked this over among ourselves... We were realistic on this. If we come here and can’t hold on, if we can’t do a thing, if we become examples of failure, we don’t want to go back to Turkey and strengthen the negative perception. Because there is still a negative perception in Turkey. Stories of bad examples are told, with a very shallow point of view, of those who came and couldn’t succeed in their venture, those who marry foreigners, Russians, who divorce their wives like that, who cheat on them, who go bankrupt, get involved in other things, this and that. And people take those bad examples whether they are true or not... There is both obscurity about here, as far as what I observed, and with a very shallow point of view, a negative perception. The worst, those people there, they are not Muslims, they don’t know religion, what can you do there, this and that, they are Russianised kind of ideas. I mean, the environment that I observed in Turkey, those in the villages, do not have the slightest idea about the Caucasus, that it is our motherland, let’s go back there, I cannot say if they talk about this, perhaps, but I cannot say they are eager about it. Since they live in the village, since they grew up there, they lived Cherkessness. Their children have learned the language; they speak in Cherkess among them. The Cherkess community exists as a closed community in villages... It is like their motherland. Either their proper ideas, or what the education system has imposed, might hinder a different kind of thinking. Neither my father’s place of origin, nor my mother’s, nor the metropolitan that we live in, I don’t feel I belong to any place.

Detailing the reasons of *others* for not thinking to return – those others from a rural background who have not moved out of their villages, living in a closed community where they feel a belonging, where they protect their language and culture – Janset, one more time explains she does not feel a sense of belonging anywhere in Turkey. Belonging to the homeland was not something she had given a thought, but instead she was developing mechanisms to explain she was not going to return for good, until the moment she was told that she can get a piece of land to build a house free of charge as someone who had a living permit:

They were telling us all the time, return like this, when are you returning, for that reason, we were all the time trying to create the feeling of we are not going to return. Since we were trying to tell this to them, we have developed mechanisms. Then I thought to myself, it is not something impossible. Because we heard this time when we arrived, there is going to be a distribution of some land... Free of charge, those who had got the living permit, they said, would be given land... We consulted our families. When we also got a positive answer from them... we changed our plane tickets. This is something important, we might not have another chance like this we thought, and waited. When we did this, I thought why not?... We are planning to build a house on that land. There, I mean, if we don't come and live there, or for summers, I mean, or we come there to stay for a while, we can have a house, we can have one foot here, and since we would do it financially in partnership, it would have eased our situation financially, and if we are coming here, let's be all together, let's be united here. This was how we will live our culture, that is how we thought. My father said, get yourself a separate land. This gave me hope. This thought came to me that maybe when my father retires, he can come here. Even if he didn't, I can attach him somehow to here. Maybe he can spend part of the year here, I thought. Even if my mother wouldn't want to, my dad can come here.

Though Janset still is hesitant to say she is going to return-migrate, she dreams about it for her father, even accepting the fact that her mother will not follow. She had previously explained how cheap transportation and friendly people had made it easier for her to develop a connection to Adygeya by making the unknown familiar.

I have already quoted extensively from the narrative of Azamad (M40s) about his first visit to Abkhazia, together with many other young people from the diaspora. His first impressions of the Abkhaz in the homeland had motivated his decision to return-migrate and he came as a student:

Well, you see your people are living there, speaking the same language as you. There is no difference even after so many years. Those people from the same kin, same family line, same family can hug each other. I had decided long before that but that time I decided to come to Abkhazia... Coming to Abkhazia is such a hassle, so hard. As thinking how to get over that hassle, this time, with the Abkhaz State University, then the *Aidgylara* (solidarity) association was strong here... We were saying how we are going to find 10 people; there were more applications than that. We asked again, can we increase the quota up to 20 people? Even that was not enough to meet the applications... at least those who speak Abkhazian... We decided to select those who can immediately start the university... I started coming to the university and that is the time I came, last I came. That is the end of it.

When the decision to return is given by a younger family member, who helps with the delayed decision of the parents to settle in the homeland after all, there are usually some who are dragged along, like the siblings. Sipse (F20s) was one of those, who was "drifted" along

with her returning family, leaving her just-starting career behind in Turkey. Her explanation of the decision is traumatic:

My brother came here for a summer camp, then all he thought about was coming here. Then he said, I am going there, if you don't come I will go alone. Father and mother decided to go all together. They said if I want I could stay behind on my own and take care of myself. I didn't dare to be alone there. They would be here altogether, I there alone.

Apsuana (F30s) and her siblings were told about their father's decision to live in Abkhazia after they had arrived there for a holiday where they were going to visit their relatives who had return-migrated a while ago. They were left in Abkhazia with only a bag of summer clothes, and relatives hosted them while their parents went back to Turkey to prepare for the actual move:

My uncle came here with a group... [Once back] he didn't sleep for days. Neither did we. He was saying "Abkhazia is a dream country"... He said I will go. His wife didn't want. He said I will take the children, if you wish come, if not stay... Whatever, after them we came here... It looked like a dream country. The sea, the mountains... My father said "I will go there when I retire, to my ancestors' land". We also opposed him... He said me and him will go and see the conditions and decide... I didn't want at first because we didn't know the languages... We were to come two of us but then we decided to come altogether... We sold our car [for the expenses], it was a new one. We also brought food for relatives here... And we left there and came here. It was always told to us that we were coming here for a holiday. My uncle as the ship was approaching, said forget Turkey now... We didn't know that they had decided, talked among themselves... Our parents left us here for 7-8 months. They went off to Turkey to complete their affairs and come back for good.

5.5.1 The Traumas of the Decision to Return or Not to Return

Many people are concerned with the problem of fitting into the Caucasian, or broader, Russian society that lives according to different ideas and follows different rules. Many of them know that back in the historical homeland they will have to overcome the language barrier, look for a job and grapple with everyday problems. Not all of them, though, are prepared for the shock when the ideas of the historical homeland prove widely different from reality. (Ganich, 2003)

There are also sad stories about the return decision, not due to a trauma in the move itself but creating a trauma and forcing those who want to return to choose between two things – usually their families and the homeland. Psefit, an Ubykh in his 60s, lives in a village in Samsun and claims that until the 1980 coup d'état he did not have much interest in the Caucasus. However, as he narrates his relation to the Caucasus, he recalls lots of names he

knew from that period. His first visit to the Caucasus was exciting and later influenced the rest of his life:

Then my niece, with that thing, Gorbachov coming to rule in the Soviet Union, I went to the Caucasus, before 1989... I was so nervous that just before I got on the bus I had a shot of *raki*. [...] Second time, I went with my partner [wife]... We stayed in Adygeya for one month... We had a really good time. There we applied for citizenship. Later that created a big trouble for us.

I waited for a long time before he told me what was the trouble that applying for citizenship had created for him. Their marriage had come to an end when his wife had not wanted to return-migrate:

These are our memories of the Caucasus. Well it is a pretty private matter but let me tell you this in two sentences. Caucasus has cost me a lot but it is worth it that I lived there for a day. Now there didn't we apply to citizenship together with my partner? That time, my partner was still working. When her retirement date got closer she started to change. Because when she retired we are going to the Caucasus, she knew I was determined, or we would have separated our ways. And before she retired, we parted.

His narrative of troubles within the family in relation to return is not a one-off case. There are many people who narrated stories of not-returning to the homeland to keep the family together, for the sake of the children, or for the elderly parents who are hard to leave behind and who were not agreeing to migrate in order to not leave behind their family graves. Psefit has not yet managed to return-migrate though he tried many times on different occasions and to both Adygeya and Abkhazia. His constant back and forth moment and activities in the diaspora (such as trying to unite a group of ethnic Ubykh to create an Ubykh return migrant settlement in Abkhazia with the help of the Abkhaz state), helped him to establish many academic, social, political and economic connections to the Caucasus. However, he has not yet manage to create the conditions for his return migration.

Another traumatic return migration account is given by Jankat (M50s), who decided to settle in Adygeya when the borders were opened:

When I came to the Caucasus for the first time, it was my last time. I came to the Caucasus burning bridges. Not coming for a visit before, I put on my backpack like a turtle, and came here... When the opportunity arose, glasnost and perestroika opened the doors... Didn't know what would be next, maybe the doors would have been closed again... [When I told people I was coming here] I got different reactions. My mom was a bit uncomfortable. She was not very supportive of my coming here.... She is a person who has a nationalist understanding, but under the conditions of Turkey. She doesn't have our

perception of the homeland... I had trouble convincing her, to tell the truth. My father is a person who is more fanatic [in terms of religion]... I said that day has come, I am going... A religious conservative person sees here differently. He was calm... he asked me “what are you thinking, planning”... He sees here as an atheist, communist place. But he said “if you say you will go there, I will not stop you, I will not say don’t go”. But he said something I will never forget: he said... “when you go there, live there with your honour and don’t think of returning back here ever”... My brother hid my passport... I forced him to give it back to me by arguing. He really didn’t want me to come... I guess his perception of life, his philosophy of life do not suit here.... Besides that, I had cousins who were *returnists* before me. When I said I am coming here, they said “how can you leave and go” and they stood in front of me... I can’t say I was supported very much in the family.

Cutting all his connections loose, carrying the guilt of leaving his family behind, Jankat still return-migrated as he was afraid he would not have another chance. Besides these traumatic decision-making processes there were many who stated they were not return-migrating to not to make a bad example. Maybe this can be considered as another myth, that is the myth of “unsuccessful return”, about those who could not adapt to life in the Caucasus – economically or socially. I call it a myth, as this is a way to say that one is afraid to fail in trying a new life in the homeland. Before, Janset (F20s) in her narrative touched upon this issue, and below is the account of Ashemez (M30s), who had thought of return-migrating to Adygeya at two different times:

I went to Adygeya for the first time in 2000,... stayed there for 1.5 months. [...] In 2009, I went for a second time. To see again, to observe the conditions about settling there... I saw many things had changed for the better. For example, the local Adyge now have a more positive perception about those who return from the diaspora. There has been a change. In the earlier years, because of the negative actions of those who returned from the diaspora, because of their bad representation, the locals looked at the diaspora negatively. [...] I expected you would ask me why I don’t consider to return myself... It is about age and family. Finance is not an issue. If I’d returned in 2009, as the prices have increased, if I returned I was afraid to set a bad example, breaking some people’s hopes.

5.5.2 Virtual and Imagined Return

The million-strong and geographically dispersed Circassian diaspora have undergone a similar civil society and internet-based mobilisation since the mid-2000s, which includes increased transnational communication, coordination, and cooperation – and increasingly also includes Circassian actors in the North Caucasus. (Hansen, 2012: 103)

An example of those who establish their first links with the homeland virtually is Akhra (M30s) who had written to me and a few other young people living in Abkhazia through Facebook. He had asked for information on various things about life in Abkhazia and had come to Abkhazia for a tourist visit that summer. In that visit he announced his decision to return-migrate, that he will learn the Abkhazian language, and save up for the new life he will build in the homeland. In the following year, we kept in touch through the internet and one day he came. The first year he kept writing to a diaspora journal about how he was learning about everyday life in Abkhazia, which was also published online and gained a lot of interest, as it was the first account by a male which questioned the *masculinity of return*, as he was sharing his experience of making pickles, juices and jams – which are very crucial for a sustainable life in Abkhazia where fruits are plentiful but of course seasonal but which are usually regarded as things women would do in the diaspora. Another example for virtual return is the case of Yetal (M30s), who had decided to return-migrate at some point in his life and spent his last years in Turkey taking language courses and chatting with possible candidates to marry in the homeland. He even announced on Facebook that he bought a special phone that he can upload a programme that has an Adyge-Turkish dictionary to communicate with girls in the mother language. He had told me, the moment we met, that all he does is dream of that day in the homeland and later, when he would have his preparations ready, he would return-migrate. In early 2013, I got the news from his friend in the association that he had return-migrated as his conditions were ready.

On 26 February 2013, I received a letter from a colleague who writes a blog under the nickname Oubykh, about how they had organised a joyful farewell party in the local association for their friend who is return migrating to Adygeya. Somebody else shared on a Facebook group on return a photo slide show combining national music with many of that returnee's photos since the early 1970s, among the diaspora Cherkess community. Most of the photos were from political and socio-cultural diaspora events, such as meetings for Abkhazia, remembrance day of the Circassian Exile (21st of May), dance and music shows, weddings, other celebrations and picnics, but also from family and friendly environments in and outside of the diaspora associations. It was easy for me to identify the people on the pictures as nearly all were from the Adyge-Abkhaz and other North Caucasian origins, whom I had met in diaspora associations or whose pictures I had seen over the last six years. The presentation, was entitled with a word play, “(Re)turning Wheels Announces Victory”, using the word “return” to refer both to his role as a person whose return would create chain migration and in

the end the victory of return, and also to his occupation as a car repairman. The presentation and also the organisation of a farewell party in the local association, are representative of the role of diaspora organisations in relation to return.

The ideal of return was created and reproduced among people who feel, think and behave the same; that is within the same ethnic group. Nartan (M30s), a young student return migrant in Adygeya, who will be introduced as a portrayal in the next chapter, explains how he always had the idea to return-migrate and had developed his thoughts in the association:

My village, the village I was born, the village I grew up in, was a Cherkess village... My family cared, I mean, followed the customs and traditions. You grow up in that environment whether you like it or not. There were lots of books in our house, we were reading and so. There, one dreams of being here, we were dreaming let me say. Since I was little, return was a settled consciousness. Waiting for the right time, waiting for the right conditions. We didn't have the chance to go during primary or high school times... Then the doors opened, and we came when we had the chance... there was no [association] in the district centre, nor in the village... I had the chance when we moved to Samsun... we started dancing in the ensemble. At the same time we started *associationism*. Those times, people wouldn't go to the association only to dance. They would go for cultural activities. People would sit, talk... [...] Our village is among the well assimilated villages in Turkey. I mean, in Samsun, the villages are far away, there are many Turk villages, Laz villages and like, in between. For that reason, there is assimilation. Samsun is among the cities where Cherkess live in huge numbers. But Samsun is also the city Cherkess have been most assimilated... For that reason, there has been more return to the homeland. It seems like running away from the sinking ship.

5.6 Conclusion

As explained in Chapter 1, I distinguish between the *transnational diasporic experiences of return* and *ancestral return migration*. Return encompasses more than return migration. In this chapter, I have focused on return journeys for settlement as well as return visits to the ancestral homeland. The return visits are also referred to as provisional return, where they could be “to visit relatives, invest in businesses, donate philanthropically, celebrate rituals and festivals, or make religious pilgrimages” (Oxfeld and Long, 2004: 9). In the case of the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora, most of the time the first visits were facilitated by transnational civil society organisations for international ethnic meetings, festivities (September 30 or October 5 celebrations), cultural festivals, and in the case of Abkhazia to join the war. There were also some people who had come directly to settle down in the ancestral homeland. There are clearly differences in experiences of the journey according to time period. In the early years

of the dissolution, transportation was expensive and hard, while in the recent years it has become cheap, easy and fast.

Most of those interviewed defined their first visit to the homeland with words like “familiarity” or “belonging”. Relating to Chapter 4, it can be argued that the Adyge and Abkhaz have been “refused an identity and an identification in the host nation” and as a result “the homeland became a strong focal point for positive image formation and symbolic associations of home, security, and belonging” (De Souza, 2005: 153).

Many who decide to return-migrate claimed that their decision-making was a very short term process. This is similar to North-American Jews’ return to Israel (Amit and Riss, 2013). The decision can be influenced by a variety of factors in host and homeland states, regional politics and personal life-histories. In her study of Caribbean second-generation return migration, Reynolds (2008: 24) finds out that “young people’s participation in transnational familial activities, and nostalgic reminiscences of island life transmitted across generations through the family narrative” motivates the second generation’s decision to return-migrate. The above narratives about ancestral return migration to the Caucasus show that there is a variety of return and return migration mobilities according to the life histories of the returnees. Those in the diaspora who have been imagining the homeland, have followed their dreams to return-migrate as a result of the political changes in the region, increased communication and cheaper transportation opportunities. Some of those who could not find what they had expected in the early years cut their relations to the homeland.

The fact that Nartan (M30s), the student returnee portrayal, compares the situation of the return migrants from Samsun, which he argues have faced more assimilation than other Adyge regions, to people in a sinking ship is very interesting. Many returnees stated idealistic reasons for return migration in the early and stagnation periods, running away from the sinking ship of culture. These are “cultural heritage seekers”, coming to protect/develop their language and live their authentic ethnic culture in everyday life (Conway and Potter, 2009: 8). There are also those who believe their nation will come to an end since they are just a minority in their homeland, so return is seen as the only solution for ethno-cultural survival. “(T)he study of diasporic return also highlights how migration can be the product of not only instrumental economic or political motives but also expressive and affective ties of ethnoracial group belonging that are constructed (and even imagined) across national borders” (Tsuda, 2009d: 37).

The reasons for not returning have been touched upon by a few people before. Apsuana (F30s), who is a return migrant in Abkhazia who came with her family in the early period, states:

The young people do not want to come here because of the problems of lack of jobs and not knowing the language, and the elderly because of the religion. “There they do not read the *Ezan*. They enter the houses with shoes. They drink alcohol.” These are their reasons for not returning.

I also observed such claims from the diaspora, among those who know about the homeland. For those who are still not aware that the homeland is somehow accessible, they still imagine a homeland of the 19th century that their ancestors were forced to leave. Those who know the homeland conditions, complain about belonging and bonds in the diasporic home; lack of jobs and employment opportunities in the homeland; differences in culture, religion, language and *khabze* (code of behaviour); problems of finding suitable accommodation, low living standards and lack of support in everyday problems; and not having *anyone* there. To solve all these issues, the suggestion comes from the diaspora itself: “*at least put one foot in the homeland*”. This is tantamount to suggesting *transnationalism of the diaspora* as a solution to connect with the homeland in manageable conditions.

However, many, either because they believe that the homeland is still far away, or because they lack the means to put one foot in the homeland, have recently started getting involved in the homeland communities through the internet. This is what some have referred to as the “virtual return”. It is clear from the observations of the cyber world that the homeland-diaspora communication has transformed with improved ICT technologies. The 21st century has changed the way the diaspora imagines the homeland. Instead of maps, visitors’ stories, and printed diaspora publications that were referred to in Chapter 4, the recent returnees find partners, home, jobs and livelihood through the internet.

CHAPTER 6

TRANSNATIONALISM OF THE ADYGE-ABKHAZ DIASPORA

6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have already touched upon the first journeys to the ancestral homeland, and the feeling of *being home* from the *first step* in the homeland. Not feeling a complete belonging to Turkey, and this feeling of familiarity in the ancestral homeland, facilitate the decision to return-migrate. The return migrants deal with the problems of settling in a new place at their arrival in various ways: other return migrants as well as official structures, such as the House of Adaptation (DAR) in Adygeya, or the State Committee of Repatriation in Abkhazia, try to help them in this process. However, the biggest discussion about the settling of return migrants in the homeland is about their long-term *adaptation* to the homeland societies. In the introductory chapter (section 1.2.4) I explained my reasons for using the term *adaptation* to refer to the post-return processes that take place in returnees' lives; as in the diaspora and among return migrants, as well as among local politicians and ethno-cultural activists, there is an ongoing debate, indeed a general discourse, about the "problem of adaptation" of ancestral returnees. In Adygeya, the NGO which is recognised by the Russian Federation as a legitimate organisation entitled to provide documents for the returnees, carries in its name the word adaptation; although it had not been actively involved in any adaptation projects for many years, the reason for the establishment of this organisation was to help the returnees to settle into their lives in the homeland. In Abkhazia, the State Committee of Repatriation, as well as The World Abkhaz-Abaza People's Congress (ABAZA), an international ethnic-NGO, and many other small-scale humanitarian NGOs, have dealt with the problems of return migrants and tried to help them adapt to life in the homeland.

But what is it, exactly, that the return migrants need to adapt to? How are they dealing with problems occurring in everyday life? What are the local and transnational, structural and individual factors that influence the integration of return migrants in their ancestral homes? Do ancestral return migrants' experiences vary from other migrants' and return migrants' experiences? The studies on migrant adaptation and integration, which have been discussed in Chapter 1.2.4, argue that there is not a single process for each migrant but there are some

common elements in the post-migration experiences. Some studies argue that these processes happen sequentially, starting with acculturation, continuing with structural assimilation, leading to amalgamation or intermarriage and identificational assimilation which “would erase the remaining differences” (Haller *et al.*, 2011: 735). In the case of return migrants, it can be argued that there is not a problem of identification and the migration takes place with the identification of returnees with the ancestral homeland. As Christou and King (2006: 830) argue for Greek returnees “engaging in a counter-diasporic move in search of what they believe is their true ethnic identity”, the Adyge and Abkhaz return-migrate to complete their ethnic identity with the three values associated with it: homeland, *khabze* and language. The last two of these are foreseen as existing only among one’s own community in the homeland in a near future. However, as in the case of other return migrations, there exists a “clash between the imagined and real home(land)” (Aneteby-Yemini, 2004, Markowitz, 2004). What the return migration discourse of the Adyge and Abkhaz refers to as *adaptation* derives from this clash. The returnees have to deal with the Soviet and post-Soviet bureaucracy that shapes the homeland institutions, the strong influence of Russian culture and Russian language in everyday life, and the different understanding of ethno-cultural identity and belonging in the ancestral home.

Conway (2009: 266) argues that “social and cultural structures, social identities, obligations and networks and the social changes therein, are as influential a set of forces as the global... structural forces for establishing the life-spaces within which transnational people... adapt to and/or resist.” In this sense, living a transnational life, being involved in both the communities of the places of birth and the ancestral homeland at the same time, comes as a way to deal with problems of adaptation to the homeland. “Instead of leaving one community and re-orienting to another, then, many settlers developed transnational involvement that encompasses both” (Rouse 1992: 45). The Adyge and Abkhaz return migrants, in the early and stagnation periods, tried to fully integrate into the life of the homeland communities, forcing themselves and encouraging other return migrants to cut all their relations to the places of birth. However, recent years have changed the perception of return as the end of the diaspora cycle; instead, returnees encourage the diaspora and recent returnees to be involved in both the diaspora and homeland communities to smoothly recover from the problems of everyday life. In this chapter, after introducing two more returnee portrayals, Nartan (M30s, Adygeya) and Abriskil (M50s, Abkhazia-Turkey), I will first (section 6.2) explain the different post-return transnationalism patterns in the previously-

outlined three periods of return: early, stagnation and recent period. Section 6.3 deals with the adaptation as narrated by the returnees themselves and how they foresee a more integrated life for their children than for themselves in the homeland. The last section of this chapter (6.4) deals with how the returnees establish new boundaries and negotiate their belonging in the homeland through constant involvement in the diaspora communities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of a new diasporic existence through increased transnationalism.

6.2 Portrayals

The final two portrayals to be introduced are Nartan (M30s) and Abriskil (M50s). Nartan is a student return migrant who settled in Adygeya. Abriskil, on the other hand, is a transnational migrant in Abkhazia. Both have been quoted from before, but their narratives were especially rich in analysis of the return migratory process in their respective communities. They have very different backgrounds and experiences but both found it opportune to analyse return migration in general besides telling their own personal stories. They criticise their own actions, as well as others'. In this respect, their narratives are helpful to sum up some key arguments in this final empirical chapter. In this chapter, the previous portrayals and some others are quoted a few times more.

6.2.1 Nartan

In his late 30s, Nartan had first come to Adygeya for higher education, but he says he had the ideal to return to the homeland since childhood. In the previous chapter, I quoted from his narrative where he explained that he was born in a Cherkess village, grew up in a traditional cultural environment, reading books about the Caucasus and “dreaming of being in the homeland”. He likened his return to escaping from a sinking ship of cultural assimilation.

Nartan had arrived in Maykop in the early 1990s, had full family support for his move and his actual decision-making spanned a very short period. He had come with other students from Turkey and settled in student accommodation. He could remember his first meal in the homeland, and how he had felt it being the best food he had ever eaten.

He says he did not experience much trouble and learned to deal with solving his problems. Still, he details how they were seen differently by the locals because of their different dress code, while he had found the influence of the Russian culture “different” in everyday life. He does not reject the Turkish influence in his own life and he does not think

this part of his identity is something to get rid of. Nartan also explains how his reaction to people who call him “Turk” changed in time.

There is a belief that we are foreigners... Because we come from Turkey, when you talk... even if you say you are an Adyge... if you came from Turkey you are a Turk [for them]. In Turkey we try to prove to everyone we are not Turks, and here still I had to make the same effort for a group of people, a couple of people actually, I was explaining that coming from Turkey doesn't make me a Turk. Later, I gave up this effort. I don't need to explain myself to anyone... If I had come here just for money or just to live abroad [as some argue]... why should I have picked Maykop, it is such a small town, there is no trade, there is nothing... I would have moved to a bigger city, why would I come here?

In his everyday life, Nartan is meeting lots of return migrants and visitors from the diaspora. However, his narrative mainly focuses on the different experiences of young people, how their integration is harder and how they have difficulty in adapting to the local culture. He argues that his education, as well as his family's connection to the Caucasus, who frequently come to Maykop, has helped him make friends with a variety of people.

I knew Nartan from my first visit to Adygeya in 2005, and he was already well integrated to life there. He is among the lucky students who had managed to find a job to settle in the homeland. He is involved in a variety of social and cultural networks, has friends among both locals and return migrants, and does business with a variety of people.

6.2.2 *Abriskil*

Abriskil (M50s) is a transnational returnee, living most of the time in the diaspora but with a more or less settled life, business and political relations in Abkhazia as well. He says both he and people surrounding him knew that he was an Abkhaz since he was just a kid. He had joined one of the diaspora associations as a young boy, and continued to have communication with associations as he moved around Turkey and abroad.

We always knew we were Abkhaz... In the house Abkhazian was spoken, but we didn't learn, don't know why... There were some family members who visited Abkhazia before the war, before me... When the doors [borders] were opened many came here [from Abkhazia] too, they stayed in our house. As a family we were always in connection with the homeland. In some regions they hid [that they were Abkhaz], you know, but we did not. Since I was a kid, at school or anywhere else, everyone knew that I was an Abkhaz. Even abroad, we were good Turkish citizens, and good Abkhaz!

As the above quote hints, like many other Abkhaz of rural background, Abriskil's identity had developed within a close-knit community and under the traditional etiquette (*apsuaraa*). When they moved to the city, associations and Abkhaz elderly had been influential in shaping Abriskil's knowledge and understanding of the homeland.

He had experienced the war and post-war period in Abkhazia and his current perception of return and Abkhazia is highly shaped by these visits. His mobility from an early age, higher education, and work experience in a variety of fields were also influential. He says "we have two identities and it will continue in the next generations", while he explains his life in Abkhazia, and his involvement in political, social, cultural and economic life there.

I met Abriskil during my first visit to Abkhazia in 2006. He was actively involved in one of the diaspora organisations and we came across each other at a variety of events in the following years, both in Abkhazia and Turkey. When I called him for an interview, we had recently passed each other in Abkhazia and he was planning another business visit soon after. Abriskil, besides narrating his own story of return, made a detailed analysis of the return migrants in relation to the political situation in Abkhazia.

6.3 Transnationalism after Return

To study the transnationalism of return migrants after their settlement in the homeland, my first target was to follow the work of De Bree *et al.* (2010), where they map the migrants' involvement in political, economic, social and cultural transnational activities. However, the fieldwork showed that the transnational activities that the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora and returnees are involved in vary a lot, and it is not very easy to create a simple typology. To explain this complex picture is a challenging task. First of all, the context of transnational activities changes over time. Following the time periods of return given in the methodology chapter (section 3.3.1) to explain the changes of transnationalism of return migrants would be a meaningful starting point: hence in what follows I consider in turn early-period, stagnation-period, and recent-period transnationalism. Nevertheless, first below, I present two quotes, one from Abriskil – the transnational returnee to Abkhazia who explains the core differences of adaptation for each period; followed by a quote by Mafè (F30s), the return migrant who had settled in Adygeya with her family in early 1990s:

If we look at the returnees to Abkhazia from Turkey, first there are those who migrated before the war and have been there during the war, fighting. They are already integrated, became Abkhazians, nearly all are such people without

exception. Then there are those who migrated after the war. They are also in the same category [integrated]. Married there, built their lives. Living like from there. They are still travelling back and forth to Turkey. But their place is there [in the homeland]. Then there is the group that followed, those who had to escape from Turkey... either had something to do with the police, or for economic reasons, such as had business problems... There is also the *associationists*... we [the *associationists*] talk a lot about return, saying that it is necessary to go there and some people follow our words... And last there is the group of returnees who went due to the events in Syria. (Abriskil M 50s)

Mafe (F30s), introduced in Chapter 5, who had talked in detail about the hardship of return migrating to the post-Soviet Russia in the early years, adds to Abriskil's periods of return a new group which can easily return-migrate and are different from the early years:

On the other hand, all those who settled here during those years were like that. Not only my father, his friends, all those who settled here right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the years 90-91-92-93-94 when the doors opened. In my eyes those are the true returnees. Whether alone or with their families, those are the real returnees. Coming to Maykop in 2011 is not something that demands a lot of courage, it is not a great bravery for me, not something for which one gives up a lot, sacrifices things.

6.3.1 Early-Period Transnationalism

This time-period falls between 1989, when the Soviet territory was opened to foreigners, up to 1995. Travel between the Caucasus and diaspora was very expensive and time-consuming, phone communication was not good and there was no Internet, so the mobility of the diaspora and returnees was very limited. The returnees and those from the diaspora who had managed to meet the requirements of the Russian and Abkhaz states had been entitled to citizenship without any problems, giving them the chance to move between two homes whenever they required. However, the majority of return migrants would only rarely move between two homes. If they had the economic means, they would go once a year for the holiday time, to visit the villages and family members who had stayed behind.

It was nearly impossible for the return migrants to be politically involved in two countries because of the lack of communication and hence of mobility to access involvement in diaspora or Turkish politics, such as voting in elections. Nevertheless, as they had the right, the majority kept their dual-citizenship, their rights for pensions and property ownership in Turkey, as well as health care. At the same time, those with Russian citizenship gained some rights for state benefits such as pensions in the homeland, while in Abkhazia they gained rights for return-migrant benefits such as land, house or flat ownership free of charge.

As there was not a developed market in the homelands, many from the diaspora established businesses based on the knowledge they gained in the diaspora, or with “suitcase” trade items they carried across the borders. Especially in Abkhazia, there was also a trade of coal, timber, and scrap metal taken to Turkey with ships in partnership with non-returnees and non-diaspora businessman. In terms of remittances, both in Adygeya and Abkhazia the flow was both ways, whoever earned more supported the family on the other side of the Black Sea. Factories established in North-West Caucasus brought lots of young relatives to the homeland, creating a chain migration in this early period.

In terms of cultural transnational activities, this period was the most active. There was both state support and diaspora support for cultural exchange between the homeland and the diaspora, as there was an unmet hunger for watching and getting to know the “other side”. Lots of young people made their first trips to the homeland for music and dance festivals, while many in the diaspora met children and young people speaking their language for the first time in concerts of the homeland groups.

The early returnees carried across the borders many things in the earlier years, but decreased the variety and amount in years that passed as many started to travel back and forth. Among the food items that are still widely carried from Turkey to the Caucasus noted in the interviews are: olives, olive oil, Turkish pepperoni (*sucuk*), bulgur wheat, *tarhana* (dried tomato-yoghurt mix used for soups), lentils, and Turkish delight. Among the food items carried from the Caucasus to Turkey are: Adyge traditional garlic salt (*ashu*), Abkhaz traditional pepper salt (*adzykha*), cheese, smoked cheese, tea, *Kalmyk chai* (dock tea), wine, vodka, balsam (an alcoholic drink that contains lots of medicinal herbs), buckwheat, maize flour, smoked meat, dried persimmon, and *adzyndzyha* (nutty dried fruit pulp). The returnees carried clothing from Turkey (and still continue to do so) as quality cheap clothing was always hard to find, while from the Caucasus ethnic objects such as dolls dressed with traditional dresses, traditional hats – *kalphakh* or *bashlyk*, national flags, and horns (*bje*) were carried frequently.

In Chapter 5 (see section 5.2), I quoted Amra’s (F70) first journey to the homeland when she had carried everything from sugar, tea to bedding but she had not thought that there would not be any cooker in Abkhazia’s market. In section 5.3, Mafè (F30s) narrated the lack of proper transportation and their long journeys to visit the diaspora. Below is a quote from Nartan (M30s, Adygeya), the student portrayal I introduced earlier in this chapter, about how in those years it was hard to be mobile between the homeland and Turkey:

The year after I came I went to Turkey but came back shortly after, as I couldn't stay for long; when one gets used to life here [in Adygeya], one wants to come back soon. I go there even whether I want to or not as I have a family there... I still go every year, for holiday and for a change... [In the old days] on the road we used to get very tired... There would be problems at the customs... Especially when we travelled through Sochi [seaport] because it is a city that deals a lot with suitcase trade. It was always troublesome to wait... If you could come out of the ship early, you were lucky, if not you had to wait in the customs for very long hours. Same was true in the Krasnodar airport. Now it has all changed.

6.3.2 Stagnation-Period Transnationalism

As previously mentioned, the return of the Adyge and Abkhaz nearly stopped in this period. Since those who have returned are recognisable with their peculiar migration stories, this study does not use portrayals of those who returned or visited the Caucasus in the stagnation years: 1995-2005. In the case of Abkhazia the stagnation period was marked with the post-conflict living conditions and the forcibly imposed embargo. It was not only a period of immobility and economic stagnation, but even a reverse migration started due to post-war security problems. Life in Adygeya was also not very colourful. Economic development was slow, it was very hard to find the basics, and transportation was only slightly better off in the years that followed. Besides, after 1995 all the laws and regulations on Russian citizenship had changed (Flynn *et al.*, 2003), and political existence as return migrants in the homeland turned out to be very hard. There was no flow of students to Adygeya or Abkhazia, as they were mainly going to Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria – the other Circassian Republic in North-West Caucasus – which had been accepting students from the diaspora (Jordan, Syria) since the 1970s. There were still a few people who came to establish businesses that would flourish only after the 2000s. Yet during this period, there was increased cultural exchange through dance troupes and ethnographic researchers visiting the diaspora settlements.

The transnational mobility and involvement in transnational activities were very limited in this period. Still, returnees who had settled in the Caucasus felt the need to travel back and forth and to get involved in diaspora affairs as much as they could. Azamad (M40s), who was one of the early returnee portrayals introduced in Chapter 4, explains the frightening journeys that had to be made through illegal border crossings to be able to reach their home either in Abkhazia or in Turkey:

During the embargo period [we were] entering and exiting from the borders illegally. We lived through really a lot. Paying bribes to Russians, and still we had to pass through the streams, the hills. Well also you got the fear of death,

because he can get money from you but can hit you from behind and kill you.... We experienced a lot of troubles when we went back and forth with the family. Both through Russia and as we entered from here illegally with the cargo vessels... I experienced so many problems. Like me, everyone lived... To tell the truth, it was very distressful. For days, on those... those cargo ships, under very hard conditions, without a place to sleep, sitting on stools by a table, we travelled so many times like that to Turkey. Besides you stow away and that is also distressing. You also worry that something could happen to other people because of you. Those were really hard times... Even my mother, she is of a certain age, how many times she has come on fishing boats, on cargo ships. It was tough for our people to come here and go back. I mean,... when you look back, you say can I undertake the same risk again, would I dare to do the same? You make an illegal entry. Maybe it's the conditions that give you the courage. I mean; I wouldn't make an illegal entry through the Russian border now, even if you give me a million dollars. When I think back, I have goose pimples. What a foolish courage that was. What if they shoot you in the back? What if the river carried you away? You are gone. But you had to go, you had to come back. It was something you had to do to live.

In section 5.3, I quoted Mafe's (F30s) narrative about how they had to take a troublesome journey from Adygeya to Turkey every year. Azamad and Mafe, as well as many others, also criticised how the recent returnees complained about waiting a few minutes at the airport or at the border while they had lived through so many problems in the stagnation period.

In Adygeya, lack of citizenship limited the political involvement of the return migrants both in places where they had come from and also in the homeland, as they wanted to make sure their actions would not create a problem in the future with Russia. In the case of Abkhazia, efforts to increase awareness about Abkhazia's status in Turkey were mainly on the shoulders of those from the diaspora who could travel back and forth. Hence, return migrants were involved in local politics and took active roles in the Committee of Repatriation in an effort to increase the livelihoods of the returnees.

Many return migrants established their now-successful business after their experiences of limited economic activities in the stagnation period. The suitcase trade and other small-scale trades continued to take place somehow. Again, the remittances were two-way, mostly carried by those who were travelling to the other country.

6.3.3 Recent-Period Transnationalism

The 21st century brought with it increased communication and transnationalism, giving migrants the possibilities to be settled in two or more localities. The recent returnees are in a much better position in this sense; as both earlier returnees and they themselves argue, they do

not need to put too much effort to be able to be mobile between their diasporic homes and the homeland. The expectations of the returnees have also changed. Sinatti (2011: 156) argues that “in defining whether respondents’ mobility patterns configure more as forms of return or as transnational circulation, it is therefore appropriate to turn to their words and practices as a source of verification”. In this sense, I would like to quote the conversation between the couple portrayals Jan and Setenay about the new form of return:

- Now I see it this way, I am definitely pro-return migration, I mean complete resettlement, I don't find it wrong. We missed that period financially. [...] I believe we should go to the homeland, both spiritually and logically if we want to live as Cherkess, we shall be in relation to the homeland. But to settle there is financially not viable at this time. As urban Cherkess, also the rural Cherkess... we shall construct the way to manage in both places. What can we do in two countries is my concern... what I am trying to say is return has to transform. There is no such life in the Caucasus where we live in the mountains, everyone is perfect and they are all smiling, as we used to read. Now everybody knows this, it is all one touch distant [in the internet]. This does not change anything, the country is our country, there is no way we could be cross with the homeland. We must definitely have one of our feet there. The children shall grow up as aware as possible that it is their homeland. [...] [I saw the older generation of kids that grew up in the association]. One spends a summer in the youth camp in the Caucasus, the other emulates and also goes [to the homeland]. If there will be necessary legal regulations in the constitution for this dual life in two countries, the Cherkess have a desire for the homeland. [...] We tell anyone we talk to about return in this regard. It was kind of frightening before. The people used to respond “are we going to leave behind our graves?” Well, don't leave your graves behind. Go there to spend three months a year. Even we believe that going there every summer for a holiday contributes to return. (Jan M40s)

- One doesn't have to go every year, even every two or three years would be fine. Having one foot in the homeland, children seeing the homeland at least three-five times will get over the alienation. When the children come to age 18-20 they will look at the homeland critically, better be connected as a child, and then develop a perception... [the homeland] shall have a place in the children's minds. (Setenay F30s)

Below I give another long quote from another one of the portrayals from Chapter 4; this is Azamad who makes a detailed analysis of the diaspora and return throughout his narrative. This quote supports Jan's argument above about the settlement in the homeland not meaning to cut all communications to the places of birth, at least under the current conditions:

Coming here from Turkey and having settled here doesn't mean cutting out relations with Turkey, not looking towards Turkey. We watch Turkish television. That is where we were born in the end, where you lived, where your

childhood friends are, it is the place where we spent the most important parts of our lives. I mean the way that I am sensitive about issues related to Abkhazia, how I feel worried deep inside, the same is true for Turkey. That is probably the same for others... The relations with Turkey are not like closing one door and opening another, everything about Turkey is to my interest... Even the people here are interested because of the diaspora living in Turkey... For that reason, now we have so many of our people there, we have lived there, Turkey has a very important place in our society's history, it is not that simple... For that matter, links with Turkey will last.

In the case of Adyge-Abkhaz return, Sinatti's (2011: 163) conclusion about Senegalese returnees, namely that "return increasingly becomes less permanent and assumes a variety of forms of commuting more or less frequently between home and host countries... thus configuring forms of 'unsettled return'", is contradicted by an increasing awareness of return migrants and diasporans, as well as homeland politicians and scholars, of the normality of transnational links and networks. With this increased awareness, many make conscious choices of involvement in a variety of transnational activities, be they social and/or cultural, political and/or economic.

These multiple attachments are results of a migratory way of life. When people interact and make different kinds of investments in social spaces related to some sort of migrant community, they also support and maintain the development of migratory infrastructures, such as those central to diasporas... These migrant communities develop a social life and communicative fields that are transnational in nature, i.e. transgress the borders of national states according to their own dynamics. (Olsson, 2011: 27).

Before moving on to how this new way of life shapes community boundaries and belonging, I would first like to discuss the discourse of returnee adaptation in the case of Adyge-Abkhaz ancestral return migration.

6.4 Adaptation to the Homeland: "Too late for us, our children will be natives"

In Chapter 1, I referred to different theories of integration and adaptation. I also mentioned that, for this study, the term "adaptation" is preferred, as this is a term that has been used by the returnees themselves. In this section, first I want to touch upon how people relate to these frequently discussed and unsolved "problems of adaptation". It is important to note that although the discourse about these problems of adapting to the life in the homeland is a highly debated topic, the majority of the returnees whom I interviewed stated that they themselves have not experienced such problems, or they have not experienced them severely; or if I tried

to remind them of some of the problems that I observed them going through, they said these were all behind them. However, many also felt the need to suggest state policies to deal with everyday problems of recent returnees, while they touched upon problems of the “others” and explained a few cases of positions of discomfort that they remember from their earlier days.

In a study of the German *Aussiedler*, Roll (2003: 286) suggests that lack of language proficiency “is a real integration barrier”, especially for younger return migrants. In the case of Adyge and Abkhaz return, lack of language skills is the most repeated adaptation problem too. This problem is twofold. First, as discussed in Chapter 4.2 about belonging and identity, the pressures and bans from the Turkish state resulted in the loss of language in the diaspora. Similar loss of language was observed amongst the Jordanian-Adyge, despite the freedoms and inclusive policies in this country where the Circassians live as officially recognised and respected ethnic-minorities, have their own school and organise language courses for many years now (Phillips, 2008: 214-217). Ben-Rafael (2013: 8) refers to “the loss of linguistic competence in the original language” as an important divide between the transnational diasporics and homelands, and the struggle of the Adyge-Abkhaz returnees in everyday-life communication with local Adyge-Abkhaz repeats this problem. Despite recent efforts to revive ethnic languages in Turkey, the current generation of return migrants, those younger than their 40s, do not speak Circassian or Abkhazian well; while older diasporics speak the languages only if they had grown up in an ethnic village where in everyday lives the languages were spoken.

The second issue related to language is that both in Adygeya, which is officially part of the Russian Federation, and in Abkhazia, which is an ex-Soviet country, Russian is the *lingua-franca*. Chirikba (2006) argues that the low number of return migrants in Abkhazia and their integration problems are mainly due to their lack of Russian language knowledge and the consequent difficulty of finding employment and a career. Russian is not an easy language to learn, there are not many options in Turkey even for those who are keen, and as it is based on the Cyrillic alphabet, it makes it harder for returnees to learn it by themselves. Besides, neither in Adygeya nor in Abkhazia, either for Circassian-Abkhazian or for Russian, are there well developed language learning courses for people who do not speak either of the languages. Still, the universities in both places as well as government-supported NGO initiatives in Abkhazia and private institutions in Adygeya have made efforts to close this gap.

However, learning or knowing the “right” languages does not necessarily create good communication with the locals. See below the account of Sine (F30), a transnational returnee

portrayal from Chapter 5, living in between Abkhazia and Turkey, where she describes her first long-time stay in Abkhazia and the difficulty of contact with the locals:

The [visa] waiting process [took very long and] was very stressful... The person that I was supposed to stay with [when I settled in Abkhazia] came back to Turkey [as I was waiting for the visa]... My plans were changing all the time... We were in contact with a distant relative from Turkey... [I stayed with that family] and they made me feel like home. [...] There were not many young returnees. I lived the hassle on my own... There was a period of adjustment. I focused on learning Russian, as the conditions permitted only that. Besides I started working on my Abkhazian... I met new people through other return migrants from Turkey. I met people through a woman married to a return migrant from Turkey. [...] As time passed my communication with [local] young people developed... Ceme I don't know if this happened to you, when you go to the university, they understand that you are different, and stay away. They didn't, they can't approach us. Maybe it was our mistake... One day someone from Turkey called me. I went to the University with that person... I met lots of people there that day. They were surprised, in a nice way, why does a university graduate come [to Abkhazia]? [...] The only problem is, not knowing the language at first, in time as it develops everything becomes easy.

Nartan (M30s), introduced earlier in this chapter, focuses on Maykop, the capital of Adygeya, and on students, as he was a student in the homeland:

It is not possible to live a life without any problems, talking about the grown-ups... the language is an issue. When one cannot speak the language, it brings employability/business problems... If one wants to do business, one has to speak Russian... Students, when they finish their education... there are not many opportunities to work... they prefer to go to bigger cities in the neighbourhood... Or they go to Turkey... Maykop is a city for students and the retired. It is peaceful here. One cannot win a million dollars.

Nartan's narrative above focuses on the others, while Sine gives an honest appraisal about her own experience. It is important to note that both Nartan and Sine did not know Russian at their arrival and understood only partly their ethnic languages (Adyge and Abkhaz respectively). The life stories of Nartan and Sine, both of whom had moved gradually from their rural birth places to urban areas and then to the homeland, where they both manage to integrate into all fields of life, show that it is easier for the younger generation to learn the local languages and adapt to the requirements of everyday life in the ancestral home (different from young ethnic German returnees that Roll (2003) refers to). Azamad, who was also in his 20s when he had arrived in the early period, explains that, as he was speaking the Abkhaz language, he did not encounter any adaptation problem. He argues that, for a person who was

raised within the ethnic community with the traditional cultural values, adapting to life in the homeland among ethnic people was not an issue:

In communicating with people here, some people would say they had adaptation problems; I never had that. First reason for this was I spoke the [Abkhaz] language pretty well. I didn't have the language problem. Also, as we were raised in the villages... you don't realise but in the family environment you learn *apsuaraa* [the customs and traditions, the etiquette]. We were not different from people here, so it made it very easy to communicate.

Though here Azamad says he did not face problems of adaptation, later in his narrative he argues that it is normal for return migrants to have problems and that the children of returnees (the 1.5 and second generation) growing up in the homeland will not experience such problems:

Abkhazia is my homeland. I want to live here ever after. This kind of [ancestral return] migration has problems... Like those who went to Greece from Turkey, from Greece to Turkey... they would all live through a variety of problems. They would definitely live some distress. A generation has to live it. When you delay return, this problem does not disappear; if you don't, your child will live these problems, and you also have the question, will the children have the courage to face such problems? If I am capable to face such problems, at least I can face it, and get over it, and the next generation, my children, and their children will not live the distress. At least this was what was in my mind. It is true that if there is a hardship, I am the one who faces it. The children do not have any problem. Neither here [in Abkhazia], nor there [in Turkey].

There are also a couple of people who would say they do not understand why there is this *discourse* of problems of adaptation. They argue that differences are normal in everyday life, but that does not require a process of adaptation. Astanda (F30s) is one of them. She settled in Abkhazia a couple of years ago, could speak Abkhazian when she arrived, and started working immediately:

I don't understand what adaptation problems people talk about. I never had a problem. Yes there is a different work culture here, and I needed time to understand that. But it would have happened in any new job, in any new place. (Astanda, F30s; field notes from 2011)

Though she says there is no problem of adaptation but it is just a discourse, the language school organised by the World Abkhaz-Abaza Congress (ABAZA) with the support of the State Committee of Repatriation in 2007-2008 turned into a *house of adaptation* for recent returnees who came in those years. The returnees would discuss their everyday problems before or after the language courses, and spend their day at the Congress office socialising

with the only people they can communicate with. Local Abkhaz would come to the Congress to meet with recent returnees, talk with them and hear how they are adapting to life in the homeland. The most repeated problems there, after language proficiency, were problems with accommodation (state-provided temporary, state-provided permanent, or rented), as well as lack of work places and shops to start one's own business.

In Adygeya, Dudar (M60s), an early-period returnee also says that he did not need a period of adaptation, but he explains that people need a period of integration to the systems in the homeland. He relates the history of the House of Adaptation of Returnees (DAR), the local NGO, which was established to help returnees at their first arrival in the homeland, but it had not been operating effectively for many years. In 2012, on my last day in Maykop, I joined the first assembly of this organisation that was taking place after a long time. The main argument to call for a general assembly was that, especially with increasing numbers of returnees from Syria due to the political unrest in that country, there was an increasing number of demands from the diaspora, returnees and locals. A young team was elected for the new administration and they started working intensively to solve the accommodation problems of Syrian-Adyge, provide them with pocket money and food, help them get their living permits and other documents, find them jobs, arranging state-supported language courses and even settling children into schools. Most of the costs were covered by other well-off return migrants' and homelander's donations and support.

Problems of settling in the homeland have been widely observed and reported about other return migrations. In Jamaica, for example, returnees found out that "little work is available, housing is scarce and expensive, the cost of living has risen sharply and their compatriots view them with reserve and jealousy" (King, 1978: 178). In another early review article on the topic of return migration, Gmelch (1980) had also reported that the returnees were approached with suspicion. There is "a view that returnees are relatively well-off, and this has led to the accusations that they are routinely over-charged by traders and craftspeople" (Potter, 2003: 6-7). In the narratives of the Adyge Abkhaz returnees, it was not possible to hear of such direct criticisms about the local population (as it would have been rude and traditionally not acceptable); however, throughout the years that I have been observing and studying this phenomenon, I have heard so many returnees complain that the locals think those in the diaspora are very rich and try to over-charge them, give them bad-quality products, or ask for high prices for selling them their houses or flats. In terms of housing, it is very hard to find suitable accommodation for rent, especially for families, both

in Adygeya and Abkhazia. With the infrastructure still intact in Adygeya there are better and cheaper options; while in Abkhazia all accommodation is conflict-torn.

Besides these first settlement problems, the return migrants' economic adaptation problems were mainly due to their lack of language resources and local connections. This is parallel to other case studies; for example in Israel, "Hebrew proficiency tends to promote employment absorption" (Neuman, 1999: 26). Hence the lack of available workplaces and production facilities was also an important factor. The fact that the acquired specialisation in the diasporic home cannot be of use in the homeland also influenced economic integration (as King 1978 suggested for Jamaican returnees). In recent years, with increased transportation, but also in earlier years of the dissolution when it was easier to trade between Turkey and the Caucasus, to solve their problems of adaptation, the return migrants realised they could make use of their resources in Turkey – in the end, there, they would not have a communication/language problem. From the early years of migration, the Adyge-Abkhaz return migrants started trading between Turkey and the Caucasus. Amra (F70s) tells how, as a family, they tried a variety of businesses in their early years of settling in Abkhazia, and when there was a chance this was based on trade from Turkey:

First, we brought some small trade items [in Turkey] to sell here. That time Ritza [the ferry that travelled between Abkhazia and Turkey] was still running. We brought, and sold stuff, anything we thought that was needed here. Small items... We brought stuff that return migrants wanted. Those days it was very hard to find anything... Later we started selling some local things as well... I would sit in the *butka* [kiosk]... Children would travel to Turkey, or I would. Whoever was coming would bring the necessary things. Then we started buying stuff from Sochi [neighbouring city in Russia]. That time the ferry had stopped. Life was very hard those days.

Amra's narrative shows that the transnationalism of their economic practices was shaped by the conditions of the time, political and economic opportunities, and the need of the family to create a self-sustainability strategy. Sine (F30s), whose first long-stay experience in the homeland was given above, was also among the return migrants who had done some trade from Turkey to gain extra income to support her stay in Abkhazia. She explains that the connections just appeared when a homelander asked her to do some trading together – someone from Turkey who was engaged in production of the required materials was also asking her for cooperation to get into the Abkhazian market. However, things had not worked as she had planned due to the economic crisis and she had to close the business shortly thereafter. Similar stories of establishing (and closing) business ventures based on trade or

transfer of goods are repeated and widely-known among return migrants. The important thing about such small-trade business is that these returnees were not involved in such business networks before their arrival. In some other cases, such as Nartan – the student portrayal who settled in the homeland during his studies – the combination of new knowledge with the old (most importantly language skills) is also a useful strategy to develop a sustainable economic existence in the homeland. However, there are also those who continue their existing links with the places they come from and establish businesses through such connections.

The lack of resources in the local context and the better opportunities that appear in relation to Turkey lead to the establishment of such new transnational economic links. In Adygeya, the newly established transnational business was more based on knowledge and people – usually ethnic Adyge, but sometimes other ethnicities as well, with required knowledge or skills were helped to migrate with a job and accommodation offer. Both in Adygeya and Abkhazia, the most requested knowledge was in the field of food: for instance restaurant chefs who knew how to prepare a special Turkish dish or dessert; or butchers to prepare *halal* meat primarily to serve return migrants; but also in the field of production or repairs of household items, cars or in the construction sector.

All return migrants somehow referred to one kind (and some, many kinds) of transnational link to Turkey, and to the specific regions where they were born, grown-up and socialised, or lived just before their “permanent return”. Still, such as the above-given examples of economic adaptation strategies, e.g. establishing new trade or business links to Turkey, some new transnational links were established and new transnational practices developed. Such economic transnational practices can be argued to be what Olsson (2011: 28) defines as a livelihood strategy for migrants where they “maintain connections between different countries in order to survive”. However, adaptation is not only about economic practices and survival merely on economic terms. The Adyge-Abkhaz returnees also establish new political, cultural and social links to Turkey, and the new transnational practices they adapt are “built within the confines of specific social, economic, and political relations which are bound together by perceived shared interests and meanings” (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998: 13). So even these new practices support their existing diaspora networks and diasporic involvement, while at the same time help the returnees to develop a sense of belonging to “here” and to “there” simultaneously. On a recent Facebook update of one of my interviewees, when Nart (M20s) stated “there and back again” to refer to his most recent journey from Turkey to Adygeya and back, half of the people were commenting about their

unhappiness that he had to come back, while another half were happy that he was back. His own comment at the bottom was about the necessity of being in-between due to belonging to both the places, and this neatly leads to the next section on belonging and transnationalism.

6.5 Belonging: Always the Host Never at Home?

My father always dreamt of at least one of his children returned to the homeland. ... It was always being talked about in the family. We made the decision together... [Our mobility results in] not being able to explain ourselves neither there nor here... We are smashed between two realities. We have different expectations from life, not different values. [...] Those who want to return choose a very small, long path. [...] A majority of the girls went back (to Turkey). Those we thought can never stay, stayed. [...] (I remind myself) it is your choice. Today people go to every direction. Human being is no more a constant. [...] I live in the devil's triangle. You are dispersed bodily, one half there, one half here. [...] Wherever I go, I am the host. I want to be the guest somewhere. When you live in between, you are always accepted as you are at home there, people take you for granted and expect things from you. (Gupse F40s)

The socio-cultural adaptation to the homeland for return migrants was usually parallel to the acceptance of different ways of behaviour and understanding. In the diaspora, there is a belief that the Adyge-Abkhaz protected their traditional ethnic values and etiquette (what the Adyge call *adygaara* or *khabze* and the Abkhaz *apsuaraa* or *kebze*) better than in the homeland. Slava Chirikba (2006) argues that there has been a disappointment in the diaspora towards the homeland and towards those who were supposed to be “real Abkhaz”, because they had expectations of an “ideal homeland” from where their ancestors had left, where the Abkhaz language was spoken, and people lived according to the traditional value system; but instead they had found people who were very much influenced by the Russian culture, frequent cases of corruption, and social and legal insecurity for return migrants due to post-war instability. The quote below from Abriskil (M50s), the transnational returnee, is in accordance with this analysis:

You have lived here [Turkey] for so many years, they have lived there [Abkhazia] as well. They lived among Russians... In the end they live in a different culture. They protected their own culture but there is a dominant culture. Here it is the Turks' culture of Turkey, there the culture of Russia. Then you meet, and it is not that easy to say let's live all together.

Chirikba also suggests that, compared to the earlier generations of the diaspora who were “romantic and idealistic”, the new generation of Turkish-Abkhaz, those in their 20s and 30s,

were pragmatic and realistic, highly educated, and nationally-oriented. In the recent years, there has been an increased return of this young “pragmatic” generation that Chirikba refers to, both to Adygeya and Abkhazia, and my participants Astanda, Nartan and Sine can all be counted as part of this generation. The younger returnees have a different process of integration into the homeland communities, as they “do not expect anything”, or they are “aware of the realities of the homeland”. Also, due to being born into an era of mobility, and migrating in a period of increased transportation between the homeland and Turkey, they are more easily involved in both communities.

Even those who do not like to travel frequently between Turkey and Abkhazia or Adygeya, state that they have families there and travel back and forth to visit them; have cultural and political interests in the diaspora; and hang out frequently with other returnees and diasporic visitors. So even for such people the family home turns into an “enduring fixture” (Conway, 2009) connecting their life to their places of birth:

In the introduction to this chapter, I stated that, like the Greeks returning to Greece in a quest for reinforcing their Greekness (Christou and King, 2006), the Adyge and Abkhaz gave a lot importance to their ethnic identity and this shaped their decision to return-migrate to the ancestral homeland where they believed they belonged. In Chapter 4.2, I discussed the feeling of being half-Adyge or half-Abkhaz and not feeling a belonging to the Turkish society. Still, the imagined homeland was different from the real one (Markowitz, 2004, Tsuda, 2009b, Christou and King, 2014). For many return migrants like Azamad (M40s), who imagined their return, feeling a belonging to the ancestral homeland continued despite all its differences in the experiences of everyday life. The younger generation that Chirikba (2006) refers to above, who approach the homeland in more realistic terms, also feel a sense of belonging but still they also feel the necessity to create new boundaries and a different sense of belonging to this new home. They do this by adapting mostly new transnational social and cultural practices.

In this section I will try to explain the role of such practices in creating a new sense of belonging in the homeland. I argue that this makes them a kind of “diaspora of their diaspora”, connecting returnees in many ways to the society and culture of their close-knit ethnic communities in Turkey. Here I will particularly focus on the transborder aspects of such practices and how they influence the everyday lives of return migrants. The three themes that I focus on are involvement in political transnationalism, ethno-cultural activities, and socialisation. When I talk about ethno-cultural activities, I mainly refer to traditional dance and music, which has been discussed in relation to the diaspora associations in Chapter 4; but

I also refer to all kind of ethnic and traditional handicraft-making. The reason I separate ethno-cultural involvement from socialisation is that the first one can be a solo activity, while with socialisation I will focus on the way returnees socialise with locals and other return migrants and diasporans as well.

6.5.1 Political transnationalism

With the loss of status in the receiving country, men tend to form, participate in and lead ethnic organizations whose interests and focus is in the country of origin. (Jones-Correa, 1998: 334)

Without speaking the local languages and reading about recent history, it is not possible, neither for return migrants nor for the diasporans, to understand the local politics. The return migrants' involvement in local political life is therefore usually shaped by their language proficiency. During elections in Abkhazia it is possible to see the returnees supporting different parties, but usually nationalist ones; and in Adygeya many do not have citizenship, so they cannot vote. In general the return migrants try to understand something of the local and regional politics in order to be aware of the realities of the homeland Caucasus; and also about Turkey because of the diaspora, families and friends living there. The next quote is from a return migrant in Adygeya, Jankat (M50s), where he narrates his interest in Turkish and Russian politics:

As much as I can... I try to follow the politics of Turkey and Russia, try to stay close to both. I try to understand and analyse both... Not for my personal future, but for the future that we dream for our community, the current [regional] developments are not very good.... I don't think Russia wants to give [the Caucasus] a chance.... I believe hard days are upon Adygeya.... And Turkey as a state policy... it may look as if it is going towards a democracy, I have doubts about that... For our Adyge I am not sure what the Turkish democratisation will bring... First of all we are not able to represent ourselves properly, second we don't know how to ask for things... I don't see a bright future for those who want to stay in Turkey and live as Adyge. (Jankat M50s)

Both of these next two quotes exemplify the importance of regional politics in the transnational involvement and mobility of return migrants. With the removal of the visas for Turkish citizens in 2010, this mobility has increased rapidly. The Internet has also facilitated the involvement of the Adyge and Abkhaz in diaspora politics. A majority of the return migrants use regular Internet, and follow and take part in diaspora and homeland-related political debates online. Below Jan (M40s), a portrayal from Chapter 5, narrates how he connected to the diaspora once he was in the homeland and why it was important:

When I was in Maykop [the capital of Adygeya], the diaspora mattered as much as it mattered when I was in the diaspora. I would follow the news from the Marje-group [a diaspora-wide mail group]. Also some chat-spaces were very important to communicate. I was also following the printed diaspora publications, such as the Caucasian Association Federation's *Nart* journal or the *Jineps* newspaper. If you are from the diaspora, even if you are in the homeland, it is important to know what the diaspora in Turkey are doing. We got information from the associations. We communicated on the phone or with email frequently. I mean the diaspora kept its importance in our lives all the time. The real [Adyge] population is in Turkey, every activity, every concert, every political mobilisation is to our interest even when we are in the homeland.

To be involved in diaspora politics those with the economic means travel to Turkey to take part in the diaspora activities, and also host visitors from the diaspora in the homeland. In an online article written by a return migrant in Abkhazia which analyses the existing political formations in relation to return, the author states that:

We know the interest of our people living in the diaspora in our homeland. When our people visit the homeland, also when we visit the diaspora, the main question is always return migration to the homeland. [...] The fact that our responsible institutions are working separately only on short-term projects is a disadvantage. We can see that the Committee of Repatriation in Abkhazia, the diaspora representatives of Abkhazia and the institutions [associations] in the diaspora should work on a... (unified) return migration project. [...] The (adaptation) projects can only be organised in the homeland but there is a lot of serious work that is to be done by the diaspora... On the side of the diaspora our people should be informed, motivated, a return migration ideology should be advertised... not only among those who think of return, but among all our people in the diaspora. (Gogua, 2013)

Similar writings can be found online or in diaspora publications, which repeat the importance of frequent visits to the homeland from the diaspora, as well as homeland-guided diaspora activities. The Adyge and Abkhaz return migrants, through such political involvement in multiple countries, try to secure their place in the ancestral homeland. As Jankat states, the diaspora or the returnees are not able to represent themselves in the international political arena, neither in their host state, nor in Russia or Abkhazia. However, involvement in diaspora politics gives them a chance to have a say, as an Adyge or Abkhaz who has lived in the homeland with a diasporic view, looking at the diaspora with a homeland lens.

6.5.2 Ethno-cultural activities

Return migrants, especially those in their early-life stages and the children of returnees, are involved in ethno-cultural events, playing traditional instruments, singing in traditional music

groups, dancing in national ensembles, and doing traditional handicrafts. Why is it important for the migrants to get involved in such activities? Is this parallel to their search for “what they believe is their true ethnic identity” (Christou and King, 2006: 830)? As I discussed before, the Adyge and Abkhaz had socialised and politicised through diaspora associations in Turkey. The associations were like schools for them, sacred spaces where they were among their own people and places and where they could dance, play traditional music, learn and produce items with ethnic value. After their move to the ancestral homeland, though the younger generations did not expect men riding horses in traditional dresses, or women doing traditional handicrafts in the gardens of their houses, there was nevertheless a belief that the traditional ethno-cultural elements were part of the everyday life. So as they used to do and value in the diaspora, taking part in such activities, on their own, or as part of a group, gained more importance. Gupse (F40s), a return migrant who had lived in different parts of the Caucasus, started playing an instrument in order to learn about her ethnic music, and this helped her to create a feeling of belonging to her life in the Caucasus. The following excerpt from her emotionally rich and sometimes conflicting narrative also explains how she feels a sense of belonging to her diaspora home, and how this in turn creates a “question” about her belonging to the homeland community:

Learning my music in a collective helped me forget my loneliness in the homeland. It is still an important motivation in my everyday life... Here we are always the returnees from the diaspora... There it was different, here it is different... There is a different kind of hunger... To catch the taste we had there, here we have got to do more.

Taking her everyday life culture to the homeland, Gupse tried to create her own “bubble” through the ethnic music that she had encountered in a diaspora association in Turkey as a child. Like Gupse, as the returnees took an active role to revive their ethnic heritage in the homeland, they created bubbles of belonging. The communication of the returnees with local non-ethnic people, who make up the majority of the population in Adygeya and Abkhazia, remained limited despite involvement in a variety of activities. However, those who could speak (or were able to learn) a relevant language found ways to communicate with the locals. Still, in their everyday lives the return migrants spent a lot of time with other returnees and visitors from the diaspora.

6.5.3 Socialisation

Moving to a new place where they do not know the local languages, migrants have a tendency to socialise with other ethnic migrants or migrants who speak their languages (Hedberg, 2009). Studies of ancestral and second-generation return also show that the return migrants prefer to socialise with other returnees and international migrants (Christou and King, 2014). The Adyge-Abkhaz return migrants are no different. If a visitor wants to meet return migrants, there are a couple of places where this person can go to where returnees spend their days socialising together. As the majority of return migrants are men, in many places you will see groups of men. Some of them, who are highly criticised by other returnees, spend their time gambling, smoking and drinking coffee in only-male coffee houses. Others, the majority, spend time in restaurants and workplaces owned by other return migrants, sitting in a corner. The Turkish-food restaurants, like the ones that I referred above, are also places where they sit for many hours, drinking Turkish tea if they serve it, eating their lunches and dinners, and occasionally even their breakfast. Above, I referred to the ABAZA association language courses which had turned into house of adaptation for recent, especially women return migrants. In that place, they could socialise with other returnees or Turkish-speaking locals without spending too much money, in a kind of homely environment where they could prepare their own tea or coffee while chatting about everyday problems of their new settlement. Many prefer to spend their spare time with people who share a similar ethno-local culture to themselves. Dudar (M60s), a returnee in Adygeya, explicates this as a crucial problem of adaptation of return migrants:

In the diaspora, our people had settled in different regions, and people stayed in close connection with people from their own area even in the associations. Here [in Adygeya] our people [the returnees/those from the diaspora] mainly spend time with others from their region [in Turkey]. Those from Bursa [city] stick together, those from Reyhanlı [district in Hatay] spend time together. The Ankara group [from the association] do everything together... They say the returnees establish “little Turkey” in the homeland. That’s not true. They have their little regional communities, little representations of their diaspora associations, even their little groups in the associations.

As if giving a response to this quote from Dudar, referring to such socialisation as an adaptation problem, Gushav (M30s), also a return migrant in Adygeya, explains:

One naturally meets with everyone that has come from Turkey. You meet, you greet. But besides that, you spend more time with people who are in harmony with your thoughts, your social upbringing. You share a common ground with

them. Some call it “grouping”. But it is very normal, it is a natural social process. This would have happened if we had continued to live in Turkey.

Only after a few years of settlement do return migrants start to spend time with their neighbours, colleagues or local friends, and only then if they manage to acquire a reasonable level of language proficiency. For the younger people, who are involved with locals in the universities and at their workplaces, the communication happens in a shorter period of time. The return migrants, despite their level of involvement in the local community, spend a lot of time with visitors from the diaspora:

[In the homeland] we met with all people who came from the diaspora. It was very crucial. Besides pals and close friends, we wanted to know the latest position towards return migration, the current organisation of the associations and also to have an informative chat, we would talk with everyone. (Jan M40s)

This frequent contact with diasporic visitors was very crucial for social, cultural and political reasons, especially in the early years when communication technologies were not so developed and people could hear about what was going on in Turkey and in their ethnic community only through such contact. Hence, even for recent returnees such contact is crucial. In Chapter 4, I presented quotes from the long narrative of Sine who stated that if it were not for the early returnees, their problems with documents and during their regular visits for living permits would have been unresolved and maybe they would have given up on getting a living permit. Still, she was also critical about how the return migrants were pushing for permanent settlement in their conversations about the future, which she did not feel ready for.

We were in the parks, in the cafes... Had something to do each day... We were going out with friends from Turkey. I also had friends from here. Girls as well. Russians and Adyge as well... We could talk and spend time with any kind of people. To be honest, to live here you need to speak the languages, and you need practice to be able to speak the language... We had a group of five from Turkey that we spend time altogether... Our teachers would say do not spend time with other students from Turkey. Maybe because of their suggestions [I spent time with many different people]. (Nartan M30s)

Even Nartan, who had friends from the local community, was closely connected to other return migrants. He explained to me how the returnee men would spend time together, doing barbecues and playing football or other social activities. I also knew that the returnee men in Abkhazia would play football regularly, and go camping in the mountains. All this

socialisation helps them to feel among people who speak like them, who act like them, who laugh at the same jokes and who understand their concerns.

6.6 Conclusion

Any migrant experiences a variety of cultural, social, psychological, economic and political changes when settling in a new environment, even ancestral return migrants. The Adyge and Abkhaz return migrants refer to this process as adaptation. There is an important discourse among the homeland, returnee and diaspora communities about adapting to the ancestral homeland. In the diaspora they argue that the homeland has a very strong Russian and Soviet influence, there is no ethnic value-system (*khabze* or *apsuaara*) there, no religion, no economic means to build a life from scratch, and no political freedom. The homelander argue that the returnees come with too many expectations of help from their homeland co-ethnics and the state, have not suffered a similar history and therefore do not understand the local conditions, have lost their language, do not speak the “world language” Russian, and are talking, behaving and living like Turks. When it comes to return migrants, some, especially those with language proficiency or those who become fluent in a short time, argue that “adaptation problems” are a discourse and they themselves have not had to go through such processes (such as Nartan, Dudar or Astanda), just a period of understanding and accepting. Many returnees who did not or could not acquire the language skills and who did not have the capital to establish their own business, buy or build a home, had more problems and had longer adjustment periods; though, in time they also developed the necessary skills and established new links and adopted new practices to stay in the homeland. All these new practices, combined with the old ones, turned out to be ways to define new boundaries of existence as an Abkhaz or an Adyge in the homeland.

In section 6.3, I tried to summarise the variety of transnational practices in the three time periods that form the Caucasian return migration typology. These are early-period, stagnation-period and recent-period phases. The early period falls between 1989 and 1995, when the travel between the Caucasus and diaspora was not very easy and faster routes were financially challenging for return migrants. Soviet communication technologies, where for example one had to wait for days to make the telephone call one had registered, reminded the returnees of 1950s Turkey. There was, naturally, no Internet and the communication and the mobility of the diaspora and returnees was very limited. Still, this was the period when the returnees themselves carried a lot of things across the borders, from food items to house

things; from business equipment to small trade items. The following period, between 1995-2005, that is the stagnation period, is when the return of Adyge and Abkhaz had nearly stopped. In the case of Abkhazia the stagnation period was marked with the post-conflict living conditions and the forced embargo which stopped diaspora mobility; while in Adygeya, economic development had slowed down, life was hard but transportation slightly improved. In this period, despite the political and economic stagnation, there was increased cultural exchange through dance troupes and ethnographic researchers visiting the diaspora settlements. In the period after the 2000s, which I refer to as of the recent period, but can also be called the period of transnationalism, the developments in communication technologies and cheaper transportation facilitated the mobility of return migrants, as well as the diaspora. The return took a new form, and even the returnees started to argue for the benefits of a transnational life lived in between the ancestral homeland and the diaspora.

Other studies have given lists of problems of adaptation that I was expecting would be repeated for the Adyge and Abkhaz return migrants; however the majority of these were either slightly referred to or stayed as observations. Among what Izmirli (2012: 235) identifies in her research on the major grievances of Crimean Tatar returnees, the following can be repeated for the Adyge-Abkhaz: land and housing deficiencies; lack of native language schools; political exclusion; false labelling based on religion; desire for autonomy in the homeland; constitutional changes that target them; unresolved sporadic violence. Diener (2012: 280) in his study of the problems of Kazakh return, states that taking “abandoned homes of departing ethnic groups” is an issue but also a solution to the accommodation problem of migrants. The same goes for the Abkhaz, who are given post-war empty houses, which creates a psychological discomfort. In terms of problems of Caribbean return, among what Conway (2009) lists, the following directly relate to return to the Caucasus: frustrations especially in work places; for women in particular, “competition for men” as an aspect of social distancing (though returnee Adyge-Abkhaz women do not choose to marry local ethnic kin but mostly the diasporans or returnees); returning women’s difficulty to make female friends (due to lack of language or jealousy); a degree of “othering”. Gmelch (1992) further adds to the list: “inability to develop satisfying social relationships; cost of living higher than anticipated; stayers jealous of their prosperity, children’s higher education; slow pace of life and the difficulty of getting things done causing irritation” (this slowness is usually valued later). “Many women describe return as suffering... a renewed dependency on husbands” (Perez, 2004: 183), as it is hard for them to find jobs, there are not enough things to do, and

they are separated from their grown-up children. In the case of the Adyge-Abkhaz mothers, many find the solution in a constant back and forth movement which will be discussed further. Bernard's and other studies on the general satisfaction associated with return migration reach the conclusion that "greater proportions of returnees rated their return experience as positive rather than negative; except... unfavorable experiences in the job market or within residential communities" (Bernard, 2004: 180). A similar satisfaction is observed among the Adyge-Abkhaz returnees who do not claim to have an adaptation problem, rather many say that others live through such problems but time moves them away. The increase in transnational involvement is also influential in getting over problems of adaptation.

All return migrants refer to some kind of transnational link to Turkey and to the specific regions where they were born, brought-up and socialised, or lived before their return migration. Some return migrants, to survive in the homeland, found ways to connect themselves to Turkey, e.g. establishing economic ties to support their livelihood. These were either in the form of small trade, or bringing along a knowledgeable person to establish a business together that was tailored to the market needs of the local communities of the homeland. Besides economic transborder practices, the return migrants also were involved in a variety of networks that connected them to other places, usually to their own ethnic enclaves in Turkey. They followed a variety of transnational practices, which I discussed above under three headings: political transnationalism, ethno-cultural activities, and socialisation. All these activities helped the settlement and adjustment of return migrants to their "new" homes in the ancestral homeland, which they had imagined, dreamed about and reached in the end. The younger generation, who had wanted to find their belonging in a unique/ideal place (see Christou and King, 2006: 824, for a discussion of the term *idiotopy*), but were more realistic about the situation in the homeland (Chirikba, 2006), were more involved in ethno-cultural activities; while the elderly and the women, who did not speak the local languages, were more likely to socialise with other return migrants. A majority of returnees established a diasporic political connection as a continuation of their lives in the diaspora where they had been or still were actively involved in diaspora politicisation through the associations.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

*Who can understand the hardship of living away from one's homeland?...
My dear homeland... all your children are returning back to you...
Even if we were born in other lands, our hearts (faces) were turned towards you.
Though we never saw you, our grandfathers told your story...
We lived to this day with the hope of the home(land).
We kept our traditions though we lost some (in time)...
Oh my dear homeland, my life, my tomorrow...
Kusha Dogan²²*

It was in Maykop in 2012, when I met Tlepsh (M30s) who reminded me of Sosruqo (introduced in the first chapter of this thesis), the way he talked from his heart when the topic of discussion was “return”. Tlepsh told me how the above-quoted song shaped his childhood dreams to return-migrate to the ancestral homeland. He had realised his dream at the first possible opportunity. He shared with me a question that had disturbed him for many years: “Where are the composer, producer, distributor of that song that had reached to my far away diasporic home town in the 1970s, carrying their love and quest for the homeland?” Tlepsh did not expect everyone to return-migrate, at least not anymore. He was indeed expecting those “dreamers” to “return-migrate” but now he just wishes those who have it in their heart find the means to at least “come” to their ancestral homelands, if only just for a visit. During the course of my study I met many who dream to “come” to the homeland, even only for a visit just as Tlepsh wishes. Some realised their dreams and some even turned their visits into permanent settlement in the ancestral homeland. During the course of my work, I also met many who are constantly travelling back and forth between the Caucasus and Turkey. Re-quoting the words of one of the participants in my study, Jan (M40s), I would like to put the spotlight on how transnational mobility from the diaspora is justified spiritually and physically:

Now I see it this way, I am definitely pro-return migration, I mean complete resettlement, I don't find it wrong. We missed that period financially. [...] I believe we should go to the homeland, both spiritually and logically if we want to live as Cherkess, we shall be in relation to the homeland... we shall construct the way, to manage in both places... We must definitely have one of

²² This song was written by Kusha Dogan, a composer born and raised in the diaspora. The original title is in Circassian and is available with Turkish subtitles here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHTptAJhjBs>. The words given here are my own interpretative and selective translation of the lyrics.

our feet there. [...] So there is this myth among the returnees. They say somebody who has put a foot in [the homeland] cannot leave, even if one leaves [the homeland] it will never get out of his mind; always wanting to come back. I believe that...

This thesis was designed as a multi-method, multi-sited ethnographic research to study the experiences that created such myths of return. Because of time and financial limits I had to focus on certain aspects related to ancestral return migration, specifically from Turkey to two Republics in the Caucasus, Adygeya and Abkhazia. With increasing mobility of the Adyge-Abkhaz people between Turkey and the Caucasus, or as widely termed by those involved in this mobility, “putting one foot in the homeland”, this study focused on a dual research question, namely to identify the *dynamics that lead to the decision for return migration* and *the effects of these dynamics and return migratory projects on the lives of returnees*. Besides the central dual research question, I identified in the opening chapter a variety of related research questions, and some further questions emerged from the narratives of participants in my study. If there was not a necessity to contain this thesis in a limited number of words, there could have been many other empirical chapters in this work, detailing some of the sections as whole chapters and or focusing emerging research questions. In an effort to sum up what has been discussed in this work, below I would like to summarise the ground my study covered and its main findings.

This study discerned a variety of processes in diasporic identification and self-realisation that were influential in creating a feeling of non-belonging to the country of birth and identifying with the ancestral homeland. The decision for return migration was deeply influenced by these diasporic experiences, but also by the socio-political and economic conditions in the ancestral homeland, which passed through three periods after the dissolution of the Soviet Union when the Caucasus became accessible for the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey. The *early period* was when return first became a reality and the mobility between Turkey and the Caucasus started. The *stagnation period*, between 1995 and 2000s, was identified with economic and political limitations and lack of return mobility. The *transnational period*, which was actually the main stimulus that led to this research study, was shaped by easier and cheaper transportation and telecommunication technologies. Despite the variety of return projects identified, the narratives showed that, besides the decision-making being directly related to the personal histories of return migrants, the experiences of first and subsequent return journeys were quite similar and led to a decision on the part of some participants to migrate to the ancestral homeland on a more or less definite basis. The post-

return migration adaptation processes also varied a lot by personal histories, but pre-migration and newly established transnational links were found to be influential in the everyday lives of returnees.

Making use of the life-history narratives of 26 returnees interviewed in the Caucasus and 22 transnational diasporans living in between Turkey and the Caucasus, I have tried to answer the twofold research question. As a field interview method, I chose not to ask direct questions to the people I interviewed. Instead, I simply asked them to narrate their life stories from their childhood, only asking them to detail some selected issues, such as their first journey to the homeland, or their involvement in diaspora communities and associations. In this regard, not all the research questions were answered in each of the narratives but participant observation and in-depth interviews in rural Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora settlements, as well as interviews with the diaspora and return migrant community members, were also used for the analysis. Hence my aggregated answers to my detailed research questions are uneven, and new issues arose during the fieldwork, too. In the following paragraphs I re-visit all the main, related and newly emerging research questions.

My first research question was about **the influence of transnational practices in the diaspora on return migration**. This has been discussed throughout the three empirical chapters. The narratives show that the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora's feelings of not belonging to the Turkish society contributed one of the most influential reasons for the decision to return-migrate, especially during the early years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1989), when the homeland first became accessible for the diaspora. Involvement in the local ethno-cultural associations, all of which today act transnationally, either through direct links to the homeland in the Caucasus, or through connection to umbrella associations that are themselves transnational in nature, was also influential. Those who spent a lot of time during their childhood and early youth within this ethno-cultural and political sphere of the associations are prone to say: *I grew up at the association*. In this study, I chose to refer to those who identify themselves through such diaspora involvement as the *associationists*. The decision to return-migrate, regardless of any involvement in diaspora associations or close-knit rural diaspora communities, was defined by many as more of a short-term decision based on current conditions, though a deeply rooted "ideal of return" can be observed in the early life histories of returnees. Those who delay making the move to the ancestral homeland or who choose not to migrate but keep their diaspora identities are nevertheless involved with the homeland in many ways.

In this regard, the emerging question was **what are the transnational (political, economic, social, cultural) practices that the Abkhaz and Adyge carry out in the diaspora?** The variety of transnational practices that the Adyge-Abkhaz living in Turkey carry out range from political and economic to social and cultural. Most of the interviewees in this study mentioned a broad range of transnational practices that they were involved in. At the *political* end of this spectrum, the biggest interest is in the international politics that influence access to and security in the homeland Caucasus. For many of those who have never been to the Caucasus, the small Republics that are spread out from the Black Sea coast to the Caspian Sea do not mean much. However, even for those who do know and understand the current political map of the Caucasus, distress in one part of the region directly influences access (as well as interest) to the rest of the region, limiting their political and physical involvement. In the earlier years, getting a visa to access the Russian Federation was very hard and was an important concern in the diaspora, requiring political silence by the diaspora organisations to continue having access to the ancestral homeland. Today, especially with the current visa-free regime for citizens of Turkey, the importance of having contacts in the homeland through local ethno-cultural associations has decreased and the majority in the diaspora keep personal links with the homeland either through the internet or through frequent visits, establishing their own political links instead of going through the diaspora based or transnational associations.

Those who deal with *economic* transnational practices in relation to the homeland are a relatively small group. These businessmen had sent either their relatives or villagers, or someone they trust, to the Caucasus to deal with the homeland side of their business operation, and look after the business enterprise (mainly shops). Though most of the time there are local partners, these business were established with an ideal to have a connection with the homeland, not with mere economic concerns. Most of these businesses are either self-sustainable (if not supported from the diaspora) or, if it earns more, the business is widened to help employ more return migrants. Among the interviewees of this study, there were only a couple of young business owners who were at the start of their transnational business life and had big prospects but none of them mentioned a permanent move to the homeland. However, many of those who were taking part in the construction of such new business projects as employees were Adyge and Abkhaz who were keen to “return” to the homeland with realistic plans. Among the returnee portrayals, there was no one who mentioned an already existing economic link to the homeland before their return, but many of

those travelling back and forth with plans for the future did mention possibilities and prospects.

In terms of *social* transnational practices for the Adyge-Abkhaz in the diaspora, the extended family connections are very crucial. Finding one's kin (carrying the same family name) in the homeland is a huge concern for identity and belonging. The extended families provide direct access to the homeland, besides being hosts, business partners and security providers (especially in Abkhazia). Also, many who have links with the homeland, host their extended families in their diasporic homes. Still, as discussed in the section on Virtual Return (section 5.5.2), a majority of those in the diaspora who dream of return choose a virtual social involvement and digital links to the homeland. They join return groups on Facebook, make friends in the homeland through online sites, find marriage partners, and connect with the homeland through the internet.

Cultural practices, such as return visits for festivals and holiday times, have already been discussed in detail, but to briefly recall, such involvement was widely observed in the diaspora especially by the *associationists*. The homeland communities also value the importance of keeping cultural ties with the diaspora, and dance troupes and musicians are frequently sent to the diaspora settlements for concerts and shows. Language schools (Abkhazian/Circassian or Russian) also take place in diaspora associations, helping to create new ways to connect with the homeland.

Next, it is important to ask the question about **the role of different levels of involvement in transnational practices in making the decision to return (or not to return)**. Defining the homeland as “home” and as a “familiar” place after the first visit is a repeated narrative in relation to the dream and decision of return migration. In this regard the childhood stories and the good experience of first visits act as important markers to create a **sense of belonging in the homeland**. The examples given in the empirical chapters show that, though a majority of recent migrants choose to have “divided” or “double” lives, the decision to return-migrate is much more easily given when one has a place to stay in the homeland, relatives who will help to support one's livelihood whilst there, a job/business that creates an important purpose to stay, and family who support their mobility between the two homes. In this regard the transnational practices, not only of the returnees but also of their families' and friends' *networks*, turn out to be very crucial in the decision-making.

Next comes the question: **what are the dynamics that influence the return migration decision of Abkhaz and Adyge?** The political and legal status of the homeland and the international regional actors has an important role in the decision-making. Especially in the case of Adygeya where migration is strictly controlled by the Russian Federation, the diaspora still have problems of mobility and settlement. In the special status jurisdiction of Abkhazia, the biggest problem is for the non-Abkhaz partners and other North-Caucasian diaspora who want to “return” to this part of the Caucasian homeland. Though some, especially elderly and Ubykh-origin returnees, claimed they could have settled in any part of the Caucasus, Adygeya and Abkhazia give strength to their decision to settle in two aspects: the ethnic population is in a minority, and many had either friends or relatives who return-migrated before them, in the places they choose to settle.

It seems like *the homeland policies of return* are the least influential in the decision-making, and despite the common discourse about lack of support, many decide to return-migrate from the diaspora without really expecting much from the local state institutions, though there is a constant complaint about lack of policy making in the field of return migrant adaptation, and of corruption in related institutions.

The role of nuclear *family* is very strong in the decision-making process, as especially mothers are not very keen to send their children away. The narratives show that the first journey to the homeland is the hardest, but many elderly women follow their children to the ancestral homeland in the subsequent years if the children choose to settle. The extended family in the homeland is also influential in the decision-making, especially if they are welcoming to their relatives from the diaspora. Early returnees enjoyed the warmest welcoming feasts and banquets thrown by their extended families (similar to the Vietnamese or Chinese returnees referred to by Oxfeld and Long, 2004: 9) but the most influential has been their suggestion to host them during their stay, find them flats/houses to settle temporarily or permanently, help them establish a business – in other words the promise to fully embrace the returnee like the closest family.

One of the research questions related to the decision-making was the role of *the place of residence in the diaspora*. The narratives and further observation show that the place where one lives in the diaspora before making the final decision to return-migrate has not been very influential. However, the place one originates from and the community one spent a childhood with (in a close-knit rural community or association) is significantly important as it shapes the

diasporic community consciousness, identity and belonging, as well as creating a belonging to an imagined homeland.

There is definitely a strong role of *cultural factors* in the decision-making. Though ideologically the return migrants claim that they were in search of the place where the ethnic language is spoken and traditional value systems of *adyge khabze and aspuaraa* were part of the everyday life, in reality these were not so romanticised. Many in the diaspora who said they decided not to return-migrate claimed that the Russian influence in the daily life, the *religious difference* (or the homeland being without a religion, as claimed by some), and as discussed in 6.5.2 the lack of *ethno-national identity* in the homeland have been influential in their “negative” decisions. Testimonies from all participants, Adyge or Abkhaz, repeated the claim that the diaspora has protected the ethno-national value systems and identity better than in the homeland, justifying their reasons to not return.

Deriving from the central dual research question, another key research question was about **the transnational practices return migrants engage in their daily lives**. One of my key findings is that returnees negotiate their lives in the “homeland” through their belonging and links to the countries that they come from. They start to value the “otherness” that they had neglected before, and they get involved in transnational activities that “others” themselves. This finding reminds us of the Japanese-Brazilians organising Samba nights after their return or starting to identify with the Brazilian culture more as they settle permanently in Japan (Roth, 2002). In relation to connecting to the places they come from, my study of Adyge-Abkhaz returnees does not lead to quite such strong connections to Turkey and Turkishness. This does not mean that they completely cut-off their relations with Turkey (though many narrated that during the early years of return they were expected to do so in order to adapt to the homeland completely). Here the narratives are two-fold. First, the majority of return migrants continue to be *involved in their respective diaspora communities* in Turkey. Second, besides keeping their previous transnational involvements and making use of their existing networks, the Adyge-Abkhaz returnees develop *new transnational practices* while negotiating their *belonging* to the ancestral homeland. These new transnational practices most of the time relate back to their diaspora communities. In this regard, they become “the *diaspora* of their diaspora”.

What do I mean by calling the ancestral return migrants in the homeland the *diaspora of their diaspora*? To adapt to their new lives in the homeland, the Adyge and Abkhaz are involved in a variety of transnational activities, ranging from economic ones to political ones,

as well as deeply focusing on ethno-cultural and social ones. *Economic transnational practices* not only relate the returnees to the diaspora but also to Turkey and Turkish resources. However, political, cultural and social transnational involvement focused mainly on the diaspora and ethnic enclaves. These, as discussed in Chapter 6, helped the settlement and adjustment of return migrants to their “new homes” in the ancestral homeland, which they had imagined, dreamed of and reached in the end.

In the light of the repeated mentioning of preserving a sense of belonging to the diasporic home, to the diaspora associations, to the homeland and one more time to the diaspora in the homeland (as one returnee had defined their own position), I found it necessary to add two further research questions: first the role of **diaspora belonging in increasing involvement in transnational activities and the decision to return-migrate**, and second the role of **belonging to the homeland and diaspora in post-return adaptation**. Both these have been answered above as the feeling of not belonging motivates the mobility and involvement beyond the borders of “here” and a search for “there”. In the case of ethnic peoples, no matter how many generations have passed (for the Adyge-Abkhaz, that is four to six generations), the far-away homeland becomes the place of belonging, and when it fails to meet the expectations after return migration, this time the “diaspora home” and the diasporic community become important.

This study combined existing theories and literature on diaspora, return and transnationalism, trying to identify the dual transnational involvement of the Adyge-Abkhaz people, and in this regard also looking at theories of adaptation and integration. The narratives of returnees identified clear generational differences, as well as the role of individual life histories in the formation of diaspora consciousness and diasporic identities, in the imagination of the homeland, and in involvement in transnational processes. Especially in recent years, the perception of return as the end of the diaspora cycle has changed; and more of the Adyge-Abkhaz people encourage the diaspora and recent returnees to be involved in both the diaspora and homeland communities in order to best adapt to and overcome the problems of everyday life.

Writing this thesis was a big challenge for me as it was very hard not to get lost in the constantly changing diaspora and Caucasian regional discourses as well as in the diversity of the data that I collected. The fieldwork, especially among the diaspora in Turkey, had provided intensive data on identity and the imagined homeland – most of the time defined as the Caucasus – but it was not possible to cover all these topics in detail in this text. Especially

due to the limited academic literature in English that relates to the region and these people, it was important to keep away from those discussions which have not even found strong ground in the related academic literature in Russian, Turkish, Abkhazian or Circassian.²³ This research was also challenging for me in regard to my own identity and positionality, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3. During the course of my work I made lots of friends, witnessed births, the start and completion of schooling and degrees, marriages as well as break-ups and divorces, and sadly the deaths of many I had come across. Sometimes, I was directly at the place of the event but most of the time I was part of the virtual community away, showing solidarity, sharing happiness and sadness as much as possible. Everyone who had contributed or criticised my work had different expectations from the study of return migration, and their contribution was very important for the completion of this study. However, important as it was to be part of the diaspora and homeland communities, being away from it in the UK and the chance to be part of an international academic network was as much important for the completion of this research project. In the UK I had a chance to be part of a variety of groups and interact with many academics in relation to my study, which helped me to place my work in the existing theories and literature.

In such a recent event, a workshop entitled “Towards New Migration Systems, Patterns and Policies in Eurasia: The Case of Turkey and the Russian Federation”, Franck Düvell in his welcome speech argued that “it is not obvious to think of Turkey and Russia as two ends of a migration system” (Düvell 2013). Throughout the day, the participants discussed if there was a migration system between these two countries. Though the Adyge (Circassian) Exile was touched upon by Düvell as one of the sad historical events of this migration route, there was no reference to current migration dynamics between Turkey and the Caucasus. As discussed before, recent studies on Eurasian migration widely ignore Adyge-Abkhaz transnationalism as a research topic. In this sense my study plays an important part in filling this gap in the regional migration literature as it focuses on changing migration patterns between the diaspora in Turkey and the homeland in the Caucasus.

²³ The identity and imagined homeland aspect, as well as the role of direct policy implications on the lives of the return migrants, will be covered in Higher Doctorate (*Doktorantura*) work that I am going to submit to the Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Abkhazia in the coming years.

To conclude, I would like to refer back to the dedication page of this thesis, where I put the photo of Deguf Sabahat Lugon showing her three fingers to represent the three things that makes a person Adyge (which also relates to the Abkhaz): *Kheku* (the homeland), *Khabze* (the etiquette) and the *Bze* (language). Being away from these, many in the diaspora decide to return-migrate for their children, the next generations to be able to have all three in their everyday lives. But this study (as other studies on return too have argued) showed that many were not able to find the idealistic homeland where they can live with the traditional etiquette, speaking their ancestral languages. Though this aspect of identity was not a key topic of interest, *belonging* was an issue repeatedly raised by the returnees in relation to both their diaspora homes and the homeland. The method of life-history interviews helped to identify the “belonging” aspect of the return journeys and how the search for belonging increases the involvement in transnational practices, both in the diaspora and after return migration; that is the *dual transnationalism* of the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora. Additionally, this study has identified patterns of involvement of the ancestral return migrants with their respective diaspora communities, becoming the *diaspora* of their diaspora in the Caucasus.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Maps

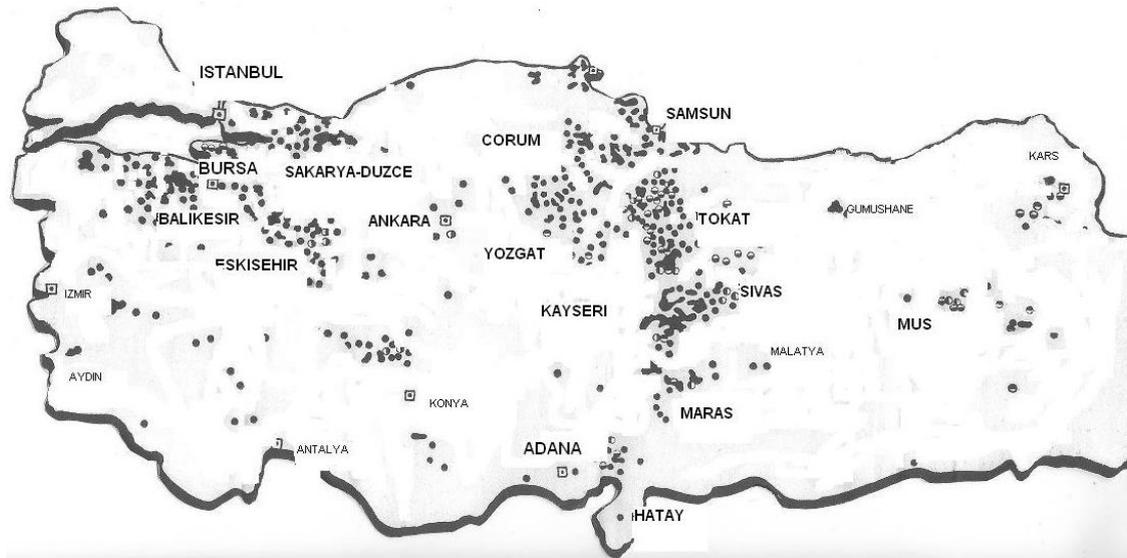
Figure 1- Map of the Caucasus



Map 1: The Caucasus ecoregion and Adygeya & Abkhazia in the Regional Context, modified from the map: The Caucasus ecoregion, administrative units

Source of base map: http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/the-caucasus-ecoregion-administrative-units_b93a [Accessed in December 2013]

Figure 3- Map of Turkey and the North Caucasian villages



Circassian Villages in Turkey

Source: Ş. Jane's Personal Study²⁴

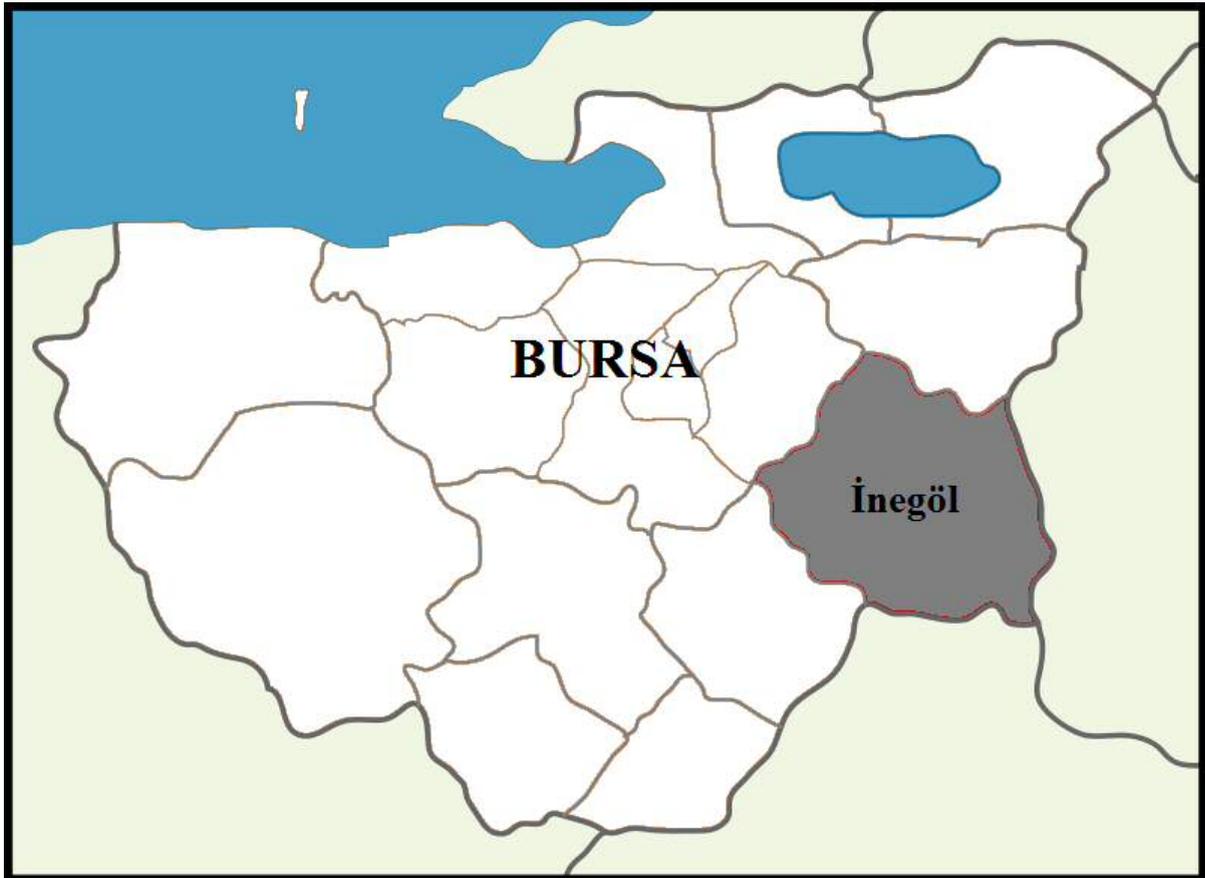
²⁴ I am grateful to Şamil Jane, who has provided me with this map, created by his own efforts and study of the Circassian diaspora.

Figure 4- Map of Field Sites in Turkey



Source of base map: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/> [Accessed in December 2013].

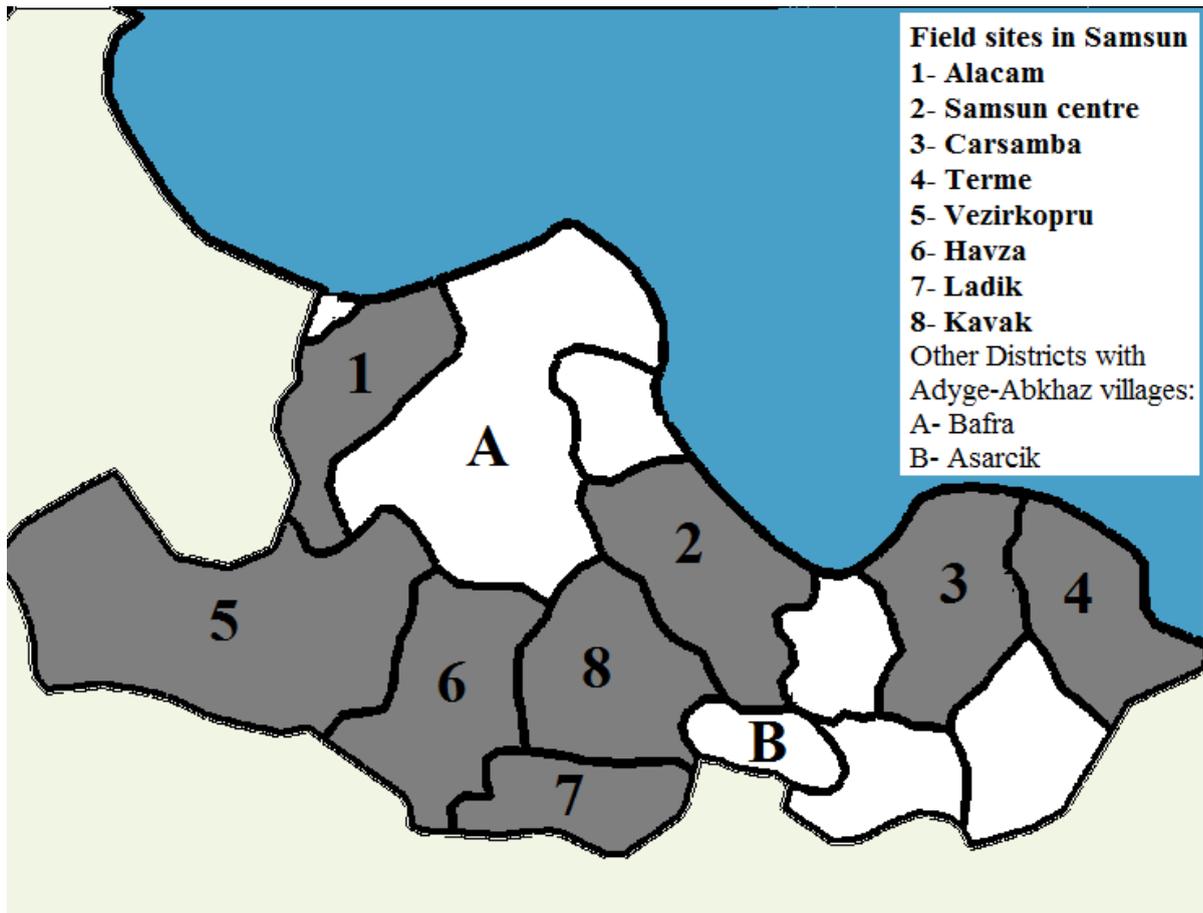
Figure 5- Map of Bursa province and İnegöl



Districts of Bursa Province and İnegöl – the only rural fieldwork site in this province – coloured in grey

Source of base map: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/> [Accessed in December 2013].

Figure 6- Map of Samsun province



Districts of Samsun Province and fieldwork sites (rural and urban) coloured in grey

Source of base map: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/> [Accessed in December 2013].

Appendix B - Terminology

B1. Labelling the people: The Cherkess, Adyge, Abkhaz and others

Abkhaz – Person or people of Abkhaz or Abaza (or Abazin) ethnic group

Adyge – Person or people of Adyge ethnic group (in all cases the sub-ethnic Adyge groups were also listed as Adyge)

Cherkess – In the diaspora, Adyge and Abkhaz people were known as Cherkess. There are many discussions about who is a Cherkess. To keep out of these discussions, this study used Cherkess only when the interviewee referred to either all North Caucasian diaspora in Turkey, or Adyge-Abkhaz-Ubykh diaspora together. When it referred to only Adyge people it was translated as Adyge.

Kabardey – The name given to the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic in the NW Caucasus by the diaspora. It occasionally refers to the sub-ethnic Adyge group but these in the majority of cases were listed as Adyge, unless there is reference to both in the same context.

Ubykh – Ethnically closest kin of Adyge and Abkhaz people. Wherever stated kept as it is. In most cases listed among the Cherkess.

B2. Place names and their use in this study

Abkhazia – The country of the Abkhaz people.

Adygeya – The country of the Adyge people (full name, Republic of Adygeya).

Apsny – The name of Abkhazia in Abkhaz used widely by the diaspora to refer to the ancestral homeland.

Caucasus – Is the name of the geographic region, discussed in detail in Chapter 2. In the translation of the quotations, to make it easier for the reader, this has replaced Nalchyk and one of the two capital cities frequently referred by the interviewees to define their destination in the Adyge homeland.

Cherkessia – The historical homeland that covers most of the North-West Caucasus, which was revived as a political ideal in the last few years as the mythical homeland that will be the home to the Adyge who are the only (real) Cherkess.

Kabardino-Balkaria, Republic of – In the narratives referred to as Kabardey.

Karachai-Cherkess, Republic of – Historically is part of Circassia and the homeland of some Adyge and Abkhaz ethnic groups.

Khoku – The name of the North-West Caucasus, in Circassian, used widely in the diaspora to refer to the ancestral homeland, including historical Circassia, or the current Republics and the historical Adyge settlements in between. Usually translated to Turkish and Russian as “homeland”. In a recent documentary movie shot by the Cherkess from Jordan in the Caucasus it was translated as “home”. (See:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqsWkaP226g>)

Maykop – The capital of Adygeya. As it was frequently used by the interviewees it was used as it is in the narratives.

Nalchyk – The capital of Kabardino-Balkaria. In the majority of the narratives this was translated as the Caucasus.

Sukhum – The capital of Abkhazia. In the narratives was not mentioned very often.

B3. Glossary

5th of October – This is the Republican Day of Adygeya, celebrated annually with fairs, concerts and other events.

12th of September - The short name used to refer to the *coup d'état* of September 12, 1980 in Turkey. During this period all the diaspora associations were closed, many of those involved in the administration of such associations were imprisoned, tortured and some were prosecuted. The relations between the Soviet homelands and the diaspora were cut unexpectedly and were delayed until the 1990s.

21st of May – The memorial day of the Circassian Exile. This day marks the end of the Russo-Caucasian (also known as Russian-Circassian) War. On this day a celebration parade was organised in the terrain of Kbaada (today Krasnaya Polyanna, where the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics will take place).

30th of September – This is the Victory Day of the Republic of Abkhazia and marks the end of the 1992-1993 conflict with Georgia. This conflict is referred to as a war by the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora and in this thesis has also been referred to as “war”.

Abaza – Refers to ethnic people. See Appendix B4.

Abkhazian – The language spoken by the Abkhaz and Abaza people, including all dialects. Also refers to the things in relation to the Republic of Abkhazia, such as Abkhazian citizenship, etc.

Adygaara – See *Khabze/Kebze* below.

Adygeneukh – Circassian word translated as half-Adyge.

Apsua – Refers to a group of ethnic Abkhaz in Abkhaz language.

Apsuaraa – See *Khabze/Kebze* below.

Associationists – Those people who are involved in the diaspora associations, who state that they grew up in the associations, who are active supporters of one or more associations or the idea of diaspora associations in general.

Cherkeska – The traditional male top clothing worn by the Adyge and Abkhaz, but also other Caucasian peoples. See Appendix F.

Cherkess Ethem, the traitor - Traitor is the direct translation of the word “*hain*” which was used in school books to refer to Cherkess Ethem, a Turkish Independence war leader of Adyge origin who fought on the side of Mustafa Kemal. Ethem was denounced as a traitor in 1921 and had to flee becoming a refugee for the rest of his life as Mustafa Kemal rejected a fair trial if he would return.

Circassian – The language spoken by the Adyge people, including all dialects.

Dernek – Turkish word for association, used in narratives to refer to diaspora associations.

Glasnost – The openness policy that was adopted in the Soviet Union by Gorbachev which brought to collapse of the Soviet Union.

Kalpakh – Traditional hat, used mainly by the Adyge.

Khabze/Kebze – The traditional code of behaviour, or etiquette of the Adyge-Abkhaz people. Abkhaz also refer to *Apsuaraa* and the Adyge to *Adygaara*, which are the customs and traditions that include the *khabze* as well. Occasionally, by those who do not know the exact

differences, these may be used in the same context. See Inal-İpa (2010: 11) for discussions on the “communal-patrimonial and partly with military-democratic and patriarchal-feudal conditions of life” that gave way to various forms of household culture development in Abkhazia and shaped the historical roots of traditional etiquette, rules and principals of traditional public behaviour.

Muhadzys – The name, in Russian, given to those who were forced to leave their Caucasian homeland to migrate to the Ottoman Empire. The word comes from Ottoman Turkish which translates as “migrant”.

Muhadzrstva – The event of the exodus or deportation of the Adyge-Abkhaz people, in Russian.

Pehlivan – Traditional Turkish wrestler.

Perestroika – The restructuring policy that was adapted by the Soviet Union by Gorbachev which brought to collapse of the Soviet Union.

Returnist – The political diaspora activists of the 1970s and 1980s who believed in the ideal of return being the only solution for the existence of the Adyge-Abkhaz people.

B4. The Caucasus: The land of 70 languages and peoples

“It has been asserted that no other territory of comparable size anywhere in the world displays such a diversity of languages and peoples” (Wixman, 1980: 1). The Caucasus is referred to in Greek mythology and Herodotus wrote:... in the Caucasus lived

many and all manner of nations...Strabo, writing about four and a half centuries later, having discounted more exaggerated estimates [of 400], affirms that 70 tribes, all speaking different languages, would come down to trade in Dioscurias, and a few decades after Strabo, Pliny claimed that the Romans carried on business in the same city by means of 130 interpreters. Arab travelers in the middle ages bore continuing witness to Caucasian polyglossia, and it was one of them, the tenth century geographer al-Mas'udi, who named the Caucasus *jabal al-alsun*, "mountain of tongues". (Catford, 1977: 283)

There are 37 “indigenous” or “autochthonous” languages that are in use today in the Caucasus which have been spoken for at least 4000 years (Catford, 1977: 284). Abkhaz, Adyge (or Circassian) and Ubykh are listed in the North-West Caucasian languages group of the Caucasic language family. Neither of the North-West Caucasian languages was written before the 19th century. Today the literary languages, mostly at the priority of one spoken dialect, are written with Cyrillic orthographies prepared in 1938 for the Circassian²⁵ and for Abkhazian²⁶ in 1954 by Soviet linguists.

²⁵ Circassian was written with Arabic till 1927, with Latin between 1927-1938. Kabardian was written with Latin till 1936.

²⁶ Abkhazian was first written with Latin in 1928, then with Georgian-based alphabet between 1938-1954.

The speakers of these languages are known with different names in the Caucasus, diaspora and other places/languages. Adyge is the self-designation of several groups in the North-Western Caucasus. Many Adyge tribes, speaking dialects of the Adyge languages, are listed as separate ethnic groups in the Russian census. These are namely, the *Adyge* (*адыгейцы*), *Kabardian* (*кабардинцы*), *Cherkess* (*черкесы*), *Shapsugh* (*шапсугу*). Adyge are known in English as Circassian²⁷ and other western usages include *Tcherkess*, *Cercetes*, *Ziques*, *Circasci*, *Adyg* and in Turkish as Cherkess (*Çerkes* or *Çerkez*²⁸); in Arabic *Jarkas* or *Sharkas*, in Persian *Charkas*. Earlier use of the term in the diaspora literature complicates the terminology in Turkish and in the diaspora-related English academic literature. While many prefer to use “Circassian” and “Cherkess” as a synonym for Adyge (Colorusso, 1991; Shami, 1998; Bram, 1999; Kaya, 2005a; Beslenev, 2007; Sahideko, 2009), some studies use the term to refer to Adyge and their ethnic kin, the linguistically extinct Ubykh and the Abkhaz-Abaza group (Shenfield, 1999; Jaimoukha, 2004; Chirikba, 2006; Miyazawa, 2009). In yet other work, the term is used to refer to all North-Caucasian diasporas including the East Caucasian Language speakers Chechens, Ossetians, or even Turkic languages speaker Karachai, etc. (Ersoy and Kamacı, 1992; Kaya, 2004; Aslan, 2007; Şahin, 2007; Gül, 2008; Doğan, 2009a, 2009b).

The Abkhaz designation is as complicated as the Adyge. The Abkhaz belonging to the tribes that were living in the area surrounding the current Republic of Abkhazia call themselves *Apsua* (*апсуа*) and are called Abkhaz (*Абхазы*) in Russian and Abkhaz or Abkhazian in English. The Russian designation Abazin (*Абазины*), on the other hand, refers to the ethnic relatives of the Abkhaz, living in the North-West Caucasus in the Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia, who speak a dialect of the Abkhaz language. This group’s self-designation is Abaza (*Абáза*). In the diaspora, on the other hand, Abaza is the name given to both Abkhaz-Abazin origin people, but in languages other than their own (Turkish and Arabic) and among the North Caucasians. As the fieldwork reveals, until the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Abkhaz-Abaza group was better known as Cherkess in the Turkish context, especially out of their own community but within the community they preferred Abaza. With access to the homeland after 1990s the Abkhaz started calling themselves *Abhaz*

²⁷ Some travellers of the 19th century explain that they use Circassian or Cherkess to refer to multiple tribes or ethnic groups. Pearson (1902, p. 134) explains that Circassian “is a generic name for the different races because, to a certain extent, a common character seems to have grown up among them, favoured by the physique of the country, or by common dangers and successes”.

²⁸ Today the “Çerkez” transliteration – with the z at the end – is rejected by the diaspora, but in many media publications it is possible to come across this spelling as well.

in Turkey to relate to the homeland, though this didn't find ground among the Abaza. In early European literature Abkhaz-Abaza people were also referred as *Abchas*, *Abchasien*, *Abas*, *Abasce*, *Abassa*, *Abasgi*, *Ashaæi*²⁹ and *Ziques*³⁰.

²⁹ Also with the following transcription variations: *Abchasian*, *Abcas*, *Abkas*, *Abasse*, *Abasgien*.

³⁰ The *Ziques* is arguably the name given to the Ubykh, now a lost nation living inbetween the Adyge and Abkhaz. In the diaspora, especially among the North-West Marmara region Adyge and Abkhaz, each group call the other a similar word while talking in their native language. In Circassian the word is *Azoq* and in Abkhaz the word is *Azoqua*. This word also has the meaning of “on the other side of the water/river” in both languages.

Appendix C - Types of return migratory projects

1. Elderly returnist (*dönüşçü*)
2. Working-age returnist (*dönüşçü*)
3. Child of a returnist (*dönüşçü*)
4. 2nd generation returnee
5. Children who motivated the return of a family
6. Family returnees who came before the last three years
7. Recently returned family
8. Broken family/ half here –half in Turkey
9. Early-period transnational (two homes, 6 months here, 6 months there)
10. Moved in the Caucasus from one Republic to another
11. Early returnee who went back to Turkey, and then came back in the recent period
12. Elderly woman
13. Single young woman
14. Single young man
15. Professional
16. Student who decided to settle

Appendix D - The life history narratives and their return typologies

	Interviewee Pseudonym³¹	Sex	Age	First Place of Interview	Return typology
1	Dudar	M	60s	Adygeya	Solo
2	Nartan	M	30s	Adygeya	Solo/ Student
3	Gushef	F	20s	Adygeya	Family/ 2.nd return Solo
4	Gushav	M	30s	Adygeya	Solo
5	Mafe	F	30s	Adygeya	Family
6	Nejan	F	50s	Adygeya	Solo
7	Jankat	M	50s	Adygeya	Solo
8	Nesren	M	50s	Adygeya	Solo
9	Perit	M	40s	Adygeya	Solo
10	Yenal	M	20s	Adygeya	Family/Broken family
11	Nart	M	20s	Adygeya	Transnational
12	Janset	F	20s	Adygeya	Transnational
13	Deguf Sabahat Baybas Lugon	F	70s	Adygeya-Abkhazia	Transnational
14	Abrek	M	30s	Abkhazia	Solo
15	Hacarat.	M	30s	Abkhazia	Solo
16	Gupse	F	40s	Abkhazia	Solo/ Mobility in the Caucasus
17	Gudisa	M	40s	Abkhazia	Warrior/solo/2.nd return with family
18	Khibla	F	60s	Abkhazia	Solo / Family / Transnational
19	Mamas	M	30s	Abkhazia	Solo
20	Nazra	M	40s	Abkhazia	Family/ 2.nd return
21	Azamad	M	40s	Abkhazia	Solo/ Student / Warrior
22	Alkhas	M	40s	Abkhazia	Solo /Broken family
23	Amza	F	70s	Abkhazia	Family
24	Apsuana	F	30s	Abkhazia	Family
25	Damey	M	30s	Abkhazia	Family
26	Astanda	M	20s	Abkhazia	Solo

³¹ The key portrayals have been highlighted.

	Interviewee Pseudonym	Sex	Age	First Place of Interview	Return typology
27	Zaur	M	50s	Ankara	Transnational (Adygeya-Abkhazia)/ Associationist
28	Berkuk	M	40s	Ankara	Transnational (Adygeya)/ Family of a returnee
29	Albus	M	70s	Ankara	Transnational (Adygeya-Abkhazia)/ Associationist/ Family of a returnee
30	Tameris	F	50s	Ankara	Transnational (Adygeya)/ Associationist
31	Maze	F	20s	Ankara	Transnational (Adygeya)/ Associationist
32	Gunala	F	50s	Ankara	Transnational (Abkhazia)/ Associationist
33	Sine	F	30s	Ankara	Returned to Abkhazia/ returned back to Turkey/ Transnational
34	Kuban	M	50s	Ankara	Returned to Adygeya/ returned back to Turkey/ Transnational/ Family of a returnee
35	Denef	F	40s	Ankara	Transnational (Adygeya)/ Associationist
36	Elbruz	M	50s	Istanbul	Transnational (Adygeya-Abkhazia)
37	Setenay	F	30s	Istanbul	Transnational (Adygeya-Abkhazia)/ Family of a returnee
38	Jan	M	40s	Istanbul	Transnational (Adygeya-Abkhazia) / Associationist
39	Abriskil	M	50s	Istanbul	Transnational (Abkhazia)/ Associationist
40	Jabaa	M	50s	Samsun	Transnational (Adygeya)/ Associationist
41	Kanbot	M	20s	Samsun	Transnational (Adygeya)/ Family of a returnee
42	Psefit	M	60s	Samsun/Alacam	Tried to settle in Adygeya and Abkhazia/ Transnational
43	Kanbolat	M	50s	Samsun	Transnational (Adygeya)/ Associationist
44	Gushan	M	30s	Bursa	Returned to Adygeya/ returned back to Turkey/ Transnational
45	Bata	M	40s	Bursa	Transnational (Abkhazia)/ Associationist
46	Levan	M	60s	İnegöl	Decided not to return to Abkhazia
47	Gunda	F	40s	İnegöl	Returned with family to Abkhazia/ returned back to Turkey alone/ Transnational/ Family of a returnee
48	Anzor	M	60s	Bursa	Family of a returnee to Abkhazia

Appendix E- The number of semi-structured interviews conducted by field site

	Urban		Rural		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Abkhazia	3	4	3	2	12
Adygeya	3	2	1	1	7
Ankara	6	2	-	-	8
Bursa	5	1	12	4	22
İstanbul	7	3	-	-	10
Samsun	7	1	27	14	59
Total	31	13	43	21	
	44		64		108

Appendix F- Photos



Photo 1: In Adygeya, those who arrive during the Republican Day find men wearing traditional dress going around the city on horseback, representing what the diaspora dreams of the homeland to be like. October 5, 2011; Maykop, Republic of Adygeya.



Photo 2: The Fire of Return being light on the Day of Repatriation to the Homeland. August 1, 2011; Maykop, Republic of Adygeya.



Photo 3: The National Museum of Adygeya opens a photo exhibition on the return migrants involvement in the economic development of the Republic. September 2013; Maykop, Republic of Adygeya.



Photo 4: The young committee of the DAR (Returnees Adaptation Home) poses with return migrants. March 2012, Maykop, Republic of Adygeya.



Photo 5: The return migrants' children's drama group performing a play in Circassian. February; 2013; Maykop, Republic of Adygeya.



Photo 6: The apartment building given to return migrants near Sukhum city centre. The buildings renovated for returnees after this one are all located out of the city, in rural and relatively less developed areas. Today, this apartment building has over 30 resident families, and a majority are returnees from Turkey with small children. The building manager is also from Turkey and the meetings and announcements take place in mixed Turkish, Circassian and Abkhazian. 2008; Sukhum, Republic of Abkhazia.



Photo 7: The volunteers during the Abkhaz – Georgian Conflict of 1992-1993 together with visitors from the diaspora. 1993, Gudauta, Republic of Abkhazia. (Photo by Abdulkadir Ardzinba)



Photo 8: The visitors from the diaspora in a meeting with the administrators of the International Abkhaz Abaza People's Congress and academics discussing the problems of return and communications with the diaspora. In the background, flags of Russia, Adygeya, Abkhazia and Turkey, as key sites for activities, are visible. 2007, Sukhum, Republic of Abkhazia.



Photo 9: The first official visit of the diaspora representatives in the homeland dates to 1975. It was met with great interest by the Soviet Abkhaz, bringing together thousands of people to meet the diasporic visitors and learn about the diaspora in Turkey. (Photo from the personal archive of Ruslan Gojba, historian, provided for the exhibition organised by Jade Cemre Erciyes in 2008 entitled ‘Abkhazia and Diaspora: Understanding the Other’).



Photo 10: The traditional Adyge-Abkhaz female and male clothing, that was banned in Turkey with the 1928 Hat Law and the 1934 Clothing Law.

The female dress traditionally included embroideries, the hat and white scarf would only be worn by married women.

The male dress is composed of the *kalpakh* (hat), and in this picture the *yamchy* – the coat used like a sleeping bag by travellers. The traditional *cherkeska* (Abkhazian: *akumju*)- is visible in Photos 1, 2, 5, 16 and 19 in a variety of contexts. 2011, Ankara Cherkess Association, Turkey.



Photo 11: Bursa Cherkess Cultural Association administration visits the Bursa Abkhaz Cultural Association. December 2011, Bursa, Turkey



Jade Cemre, Fieldwork January-February 2012

Photo 12: Bursa Abkhaz Association, the youth came together to spend the Friday evening at the association with fellow Abkhaz-Adyge. December 2011, Bursa, Turkey.



Photo 13: As I was leaving my rural field site, Inegöl, Bursa; I came across a returnee who was going back to Abkhazia after a visit to his family. I hear one young boy call out to the returnee ‘next time we go together’, while another man in his 30s said ‘I will be coming to visit you in the holidays as I said’. As they wave him goodbye with prayers, even the mothers and sisters do not cry. January 2012; Inegöl Bus Station, Bursa, Turkey.



Photo 14: At the oldest diaspora association in Turkey, I came across the Circassian language course which includes a variety of activities to increase practice, including a group visit to the homeland. This picture is from a conversation exercise during which the attendees do role playing. June 2012, Istanbul North Caucasian Association, Turkey.



Photo 15: The language course ends with a traditional singing and dancing circle. June 2012, Istanbul North Caucasian Association, Turkey.



Photo 16: The Sakarya North Caucasian Nart Children's Dance Ensemble making a show in a local government hall. The associations in Turkey focus on dance groups as a key activity to Turkey.



Photo 17: I come across a TV documentary crew shooting a film about the Cherkess culture in an Ubykh-Adyge village in Alaçam district. May 2012; Samsun, Turkey.



Photo 18: In a village in Havza district, the family I visit show me the Adyge flag that their relative living in Adygeya has brought for them from the homeland. Visible in the background is a traditional Cherkess figure that is frequently seen in stickers, paintings, prints and other souvenir items that fill up the houses and cars of the Adyge-Abkhaz diaspora.



the father wearing a traditional Cherkeska. May 2013; Sivas, Turkey.



Photo 20: A sticker from a car stating the ancestral family name of the owner and with a commonly used Cherkess male-female figure. Photo by: Asugba Selahattin Sayar.