

**CONCEPTIONS OF HOMELAND AND IDENTITY AMONG MESKHETIAN
TURK REFUGEES IN THE U.S. AND TURKEY**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the Meskhetian Turks, a small non-titular group who has experienced multiple displacements, violent persecution, and ongoing exile since 1944. Initially, the Meskhetian Turks were one of several groups who were deported from their homeland, Georgia, to Central Asia under Stalin's rule along with the other groups such as the Chechens, Crimean Tatars, and Ingushes who were designated as traitors of the Soviet Union in 1944. After being victims of mass deportation from Georgia, the Meskhetian Turks experienced pogroms in Uzbekistan, and human rights abuses in Russia. Starting from 2004, the U.S. accepted approximately 14,000 Meskhetian Turks as refugees.

By incorporating qualitative data collected through fieldwork in Turkey and the United States, this dissertation investigates where the home is for the group as asking whether Georgia still holds the meaning as homeland or the location of the "homeland" is shifting, as the population resettles in a surrogate homeland, Turkey. The processes of de-territorialization and reterritorialization are operationalized by examining "sentimental attachment to homeland" (to Turkey or to Georgia at various scales of place) and "satisfaction with place" (current places of residence in both Turkey and the United States). As referencing the literature on transnationalism, de-territorialization vs. reterritorialization, primordialism and integration, this dissertation sought to answer the questions of if the multiplicity of attachments to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them can be observed for Meskhetian Turks and as a diasporic ethnic

group which does not have a nation-state, how Meskhetian Turks preserve their cultural values and ethnic identity in Turkey and United States. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of ethnic identity formation among displaced populations, with special focus on the concept of homeland and transnationalism.

DEDICATION

To my family

and

Annem ve Babam için

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Upon the completion of this study, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to those people whose encouragement and support made the completion of this dissertation possible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Inspiration: One Hot Afternoon in Houston

Two men named Ridzvan and Muzaffar were waiting in front of a grocery store in a relatively low-income neighborhood one hot, muggy Saturday afternoon in Houston. They seemed like they were looking for somebody, and they approached a friend of mine and asked *Türk müsünü?* (Are you Turkish?). The two men, Ridzvan and Muzaffar, did not know any English, and they were looking for somebody who could communicate with them in front of a grocery store directly across from their apartment complex. They were just waiting and looking for somebody that they can relate to and once they see us, they recognized us being Turkish and started to speak in Turkish with us. Right after our conversation, they invited us to their home without any hesitation. Both brothers were placed in an apartment complex with their families which were very close to each other. We went to Ridwan's apartment where he was living with his wife and children. Soon after our arrival, Muzaffar's family joined us and we spent a couple of hours together. They seemed very pleased to meet with the people sharing similar heritage and cultural values. They were more pleased when we mentioned about the Turkish cultural center and the possibility of meeting with more Turkish people there.

Ridwan and Muzaffar told us that they were brothers who had arrived in the United States two weeks before their families. They were settled by the state of Texas in

an apartment complex comprising mainly refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. Prior to their arrival in Houston, they had been living in the Krasnodar Krai region of Russia where they were discriminated against by the local administration due to their ethnic identity. In Krasnodar Krai, they were not given any legal status and were forced to deal with hostility by both society at large and government officials. When the United States declared that Meskhetian Turks would be accepted as refugees from the region, most of them signed up to migrate to the United States as legal refugees. As Ridwan said, the reasons for this migration were clear:

We came to the United States in order to be able to establish a settled and safe life for our families and next generation. We were not respected and did not have any security back in Krasnodar, Russia. We were always under the fear of being harassed by the Russians. Despite all these happenings, we kept our Turkishness and religion.

This brief conversation struck me as reflective of many themes that interested me during my research. Until our first meeting with Ridwan and Muzaffar, I have not heard about the group before, and also I didn't know that there were from southern part of Georgia called Meskhetian Turks. Once they said that they came from Russia, I had assumed they were either Azeri or Turkmen; however as I see how we were speaking the same language which is Turkish that Turks speak in Turkey, I was very much surprised.

Later on when I had a chance to talk to the group in a variety of settings, they expressed that they would like other people hear their deportation and painful stories. While I was talking to them, I could easily feel that they were afraid of being in the United States due to not knowing the culture and what to expect. They were also saying

that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Meskhetian Turks found themselves grappling with uncertainty of changing social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Yet, they could rely on their knowledge of Soviet realities that provided common grounds for them and other citizens of the former Soviet Union and allowed them to navigate an emerging socio-cultural terrain of independent Russia. Yet, the shared background proved insufficient to create certainty in an atmosphere of rising nationalism and economic crises. On the other hand, Ridwan's wife pointed out that in the United States everything including water and flour was different. In a context where everything was unfamiliar, certainty of status and rights created a solid basis on which the group could build their life in the new country.

My encounters with the Meskhetian Turks and observing the brothers' effort to find somebody familiar in an unfamiliar world became the starting point for my dissertation. I started this research with the intention of investigating the strategies of Meskhetian Turks preserving for their ethnic identity in the United States. Yet, as I continued to conduct my study, my focus shifted to the idea of homeland and the multiplicity of identities that Meskhetian Turks have held.

Later, I added Turkey as another field for study and conducted field research among Meskhetian Turks living in Istanbul. This helped me to explore how living in a society that shares the same language, religion and many other cultural characteristics affected the ethnic identity preservation of Meskhetian Turks in Turkey as opposed to that of those living in the United States. In this dissertation I used the concept of culture as the core element of ethnic identity and used Meskhetian Turk culture and Meskhetian

Turk ethnic identity interchangeably. According to Barth, groups form on the basis of differences of culture not similarity. When I use ethnic identity, I refer to one of Barth's analyses of ethnic identity as "the social organization of culture difference" (Barth 1969). I know that the relatively distinct culture of Meskhetian Turks helped them to draw their own boundaries and maintain their culture during exile years. Barth's emphasis on the boundaries of ethnic groups and culture differences were suitable for the case of Meskhetian Turks. Since culture and cultural variation are in the center of ethnic identity, I used Boas' definition of culture "shared beliefs, values, customs, rituals, and behaviors that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning" (Plog and Bates 1976:7). When I refer Meskhetian Turk culture or ethnic identity I refer to their material culture such as women's scarves, expressive culture, and practices such as their family relationships. Therefore with preserving ethnic identity/culture I meant maintaining their cultural characteristics for example language, family traditions, rituals and customs, and belief system. I have an emic perspective in regards to using the concepts of ethnic identity and culture since the way Meskhetian Turks define their culture and ethnic identity and my observation led me to use above definitions and concepts interchangeably. In this thesis, I understand that racial and ethnic identities are socially constructed, fluid categories that change according to contexts and experiences. Therefore, I investigated whether Meskhetian Turks in Turkey integrated into Turkish society or consider themselves as a distinct group with a different origin and history. I became interested in the degree to which gendered differences affected the process. In

this respect, I also analyzed the notion of homeland for the Meskhetian Turks and the links between the territory and ethnic identity.

Before moving into the research questions, background information about Meskhetian Turks is necessary because Meskhetian Turks comprise a small ethnic group that has experienced multiple displacements, violent persecutions, and ongoing exile since 1944. Initially, Meskhetian Turks were one of several groups who were deported from their homeland in Soviet Georgia to Central Asia under Stalin's rule, along with the other groups such as the Chechens, Crimean Tatars, and Ingushes who were designated as traitors of the Soviet Union in 1944 (Oh 2012).

In 1944, Meskhetian Turks were deported to Central Asia and placed in "special status settlements," a euphemism for labor camps. Meskhetian Turks continued to live in the republics of Central Asia, until 1989 in Uzbekistan, where they were settled since they were not allowed to repatriate to their original homeland. After violent clashes in the Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan, in 1989, many Meskhetians fled to Russia with the help of the Soviet army. In the course of the conflict, 101 Meskhetians were killed, 1,200 wounded and their houses and other property destroyed (Aydingün 2002). Although there is not enough evidence to suspect the disturbance in Fergana Valley, according to the local news and authorities, the pogrom happened due to economic competition, unemployment and population pressure. The Soviet Government assisted the Meskhetian Turks in their relocation to various areas of Central Russia. Mainly Soviet Army evacuated 17,000 of Meskhetian Turks different parts of Russia. Rest of the group who were living in the other parts of Uzbekistan left their previous setting by their own

means to Russia. Some Meskhetians, around 13,000 of them, chose to re-unite with family members residing in Krasnodar Krai and opted to move there. Others followed their lead, justifying their choice with geographical proximity to Georgia, comfortable climate conditions and advantageous conditions for agriculture, a traditional occupation of Meskhetian Turks (Ossipov 2007).

Small number of Meskhetian Turks could settle in Georgia. Those Meskhetian Turks who succeeded in moving to Georgia faced discrimination and legal difficulties. The Meskhetian Turks who remained in Krasnodar Krai (elsewhere in Russia the situation was resolved) were denied Russian citizenship and the basic rights associated with citizenship. As of 2005 and, throughout the previous decade, their legal status was defined as “stateless people temporarily residing in Krasnodar” (Swerdlow 2006:35).

Constrained in their ability to move, Meskhetian Turks had been residing in that part of Russia trying to make sense of transformations around them. They also continued to appeal to authorities hoping to find legal permanence and stability. Yet, after 15 years of struggle Meskhetian Turks were still denied Russian citizenship, their plea was heard by the United States where they were accepted as refugees of special humanitarian concern (Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2007).

Origins and Terms

The ethnic origin of Meskhetian Turks has been a controversial issue. There is not a consensus whether they are ethnic Georgians or ethnic Turks who were placed in the region during the Ottoman Empire period. (Khazanov 1992).

After the deportation of 1944, Soviet officials designated the group as “Turks” whereas the group was called either Georgians or Azerbaijanis in Central Asia. In Turkey the term ‘Ahıska Turkleri’ (Ahıska Turks) is used with reference to Akhaltsikhe, the largest city in their native region (Pentikäinen and Trier 2004). Also the group members who consider Turkey as their homeland and relate themselves with Turkish heritage through Ottoman Empire call themselves as Ahıska Turks.

Another view in regards to group’s origin which is mostly accepted by Georgian, Soviet and post-Soviet historiography that Meskhetian Turks are descendants of the ancient Georgian tribe of ‘Meskhet’ (Wimbush and Wixman 1975:81). The argument continues that due to the Ottoman influence on the area starting sixteenth century and the spread of Islamic conversion separated the groups as Muslims and Christians. Therefore, Meskhetian Turks and Christian Georgians emerged as ethnic groups. “The counter-argument holds that the ancestors of Meskhetian Turks were people from Turkic tribes that settled in the region between the fifth and seventh century. It has been suggested that during the eleventh through twelfth and especially from the sixteenth through eighteenth century, when the present-day Georgian lands were under Ottoman rule, the local Turkish tribes were effectively consolidated, thereby creating a new ethnicity: the Meskhetian Turks” (Swerdlow, 2006:171).

However, according to Khazanov above explanation for the origin of Meskhetian Turks is the oversimplification of “the ethnic history of the group, particularly if one compares it with another Muslim Georgian group, the Adzhar, who in spite of their conversion to Islam have retained, not only the Georgian language, but to some extent

also the Georgian tradition culture and self-identification. As a contrary argument, the traditional culture of Meshetian Turks, though it contained some Georgian elements, was similar to the Turkish one” (Khazanov 1992:37-38). Kathryn Tomlinson has argued that in Soviet documents about the 1944 deportations of the Meskhetian Turks “they were referred to simply as "Turks", and that it was after their second deportation from Uzbekistan that the term "Meskhetian Turks" was invented” (Tomlinson 2002:23).

Furthermore, according to Wixman and Wimbush, “Meskhetian is the term needs to be used to refer to the national movement of the exiled ethnic groups comprised of Meskhi Turks, Karapapakh, Kurds, Turkmen, and Khemshin who originally lived in southern Georgia and Armenia. They also noted that Meskhetians should not be confused with Meskhi Turk, the latter being but the largest ethnic group of the Meskhetians. Specifically, Meskhi Turks are all those who are listed in the 1926 Soviet census as Turks from the Meskhetia region of Georgia. They have no particular ethnic or linguistic character which differentiates them from the Turks of Turkey. They are simply Turks who happen to live in the area called Meskhetia” (Wimbush and Wixman 1975:88-89). Later in the dissertation, I have interview notes that confirm above mentioned argument as well. Majority of my interviewee call themselves as Ahiska Turks and sometimes Turks except few exceptions. Almost all of my interviewees consider themselves Turks living in the area called Meskhetia during former Soviet Union. On the contrary, Georgian officials prefer to use the term Meskhetians as well as some Meskhetian Turk leaders to emphasize an underlying Georgian identity (Aydingün et.al 2006). Most of my informants stated that they prefer not to use this term since they

see it as a denial of their Turkishness. It must also be noted here that Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed clearly stated that they are different from Turks of Turkey culturally and it is mainly because of the influence of Soviet experience in their cultural identity.

Meskhetian Turks as an ethnic designation emerged around 1960s but officially started to be used after the violent pogrom and deportation in Uzbekistan in 1989 (Pentikäinen & Trier 2004). My adoption of this term is due to the common usage of the term in academic works. I preferred to refer the group as Meskhetian Turks in my dissertation even though I used the term Ahiska Turks when I was interviewing with the group members.

Meskhetian Turks used to live in southern part of Georgia previously known as Meskhetia. The local people including Meskhetian Turks were mainly occupied with agriculture and animal herding with large livestock. (Blandy 1998)

Population

Estimating the actual population of Meskhetian Turks is difficult due to their dispersion throughout several countries. According to the Soviet census in 1989, there were 207,502 Meskhetian Turks living in the Soviet Union. However, a possibility exists that this estimate is low because Soviet officials often have counted them as a part of the nationalities of Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks. According to Swerdlow (2006), based on the sum of data and extrapolation from studies conducted in different countries currently an estimated 350,000 to 400,000 Meskhetian Turks live in nine different countries: Today 90,000-110,000 Meskhetian Turks live in Azerbaijan, 600-1,000 in Georgia,

150,000 in Kazakhstan, 50,000 in Kyrgyzstan, 70,000-90,000 in the Russian Federation, 40,000 in Turkey, 10,000 in the Ukraine, 15,000 in Uzbekistan, and 10,000 in the United States (Pentikäinen & Trier 2004).

Research Questions

The link between homeland and identity has been controversial. Considering Meskhetian Turks who have been displaced multiple times and do not have a nation state, it is even more complicated to come to a conclusion about the link between homeland and identity. Given their overwhelming exposure to varying cultural and political settings and their recent history of displacement and migration, Meskhetian Turks do not constitute a homogenous population with a shared set of ethnic values, orientations, and identifications or desire to repatriate to Georgia or resettle in Turkey differ considerably from country to country. Going back to Ridwan's and Muzaffar's story, their closeness to Turkish people but at the same time hopeful sayings in the United States opened up another discussion about the possibility of having multiple homelands. In addition to that, the formation of a subjective sense of belonging to Turkey as a motherland/fatherland is assumed to be significant among the Meskhetian Turks. However, due to legal challenges for residency and Turkey's political stance towards ethnic Turks outside of Turkey, I hypothesize that the territorial Meskhetian Turk identity which is closely linked to Turkish identity has led to the formation of reterritorialized, "transmigrant" and or transnational identity among some members of this group.

By incorporating qualitative data collected through fieldwork in Turkey and the United States, this dissertation investigate where the home is for the group as asking whether Georgia still holds the meaning as homeland for them or the location of the “homeland” is shifting, as the population resettles in a surrogate homeland, Turkey among the group living in Houston and Istanbul. The processes of de-territorialization and reterritorialization are operationalized by examining “sentimental attachment to homeland” (to Turkey or to Georgia at various scales of place) and “satisfaction with place” (current places of residence in both Turkey and the United States). The framework of transnationalism shifts the focus from the idea of original homeland to the duality or multiplicity of places for the immigrants. (Clifford 1997, Kearney 1995, Rouse 1991, Basch et al. 1994). As referencing the literature on transnationalism, de-territorialization vs. re-territorialization, primordialism and integration, below questions were investigated in this dissertation:

1. As a community that has been displaced and uprooted multiple times for many decades, can we observe the deeply territorializing concepts of identity among Meskhetian Turks living in the United States and Turkey? Is the concept of nation-state still a relevant category of analysis for a group who does not have a nation where they can repatriate to? How the multiplicity of attachments to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them can be observed for Meskhetian Turks?
2. As a diasporic ethnic group which does not have a nation-state, how Meskhetian Turks preserve their cultural values and ethnic identity in Turkey and United

States? Given the nature of ethnic identity as complex, overlapping and shifting, how can we observe the elements of assimilation and acculturation among Meskhetian Turks in Turkey and the United States?

Organization of Dissertation / Chapter Summaries

In Chapter II, I problematize the concepts of refugees, homeland, diaspora, transnationalism and identity them by tracing their evolution through the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods. Discussing the contemporary situation of Meskhetian Turks in Turkey and the United States as diaspora communities, I examine if a link exists between territory and identity. In addition, I address the concept of homeland and if a possibility a multiple understanding of homeland exists for the group in two settings.

In Chapter III, I provide additional information about the history of Meskhetian Turks as well as their multiple forced migrations from Georgia to Central Asia, to Russia and to Turkey and to the United States. This chapter situates the Meskhetian Turks historically and introduces their limited discourses on displacement. In my review of Meskhetian Turkish history, I examine the complexity of the relationship between the territory and identity.

Chapter IV presents the research methods. This section explains the methods of the study, research process, positionality of the researcher and procedures.

Most Meskhetian Turks that I met and interviewed related themselves with Turkey. So Chapter V analyzes whether Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey have integrated into society at large and consider themselves as now living in their homeland.

Chapter VI provides ethnographic data to address the existence of notion of the multiplicity of attachments for Meskhetian Turks living in the United States by looking at different components of the idea of homeland such as a sense of belonging, acculturation, and transnational networks. Additionally, I analyze the common idea of taken-for-granted ways of thinking about identity and territory among Meskhetian Turks as a multiply displaced and uprooted community and look for the answer to the question: how can such deeply territorializing concepts of identity be observed among Meskhetian Turks living in the United States?

Chapter VII looks for answers to the question of where Meskhetian Turks situate their religious identity of Muslim-ness in the United States. Islam has been a vital component of Meskhetian Turk identity in Russia and the Republics of Central Asia during the exile years. So I investigate whether religion still constitutes a critical role in their identity reformation process in the United States in which a profound prejudice exists towards Muslims by the society at large. Also, I briefly examined the concept of “cultural Islam,” which comprises the religious beliefs of most people who have lived under a communist regime for long years such as Muslims in Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union.

Themes of displacement, forced migration, transnationalism, complexities of homeland and identity, the relationship between the territory and identity and the notion of multiplicity of homeland are all brought together in Chapter VIII, the conclusion. The concluding chapter pushes these questions further by applying conclusions drawn from

the stories of Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed to explain arguments about whether culture and identity are often re-territorialized or de-territorialized.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has become common to observe that the spatial and social displacement of people has been increasing around the globe at a fast pace, and this results in enormous numbers of people's being classified as refugees (Malkki 1995; Warner 1994; Castles and Davidson 2000; El-Shaarawi 2012). Meskhetian Turks, as an ethnic group that is not associated with its own nation state, have been living in exile for more than 70 years. They have been dispersed in the republics of Central Asia, Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, United States and Turkey. The country of Georgia has been reluctant to repatriate them to the region that they were originated from. Deriving from these points, this chapter aims to provide a theoretical foundation of forced and voluntary migration, transnationalism, refugees, exiles, and the concept of diaspora in order to clarify and support the research questions of the dissertation about the multiplicity of homeland and the identity reformation process of Meskhetian Turks residing in Turkey and the United States.

According to some of the literature, immigrants and refugees have traditionally been viewed as temporarily uprooted people, who after leaving or being forced to leave their homeland are subsequently assimilated into their place of arrival (Stein 1981; Stein 1981; Park 1999). This aspect does not adequately challenge the static idea of cultures and nations.

“The framework of transnationalism attempts to capture the daily interactions across international borders and to accommodate the immigrants’ embeddedness in more than one society and one nation-state. Whether called the ‘transmigrant’ (Glick-Schiller et al. 1995) or the ‘bifocal subject’ (Gupta & Ferguson 1992), the ‘circulating migrant’ (Rouse 1991), the ‘remigrant’ (Park 1999) all these proliferating alternative terms urge the recognition that migration cannot simply be viewed as the unidirectional uprooting and re-rooting of identity in a new, national territory” (Parla 2006:77-78).

While focusing on transnationalism, nationalism is still a relevant category. Nation-states and nationalist ideologies have an important place in attributing meaning to the very experience of displacement and the original homeland. “Investigating the overriding grip that nation-states and nationalist ideologies exert on the dislocation experience is of crucial importance in attributing meaning to the very experience of displacement. The nationalist ideologies that posit an absolute correspondence between homeland and ethnicity in general determine who does and does not belong to the nation-state” (Parla 2006:89-90). The prolonged displacement of Meskhetian Turks for years resonates with this way of thinking. They were displaced from Georgia in 1944 due to their link with Turkish heritage and possible fear of their alliance with Turkey during World War II. After that they had to be deported from Uzbekistan where the majority of the Meskhetian Turks used to live due to rising nationalism and ethnic tensions. Finally, they had to take refuge from Krasnodar Krai, Russia due to their ethnic heritage in a nation state which is still in the process of creation.

Above mentioned “absolute correspondence between homeland and ethnicity resonates particularly with Turkish nationalism and its strong ethnic emphasis, especially when the migrant population in question is seen as returning ‘home’. When the Turks of Bulgaria who fled their homeland in 1989 as a result of the repressive measures of the falling communist government in Bulgaria arrived in what Turkish nationalism designates as their true, ancestral homeland” (Parla 2006: 72-73). Similarly, Turkish government accepted around 500 Meskhetian Turks of Ukraine as mentioning them returning their homeland. It is also confirmed with my interviews that majority of the group identify strongly with Turkey as a surrogate homeland. Whereas, Turkey does not have a policy for “return migration” and give citizenship to the Meskhetian Turks all around the world. Therefore, most of the members of the group have the formal citizenship status of their country of residency with negotiating the complex realities that confront them particularly in the process of ethnic identity preservation for the younger generation.

In this chapter, I utilized the concepts of displacement and homeland as well as generating and relying on theories on forced migration, ethnic identity and transnationalism guided by the research questions mentioned in the previous chapter.

Refugees

Refugees have an important place among the immigration and forced migration literature (Colson 2003; Malkki 1992; Salem-Murdock 1989; Krulfeld and Baxter 1997; Harrell-Bond 1986). According to the annual flow report on the U.S Department of

Homeland Security webpage, in order to be eligible for refugee or asylum status, the applicant must meet the following criteria: “A person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality (or if an applicant is considered stateless, his or her country of last habitual residence) because of prosecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion” (Martin 2011). Depending on the decisions of the immigration officials, asylum seekers may be sent back to their ‘homelands’ or stay in the United States. The refugee as a social category emerged after World War II. Beforehand there were people looking for refuge, but the refugee as a specific social category and legal problem of global dimensions came into exists after the World War II (Malkki 1995).

Refugee rights for the first time were mainly mentioned under The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It states in the declaration that: “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” (Nobel 1988:20) Therefore, the international law pertaining to refugees was developed within the framework of human rights. The most universally cited and accepted part of the basic legal definition of the refugee status which contained in the Geneva Convention as follows:

Most of the legal definitions and information about refugees use ‘stateless people’ and ‘displaced people’ synonymously (Malkki 1994). A stateless person is any individual who is not considered to be a citizen, or national, of any state (Grahl-Madsen 1966). According to this definition, a person can have a nationality or be stateless at the

time when he or she becomes a refugee. However, not all stateless people are refugees, and not all of the refugees are stateless (Malkki 1994). Considering the case of Meskhetian Turks, the ones residing in Central Asia were not classified as refugees, because they were granted citizenship in the newly independent countries of Central Asia after the fall of the Soviet Union. In contrast, the Meskhetian Turks who are now living in the United States were accepted under the refugee category given discriminatory policies of local administration of Krasnodar Krai against Meskhetian Turks was released in the world wide news. ‘Displaced people’ has been used commonly as a synonym for ‘refugee’ at least in a legal sense, but they do not overlap perfectly just as in the case of ‘refugee’ and ‘stateless people’.

According to the records of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), about 13 million people are refugees, having been uprooted from their homes and coerced to seek safety in other countries. Another 50 million people would be refugees if they could be accepted as refugee or given asylum and cross an international border.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that not all of the people leaving their homeland under extreme duress are classified or accepted as refugees by certain countries, especially the United States. As Schiller points out (1997), the allocation of refugee status is arbitrary, politicized, and tied to U.S. foreign policy. Those denied refugee status as well as those who, for various reasons, do not apply, are instead often labeled immigrants or undocumented aliens. Ongoing global and local political concerns continue to have an impact on refugee and immigrant lives (Baxter and Krulfel 1997).

The Syrian refugee crisis all over the world is a fitting example for this reality. Due to political and security concerns, many of the EU countries and the US suspended their Syrian refugee acceptance. This will lead refugees to seek out alternative ways to enter those countries.

After the USSR disintegrated in 1989, Meskhetian Turks were not recognized as legal citizens of their countries. A significant number of Meskhetian Turks were living in Uzbekistan, and Russia in addition to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This caused conflict in Uzbekistan between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in 1989. Due to the pogrom, Meskhetian Turks were resettled in different parts of Russia and some of them moved to Krasnodar Krai where they had to face with the ethnic discrimination since they were not given any citizenship or residency rights. They were under the ‘well-founded fear of persecution’ due to their ethnic identity and are accepted as refugees to the United States. Classifying as a refugee and the possibility of not being able to return to any nation brings out new discussions in regards to ethnic identity preservation and the concept of homeland which will be addressed under the identity and homeland section of this chapter.

Before moving into identity and homeland concepts, I think it will be useful to talk about transnationalism since Meskhetian Turks were spread in different countries and maintain their relationship as a one Meskhetian Turk community.

Transnationalism

The anthropologists Linda Basch, Cristina Blanc-Szanton and Nina Glick Schiller (Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1992) have made an important contribution to the literature of transnationalism. They define the concept of transnationalism as follows:

We define 'transnationalism' as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. (Basch et al. 1994: 7)

According to Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blank (1994), the essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that the immigrants or refugees sustain in both home and host societies. So immigrants or refugees "take actions, make decisions and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states" (p.7). At the same time, transmigrants who have been dispersed in different geographic locations usually continue their connections with their place of origin. The transmigrant, thereby defined as a special category of being, is capable of maintaining multiple "homelands in the world, and taking actions, "making decisions, and developing subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states" (Diener 2009:35). Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blank offer the Haitian "Tenth Department", the Grenadian "constituency" in New York, and

the Filipino *balikbayan* as examples of transnational ties, evidence of migrants who continue to be the members of the state from which they originated (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blank 1994:8). It should also be noted that the relationship between the host and home country could be discrepant with the complexity of the lives of transmigrants.

The dynamic nature of the discourse of transnationalism in a globalizing world brings a new dimension to the conceptualization of minorities, mainly refugees. Complex relations of refugees with their home and host countries or even their stateless status create a transnational community not bound by the geographical borders of either the countries of origin or the countries of settlement.

It has thus now been established that sociocultural groups can no longer be understood as discrete territorially-defined entities. Arjun Appadurai predicts that states will remain the same but that global cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and the rise of diasporic identities will render new or future conceptions of home and host country as well as nationalism and the homeland concepts (Appadurai 1993, 1996a&1996b).

Today, due to the rapidly-expanding mobility of people, it is common to see “the refusal of cultural products and practices. This leads to a profound sense of a loss of territorial roots and an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of places” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:23). Edward Said also mentions the general homelessness of the world people in 1979, referencing identities gradually becoming deterritorialized, or at least differently territorialized (Said 1979). Gupta and Ferguson brings another dimension to displacement and de-territorialization. According to them, “it is not only the displaced

who experience a displacement, even people remaining in familiar and ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed, and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and the culture broken” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:10).

Based in the interplay of homeland and transnationalism, how can the concept of homeland be situated within the global cosmopolitanism and de-territorialization of the states? According to Diener (2009), rather than signifying an abject de-territorialization of the state, the formation of such connections could be viewed as a variation on the reterritorialization model which has room to have multiple attachments and homelands (p.35). Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 1996) have argued that processes of “de-territorialization are nearly always accompanied by concurrent processes of at least partial reterritorialization. ‘De-territorialization’ is one term for the displacement of identities, persons, and meanings that has been very common in today’s world system. Cultural anthropologists use the term de-territorialized to refer to a weakening of ties between culture and place. In other words, it is the removal of spatial boundaries of culture for a certain time and location. It implies that certain cultural aspects tend to transcend specific territorial boundaries in a world. Malkki is a prominent advocate of the idea of rejecting the strong link between space and people. She vehemently rejects ‘the widely held commonsense assumptions linking people to place, nation to territory’ which she argues ‘are not simply territorializing, but deeply metaphysical” (Malkki 1992: 27). She contests what she calls “the presumed natural relationship between ‘countries and roots, nations and national identities”” (1992: 26). She further argues that

“in the sedentarist thinking 'the link between people and place is routinely conceived in specifically botanical metaphors. That is, people are often thought of, and think of themselves, as being rooted in place and as deriving their identity from that rootedness”. (1992: 27).

Meskhethian Turks as a group which was displaced multiple times and living scattered around the world, the concept of homeland and identity cannot be understood only in regards to specific places and through the lenses of rootedness. “Rather, much of the human experience is appreciated as taking place in what Appadurai (1991) has aptly termed ethnoscapas – between the boundaries rather than within the spaces each of them confines” (p.46). In addition to that, most of the Meskhethian Turks that I interviewed with in the United States consider Turkey as their homeland since they relate their ethnic identity with Turkey and Turkish culture. Nonetheless, they also mentioned about the differences that they observe between their cultural characteristics and the Turkish peoples’ who are living in the United States. Therefore, the presumed link between the Meskhethian Turk identity and Turkey as a territory could be an imagination of the group during the years of oppression in former Soviet Union and Russia. The relationship between Turkish people and Meskhethian Turks as well as similarities and differences between the two groups will be discussed in the further chapters. Also the transnational relations are maintained in multiple ways, including through new forms of communication.

Furthermore, social media and internet have a significant effect on the transnationalism and sustaining constant social relations that link together all of the

Meskhetian Turks in different countries. For example, if there is a wedding in Kyrgyzstan, the relatives can watch the wedding ceremony live in Houston and can even interact with the people via internet. So many refugees and immigrants today built social areas that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders and technology has a great contribution on it.

Diasporas

Meskhetian Turks as a refugee group established a variety of cultural centers and connect with the other Meskhetian Turks via social media and different social events. Therefore, the concept of diaspora and the degree of its effect on identity and the idea of homeland could contribute answers to the questions raised in this dissertation.

William Safran was one of the first scholars who pointed out the dearth of studies on diaspora in the inaugural issue of the journal *Diaspora* and defined the diasporic people as “being dispersed from a specific center to two or more places; continue to hold a "collective memory, vision, or myth" about the original homeland; continue to believe that the original homeland is their "ideal, true" home and dream of returning; believe that they should remain committed to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland; sustain a strong ethno-communal bond based on that ongoing relationship with the homeland; and maintain a troubled relationship with the wider society, believing that they can never be fully accepted and causing them to remain "partly alienated and insulated" from it” (Safran 1991:83-84).

“The concept of diaspora can take into account the refugees’ specific transnational experiences and social relationships” (Wahlbeck 2002:34). The discourse of diaspora has been addressed by several scholars for three decades from multiple points of views. “As the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted. This has resulted in what one might call a ‘diaspora’ diaspora which is a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space” (Brubaker 2005:32).

Robin Cohen however, in 1997 distinguishes the global diasporic people “between victim, labor, imperial, and trade Diasporas. He also agrees with Safran’s criteria, but suggests that, in addition to the foregoing, the dispersal may have been an "expansion" in search of trade or economic opportunities. Moreover, he argues, diasporic communities continue to hold "a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement" and "the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism” (Cohen 1997:26).

Anthropologists also use the term ‘diaspora’ “to describe a type of social consciousness that locates individuals in multiple cultural and social spaces” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:21). Gilroy’s study (1993) about the black populations in Atlantic and Halls’ discussions on (1991) globalization “reconceptualized the mid-Atlantic as a zone of movement, connections, and structures of domination and power that produce multiple black diasporic cultures. Another example is Aihwa Ong who examined the multi-sited, multi-layered geography formed by networks of family ties, kinship,

sentiments and commerce that evolved from connections formed by earlier Chinese Diasporas” (Levitt and Waters 2002:34).

In reference to above discussion a workable definition of a diasporic community must allow for a change in the relationship with the wider society. Not all of the diasporic communities desire to return to their homeland, and also, not all of them have a homeland. In addition to that, definitions of ‘diaspora’ “must allow for a change in the identity of the diasporic community and its members as such shifts that allow for the blurring of boundaries and for the complexity of multiple senses of belonging and multiple ideas of home” (Berns-McGown 2007:78-80). Therefore, any workable definition of ‘diaspora’ must begin with what all diasporic communities have in common such as having a connection to somewhere else in addition to the adoptive country in which they have settled and the measure of their distance from the wider society, and it must take into consideration changed international political environment. “To be in the diaspora is to perceive oneself as linked to multiple places and to hold a complex identity that balances one's understanding of those places and the way one fits into each of them. It can be deeply nostalgic, and it raises questions about the nature of "home" and belonging. Diaspora can also be defined as a space of connections as such the mythic homeland and the adoptive country” (Berns-McGown 2008:81).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, most of the newly independent states started to build their own national identities by nationalizing and indigenizing their territories. The non-titular ethnic minorities such as Jews, Volga Germans, Koreans, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks were marginalized in the newly independent

countries in ways that they weren't during the Soviet years. These small size non-titular groups were vulnerable and faced hardship during the nationalizing process in the newly independent states (Oh 2012). As it is stated before, Meskhetian Turks living in Uzbekistan suffered from this process and became the victims of a pogrom that broke out in 1989 with the rise of nationalist sentiments that predated independence.

Most of these non-titular small size groups created their diaspora communities in the newly independent nation-states of Central Asia. Meskhetian Turks are one of these diasporic communities whose members were spread in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. Due to the ethnic discrimination of Krasnodar region, Meskhetian Turk diaspora stretched to the United States. While analyzing the concept of diaspora and diasporic identity for Meskhetian Turks, we should keep in mind that "for many diasporas of Central Asia, the ideologies of home, soil, and roots fail to line up with the practicalities of residence". (Uehling 2001: 394). Diaspora identity for Meskhetian Turks contains disparate and even contradictory elements which are constantly evolving in reaction to changing circumstances. Meskhetian Turks have been preserving their ethnic identity yet there are differences among the groups based on their country of residency which support the above mentioned linked to multiple places and holding a complex identity idea. Meskhetian Turks' situation can fit into the definition of connections as such the mythic homeland and the adoptive country.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to explore how the concept of homeland continues to resonate for a group that is currently dispersed transnationally as well as if

there is a taken for granted link between the identity and territory. So it will be to the point addressing the homeland and identity concepts in different contexts.

Homeland and Identity

“What does it mean,” asks Clifford, “at the end of the twentieth century, to speak . . . of a ‘native land’? What processes rather than essences are involved in present experiences of cultural identity?” (Clifford 1994: 275).

“Such questions are of course not wholly new, but issues of identity whether collective or ethnic today do seem to take on a special character, when more and more of us live in what Said (1979) has called ‘a generalized condition of homelessness’” (p. 18), “a world where identities are increasingly coming to be, if not wholly de-territorialized, at least differently territorialized” relationship to this, “a problem of perceptions of home and homeland in a dynamic world exists that is characterized by migration, expulsion, travel, transnationalism, and multiculturalism, and it draws attention to the following question: What and where becomes “home” after someone has crossed state borders and cultural boundaries, either voluntarily or forced by particular circumstances” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:69-70).

Recent writings on transnational sociocultural systems, transmigrants, and the de-territorialized nation state have challenged the notion of place and homeland (Espiritu 2003). According to Hutchinson and Smith (1996), homeland, a definite territory, a piece of land where a people emerge, live, or imagine it as their proper place on earth, even if they no longer occupy it, is undoubtedly one of the essential elements of ethnic

identification (p. 7). Homeland is a concept so intimately integrated into human psychology that the scholars have paid very little attention to it. Place is bound to processes of identity formation and reformation. At these conceptual foundations, place reflects strategies and sentiments of inclusion and exclusion, implying that how we identify ourselves is greatly affected by where we feel we belong and equally by where we believe we do not (Diener 2009; Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004; Malkki 1992, 1995; Smith 1999). The purpose of homeland is to physically and psychologically sustain groups of people who regard themselves as bound up with each other and who share a collective consciousness (Diener 2009).

Most homeland literature assumes that culture, historical memory and societal organization were already inscribed in the space. This concrete spatial view and the “assumed isomorphism of space, place and culture result in some significant problems” (Gupta & Ferguson 1992:32). Immigrants, people living in borders, refugees, transnational business people or professional elites, will not fit into this way of space-culture premise (Gupta & Ferguson 1992). According to Gupta and Ferguson (1992) and as also mentioned in transnationalism a disjuncture exists between the place and the culture lived by certain groups such as Khmer refugees in the United States or by Indians in England (p. 7).

“Today, most anthropologists seem to agree that world views based on the fixed category identity-place, such as the ideology of the nation-state, wrongly assume that identities are inescapable destinies, naturally predetermined by kinship ties, ethnicity, locality, and shared culture. A widespread consensus seems to exist that people are

rather engaged in multiple identification processes, many of which are not necessarily rooted in genealogical or territorial assumptions” (Basch et al. 1994; Baumann & Sunier 1995; Hannerz 1987; Kearney 1995; Malkki 1992).

Rootedness has been a subject in social sciences with the emergence of transnationalism and the easy mobility of the people. Until that emergence, most scholars accepted the anachronistic view of homeland and its link with identity. So, before analyzing the relationship between fluid perception of homeland and identity, the evolution of the people-place bond in social fields must be addressed.

Evolution of People-Place Attachment in Social Studies

The very obviousness of the link between people and place and, by this means with the identity built into everyday language and often also into scholarly work, makes this link elusive as an object of study. Common sense, as Geertz has said (1973), "lies so artlessly before our eyes it is almost impossible to see" Geertz, (p.28). So it is a commonsense to be rooted in a place, as noted by Malkki (1992).

Metaphors of kinship are used to denote “natural” ties between an ethnic group and a specific place. The usages of motherland and fatherland for the homeland “suggest that each nation is a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it. Thinking about nations and national identities may take the form of roots, trees, origins, ancestries, racial lines, autochthonism, evolutions, developments, or any number of other familiar, essentializing images is mainly aborescent” (Malkki 1992:27-28).

Throughout history and in scholarly works, statements have been made that humans have a tendency to demarcate the boundaries of possession and assert control over various portions of the Earth's surface. The assertion of the sense of ownership of a land was considered to be generally naturally from the existence of oppositional identity structures, most prominently taking the form of kinship (Diener 2009). From this point of view of the primordialist interpretation of nations, nationalism has been built, which identifies the nation as a social group linked to one place that is unique to that group.

Attachment is “a primordial sentiment; the significance of attachment derives from its self-evident meaning with respect to affective ties to local environments. Attachment to the community often entails efforts to remain within the protective range of familiar places. Attachment to places is certainly social and most profound when human relationships are embedded in current or past group affiliations and identity is based on ethnic, racial, class, or cultural parameters” (Giuliani 1991:90).

Shils used the concept of primordialism first in 1957. He has suggested that modern society is “held together by infinity of personal attachments, moral obligations in concrete contexts, professional and creative pride, individual ambition, primordial affinities and a civil sense the level of which changes from person to person. Shils' understanding of primordial attachments is clarified as the following”:

As one thought about the strengths and tensions in family attachments, it became apparent that the attachment was not merely to the family member as a person, but as a possessor of certain especially “significant relational” qualities, which could only be described as primordial. The attachment to another member of

one's kinship group is not just a function of interaction It is because a certain ineffable significance is attributed to the tie of blood The fact that those both factors operated in many of the more intensely knit families does not demonstrate that the two variables are one, but rather that two types of attachments each move in the same direction (p. 142).

Similarly, Geertz (1973) has argued that primordial attachments stem from the assumed givens of "immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language ... and following particular social practices" (p. 259). "He has suggested that primordial ties are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves ... as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtues of some unaccountable absolute importance attributed to the very tie itself. The general strength of such primordial bonds, and the types of them that are important, differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. But for virtually every person, in every society, at all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural some would say spiritual affinity than from social interaction" (p. 60).

"According to Geertz, (a) assumed blood ties are based on quasi-kinship, which is defined as untraceable but sociologically known kinship, (b) race refers to phenotypical physical features, especially to skin color, (c) language differences are not as divisive as the first two aspects of primordial ties according to the several cases

around the world, and (d) differences in religion, geography and customs also have the potential to cause primordial discontent” (Bayar 2009:67).

“As Geertz has argued, individuals attribute an ineffable importance to their assumed, sociologically known kinships; primordialism acknowledges the role of social factors in the construction of ethnic identity and in the significance of perceived kinship ties. In other words, the theory underlines the fact that the boundaries between ethnic groups are drawn along assumed similarities and dissimilarities” (Bayar 2009:89). Deriving from this point, kin group essentialized meanings would emanate relating to a territory’s provision of a material base for existence. So the territory is the primary factor drawing individuals together (Diener 2009).

“Primordialism, in relationship to ethnicity, argues, “ethnic groups and nationalities exist because there are traditions of belief and action towards primordial objects such as biological factors and especially territorial location” (Gryosby 1994:168). As a counter argument to primordialistic view towards homeland, the instrumentalist perspective posits that homeland is amorphous concept, which could be reconfigured from various economic, social, political and cultural circumstances (Diener 2009). According to instrumentalist point of view a place of residence, homeland within this context, is meaningful only to the degree that it meets the needs of its occupants. Therefore, this perspective is open the de-territorialization and reterritorialization of communities due to social, cultural, economic or national reasons. Although the instrumentalist view seems to explain the common trends of today, transnationalism,

displacement, and immigration, it has difficulty in explaining the sentimental, often non-rational bonds of people and places.

Until the late nineteenth century, the majority of the people in the world identified themselves strongly with local homelands/motherlands/fatherlands. The extrapolation of this connection from the local to the larger scales involves two processes: the nationalization of social space and the territorialization of identity. Both of these processes represent a very dynamic identity formation.

Homeland as an Idealized Mythical Piece of Land

Meskhethian Turks as an ethnic group who do not have a nation-state are dispersed; their political powerlessness has rendered them subject to persecution and — under Stalin’s rule — to genocide similar to other ethnic minorities of the former Soviet Union. Today, they could be in one point “regarded as constituting a classic diaspora in the sense that through however many generations they can trace their residence in a host country, they evince “the spirit of the first generation in the links they maintain with their traditional structures” (Safran 1991:86). Meskhethian Turks were deported from their original homeland of Georgia in 1944. The continuing oppression after their deportation in different parts of the former Soviet Union and their loss of homeland paved the way to the construction of a myth of homeland. This provided the basis for the formation and strengthening of the Meskhethian Turk identity and their yearning for their homeland.

According to Lévi-Strauss (1955), societies create myths to resolve a demand for satisfactory resolutions. Myths are used to explain and create meaning in complex and seemingly unknowable situations. For example, myths help the groups to answer questions like “who are we? Where are we from?” which have ultimate importance for the existence of a group. By associating the existence of the group with the items in the environment, myths create a deeper meaning. In the case of the process of constructing a homeland, a myth establishes an existential bond between a social group and a particular land. A myth, on the one hand, penetrates into the empirical/actual group and attributes to it an imaginary depth, reconstructing that group as the imaginary body of the society (Aydingün 2010:26-28).

Nevertheless, the actual piece of land emerges through the myth as the cradle and the space for the flourishing of that particular, now imaginatively constructed, community. United with the group, the homeland emerges as something more than a mere territory. As can be seen from terms such as “motherland”, “fatherland”, “ancestral homeland” or “historic homeland”, homeland is an emotion-charged and abstract concept (Aydingün 2010:27).

Most deported ethnic groups were allowed to repatriate after Stalin died, yet the Meskhetian Turks along with some other ethnic groups including the Crimean Tatar and Volga Germans, had to remain in exile. Their prolonged exile circumstances further contributed to the strengthening of the feelings of attachment to the homeland through myth making because the homeland emerged in the minds of those deported and their offspring as an unreachable and beautiful place surrounded by the mysterious

atmosphere of the myth. As it is stated in my interviews with the elderly Meskhetian Turks, they were always dreaming about their villages in Georgia. As they become more separated from their original homeland, and the reality of Georgians and Armenians live in the villages where they used to live, the hope for going back to their homeland continues to keep the group together. But, they are aware of the reality that their repatriation to their original homeland is not possible at this time. They have a special situation since they have a dual homeland: Meskhetian region of Georgia and Turkey. “They consider both to be the lands of their forefathers” (Aydingün 2006:31). They have a sense of attachment to Meskhetian region due to being originated in that territory, and they consider Turkey also their homeland due to their connection with Ottoman Empire.

De-territorialization and the Changing Face of Homeland

“For decades, the relationship between people, place and identity has been the subject of much debate among social and cultural anthropologists. The debate centers on the notion of the territorialization of identity and is polarized between those who argue that people and place have a deep- and lasting-natural bond (sedentary and essentialist theories on identity), and those who advocate the existence of a post-modern condition of identity whereby people no longer have a strong attachment to place anymore and that “home” ceases to exist in this increasingly globalized world (de-territorialized theories of identity)” (Diener 2009:44-45).

It is an obvious reality that mobility and displacement have been a common reality in the globalized world. Referencing Said's homelessness premise, scholars such as Daniel Warner (1994) and William Connolly (1991) have rendered the notion of 'home' obsolete and argue that a generalized feeling of homelessness now exists in the world. They argue that the controversial relationship between person and place has occurred in this post-modern age; this disjuncture is worldwide because "it applies to both those who are physically homeless and those who are not". As Warner (1994) said, "The homeless, therefore, are not necessarily those without a territorial place although the two can be easily confused" (p. 369).

Warner argues that "rifts and splits have appeared in the relationship between person and place and thus these have challenged the essentialist and sedentary understanding of man's bond to place. These rifts have and always will exist. In the case of refugees, the argument is made that these rifts existed prior to flight and will exist after a return takes place. Connolly (1991) calls this denial and repeated attempt to prioritize the need for a home a deeply ingrained nostalgia for a politics of place" (p. 464)

Appadurai also predicts that states will remain, but that globalism, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism will challenge the current conceptions of nationalism and the homeland that they generated. In one of the most textured studies of globalization and transnationalism and their effects on identity, Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (1994) studied the multiple attachments of people to their societies of origin and settlement. Their study challenges the notion of the one and mythical

homeland and gives examples to territorial belonging, which derives from both areas of origin and venues of resettlement. Therefore, the transmigrant is identified as a special category of being, capable of maintaining multiple homelands in the world and “taking actions, making decisions, and developing subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states” (Diener 2009:35). Meskhetian Turks living in the United States were accepted as refugees about a decade ago, but currently they have resettled in the United States and constitute one part of the Meskhetian Turk diaspora.

According to Connor’s (1986) study, the people in diaspora feel equally at home in their diasporic residence as they do in their “ethnonational kin-states” (Diener 2009; Connor 1986). This feeling has been explained as expatriate communities bringing homeland images and identities with them into diaspora, and, most of the time, they reconstruct small-scale homelands in venues of resettlement. At this juncture, the collective identity has an essential place, which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, the strength of attachments to the homeland varies based on different cultures and historical periods (Diener 2009).

Repatriation to Georgia or Turkey-Where is Homeland?

“The desire for return or repatriation is fundamentally related to what the particularities of a certain group of refugees' conceptions of home and homeland are — what they believe they are returning to and what that place may signify for an individual and a group. How that conception is politically mobilized and employed to campaign for

return by a group is also important” (Malkki 1995:13; Warner 1994:34). Furthermore, the repatriation idea is very much related to the people-place attachment.

Different theories and arguments exist about the “attachment and fixation of people to places, and the construction of territorially based communities and identities, as something which is worthy of explanation, rather than a natural given. Clifford describes how “dwelling” is seen as the unproblematic background of “travelling” or movement (1992), and Malkki has explored how the “sedentary imagery” permeates common assumptions and conceptualizations. People are seen as “rooted” in the soil of their “homeland” that nurtures their specific culture. Hence, refugees and the displaced are “uprooted” people susceptible to a loss of identity and moral integrity, and therefore subject to techniques of control, investigation and intervention” (Malkki 1992:45-49).

According to Malkki, (1992) the “sedentary” way of thinking is deeply embedded in the “national order of things”, the division of space between sovereign and exclusive nation-states (Malkki 1992). The original homeland of Meskhetian Turks is Georgia, a place where they were once an ethnic minority and where they are currently an undesired group. Those accepting Turkey as their surrogate homeland face issues with citizenship. Although they do not fit Malkki’s argument in regards to homeland and repatriation concepts as a community with not having a nation-state, their multiplicity of attachments could be considered under Gupta and Ferguson’s arguments, which is that space is not de-territorialized but reterritorialized. The “rapidly expanding mobility of people, goods, capital, and ideas and the concomitant erosion of spatially bounded social worlds have been conceptualized in theories of postmodernity as de-territorialization.

Space has not become irrelevant; it has become reterritorialized. Ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places, often imagined at a distance, are becoming ever more important. The challenge is thus to explore how places are imagined (given identity and meaning) and inhabited in the context of a global political economy of space” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:9-11). “Processes of repatriation and reintegration offer possibilities for analyzing the connections between power, space and identity. The imagined communities of refugees (Anderson 1983), for example, are constructed around imagined places and the causes and identities that the refugees attach to these places” (Stepputat 1994:175-177).

Voluntary repatriation is considered the ideal resolution for the refugees, however, for Meskhetian Turk refugees, going back to Georgia remains highly problematic. “Economic and social re-integration issues in the form of restitutions of land, property rights, language barriers, citizenship questions, tensions between Meskhetian Turks, who are Muslim, and Georgians, who are mostly Orthodox Christian, are only a few of the long list of problems. The Georgian government never signed the Bishkek Agreement of 1992, which calls for repatriation of all formerly deported peoples. In 1996 Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze, signed a presidential decree in which he agreed to grant citizenship; restore nationality, grant economic privileges, and assist in reintegration, but the provisions of the agreement have not yet been enforced” (Ray 2000:43-45). The terms of the agreement contain several requirements including obtaining Georgianized names, learning Georgian, and not resettling in their places of origin. These requirements are organized according to a pattern that, using

Malkki's language, reflects the "national order of things" (Malkki 1995). "This situation does not preclude resistance. Indeed, the ability of Meskhetian Turks to identify themselves in non-national terms is an important instance of resistance. When Georgia joined the Council of Europe in 1999, the country committed itself to a 12-year plan to repatriate and integrate the deportees. Until today, the government has not made a serious move toward fulfilling that obligation" (Rimple 2007:90).

The majority of the Meskhetian Turks is living in diaspora in places like the United States, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Russian Federation. As many studies have suggested, notions of "nativeness and native places become very complex as more and more people identify themselves, or are categorized, in reference to de-territorialized homelands" (Appadurai 1993:56). In reference to the existing literature, people are chronically mobile and routinely have been displaced in the last few decades. Therefore, they construct new homes or homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases. So deriving from this point of view, Chapters V and VI examine how Meskhetian Turks living in the United States and Turkey define what and where becomes "home". They are also focused on how the concept of homeland continues to resonate for a group that is currently dispersed transnationally. In this regard, the intensive fieldwork conducted in Houston and Turkey among Meskhetian Turks gives an idea about whether the concept of homeland in Georgia continues to hold meaning or whether the location of the "homeland" is shifting, as the population resettles in the surrogate homeland of Turkey.

In addition to the idea of shifting homeland, these chapters seek an answer for the question of how such deeply territorializing concepts of homeland, nations and ultimately the link with identity is observed among Meskhetian Turks. The next chapters will address the interplay of homeland and identity in more detail; however, showing the concept of deterritorialization and how it is linked to the formation or reformation of identity is important.

Gender and Identity

Gender models, the statuses and behaviors are most likely to undergo changes in the context of immigration and refugee existence. Altered accesses to the resources and new differential employment opportunities in different situations sometimes foster changes in gender roles and statuses (Camino & Krulfeld 1994).

Refugees often have transferrable job skills in their resettlement; however, a lack of facility in the language of the host country renders them only eligible for entry-level, mostly low-paid, positions in their countries of resettlement. Sometimes refugee women are better qualified for higher-paid jobs than men. This may create feelings of inadequacy for men, often leading to the conflicts between sexes.

However, each ethnicity has its own characteristics and, according to the existing literature, differences exist among refugees in terms of the relationship between gender and identity (Ong 2003; Mortland 1994; Franz 2003; Pittaway & Bartolomei 2001). Meskhetian men and women tend to either embrace or resist the host culture in different aspects of life. This dissertation seeks to analyze the degree to which gender role

changes occur among Meskhetian Turks, as a strict patriarchal community, mainly in the United States as a country enforcing gender equality. Furthermore, the gender relations will be investigated among Meskhetian Turks in Turkey a country that has a mixture of secular policies and a different patriarchal culture.

Changes in the “personal, social, and economic lives of refugee women and men are neither simple nor unidirectional, and frequently these changes are not desired or welcomed by the women and men themselves upon relocation” (Franz 2003:34). Gender has a complex place in the ethnic identity formation process in the United States (Davis and Sherman Heyl 1986; Foner 1986; Prieto, 1986; Simon and Brettell 1986; Lamphere et al. 1993; Pessar 1995). Most of the time refugee women coming from a variety of background use different strategies may be looked oppressive but they help them to maximize their security and optimize life options within a strict patriarchal system that they are living in (Kandiyoti 1988). For example, Meskhetian Turk girls get married at early age even sometimes before finishing their high school. Their parents and grandparents are highly concerned about protecting their daughters and they all believe that they will be protected by their Meskhetian Turkish husband. After getting married, most of the Meskhetian Turk women finish their high school and continue their higher education even though most of them have kids and fulfill all of the house chores. Coping strategies of Meskhetian Turk women in Turkey and United States will be elaborated more in the next chapters.

According to the immigration and refugee scholarship, some of the refugee and immigrant women tend to adapt more quickly to their new socioeconomic environments

than men in the United States (Franz 2002, 2003; Ong 2003, Kibria 1994; Sossou et.al 2008). But it must be noted that it should not be generalized for all of the refugee and immigrant populations. Most of the female refugees and immigrants quickly find regular illegal work in the first years of their residence. On the other hand, men had difficulties accepting this downward economic mobility, and this affected their integration into the American culture. For example, Bosnian refugees resettled in the United States in early 1990s, although women seemed to integrate to the American culture and the lifestyle, “they defined their identity through cultural and religious traditions such as traditional methods of food preparation or, for Muslims, fasting during Ramadan. Thus, the women understand their own ethnic identity as not being necessarily linked to a particular place, primordial ties, or even political categories. The men's identity seems to be intrinsically linked to their places of origin and the social status they had lost. Most of them are not happy with their situation in the United States and are willing to repatriate” (Franz 2003:67-70). Thus, the way the women and men define their identity varies due to the cultural characteristics. Women act more pragmatically to the rebuilding process in a new country and negotiate their identity, which is the mixture of culture and tradition. Conversely, men and their ethnic identity link to their country of origin, and the difficulties they face in the new country discourage their integration. Similar case was investigated for Meskhetian Turk community. I looked for if women tend to adapt and integrate to the American society more quickly and easily than men and I did not reach the same conclusion with Franz whose research was among Bosnian refugees. Due to the separation from their close relatives and moving to a place where the culture, traditions

and religion are very different than they used to be, Meskhetian Turk women are more conservative to adapt and integrate to a new culture as opposed to their husbands. I will be elaborating the degree to which women have difficulty in adapting to a new society in the next chapters.

In addition to the macro level of integration of refugees and the intersection of gender, gender relations at the household level need to be investigated in order to have a better understanding of how gender plays a role in the adaptation and identity reformation process for refugees. As it is stated above, most of the Meskhetian Turks have a strict patriarchal family structure. The expectation of many Meskhetian women is to stay at home and do the daily household chores including cooking bread, cleaning the home, and rearing their children, among others. This tradition has continued in the United States and Turkey with some modifications. Meskhetian women work in urban industrial settings with the rest of the family in the United States. In some states, women take positions such as cleaning staff in hotels or caretakers for the elderly. The hours are challenging and the pay is low, but women are pleased with their situation because they have a chance to support their family economically (Reisman 2012). Although the expectations of women in terms of fulfilling house chores remain the same, most of the time when mothers are working overtime hours, the daughter of the home, after she graduates from high school and get married, is expected to do the majority of these household chores. The strict patriarchal family and community system and women's coping strategies within this system will be discussed in the further chapters through the lens of Kandiyoti's bargaining with patriarchy framework.

Pedraza's (1991) analysis of the social consequences of gender and the degree to which women impact life in new settings offers insightful information about women's role as a mediator between fathers and their daughters. In most refugee or immigrant settings, caring for all the children's needs is the women's/mothers' primary role. Pedraza gives an example from the Jewish immigration experience in the United States. She states that through immigration, daughters are exposed to the ways of a modern, secular world. Although mothers themselves adhere to traditional ways, these women played the role of mediators between fathers and daughters within the family (Pedraza 1991:319). If Meskhetian Turk mothers and grandmothers play a mediator role between fathers and daughters or whether they function as a protector of the status quo will be discussed later as well.

Women and girls comprise a significant number of the Meskhetian Turk community both in Turkey and the United States. They also have an important place in the process of child rearing and conveying the cultural values and traditions to the next generation. Therefore, it is important to investigate where women stand in the ethnic identity preservation process and establishing homeland in diaspora.

Summary and the Theoretical Framework

Harrell-Bond and Voutira state that refugees were born in this century, as the people who did not fit the nationalist principle 'one state - one culture' (Hirsch 2005). In the Soviet and pre/post-Soviet context, Meskhetian Turks and their forbears have been subject to forced migration for about 70 years on account of their status as stateless.

As it is stated above there are discrepancies among the transnationalism scholars and one of the splits is specifically around the significance of territorial attachments. One side stresses the decline of the national homeland as well as primordialist view and favor of “flexible citizenship,” (Ong 1999), where displacement is the eventual destiny of the migrants. The second notion expresses the significance of continuing political and emotional attachments to a national homeland due to the diasporic existence of the displaced. (Parla 2006)

The discourse of transnationalism changed the foci of the origin and destination and give rise to the idea of the duality/multiplicity of locations that could be accepted as homeland by the immigrants or refugees. “This idea has been called with different terms as ‘transnational communities’ (Kearney 1995), ‘bilocal communities’ (Clifford 1997), or ‘transnational circuits’ (Rouse 1991). This idea of multiplicity of homeland appears more suited to the experience of Meskhetian Turks than either the classical diaspora paradigm that posits yearning for a single homeland as fundamental, or the cosmopolitan paradigm that altogether dismisses embeddedness in a particular locality” (Parla 2006:35-36).

Homeland is a place in which the community emerges as a separate and distinct entity. Ethnic identity formation is a complicated discourse affected by many factors including religion, networks, expectations from the receiving country, similarities and the differences between the country of origin and the ‘host country’, socioeconomic backgrounds, displacement, gender, age and previous experiences. For refugees, the complexity of their experiences in their countries of origin, and in response to their

diaspora itself, add further complexities to the process of ethnic identity formation. The next chapters document the experiences of Meskhetian Turks in the United States and Turkey and provide further analysis of these circumstances.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORY OF MESKHETIAN TURKS

The Meskhetian Turks is a group which was deported with several other nationalities from their original homeland to the republics of Central Asia during World War II.

The ethnic origin of Meskhetian Turks is highly controversial. A common belief is that the Meskhetian Turks are Turkicized Georgians who converted to Islam between the 16th century and 1829, when the region, Meskheta-Javakheti was under the rule of Ottoman Empire as figure 1 shows. Some believe even in the 19th century many Muslim Meskhetians could still communicate well in the Georgian language. Notwithstanding the possibility of this point of view, the adherents of this argument have oversimplified the ethnic history of the Meskhetian Turks. The situation of the Meskhetian Turks was complicated, and the possibility that some Turkish elements were part of their ethnogenesis, to use Soviet scientific parlance, should not be rejected out of hand (Khazanov 1992).

However, rejecting the Georgian influence in the developmental process of Meskhetian Turk identity would also be unfair. Beginning with the Seljuk period that lasted from 1037 to 1194, Meskheta was a frontier region in which Georgians and Turks and Muslims and Christians lived side by side for many centuries. According to

historical records, about 18 percent of the population was bilingual Muslims who spoke both Georgian and Turkish (Khazanov 1992).



Figure 1. The Ottoman Empire in the 16th century when Georgia was under Ottoman rule. (Andersen 2004)

According to Wimbush and Wixman, Meskhetian Turks are the largest ethnic group used to live in Meskhetian region along with Karapapakh, Kurds, Turkmen, and Khemshin people and originally called Meskhi Turks (Wimbush and Wixman 1975). They also stated that “Meskhi Turks are all those who are listed in the 1926 Soviet census as Turki from the Meskhetia region of Georgia. They also emphasized that no particular ethnic or linguistic character - nothing, that is, which differentiates them from the Turks of Eastern Anatolia. They are simply Turks who happen to live in the area

called Meskhetia” (Wimbush and Wixman 1975:76). Based on my fieldwork in Turkey and the United States I agree to a certain degree with them that Meskhetian Turks are very much alike with the Turks of Eastern Anatolia but with a lot of Soviet and Central Asia, particularly Uzbek effect on their cultural and ethnic characteristics.

With the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1918-1920, Meskhetian Turks were engaged in a war of independence war to establish their own state. In October 1918, the Meskhetian Turks established the Ahiska republic. After a while Meskhetian Turks united with other ethnic groups, Karapapakh, Kurds, Turkmen, and Khemshin, living in the region to form a new state called the Democratic Republic of Southwestern Caucasus. The republic lasted from December 1, 1918 until April 19, 1919, when it was dissolved by the British High Commissioner and control was ceded to Georgia on 7 July 1920. Figure 2 shows the boundaries during this period. Although brief in existence, this state entity played an important role in the process of ethnic identity formation and homeland concept for Meskhetian Turks (Yunusov 2000).



Figure 2. The Georgian border after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and several international treaties and agreements including the Soviet-Georgian Treaty of Moscow of May 7, 1920. (Andersen 2004)

“The Soviet government had a policy to maintain and even strengthen the ethnic institutions that were established in the 1920s. The ethnic institutions established by Soviet policies strengthened the ethnic identity of many members of groups that had official homelands within the Soviet Union by privileging ethnic identity attributes over those of class, location, or religion. These institutions operated locally, within the homelands, so that members of minority groups who lived elsewhere in the Soviet Union were particularly vulnerable to assimilation” (Gorenburg 2006:43-45).

It should also be noted that “in the former Soviet Union officially there were 15 Soviet Union Republics had an autonomous status with titular ethnic/national group such as Georgians, Kazakhs, etc. had a dominant administrative position. Within some of these republics smaller ethnic groups were granted local autonomy as embedded

republics or autonomous regions such as Abkhazians in Georgia. In the Russian Federation alone there were sixteen embedded autonomous republics during the Soviet period. The political foundation of these ethnic homelands consolidated the ethnic homogenization of the republics. The national consciousness of the titular populations had an effect on their social mobility during Soviet period. This also added to the perception of ethnic/national hierarchies” (Hagendoorn et.al 1998:345). According to Karklins, in most cases the non-titular nationalities in the Soviet republics were under rule of the territorially based group-titular groups, except Russians (Karklins 1986). Meskhetian Turks were classified as one of those non-titular groups mainly resided in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan.

Empire and nations with the titular groups became the Soviet structure which was mutually supportive in the Soviet context (Hirsch 2000). Even though “ethnic consolidation” thesis was valued by the Soviet Union, using Russian as a language was encouraged. (Pelkmans 2006, Gorenburg 2006). All of the ethnic groups needed Russian to communicate with each other. In addition to that promoting one central language resulted into the decline in use of the other languages. However, my informants repeatedly stated that they preserved their language during those years.

The aim of “Bolshevik efforts was to create a federation that was national in form but socialist in content which resulted in the institutionalization of ethnicity through ethnic republics and passport identification. This institutionalization, it is argued, strengthened ethnic identification among minorities by forcing a single and unchangeable ethnic identity upon each person and by establishing incentives for

individuals to identify as members of a minority ethnic group within their titular republic. The personal ethnic identity was enshrined in the internal passport, which listed nationality. Personal nationality was noted in almost all official transactions, was transmitted by descent, and was formally unchangeable across generations except for the offspring of interethnic marriage, who could choose either of the parents' nationalities when they received their passports at the age of 16" (Brubaker 1996:31).

In 1936, the Turkic majority ethnic population of Azerbaijan was assigned a new ethnic designation and called Azerbaijani instead of Azerbaijani Turk or simply Turk with whom the Meskhetian Turks were lumped at this time (Khazanov 1992; Yunosov 2000). Some Meskhetian Turks were renamed as Azerbaijanis. In 1935-36 this entire group of Turki was reclassified as Azerbaijanis. Others registered as Georgians but most of the group members registered as Turks without estimating the possible consequences of it. Until the 1940s, Meskhetian Turks did not pay much attention to the official renaming and called themselves Turks or the local people of Meskheta region under the rule of Republic of Georgia as it is indicated in figure 3.



Figure 3. Georgian state borders upon incorporation into the Soviet Empire. (Andersen 2004)

“Between 1937 and 1949, the Soviet officials under Stalin administration deported more than two million people of 13 nationalities from their homelands to remote areas of the USSR”. Soviet Koreans were the first ethnic minority group was deported and relocated to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to prevent them from assisting Japanese spies and saboteurs. The success of this operation led the secret police to adopt, as standard procedure, the deportation of whole ethnic groups suspected of disloyalty to the Soviet state. In 1941, the policy affected Soviet Finns and Germans; in 1943, the Karachays and Kalmyks were forcibly relocated; in 1944, the massive deportation affected the Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Crimean Greeks, Meskhetian

Turks, Kurds, and Khemshins; and finally, the Black Sea Greeks were moved in 1949 and 1950” (Pohl 1999:32).

In November 1944, the Meskhetian Turks with the other ethnic groups such as Khemshins, Kurds, and Turkmen were deported to the republics of Central Asia as in small groups in the territories of Kazakhstan (29,497 persons), Kirghizia (9,911), and above all Uzbekistan (42,618), where they were known as “special settlers” (Conquest 1970). During the deportation thousands of them died but classified as “missing” (Sumbadze 2007; Trier & Khanzhin 2007; Veyselöglu 1999).

The reasons for their deportation remained unclear for a long period of time. Historians have had several assumptions (Martin 1998; Bugai and Gonov 2002). At first glance, these mass deportations appear to be a product of Stalin’s paranoia. According to Martin (1998), “Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union led to a massive escalation in Soviet ethnic cleansing. The Soviet government immediately deported 1.3 million citizens of German origin from European Russia to Siberia and Central Asia. After the retreat of the German army in 1943–44, the Soviet state deported its entire Crimean Tatar, Kalmyk, Chechen, Ingush, Balkar, Karachai, and Meskhetian Turk populations to Central Asia on the charge of collective treason” (Martin 1998:820). Many experts have suggested, however, that the relocation of Muslims was the aim of Soviet Union’s policy to place the borders with the pro-Christian communities (Bugai and Gonov 2002). “In the previous century, Russia had viewed the Ottoman Empire as one of the greatest threats to its southern borders, and the two nations went to battle on several occasions. During World War I, Russia had coveted and advanced upon Constantinople (Istanbul)

seeking access to the Mediterranean Sea. In World War II, Stalin believed Turkey's neutrality was shifting to favor Germany. He viewed Muslims inside Russia's borders as potential spies and collaborators - enemies. This perceived weakness had to be removed and replaced with pro-Russian support” (Wimbush and Wixman 1975:98-100).

Meskhetian Turks were assumed to be one of the potential suspicious groups due to shared linguistic and religious characteristics. The official number of Meskhetian Turks who were deported in 1944 is still unavailable. According to the recent publications and Georgian documents, 150,000-200,000 Meskhetian Turks were forced to leave their homeland Georgia by the Soviet Army. Deportees were not provided with any oral or written explanation and their deportation was not mentioned in any Soviet documents of the period (Khazanov 1992). After the collapse of Soviet Union, however, documents were discovered that provided more details. According to these, authorities believed that a significant number Meskhetian Turks, Kurds and Khemsins were connected by kinship to the population of Turkish border areas and thus feared to be a potential source of espionage (Blandy 1998).

In addition to above mentioned assumed possibility of collaboration with the enemies during World War II, according to Wimbush and Wixman the deportation of the Meskhetians, including Meskhetian Turks, Khemshins, Kurds, and Turkmen was “directly related to historical Armenian claims on particular areas in northeastern Turkey and on their plans for the future incorporation of these areas into a Greater (Soviet) Armenia. They also pointed out that the selection of people to be deported shows a strong Armenian bias based the information about the population of the Meskhetian

region was overwhelmingly Armenian according to the 1926 census. Of the total population of 78,937 only 6,940 were reported to be Meskhetian Turks, while 57,791 were reported to be Armenian. For the other populations, the Karapapakh inhabited northern Armenia, and Khemshin, who were Muslim Armenians, were selectively took from the Adzhar, Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, ASSR, while the remainder of the Adzhar population, who were Islamicized Georgians but not Turkified, was left intact. Furthermore, it should be noted that the deported peoples shared a number of characteristics: all spoke Turkish as their native or second language, they shared a well-defined common territory, all were Islamicized, and all manifested a strong sense of Turkishness. After the World War II, the Armenian population who used to live in Eastern and North-Eastern part of Turkey resettled in the Meskhetian region of Georgia based on their demand with the dream of Greater Armenia. The removal of the Meskhetians was a concession to traditional Armenian hatred of Turks by the Soviet government” (Wimbush and Wixman 1975:82-86). Their argument also supports the extent to which Georgian government’s reluctance for the repatriation of the deported groups.

The status of Meskhetian Turks was partially relieved after Stalin’s death with one important exception. Although Meskhetian Turks and some of the other ethnic groups, Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars and other smaller groups, were given some flexibility, they were not allowed to go back to their original homeland. Soviet officials did not acknowledge deportation of the ethnic groups of Meskhetian region until 1968 despite acknowledging the above mentioned ones in between 1956-1957. Soviet

Officials did not want to acknowledge the deportation of these groups and had tried to create the impression of nothing happened in that region. Between the years of 1956-1968 Meskhetian leaders were in communication with the Soviet officials for repatriation but it was not until 1968 their deportation was publicly acknowledged. After 1968, there was not any concrete action for the groups to repatriate to Meskhetian region. All of these efforts were futile. Meskhetian Turks' request was addressed by Supreme Soviet of the USSR, which stated that "the people deported from Georgia enjoy the same rights as do all citizens of the Soviet Union to live everywhere in the USSR in accordance with the legislation in force on labor and passport regulations." However, it immediately made a reservation by noting that citizens of Turkish and Kurdish nationalities, Khemshins and Azerbaijanis who previously lived in Georgian SSR had settled "permanently in the territory of Uzbek SSR, Kazakh SSR and other union republics" (Bulletin of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, No 23, 1968). In 1968, Georgian officials announced they would allow 100 families a year to settle in other regions of Georgia because, according to the Georgian authorities, room no longer existed for Meskhetian Turks in the Meskheta region. However, records show that even this small promise was never fulfilled. Between the 1960s and the 1990s only 186 families (1,211 people) managed to return to Georgia, but they were all resettled in different parts of Georgia (Khazanov 1992).

As it is shown in figure 4, Meskheta region is under the current boundaries of Georgia. However, Meskhetian Turks were not given permission to repatriate after Stalin died in 1956 but they were allowed to move around the USSR. "They were granted the

right to migrate to Azerbaijan (Khazanov 1992). Some Meskhetian Turks holding Azerbaijani passports moved to Azerbaijan, those who had the means moved to Turkey, others to various areas such as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and a vast number to Uzbekistan. Georgian actions also prevented any repatriation of Meskhetian Turks forced the group to settle in other parts of the Soviet Union: in Azerbaijan, in the North Caucasus (particularly in North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Circassia), in Stavropolo'skii and Krasnodar Krai and even in Moldova. However, the majority of them continued to live in Central Asia, more than half in Uzbekistan until 1989. However, in the decades following 1956, Meskhetian Turks endured discrimination and 'repeated displacement' (Trier & Khanzhin 2007:4).

In 1970, Some Meskhetian Turks demanded the right to immigrate to Turkey through the Turkish Society for the Defense of the National Rights of the Turkish People in Exile. Although their collective request was rejected by the Turkish government, a limited number of Meskhetian Turk families were accepted as immigrants.



Figure 4. Current country borders of Georgia. (Andersen 2004)

Mass Deportation from Uzbekistan in 1989

“From deportation in 1944 until today, most Meskhetian Turks live in Central Asia in places like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. However, in June 1989, interethnic clashes took place in the Ferghana Valley of Uzbek SSR between Uzbeks and the Meskhetian Turks who had been resettled during the Stalinist period. A fight that started at a small market kindled major violence against Meskhetian Turks in the cities

of Fergana, Kokand, Marilan, and Namangan. According to official reports, 171 people died as a result of the violent clashes and the vast majority of them were Meskhetian Turks. (Rubin and Lubin 2000: 45-46; Megoran 2002: 243). As a reaction to these clashes, the Soviet government relocated almost all 15,000 Meskhetian Turks out of Uzbekistan” (Rubin and Lubin 2000: 45-45, 177).

The official press merely indicated that the pogrom happened due to “the ethnic tension between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks. However, it is not clear as to why tensions would rise among the two, given the fact that the Meskhetian Turks were, among all the resettled nations in Uzbekistan, the closest to the Uzbek population in faith, culture, and language. According to Mirkhanova, one of the reasons behind the attack on the Meskhetian Turks in Ferghana was that the majority of Meskhetian Turks possessed larger sections of land than the local Uzbek population. Thus, feelings of resentment by local Uzbeks (the majority) over a relatively wealthier minority group at a time of political and economic crises in a densely populated region of the Soviet Union may have been a major reason behind the attacks. According to Kudrayev (1996), two-thirds of Uzbekistan’s inhabitants have been living in rural areas, thus, the question of fair land ownership had been, and remains today, central to the economic and political stability of Uzbekistan” (Mirkhanova 2006:38).

Meskhetian Turks living in Uzbekistan did not have any clashes or any problem until 1989. According to Saida, one of the Meskhetian Turk women living in Houston her life in Uzbekistan was very convenient until the pogrom happened:

I grew up in Maevka, Kyrgyzstan. Then I got married and moved to Uzbekistan with my husband when I was 21. We were living in Tashkent, and I was working

as a school teacher. I was also speaking Russian very well. We had a very good life until 1989. My husband was working as a government official and we were making good money. We owned a house. We had Uzbek neighbors and were getting along well. We used to go to same mosque during the religious holidays and celebrating most of the religious days together.

Based on her information, and my other interviewees' notes, Meskhetian Turks used to live in Uzbekistan had access all of the resources such as having a higher education, living in bigger houses, gaining an employment etc.

In addition to the above reasons for the pogrom, it is also assumed by some of the scholars and public media that the unstable economic and political conditions triggered the clash between the two groups. (Mir Khanova 2006).

Aynur, one of the Meskhetian Turkish women living in Houston said that she barely remembers what happened since she was a little child by the time:

We used to live in Samarkand with my family until the pogrom. All I remember was we did not feel safe and couldn't sleep at night. There were people outside on the streets and they were yelling Turks go away, get out from our country otherwise we will kill you. We sought refuge in Soviet shelter from where we were taken to Russia by bus.

The Union of Ministers of the USSR, ordered the evacuation of Meskhetian Turks residing in Ferghana Valley to Russia. Seventeen thousand Meskhetian Turks were forced to leave Uzbekistan and relocated in different parts of Russia but not allowed to repatriate to Georgia. (Mir Khanova 2006).

Because of the favorable climatic conditions, many Meskhetian Turks preferred to move to Krasnodar Krai which is on bordering Black Sea. However, the local authorities in Krasnodar did not want to accept Meskhetian Turks as legal residents, and

did not give any citizenship rights. Alim, a Meskhetian Turk man living in Houston shared his experience in Krasnodar with me:

Soon after our arrival, we rented a house in Krasnodar. We had some money because the Uzbek government bought our houses. We had to live under terrible conditions in Krasnodar. There was no gas. We had to start our lives from the very beginning. Back in Uzbekistan we did not have any problems like these. We were living a comfortable live peacefully until the pogrom happened. Until the collapse of Soviet Union, we were allowed to buy houses or drive cars in Krasnodar but after the collapse we became the citizens of nowhere. Therefore, we did not have any rights. The local people also did not like us. Once when I took my son to doctor, he did not realize that I was a Turks since I was speaking to her in Russian but after she saw our names on the paperwork she treated us very badly and did not want to take care of my son.

From the point of view of the Krasnodar regional authorities, “Meskhetian Turks were personally choosing to live in Krasnodar so, as a local administration policy, they refused give the Meskhetian Turks the right to have a permanent residence in the region. Moreover, a refusal to provide a legal status to Meskhetian Turks is known to also have been meant to stimulate their departure from the region and to prevent the arrival of new migrants” (Mirkhanova 2006: 34).

The ethnic discrimination policy of the local authorities of Krasnodar Krai and its release in media was the reason of the United States acceptance of large group of Meskhetian Turks as refugees. After the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, Russia and Uzbekistan emerged as newly independent countries. Generally, residents of these former Soviet republics were granted citizenship status in these new countries, yet many individuals, such as the Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar, fell into a limbo status. Although Meskhetian Turks were Soviet citizens, the local government in Krasnodar has refused the group Russian citizenship to this day. The officials claim that Meskhetian

Turks should be citizens of Uzbekistan, not Russia. As a result, Turks are not entitled to any of the rights or benefits that citizens of Russia receive (Kuznetsov 2007) and legally, they have no status. The people of Krasnodar Krai considered Meskhetian Turks to be “illegal immigrants” (Kuznetsov 2007:227).

The discriminatory policies to Meskhetian Turks by the local government in Krasnodar Krai caught the attention worldwide and the United States also took action and granted refugee status to Meskhetian Turks in 2004. (Koriouchkina & Swerdlow 2007). “In between the years of 2004-2007 approximately 15,000 Meskhetian Turks have been resettled in 33 states and the District of Columbia, with Pennsylvania and Georgia host to the largest numbers. Other sizable populations are found in Washington, Illinois, Kentucky, Arizona, Idaho, Texas, Virginia, New York, and Colorado” (Aydingün et.al 2006:45).

The subjects of this study are the Meskhetian Turks who are living in Houston, Texas and in Istanbul, Turkey. All of the Meskhetian Turks living in Houston area as well as in the other states and cities moved to the United States from Krasnodar Krai, yet Meskhetian Turks in Turkey are from a variety of places including but not limited to Uzbekistan, Russia and Azerbaijan. During my fieldwork the only difference that I noticed that Meskhetian Turks migrated from Azerbaijan maintain their cultural and religious traditions more than other group members. This difference will be discussed more in detail in the next chapters.

Before moving in to methodology chapters, I briefly described the life cycles of Meskhetian Turks both in the United States and Turkey. The idea behind examining the

life cycle of Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar is to be able compare and contrast a refugee's life after resettlement in the United States with that in Krasnodar.

Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar Krai

“After the pogrom happened in Uzbekistan, around 15,000 of Meskhetian Turks were resettled in Krasnodar Krai. Unlike other regions of Russia where Meskhetian Turks lived after fleeing Uzbekistan in 1989, Krasnodar authorities refused to recognize newly resettled Meskhetian Turks who arrived in the region as Russian citizens. While it was common for migrants and ethnic minorities to face certain levels of discrimination in post-Soviet society, Krasnodar Krai presented a case of what has been called ‘soft ethnic cleansing’ (Aydingün et.al 2006:9).

Brief Description of Life in Krasnodar

The significant number of Meskhetians used to reside in rural areas occupied with agriculture. They also operate small-scale wholesale or retail businesses, or work as temporary manual laborers (Aydingün et al. 2006). They used to have their own land, which they could obtain through *propiska* “a residence permit and vestige of the Soviet system that is used to both regulate a person's permanent residence and to monitor movement throughout the country (Aydingün 2010). Without a *propiska*, the Meskhetian Turks could not own property, work legally, obtain a passport or other personal documents of identification, attend public institutions of higher education, register marriages and the births of their children, and gain access to social security pensions or healthcare benefits” (Pentikäinen & Trier, 2004). Until the collapse of the former Soviet

Union, Meskhetian Turks were given propiska but soon after that, they were not given any legal status to maintain most of their needs. They could plant in those lands and sell the products in the local bazaar.

Meskhetian Turks speak Anatolian Turkish dialects mixed with Russian, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Uzbek Turkish. Depending on the former Soviet republics in which they previously lived, they borrow words, particularly for the objects that they were unfamiliar with before. For example, they use Turkish words for bread or water; however, they use Russian words for refrigerator, car or airplane. When they were living in Krasnodar, they had a satellite dish through which they could watch Turkish TV channels. Hence, their language in Russia was a combination of Russian, a variety of Turkic languages and Istanbul Turkish, which they could obtain from the Turkish TV programs.

Similar to other Soviet citizens, Meskhetian Turks on average obtained a high level of education; “Soviet education was a centralized state-run system that provided access to schooling for all Soviet citizens. Meskhetian Turks made good use of the Soviet education system. The majority completed high school, but compared to members of other ethnic groups, they encountered problems when it came to enrollment in universities due to discriminatory ethnic-based quotas that limited opportunities for youth who did not belong to the titular nationality of each individual Soviet republic” (Brubaker 1994:90). Even though the group faced with discrimination, a significant number of Meskhetian Turks gained vocational and higher education in Uzbekistan (Coskun 2009). In Krasnodar, however, Meskhetian Turks faced extraordinary obstacles

to gain enough education. Without a *propiska*, they were not allowed to go to schools; even if they could start the school they could not have their diplomas because they were categorized as undocumented aliens. (Aydingün 2002). Due to the discriminatory quotes and document issues, none of the Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar could attend higher education schools after they relocated there.

Due to the concerns of preserving cultural values, language and religion, Meskhetian Turks had relatively limited social contact with the Russian people. The only interactions would be for official and economic reasons, for instance, to sell their products or to renew their passports, etc. (Aydingün et al. 2006).

During my interviews, some of the Meskhetian Turk women stated they usually stay at home and do household chores and rear their children in Krasnodar Krai. When women worked outside of their home, they were working in the fields and selling the fruits and vegetables from their field in the bazaar with the rest of the family (Aydingün et al. 2006). Girls used to go to school in Krasnodar as well. Right after the secondary school, most girls had an arranged marriage. Meskhetian Turks do not allow their sons and daughters to get married outside of the community (Aydingün et al. 2006).

Meskhetian Turks mainly practice patrilocal family setting. Most of the married couples initially live either with their husband's family or very close to them. In general, Meskhetian Turk families live as extended family. For example, brothers, their families and the parents may live in the same house. (Coskun 2009).

There is a strict hierarchy within the family that depends on age and gender. The older members of the family need to be respected by the younger ones. The eldest male

member of the family has the power, not only traditional power but also economic power. Elderly women have an important place in the family, but their power only extends to the matchmaking strategies and teaching proper behavior to the young members of the family (Aydingün et al. 2006).

Overall, the dislocations and persecutions had significant place in Meskhetian Turks history and the extent to which they preserved their identity. Their first deportation due to being considered as a threat to Soviet planners and also due to some other political reasons helped them to create a collective memory of identity which is being passed on from generation to generation. Their unfortunate experience in Uzbekistan because of economic and political reasons and ethnic discrimination that they had to encounter in Krasnodar also helped the group to unite and keep their Meskhetian Turkishness.

Studies on Meskhetian Turks

Meskhetian Turks have been one of the most exceptional populations that have experienced long term and ongoing exile since 1944. There are several studies on their Central Asia and Russia deport, yet there are limited amount of works on Meskhetian Turks in the United States and Turkey as well as their other resettled countries such as Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Uzbekistan. Ayşegül Aydingün is one of the scholars worked on Meskhetian Turks and their deportation as well as their experiences in Turkey. In addition to her studies there are several PhD dissertations focusing on Meskhetian Turks: Nurhayat Bilge, Meskhetian Turks Exploring Identity

Through Connections of Culture, Elisaveta Koriouchkina, Contingent Ethnicity in State(s) of Change: The Journey of Meskhetian Turks from the USSR to the Post-Soviet World, Kathryn Gillian Tomlinson, Coping as Kin: Responses to Suffering amongst Displaced Meskhetian Turks in post-Soviet Krasnodar, Russian Federation.

Besides these mentioned studies there are some other articles and research works about Meskhetian Turks that I included them in the bibliography.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY



Figure 5. Meskhetian Turk wedding in Houston (The author and the Meskhetian Turk couple).

It was one of the hot summer days of Houston when I first met and was hosted by Meskhetian Turkish community. As a constant homesick immigrant woman, I was counting the days down to visit to Turkey for the summer. When Ridwan and Muzaffar brothers were telling me their stories, I was trying to imagine the feelings of not having a homeland to be able to visit and eventually repatriate. They were telling me that they were originated from Georgia and it is their ancestral land but Georgia does not allow them to repatriate. They were also telling me that Turkey is their motherland but Turkey

does not have any policy for Meskhetian Turks' repatriation. So, I was sitting with a group of people with neither having a nation state nor having a homeland which they can dream to be able to back. They were also telling me that they eventually would like to live in Turkey but when I asked them if they had ever been there, they all said "no". Their information about Turkey solely relied on what they watched on TV through satellite dishes in Russia. All the same, I was very much impressed the degree to which they preserved their ethnic identity, Meskhetian Turkishness, over the years. They were repeatedly stating that they did not give up from their religion and language as a non-titular ethnic group in former Soviet Union and Russia. They also tried to assure me that they will continue to preserve their culture in the United States.

Since then, I met with the community members multiple times for a variety of reasons but my first visits and contacts with the community initiated this dissertation and my research questions about the concept of homeland and its linkage with the ethnic identity. Given that Meskhetian Turks were deported multiple times, this dissertation is about how home is both imagined (Georgia or Turkey) and an actual geography (United States); or more specifically, it is about how home is both connected to and disconnected from the physical space in which one lives. Deriving from this point of view I looked for the answers for the following questions: how Meskhetian Turks constructed their homeland and if there is a possibility of the idea of multiplicity of homeland among my informants who are residing in the United States and Turkey? In addition to that I inquired how they use memory and imagination of homeland as well as their current geographical location to preserve and construct their ethnic identity.

To begin to address the above questions I conducted an ethnographic field research in two different settings; Houston, Texas and Istanbul, Turkey from the spring of 2013 until the spring of 2015. My fieldwork in Houston, Texas was over a two-year period of time from the years of 2013 to 2015. This phase of research sought to understand the Meskhetian Turk population, collect basic demographic data, and document the particular version of Meskhetian Turkishness that had emerged as a result of resettling in the context of this location. Contact with the community already existed through the Turkish cultural center and some common friends, and through my connections, I had the opportunity to reach my interviewees, enter into the community and become a supportive friend.

I also conducted a fieldwork in Istanbul, Turkey during June and July of 2014. During this phase, basic historical information from the Meskhetian Turk population was gathered and key contacts with community were made. Initial contact was made with the Meskhetian Turks in Istanbul through “Bizim Ahıskalılar Derneği” (Our Meskhetian Turks Cultural Center). The president of the Association became my key informants who provided me insightful information about the Meskhetian Turks in Turkey. He also introduced me with the rest of the community in Istanbul.

My first contact was via phone call. I called the center and scheduled an appointment with the president. The center had a very welcoming environment from the first day I visited, and I came to the center daily while I was in Turkey. During my visits, I met with a variety of Meskhetian Turks, including those migrating from Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation. I was able to interview Meskhetian

Turks who were Turkish citizens as well as those who were illegal Meskhetian Turk immigrants. Interviewees were from a variety of ages and were both men and women. I participated their community Iftar dinners and religious rituals after these dinners, and I also visited their homes during religious celebration days. A preliminary assessment of similarities and differences between Istanbul and Houston were noted after these visits.

Research Population

While the primary units of analyses of this research are the contexts, I chose to work with four primary groups in Houston and Istanbul, which were the two field sites. This first were Meskhetian Turk women from a variety of ages of 18-40. The second primary population was both adolescent boys and girls aged 13-17. To study this population, I also engaged their parents and elder sisters and brothers. The third group was Meskhetian Turk men, aged 20-55. The final group was elderly people who can give information about the pogrom in Uzbekistan and tell me the life stories of Georgia deportation and ethnic discrimination happened in Krasnodar Russia. I reached the total 60 of my informants through existing contacts. All of the informants had multiple interviews with me. One of the biggest motives behind their acceptance of the interview process was their belief that I would give voice to their ethnicity and concerns to larger audiences.

Long-term fieldwork was conducted with these three research populations in three consecutive stages. Between March 2013 and May 2014, I conducted research in the Houston area. Between June 2014 and July 2014, I conducted research in Istanbul,

Turkey. Finally, between August 2014 and February 2015, I worked on the comparative analysis of the data collected from both field sites and re-interviewed the interviewees and participated in social events in Houston Texas.

Data Collection

The intent was to study my research questions through ethnographic research in Houston and Turkey to investigate the notion of home and homeland and the extent to which these notions impacted the identity (re)formation process of Meskhetian Turks. Such research requires a “multi-sited ethnography” to compare ethnic identity formation process among refugees (Marcus 1995; Falzon 2009; Hannerz 2003). The data for this study was collected utilizing qualitative methods via unstructured open-ended interviews, in-depth life history and family history interviews and participant observations.

Multi-Sited Ethnography

Clifford (1997) suggests that refugee decision making in the course of resettlement is influenced by the intersection of multiple factors at different levels in different contexts and at different scales that go beyond the sending/receiving dichotomy. Both immigrants and refugees can be engaged in multi-sited lives with active social networks that span multiple countries and cities. Refugees, for example, often negotiate relationships between and among social spaces that include a world of resettlement sites and temporary camps. While not all immigrants or refugees identify or participate in these diasporic networks, some groups, such as Meskhetian Turks, organize themselves

around important networks of communication and a shared ethnic identity and experiences of oppression (Aydingun 2009).

Marcus proposed “multi-sited ethnography as a way to examine global processes and the increasing interconnectedness of all people through the process of globalization. According to Marcus, multi-sited ethnography solves the need for a method to analytically explore transnational processes, groups of people in motion, and ideas that extend over multiple locations. Marcus argues that multi-sited ethnography allows for a macro-level understanding of a topic because this method allows a researcher to trace populations, ideas, and material objects through time and space” (Marcus 1995:35).

Sample Population

Given that my study is basically interpretive, I interviewed 60 Meskhetian Turks including adult men, women, adolescents and elderly people living in Houston and in Istanbul. As for the sampling technique of the study, I used snowball and purposive sampling (Schensul et al. 1999; Bernard 2012). Purposive sampling helped me to interview those who remembered the deportation tragedies from Georgia and Uzbekistan, young Meskhetian Turks and their adaptation the United States, and the men and women who were the parents of the adolescent respondents so that I could capture the generational as well as gender differences. I used my existing relationships with members of the community to gain access to a larger segment of the population. Tables 1 and 2 show the breakdown of my interviewees by their age, gender and location. I broke down the adolescents’ ages since the degree to which I could have information and their experiences were related with their ages.

I should also note that my informants in Turkey and Houston were not related. Although most of the Meskhetian Turks in Houston has relatives in Turkey, my informants in Istanbul stated that they do not have relatives but they heard about the United States experiences from their Meskhetian Turkish friends.

Houston							
Girls		Boys		Women		Men	
Age 13-15	Age 16-18	Age 13-15	Age 16-18	Age 18-40	Age 40 and above	Age 18-40	Age 55 and above
4	7	3	5	11	2	6	2

Table 1. Houston sample population breakdown.

Istanbul							
Girls		Boys		Women		Men	
Age 13-15	Age 16-18	Age 13-15	Age 16-18	Age 18-40	Age 40 and above	Age 18-40	Age 55 and above
1	1	1	1	5	1	4	1

Table 2. Istanbul sample population breakdown.

Unstructured Interviews

My research heavily relied upon unstructured interviews. The rationale for this decision was the individual nature of the questions and my aim to gain different perspectives in different settings. Through individual interviews in a secure location, I could gain more comprehensive and meaning-sensitive information from interviews than

that gathered from a survey alone. (Bernard 2012). All of my interviews were conducted in Turkish, and I audio-recorded most of the interviews.

Life History and Family History Interviews

I collected life histories from my elderly interviewees in order to collect information about the deportation from Georgia and Uzbekistan. These included information from those who remembered the deportation from Georgia, and those who were exposed to the violence in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan. My elderly informants were living with their sons and their families both in Houston and Istanbul. Most of the Meskhetian Turkish parents believe that children learn from their extended family members including grandparents who teach the traditional Meskhetian Turkish way of life, and the children continue to learn from them as they grow up. So interviewing adults and the elderly in the household plays a critical role in developing an understanding the younger generation of Meskhetian Turks and their adaptation strategies in the United States. During my research, I frequently visited their homes and met with their families and friends. Additionally, I collected family history interviews with adult men and women to investigate whether there were any changes in their family settings and rituals since they have been in the United States.

Internet Resources

Social media and internet have significant effects on the transnationalism and sustaining constant social relations that link together all of the Meskhetian Turks in different countries. So many refugees and immigrants today built social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders and technology has a great contribution on it.

In addition to this, Meskhetian Turks established a variety of cultural centers in different countries and connect with the other Meskhetian Turks via social media and forum sites of the cultural centers and associations.

During my data collection period, I used social media and above mentioned forum sites in order to have a better understanding of Meskhetian Turk identity and its preservation across the countries. The discussions on the forum, pictures and statements on the social media contribute questions about the existence of one unique Meskhetian Turk identity and the degree to which group members maintain their cultural characteristics in their current settlements.

Participant Observation

Participant observation has an essential role in collecting information about the lives of Meskhetian Turks in the United States. This method enabled me to observe the rituals, traditions, and customs of the population. I spent 25 months collecting information and, during this time, I participated in wedding ceremonies, circumcision parties, birthdays, wedding rituals (parent meetings ceremonies of the bride and groom sides, engagement parties, and henna night) as it is also illustrated in figure 5 above and funerals. Also, while conducting interviews in their homes, I observed their family dynamics, child rearing methods, employment decisions and language choices.

Formally the information in this dissertation came heavily from unstructured interviews and participant observations both in Istanbul and Houston. Such interviews were very valuable for my research, because they allow me to listen to individuals' own interpretations, definitions, and perceptions of their experiences, in short to listen to their

life stories. My questions were open-ended and covered four general areas: deportation history and the notion of homeland, ethnic identity and practices, family relations, and community development. Girls who knew me from school where I used to work and cultural center where I volunteer from time to time were comfortable to talk to me for hours but the girls in Turkey were a bit hesitant to talk to me and they usually gave short answers to my questions. Men and women as well as elderly people were willing to talk to me since they wanted their stories to be known by many people. Some chose to give all the details of their lives; others focused on specific events that were particularly important to them. Because gender has been a marked category for women, the mothers and daughters I interviewed sometimes told their stories referencing to the dynamics of gender. Most of the Meskhetian Turk women and girls that I interviewed seemed accepted their strict patriarchal family structure but during in-depth interviews I could have some information from women and girls in regards to strict gender roles and gender expectations, particularly of mother in law control over brides and parental control over girls' whereabouts.

I believe my personal position had an effect on the process of data collection. As Turkish born immigrant woman, I came to the research project not as an "objective" outsider but as a fellow Turkish immigrant who shared some of the experiences of my respondents in the United States. I kept my close relationship with the group and actively shared with my informants my own experiences of being a Turkish immigrant woman; of being perceived as an outsider in the United States society, of speaking English as a second language, of belonging to another religion and still practice it. Some respondents

were encouraged with my story and told that they were more hopeful about their children in this country. In addition to that some of the group members had many requests from me to take them to hospitals, resettlement agencies, schools, shopping malls etc. and translate for them.

Similar to my experiences of the United States, I easily blended in the community in Turkey. When I first arrived in Turkey, the next day I called their cultural center asked for an appointment. The president of the center was very kind on the phone and scheduled the appointment the very next day. From then on, he became my key informant who told me several of deportation stories, introduced me with the other members of the group and hosted me in his family's house multiple times. His reference helped me a lot during my field research in Turkey. I was spending most of my time either in cultural center or one of the family's houses during the day. Meskhetian Turk women were very comfortable with me and sharing their experiences with all the details. I was pregnant during my fieldwork and they were giving me all different advices for having an easy labor and delivery, how to raise a healthy baby and how to have lots of breast milk to feed the baby. Sharing Ramadan Iftar dinner and celebrating Ramadan festival were also very valuable for me to see and compare their customs and traditions from the practices of Turks of Turkey.

I do not claim that these shared experiences granted me "insider status" into the Meskhetian Turkish community; the differences in our histories, some of the cultural practices, and family structures remain important.

Qualitative research methods were used for this research. I analyzed the qualitative data by summarizing field notes and interviews in Microsoft Word, coding them for themes relevant to the stated research questions and expected outcomes, and then looked to see how widely similar incidents or responses occurred through a number of different situations pertaining to refugee belonging, ethnic identity and the concept of homeland. I then classified the data into separate typologies, comparing how those structures either had created and sustained or hampered social, political and economic incorporation in different scales. All material written in Turkish language was translated into English to facilitate analyzing between field sites.

Challenges and Limitations of Project

Although I had some advantages during my study such as having similar language and cultural characteristics, there were several challenges. One of the challenges was during my interviews with adolescents in Turkey. Since they did not know me well, they were shy most of the time and did not respond some of my questions. They just answered the questions that they wanted to with short answers. But I could have some information while I was observing their interaction and communication with their parents and friends. I also had some difficulty to talk to new brides. The newly-wed informants that I interviewed were hesitant to talk to me since their mother in law or any other woman was with us almost all the time. On the other hand, since I knew most of those girls before they got married, I could ask most of my questions beforehand but I wanted to hear more about their experiences after marriage.

Aynur who has a picture in the beginning of the chapter was my student for three years and I was close to her and her mother. When I visited her table during the wedding, she did not speak to me even a word since it is expected brides to remain silent during the wedding ceremony according to Meskhetian Turk tradition.

Although we are speaking the same language, my informants' frequent use of Russian words was one of the challenges that I faced during my interviews. All of my interviews and informal talks were in Turkish, and they were very comfortable during their conversations with me. Sometimes, however, they used Russian words that I did not understand and sometimes they spoke entirely in Russian and I could not understand that either. Shifting between Russian and Turkish seemed almost effortless even for the older interviewees. For the younger interviewees who grew up in Russia, the Russian language was their second native language.

The history of Meskhetian Turks' reflects the complexity of ethno-linguistic processes that contributed to formation of their identity and a sense of group unity. Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey spoke Turkish only, and I had easy and comfortable conversations with them.

In conclusion, this study aimed to understand the notion of homeland for Meskhetian Turks as a multiple time displaced community and if the degree to which they preserved their ethnic identity within this process

CHAPTER V

TURKEY AS A HOMELAND

Introduction

Meskhetian Turks are as a community without a nation state is dispersed; their political powerlessness has rendered them subject to persecution and — under Stalin’s rule — to genocide similar to some other ethnic minorities of the former Soviet Union. Today, they could be “regarded as constituting a classic diaspora in the sense that, through however many generations they can trace their residence in a host country, they evince the spirit of the first generation in the links they maintain with their traditional structures” (Safran 1991: 86). Although they can fit in the definition of classic diaspora, their situation is not quite comparable to that of other diasporas mentioned in the previous literature chapter as, to a certain extent, their homelessness is due to Georgia’s reluctance to repatriate them.

The myth of return for Meskhetian Turks is confusing. Although they have had a precise notion of their place of origin, their national sovereignty was for a very limited period of time. Therefore, they consider themselves related to the Ottoman Empire, which collapsed decades ago, but not to the ethnic Georgians. So most Meskhetian Turks relate themselves ethnically and nationally to Turkey but their mythical geographic focus is in present-day Georgia. According to the fieldwork and interviews conducted on a variety of countries by different scholars including the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Russia and

the United States, most of the Meskhetian Turks consider Turkey as their homeland because they relate themselves with the Turks ethnically and religiously. However, they accept Georgia as their original homeland (Malynovska 2009; Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2009; Aydingün 2009). On the other hand, most Meskhetian Turks live in diaspora in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and United States, and they do not repatriate to Georgia or go to Turkey. A variety of reasons exist for why such homelands are not welcoming places with which they can identify politically, ideologically, or socially (Georgia).

This chapter is dedicated to analyzing whether Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey have integrated into society and constructed a sense of belonging through considering themselves as living in their homeland. Among the questions are: how living in Turkey affects their Meskhetian Turk identity and do they relate themselves with the local people or do they differentiate their ethnic identity from the Turks when they live in Turkey. Some Meskhetian Turks living near Turks in the United States have expressed their concern that they are “Turkifying” in the United States due to the close and frequent contacts with the Turkish community from Turkey. So, this chapter will address whether the Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey feel that their ethnic Meskhetian Turk identity is under jeopardy of being assimilated under the Turkish identity.

Meskhetian Turks in Turkey

Meskhetian Turks were deported from Georgia in 1944. This was the time that all of the population moved from its homeland, and this movement profoundly affected

the development of group identity and consciousness. Even before this migration, the transition period migrating to Turkey which was prior to the deportation, started to shape the group identity and consciousness. There were three wave of migration of Meskhetian Turks to Turkey in addition to individual migration by the group with their own will.

1. Transition period-1853-1944

According to Aydingün (2002), transition period refers the migration of Meskhetian Turks from Georgia to Turkey in between the years of 1853-1944. During the Russo-Turkish War (1853–1854), the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and the two World Wars (1914–1918/1939–1945) the status of Meskheta-Javakheti region remained complex, being claimed by both the Turkish and the Russian sides. Therefore, a significant number of Meskhetian Turks moved the regions which are inside the Republic of Turkey's boundaries today.

It was during these transition periods that “the Meskhetian Turk ethnic consciousness began to take shape. Before the region became part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and especially before their deportation, Turks, Kurds and the Meskhetian Turks had little consciousness of having a separate ethnic identity (Khazanov 1992). At the time, ethnic peculiarities were of minor importance and very often religious differentiation whether being a Christian or Muslim was more fundamental than ethnic or national differences. Most of the time local identities of kin, village, class and religion were very important” (Wimbush and Wixman 1975:87).

As a result of the deportation and the wars, Meskhetian Turk ethnic identity began to be created, although no discrete ethnic name existed for the group (Khazanov 1995). Meskhetian Turks were on the side of the Ottoman Empire during the Russian–Turkish War; and they followed the same pathway during World War I and demanded to be allowed into the Ottoman Empire at its conclusion (Silagadze and Guruli 2009). However, after World War I, the region was given to Russia (Meskheta region) with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and the group was treated as a potential enemy of the regime and a security risk along the Turkish by the former Soviet Union. The negative attitude of the administration towards Meskhetian Turks played an important role in the development of the ethnic sentiments among Meskhetian Turks and helped to strengthen their feeling of Turkishness (Aydingün 2002).

Until the Russia established the control over the land starting from 1918, a significant number of the Meskhetian Turks migrated to Turkey. So from 1917, when the World War I began, until the 1944 deportation some Meskhetian Turks secretly fled to Turkey. Those who remained in Meskheta region were deported in November 1944 (Aydingün 2009).

2. Second Immigration wave after the collapse of Soviet Union-1992

Facing the important problems in the post-Soviet republics in which Meskhetian Turks live in addition of the pogrom in Uzbekistan, they continuously demand the help of Turkish government to open a repatriation program for the group living in Russia and Central Asia. 1989 was not an easy year for Turkey to call Meskhetian

Turks to resettle in Turkey because of the mass return migration of the Turks of Bulgaria to Turkey. The Turks of Bulgaria fled to Turkey in 1989 as a result of the repressive measures of the falling communist government in Bulgaria. Around 300,000 Turks of Bulgaria migrated to Turkey in 1989 and 1990 (Parla 2006). Due to the financial difficulties of accommodating the Turks of Bulgaria, Turkey did not seriously consider the demands of Meskhetian Turks in those years. However, in the early 1990s with the initiative of Turgut Özal, 8th president of Turkey, the issues of the Meskhetian Turks were given priority and a law passed on July 11th, 1992 for the migration and the settlement of the group in Turkey. This law allowed Meskhetian Turks to migrate Turkey as settled immigrants and granted Turkish citizenship. On the other hand, limited number of Meskhetian Turk which was to be determined by the Council of Ministers, were going to be allowed to migrate. Therefore, the priority was given to those living in the most difficult economic and social conditions. As a first step, the council agreed to finance the resettlement of 500 Meskhetian Turk families. In 1992 150 families and in 1993 350 families migrated from Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Aydingün 2007). Other than these migration flows, Meskhetian Turks continued and continues to migrate to Turkey with their own means. Although they are allowed to enter and stay in the country, they are not given legal status for residency in Turkey. The challenges of not having residency will be discussed later in the chapter.

3. Third Immigration wave after the clash in Ukraine-2015

Due to the conflict between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, Turkish government accepted 3,000 Meskhetian Turks as asylum seekers living in Sloviansk, where deadly fighting continues between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists. Turkish government promised to Meskhetian Turks of Ukraine to provide housing and job opportunities. Currently over 300 families arrived in Turkey and settled in the Eastern part of Turkey as it is shown in figure 6.



Figure 6. Meskhetian Turks arriving in Turkey from Ukraine in December 2015. (Hurriyet Newspaper 2015)

Throughout history, Turkey has been a country accepting a significant number of refugees and asylum seekers. Since 2011, Turkey has accepted Syrians refugees who are fleeing from the conflict in Syria. Although serving as a stage for migratory movements for many years, Turkey does not have a comprehensive and effective refugee and asylum acceptance and resettlement policy. For immigrants of Turkish origin such as those from

Bulgaria and Meskhetian Turks, an ad hoc solution has been developed as a short-term strategy. Meskhetian Turks benefitted from this policy in the early 1990s (Oner and Genc 2015).

Although governmental priority was given to those living in difficult conditions, a significant number of Meskhetian Turks migrated to Turkey and gained Turkish citizenship along with governmental support for the resettlement in the years between 1992 and 2005 (Aydingün 2009). After this resettlement, a large number of Meskhetian Turks continuously migrated to Turkey via their own means. Those who migrated to Turkey as a result of the resettlement program were allowed to reside in Turkey but were not given a legal residential permit. Yet, even though they are illegal immigrants, the local administration officials and the local population unofficially welcome them. The repatriation program officially ended in 2005 and after that period of time, Meskhetian Turks were subjected to go through the same procedure with the other foreign country citizens in Turkey.

Demography and Mapping

According to the estimations of the Meskhetian Turks associations, at least 40,000 Meskhetian Turks now live in Turkey. In addition to this, thousands of Meskhetian Turks seasonally migrate to Turkey for work (Aydingün 2009). With the arrival of temporary workers and undocumented Meskhetian Turks, the population far exceeds the official number of 40,000. Meskhetian Turks have mainly populated big cities such as Istanbul, Bursa and Antalya. The fieldwork for this current study was

conducted in Istanbul where approximately 17,000 Meskhetian Turks including Turkish citizens and undocumented Meskhetian Turks are residing according to the Meskhetian Turk associations in Istanbul. Although groups are scattered in different municipalities in the city, they live in clusters in these areas.

Meskhetian Turks living in Istanbul mostly came to Turkey by their own means and settled in the areas in which they have either relatives or friends. Several Meskhetian Turk association chapters are present in Istanbul, which is the most populous city in Turkey and the country's economic, cultural, and historical center. The city offers a variety of job and educational opportunities for the people, and most migrants and refugees prefer settling there. Meskhetian Turks, who typically do not have a higher education degree or a legal work permit, work in the textile or car industries as well as in temporary jobs in the construction field. Those with legal citizenship typically have degrees in higher education and work in social services as doctors, teachers, and nurses.

Meskhetian Turks living in Istanbul come from different backgrounds. According to the *Bizim Ahiskalilar Dernegi* (Our Meskhetian Turks Association) at which I conducted my fieldwork and initiated my contacts, Meskhetian Turks in the city come from Uzbekistan, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. I spent a great deal of time at this association and was able to meet with the people coming from different countries and backgrounds. Most coming to the chapter were either newly migrated or undocumented people who needed health care or help in filing a residence permit to live in Turkey.

Meskhetian Turks who have a profession in social services or industry are the ones who settled years ago with the special resettlement program in 1992. The area in which I mainly conducted my fieldwork was settled by the group who migrated from Azerbaijan and mostly by their own means. They all lived within walking distance from each other and the Our Meskhetian Turks Association. Thus, they could spend most of their time together. Meskhetian Turks have a collective way of life, and this has helped them to protect their ethnic identity. When I attended the social events in Turkey, I was able to observe that most people were either each other's relatives or from the same village in Azerbaijan.

Overall, no official data regarding the total number of Meskhetian Turks or their demographics for those living in Istanbul exists due to their movement and the legally indefinite status of the group. This study relied on the information given by Our Meskhetian Turks Association. According to them 40% of the Meskhetian Turks are under the age of 18 and 52% of the group are female.

Home/Homeland – Negotiation of Belonging

Although the literature review chapter adopted the homeland definition of Hutchinson and Smith (1996), the idea of homeland is more complex in regards to the negotiation of belonging because of Meskhetian Turks have been multiply displaced and do not have a nation-state. Meskhetian Turks are geographically dispersed in different countries. "Belonging is very much related to transnational ways of being, which means an individual has social relationships and practices that span borders, and they only

become a transnational way of belonging if the individual recognizes and highlights this as part of who they are. An individual's belonging is similar to the dialectical process of ethnic identity negotiation that Nagel describes. As Nagel notes (1994: 154) Ethnic identity and boundaries are determined by establishing who is a member and what their designated ethnic category is, and then the ascription of that category by the self and others" (Diener 2009:43-44).

When I asked to my interviewees about the definition of homeland, most of them described a homeland as a piece of land where your ancestors were born and raised; you meet all your needs and live without any fear. Saniye, a 56-year-old Meskhetian Turk woman who migrated to Turkey in 2006, described the homeland as:

Homeland is a place where you feel yourself belong. You do not feel insecure any time. When you go out you can see people around you who speak the same language with you, believe in the same God.

Belonging is not as straightforward as being; with no national territory, flag, anthem, or relics that are universally recognized as being Meskhetian by insiders or outsiders, so no way exists to publically and recognizably "belong". Nonetheless, Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed for this study consider Turkey as their homeland and Turkish flag as their own flag.

According to Cemil, a middle aged Meskhetian man moved to Turkey in 2005 from Russia:

My children are going to public elementary school in our neighborhood and they are saying the Turkish pledge of allegiance in addition to national anthem every morning before going into class. I feel myself very proud and good for my children since they are Turkish and recognize it every day in the school. We did not have a chance like this in Uzbekistan. We are neither Uzbek nor Russian but

we had to say the Russian national anthem as well as Uzbek pledge every day. We are Turkish, we speak Turkish, and we are Muslims. So I am very happy that my children are growing in this country.

For Cemil, Turkey is the homeland because he speaks the same language and shares the same religion and cultural values. He also regarded the Turkish national anthem and pledge as his own and was pleased that his children are growing up internalizing it. Cemil grew up in Uzbekistan and moved to Russia after the pogrom. He had been an ethnic minority in his previous settings. However, he defines himself as part of majority in Turkey despite the legal challenges. Therefore, he owns the national anthem, pledge, language, flag etc.

Turkey as an ethnically diverse country has been in a long journey in the process of negotiating with its own ethnic minorities within the framework on Turkish nationalism. The transformation from a richly heterogeneous multi-ethnic empire to a relatively homogenous nation-state could not have been achieved had it not been for the two major events that took place before the founding of the Republic: the Armenian massacres during WW1, and the compulsory population exchange of 1923 between Greece and Turkey (Parla 2006). These two brutal occurrences paved the way for the formation of an ethnically cleansed Turkey. The denial of previous ethnic diversity and of momentous historical events like the exchange and the Armenian massacres is integral to Turkish official history as well national identity. Thus, Turkish nationalism foregrounds the unity of race, culture and language in determining what constitutes the nation claiming of ethnic homogeneity and purity are seen to constitute the foundations of Turkish nationalism. One relevant manifestation is the discrepancy between

exclusionary and discriminatory practices of citizenship (Parla 2006) on the one hand, and the rhetoric of inclusiveness and unity on the other. As evidence of the all-embracing nature of Turkish nationalism, a frequently cited phrase is Ataturk's famous dictum, "How happy the person who says I am a Turk." It is the phrase that is being repeated with the pledge every morning before the classes at every elementary and secondary school. This mandatory practice has been an ongoing issue among ethnic minorities especially among Kurds. According to some of scholars the phrase pointedly suggests, the seeming availability of membership, based merely on self-identification, is merely a facade; beneath it lurks the darker reality of Turkish nationalism, which has systematically denied equal membership to various minorities from the very inception of the Turkish nation-state (Yildiz 2001). Among the minorities whose legal and cultural rights have historically been curtailed in one respect or another are both non-Muslim minorities such as Armenians, Greeks, Suryanis, and Jews, and Muslim minorities such as Kurds and Alevis. In addition to legal discrimination and cultural oppression, the very notion of "minority" elicits fierce reactions on the part of Turkish nationalists, as evidenced by the backlash to the minority report discussed above. Nationalists claim that the minority concept has no relevance for the Turkish context, and its use can only imply racism or separatism. Paradoxically Turkish nationalists cries out for recognition of minority status of its own ethnic kin abroad such as Meskhetian Turks, Turks in Bulgaria, Turks in Balkans, but simultaneously denies the existence of minority for groups within its own borders (Parla 2006).

The ownership of Turkish national discourse and elements such as Turkish flag, language, national anthem and pledge by most of the Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed is related with the above argument. In addition to that the welcoming nature of dominant society to the group despite the legal challenges for their citizenship and residency is also due to the shared ethnic kin and their sympathy towards the history of the group.

Although my Meskhetian Turkish informants have a strong sense of belonging in Turkey, most of them have great difficulty when explaining their hometown in Turkey when anybody asks them “where are you from”. Where are you from is one of the most common questions in Turkey when somebody meets with a person. Even before asking the name of the person, the original hometown is asked in order to have an idea about that person’s cultural background. People have a common thought about the place and people attachment and how it shapes the people’s habits, worldview, and culture. So Meskhetian Turks are challenged when they are trying to explain their hometown.

Ilyas, a 53-year-old Meskhetian Turk migrated to Turkey in 2008 said that:

When we get in to a taxi, the very first question being asked is: Where are you from brother? So once I told a driver that I was born in Russia and raised in Azerbaijan. So the taxi driver said that so you are not Turkish. But we are Turkish. It is very hard to explain most of the time. People do not understand our situation and most of them have not heard about Meskhetian Turks before. If we have time and opportunity, we tell them the story then they have sympathy but that is not always the case.

Most of the Turkish people of Turkey still do not have an idea about the existence of Meskhetian Turks. I and most of the Turkish community in Houston had never heard about the group until 2005. It is not common for an average Turk to know

the group. So most of my informants stated that it is sometimes difficult to explain their situations to the local community.

Some Meskhetian Turks have been disappointed in Turkey due to legal regulations. Most of the recent Meskhetian Turk immigrants suffer from not being able to gain citizenship or work because without citizenship they cannot legally work or attend school without residential permit. One 64-year-old Meskhetian Turk woman who migrated to Turkey from Russia that I met in Our Meskhetian Turks Association told me her and her son's story. They had faced ethnic discrimination in Russia and moved to Turkey to resettle permanently. However, due to the challenging and costly process of gaining Turkish citizenship and residential permit, they stay in Turkey illegally and, due to that fact, they work in underpaid jobs such as small textile factories, constructions etc.

She was in the association in order to consult with the president to apply for the residential permit, and she was complaining how they were treated the same as other foreign people who are not Turkish by the Turkish authorities in regards to gaining Turkish citizenship:

We are Turks, we speak Turkish and we are Muslims. We were discriminated against in Russia and Uzbekistan due to our Turkish identity but we preserved it. We were always proud of our Turkish heritage. The Turkish flag is our flag, and Turkish republic is our country. But we are so disappointed in the way Turkish government treats us like an alien. My son moved here but he could not find a job. He had to go back to Russia. We are living in a very poor neighborhood with poor conditions. We have help from the local people and administration but we need to have a permanent solution. We do not have any other place to go. This is our home. We also hear that our relatives and friends who migrated to America live a prosperous life. The American government helped them even though they are not American. Why is the Turkish government not helping us...?

This perspective stresses that strong notions of belonging and attachment to a territorialized homeland do not have to be exclusive or problematic.

When I visited the association for the first time, the staff working in the center gave me a tour of the building. A huge map of the Meskheta-Javakheti region within the borders of Georgia hung on the entry wall. The president of the association spoke about the region, which is in the southern part of Georgia as their homeland:

This is our original homeland. This is where our ancestors were born and raised. This is where our culture emerged. Now if you ask me if I want to go back and resettle in that region, I would doubt it. Now all of those lands are filled up with other people speaking different language, not Muslims. So what am I going to do when I moved there? I also do not speak Georgian and cannot learn after this age. Our homeland is here, Turkey. This is our bigger homeland, which used to be the Ottoman Empire. We were all Ottoman in the past.

Some literature posits that the relationship of territory, boundaries and identity is a constructed process, often used by the agencies of the state in strengthening the notions of homeland and territorial belonging on the part of the constituent population who are expected to retain a loyalty to that state (Paasi 1999; Newman 2001). For Meskhetian Turks, this process works in a different direction. Most Meskhetian Turks feel they territorially and nationally belong to Turkey. They mention about how they were proud to see when a Turkish singer won the Eurovision competition in 2003 or Naim Suleymanoglu became the World and Olympic Champion in weightlifting. These relating examples are examples of the fact Meskhetian Turks feel themselves as belonging to Turkey. Although acknowledging the Meskheta-Javakheti region in Georgia as their original territorial homeland, they consider Turkey as their motherland and eventual destination. Latifa, a Meskhetian Turk woman in Turkey who I interviewed,

mentioned how they call themselves Turkish instead of Ahiska Turks especially in Central Asia, Russia and Azerbaijan.

Whether they have gained citizenship or not, Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey consider Turkey as their homeland. Meskhetian Turks came with the return migration program were given citizenship as well as the ones who paid their residency fee and met the other eligibility criteria determined by the Council of Ministers. They expect to be given certain privileges because they consider themselves as part of the Turkish community. In that sense, those who are living in Turkey without citizenship or residential permits suffer from difficult economic conditions and do not have any health insurance or the right to attend school. Some of them admire those who migrated to the United States and gained permanent residency and eventually citizenship. The challenging economic conditions of Turkey as well as no guarantee of either residency or citizenship status for Meskhetian Turks make it difficult for them to resettle. Yet, they do not want to accept the reality of being stateless because they have always considered Turkey as their eventual homeland.

Self-Identification and Homeland Image

Meskhetian Turks of all ages and gender that I interviewed in Turkey defined themselves as Turkish. They considered themselves as the sole Ottoman Turkish remained in former Soviet Union. (Oh 2006). They consider themselves as the representative of Turkey and previous Ottoman Empire whereas they call the other Turkic groups such as Kazkhs, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks as distinct ethnic groups sharing

similar language and religion. Even though in some cases they were defined as other ethnicities, mainly Azerbaijani, in their passports, they always recognized themselves as Turks. By referring to themselves as “Turks,” which is the same self-designation their elderly people use, Meskhetian Turks are rediscovering their Turkish heritage (Oh 2006). The president of the Association also expressed his thoughts about their Turkishness:

We are Turks that is how we described ourselves in former Soviet Union and Russia. Kazakhs are Kazakhs, Kyrgyz people are Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are Uzbeks. We share some commonalities with Azeri people but they are Russianized.

There are numerous similarities and differences between Turks of Turkey and Meskhetian Turkish. Both groups speak the same language despite the slight accent difference and borrowed words from different languages, believe in the religion of Islam and celebrate the similar religious holidays such as Eid el Adha, the month of Ramadan etc., share the same historical roots, Ottoman Empire etc. On the other hand, there are some slight differences between the two groups. For example, Meskhetian Turks that I met usually cook Central Asian, particularly Uzbek dishes such as Uzbek plov (Lamp and rice pilaf which is a very common dish among Central Asian cultures a well), hinkal (meat dumpling), Russian honey cake etc. They also have their own bread that should be cooked every morning by the female members of the family. It has a very important place in their culture. I was given bread as a gift many times after my visit the community members. In regards to practicing their religion, Meskhetian Turks are very similar to an average Turkish Muslim who follows the important days of religion such as

fasting during the month of Ramadan, practice Friday and 'Eid prayers, Islamic dietary such as do not eat pork. However, the difference between pious and secular Turks in regards to practicing religion can easily be observed abroad, in this case in the United States. Next chapter will address these differences between the Turks and Meskhetian Turks. Furthermore, the strict patriarchal family structure that most of the Meskhetian Turks have is common for most of the Turkish families living in rural areas of Eastern Turkey. It is not very common to see arranged marriage which is a common practice among my informants in big cities of Turkey but it is common in the rural parts of Turkey. Lastly one of the obvious markers of Meskhetian Turk women which easily differentiate them from Turks of Turkey is most of the middle aged women wear their scarf loosely, just to hold their hair with most of their hair visible and free with a certain type of colorful head scarf. Different way of wearing headscarf than the Turkish women of Turkey is the declaration of Meskhetian Turk identity is also implicated in the performance of their distinct cultural identity. However, some of my informants in Turkey adopted the headscarf similar to pious Turkish women. In Figure 7, there is a Meskhetian Turk woman who wears classic Meskhetian Turkish scarf and Meskhetian Turk women wear their scarves as a religious symbol.



Figure 7. Meskhetian Turk women in Quran class in the association.

“The idea of homeland always had special meanings for the group, as a romantically defined goal towards which almost every single aspect of an individual’s life is directed. To the Meskhetian Turks, homeland was a spatial representation influenced by political and cultural factors, rather than a simple fact of geography. Many elderly Meskhetian Turks told me that they would know the place and be able to find their way around even if they were blind. Such narratives of the homeland certainly form the logic and basis for their identity” (Oh 2006:90).

Accordingly, most of the Meskhetian Turks participated in my study consider Turkey as their eventual homeland. Based on my analysis of data social media where Meskhetian Turks post their pictures and videos from all over the countries that they are living in (mainly Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and the United States), almost all of them feel themselves to be in a state of continuous exile. Most consider their homeland as Turkey because the region and they used to be the part of Ottoman Empire.

When I was involved in a discussion forum of the World Association of Meskhetian Turks online, I observed that most Meskhetian Turks living in the republics of Central Asia would be willing to migrate to Turkey in order to preserve their ethnic identity. For example, one discussant in the forum living in Kazakhstan shared his concern about his child losing their mother tongue and customs. As Aydingün (1992) notes, the fear of losing their cultural characteristics encourages them to migrate to Turkey. In such a situation and with that fear, migration to Turkey seems to be the only solution for the group.

One of my elderly interviewees in Houston, Texas shared her concern with me about her granddaughter assimilating the American culture. When I visited her home in an afternoon, I was chatting with her and her daughter-in-law about general issues including child rearing in the United States. Munisa (the daughter-in-law) has a son around my son's age (3-years-old), and we were sharing our experiences about how to protect their mother tongue. Suddenly, her mother-in-law started crying because she was very much concerned about her granddaughter who was 16 at the time.

She does not have any Turkish friends. All of her friends are English-speaking people. I am very concerned about her future. I am planning to send her to Turkey where I have my other son and his daughters. It will be better for her to stay there. This way she can preserve her culture, religion and language.

This example demonstrates how she feels that her ethnic identity is tied to Turkish identity in Turkey and the feeling that if her granddaughter lives in Turkey she will be protected.

Other than this above migration, some Meskhetian Turks have migrated to Turkey informally. Although they were allowed to get in the country, they were not given any legal status to live in such as health care benefits, employment permit etc.

The return myth for some of the Meskhetian Turks has become more complicated than anticipated. One elderly Meskhetian Turk man that I interviewed complained about how Turkey had become too Westernized in terms of culture and language and that he was disappointed and had a hard time adapting to this new environment. This was not the case for the younger generation because they were more familiar with the progress of Turkey via watching Turkish soap operas and reality shows through satellite dishes whether in Russia, Azerbaijan or Central Asia. For the elderly people preserving the Ottoman traditions such as respecting elder family members, which were the main engines for the survival of the community, is essential.

As a community that had been through intense exile for many years, the Meskhetian Turks were expecting to be respected by the Turkish government in a way that resembled the Turkish people living in Bulgaria in 1989. At that time, the National Assembly of Bulgaria passed laws to allow the Turks of Bulgaria back to Turkey. Due to the ethnic discrimination of Bulgarian government, Turkish government opened the Bulgaria-Turkey borders and accepted all of the people from Turkish heritage living in Bulgaria and gave them citizenship. After dreaming of a return to Turkey, the Meskhetian Turks, however, were disappointed when the Turkish government did not internalize them as Turkish citizens.

Further, they felt disrespected by policies that treated them the same as other foreign migrants. Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey feel that they belong to and own the country more than Kurdish people and Syrian refugees, yet Turkish policies don't make this distinction. Leyla, a 42-year-old Meskhetian Turk woman stated that:

We are more Turkish than Kurdish people living in our neighborhood. They abuse the social welfare system, and they are lazy people. We deserve more rights than them in this country.

Leyla's statement is in line with the Turkish nationalist point of view which denies the ethnic diversity and appropriates the ethnic kin living elsewhere.

To sum up, migrating to their eventual homeland is an expansive and difficult undertaking for Meskhetian Turks. This fact divides the potential migrants into those more thoroughly territorialized and those simply lacking the financial resources to move. According to Oh's (2006) research among Meskhetian Turks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, most Meskhetian Turks described a homeland as a place that has ideal economic and social living conditions. Thus, Meskhetian Turks living in Central Asia do want to migrate to Turkey but also understand that without land and support for economic life, migration is not feasible, even if they could migrate legally (Oh 2006). Oh also mentioned that the younger generation has a pragmatic image of their homeland and the myth of return rather than having a nostalgic longing for their homeland.

Based on the other research and my fieldwork among the Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey and the United States, in general, most of my Meskhetian Turkish informants hope to see their future in Turkey and perceive it as the only place where they can feel at home.

Gender Strategies, Identities and the Notion of Homeland

During my interviews with the respondents, I realized that sometimes differences exist between how women and men experience their lives and situations in Turkey. Although I did not see any difference in regards to how they relate to Turkish society and to the Meskhetian Turkish community in Turkey, the way they experience their lives and situations somewhat varies between men and women.

The story of my Meskhetian Turk female informants living in Turkey can be divided into two: 1) the decision to migrate to Turkey and 2) the integration process with respect to Turkish society. Based on my interviews and observations men are the decision makers in the process of migrating to Turkey while women had a hesitant attitude about resettling to Turkey although they consider it as their eventual homeland. As Werner and Barcus (2015) stated, patriarchal power dynamics have an important place in the decision-making process of migration which I also observed it among Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed both in Turkey and the United States.

Ayşe was one of the women who migrated to Turkey with 5 children after living almost twenty years in Azerbaijan. She recounted her story as:

My family and I were one of the victims of the pogrom in Uzbekistan in 1989 and we moved to Russia. Soon after we moved I got married with my husband and moved to Azerbaijan. Until 2009, we lived in Azerbaijan. We were living in a small town and raising livestock as well as had land where we were planting corn and wheat. But my husband was always willing to move to Turkey. He had been in Turkey once when he was younger, and he could never forget it. He said that it smells different over there. So suddenly he decided to move to Turkey. I did not want it. We had a settled life in Azerbaijan, and our children were going to school there. We had established our life and could meet all of our needs. My husband was always looking for something. Even though I disagreed to migrate, we all obeyed what he decided and moved to Istanbul in 2009.

So as Ayse's story relates, she contributed to family discussion about migrating, but she did not have enough influence in the decision-making process.

As Werner and Barcus (2015) pointed out in their article on Mongolia's Kazakhs, the decision to migrate is not made alone especially for the younger adults, and most of the time this decision is made in consultation with the husband's parents before migrating. For Meskhetian Turks in my study, once the decision is made, they resettle close to relatives to have their support during the resettlement process. For example, Zehra and Ali were relatively young couple at their late twenties when they decided to migrate to Turkey. Ali's uncle worked in a private college student dormitory, and once they moved, the young couple could live with the relatives until they rented an apartment. Ali's uncle found a job for Ali in the same dormitory as well. Through their relatives Ali and Zehra met with the Meskhetian Turkish community who lived in the same part of the city.

Compared to the Meskhetian Turk women living in the United States, Meskhetian Turk women in Turkey have been less open and receptive to the local community and the new life in Turkey, but they find it easier to make contacts and adapt to new conditions than do men. Most of my female interviewees were not working and were housewives, and they had difficulty integrating into the local society in the very beginning. When I compared the data that I collected from the those living in the United States and Turkey, I can conclude that the "voluntary migration" of the Meskhetian Turks to Turkey had an effect on women. As one of the respondents mentioned above,

they were maintaining their life in their previous setting, so resettling in Turkey, even if they considered it as their homeland, is another burden on women mainly due to separation from their own kin.

This chapter aims to see if Turkey is a homeland for Meskhetian Turks based on my fieldwork conducted in Istanbul, Turkey. In order to be able to analyze the notion of homeland and its link with the identity for the group in Turkey, I focused on two concepts, Sense of belonging and integration within the context of Turkey.

Sense of Belonging for Women in Turkey

In this dissertation, I am referring to the sense of belonging as social connections, a sense of connection to a particular community of people and having historical connections. In addition to these, I borrowed Miller's definition of the sense of belonging who wrote that "Belonging is a state of being from which wellbeing is derived; a relation that makes us feel good about our being and our being-in-the-world; a relation that is fitting, right or correct" (Miller 2003: 218). A sense of belonging is also related to the relationship between the host and newcomers whether they are granted legal status, access to health care and social protection as well as to accommodation, education, language training, employment and political participation. In addition to these opportunities, a sense of belonging is very much related to whether individuals or groups maintain their group networking within their group while at the same time actively participating in the larger societal life of the host country.

When I had informal chats with the women and girls in their social gatherings and Iftar dinners, they expressed that getting used to a new country and location took time and was not that easy even though they considered it as their homeland.

Leyla, a 42-year-old Meskhetian Turk woman, said that:

We were like foreigners here when we first arrived in Istanbul. We did not know how things work here. We were living in a small village in Azerbaijan where everybody was living in houses. Here, everywhere is apartments, and there is variety of people living in one building. People are from everywhere. It took us time to figure out how to rent an apartment and purchase our furniture and other needs. It also took time for us to get used to Turkish money. Luckily, we could find an apartment, which was in walking distance from our Meskhetian Turkish friends. We can also walk to the cultural center.

Most Meskhetian Turk women gather within their own community, but those who had lived in Istanbul for more than five years also socialized with their Turkish neighbors with tea gatherings. Leyla said:

We have weekly gatherings with my neighbors. We drink tea and have pastries when the children go to school. We also collect money each week, and one of us gets that money. We rotate this until all of us have the collected money.

Most Meskhetian Turk women living in Turkey seem to build their sense of belonging slowly as they meet with the local people and get used to the system in Turkey. Habibe, one of the Meskhetian women who has been living in Istanbul since 2004, said that:

Turkey is our fatherland. We speak the same language. We have similar cultural characteristics with most of the people here. There are mosques everywhere. So we are not afraid here that our children will lose their language or religion. One of my daughters is married to a Turkish man. He is from the Black Sea region. They live in another city but it is just two hours away from here. Her mother-in-law is a very good woman. She is treating my daughter just like her own

daughter. They are very good people. They will visit us soon during the Ramadan holiday.

Meskhetian Turkish community that I conducted my fieldwork was very open to Turkish society and they were fine with the intergroup marriage with the Turks of Turkey. In addition to social life, the issue of employment, access to health care and social benefits is matter of concern for Meskhetian Turks women as well. Fatma's husband used to be a surgeon in Russia but because he does not have his working permit, he cannot work in the hospitals. He is volunteering at the association every Tuesday for the people of the community who do not have health insurance and recommends treatment plans and medicines. He is working in a local grocery market although he has a college degree as a medical doctor. Fatma is very upset about their (and mainly her husband's current) situation and willing to speak to the legal authorities so that they hear their voices. Below is a picture of Dr. Mamedov who has a medical degree that is not accepted by Turkey so he cannot work as a doctor.

The Our Meskhetian Turks Association aims to support Dr. Mamedov's rights by reaching broader constituencies. Mr. Binali Muzafferoğlu, the president of the association, said that:

This is our homeland. We have no place to go. Russia discriminated against us because we are Turks and Muslims. We came here but we are treated like foreigners here. This is our nation; the Turkish flag is our flag. We speak Turkish. We want citizenship. The government is helping Syrian refugees more than us. We also deserve to have legal permission to stay in this country.

Although some of them are suffering and complaining about the legal issues in Turkey, they feel they do belong there and will continue to live in Turkey.

Functional Integration

The notion of integration can be conceptualized and understood within different theoretical frameworks such as acculturation and assimilation or pluralism (Berry 1992; Alba and Nee 2003). Berry (1992) developed a categorization system with “four alternative responses of minority members to the dominant group. The categorization is based on two issues. One issue refers to the degree to which minority members wish to maintain relationships with the larger society; the second issue refers to the degree to which minority members wish to maintain their original identity and characteristics. Based on these dimensions Berry et al. distinguishes four categories”.

According to Berry et al. (1992), the categories are:

Assimilation is the strategy chosen by minority members to whom it is not important to maintain their culture and identity and who wish to join the dominant society, Integration is the strategy used by immigrants who wish to maintain their ethnic identity but who consider contacts with the dominant society to be of value, Marginalization is the option in which minority members lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society either by exclusion or withdrawal, Separation is the strategy of minority members who wish to maintain their ethnic identity while minimizing contact with the dominant group” (Berry 1992: 58-64).

Based on the research and my fieldwork among Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey and the United States, the situation of Meskhetian Turks falls more suitably under integration as a stateless group who wish to maintain their life without any problem or fear.

In this part of the dissertation, I will be referring to integration as Meskhetian Turks being granted of legal status, access to health and social services, education,

employment and political participation. The degree of functional integration of the group varies depending on the history of settlement, the location, the number of Meskhetian Turks and definitely the economic conditions of the host country (Trier and Khanzin 2009).

Even though the above-mentioned conditions determine the degree to which the newcomers integrate into a society, the situation in Turkey is somewhat special for Meskhetian Turks. Most of the group members who moved to Turkey during or after the collapse of former Soviet Union seem to have finally found a refuge where they feel safe and which provides opportunities for full integration. Despite economic difficulties and some legal obstacles, most Meskhetian Turks in Turkey consider that country to be their final destination and have a sense of belonging based on ethnic Turkish identity. They recognize the Meskheta region of Georgia as their original homeland; however, they consider Turkey as their fatherland (due to their Ottoman roots) as well as final/eventual homeland.

Although Turkey has a special place for the Meskhetian Turks, I will be studying the functional integration under the categories of employment, education, health care, social interaction and community integration, compact living vs. urbanization, socio-economic issues, relations with political authorities, political involvement and leadership and social media (Trier and Khanzin 2009).

Employment

Between the years of 1992 and 2005, the Turkish government had granted

residence permits as well as working permits to Meskhetian Turks. Those who arrived after 2005, must also apply individually, and they are given a 6-month residence permit without a work permit. Just like other foreigners, Meskhetian Turks now must go through the same procedures to apply for work permit. Until 2005 the police department used to give work permits to Meskhetian Turks because they were classified as “national refugees” according to the Law of Settlement. According to this law, those who are of Turkish descent and culture are entitled to migrate, settle and receive Turkish citizenship. However, due to the ambiguity of the definition of ethnic backgrounds, the Council of Ministers has the power to determine which group has Turkish descent and culture (Aydingün 2009). The Turkish government did accept a limited number of Meskhetian Turks from Ukraine as national refugees in December 2015 and resettled them in the southern part of Turkey.

Ali, a 55-year-old Meskhetian Turk who moved to Turkey in 2013, prides himself on being a hard worker and feels that this is an attribute of Meskhetian Turks: “We had always have a positive image anywhere we migrate or move as being a hard-working people, capable of making even the most dreadful land prosperous.” He decided to move to Turkey from Russia because he was afraid of his children assimilating into the Russian culture. He also expressed his desire to make sure that his children and grandchildren would grow up in a country in which they feel themselves being in their homeland. Unable to work legally due to not having the work permit, he has been unable to establish an economic belonging to Turkey. Ali and his family could

gain their residential permit for five years but it takes time and also is costly to obtain a work permit in Turkey.

According to the president of İnegöl Ahıska Türk Derneği (Meskhetian Turks Cultural Center located in Inegol), 40,000 to 50,000 Meskhetian Turks live in Turkey without employment authorization. They are working in temporary jobs with low wages. In his interview in January 2014, he complained about how one of their members who was a surgeon educated in Russia was working in a factory. Most Meskhetian Turks who are doctors or nurses returned to Russia because they were unable to perform their profession and had to work in under-waged jobs. The president was mainly asking for citizenship for all of the Meskhetian Turks without having any waiting period. He was also demanding that Meskhetian Turks living in the other countries be given dual citizenship with Turkey.

Working is essential for Meskhetian Turks for the survival of their families. Those who have a work permit or citizenship who are employed either in factories or careers based on their professions do not complain about any problems. They seem to be integrated into the society and can provide for their family's needs. Conversely, illegal workers in most cases are exploited by their employers who are aware of the fact that illegal immigrants do not have the right to work or to complain to the legal authorities about their situation.

Turkey has been a country that attracted many immigrants from Central Asia, Africa, Caucasus, and recently Syria. So all of these people are looking for a job, and the employers easily exploit them with low wages and make them work in difficult

conditions and long hours. Meskhetian Turks do not accept being classified the same as other immigrants. Yet, according to the president of the Cultural Center of Meskhetian Turks, the Turkish government no longer provides special citizenship acceptance for them. So, they are classified as being one group from among all foreigners and immigrants in Turkey. Since 2005, Meskhetian Turks have been treated as one of the “other foreigners” in regard to obtaining residence and work permit, which requires annual payment and whose approval is not guaranteed. Furthermore, obtaining a residence permit requires an annual fee of \$350 every year, which is a high amount of money for Meskhetian Turks who are living in economic difficulties.

Education

Education is another area where a lack of residence and work permits causes important problems for the Meskhetian Turks who want to go to school. Those who have Turkish citizenship do not face any problems, but those who without citizenship or residence permit are subject to legal discrimination even though local administrations do not cause any problems for them enrolling to schools.

The Student Oath (Öğrenci Andı) is words that all Turkish children learn. The oath says the following:

I am a Turk, honest and hardworking. My principle is to protect the younger to respect the elder, to love my homeland and my nation more than myself. My ideal is to rise, to progress.

Oh Great Atatürk! On the path that you have paved, I swear to walk incessantly toward the aims that you have set.

My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish existence. How happy is the one who says "I am a Turk!"

NE MUTLU TÜRKÜM DİYENE! / HOW HAPPY IS THE ONE WHO SAYS "I AM A TURK!"

“I am so glad that my children are saying the above pledge every morning before they start their class. They are Turkish and I want them to feel it head to toe... ” said Ismail who migrated to Turkey two years ago from Russia. He came with his family because he was concerned about being unable to rear his children in the way he wished so he moved his family to Turkey. Continued Ismail, “We were always excluded in Russia, Azerbaijan and Central Asia because we were Turks. Here there is no one who will exclude us.”

Meskhetian Turks who can go to schools would like to pursue their higher education in Turkey even though it is competitive and they must achieve the necessary scores on the university entrance exam to be eligible to go to university. Most Meskhetian Turk families that I interviewed were saving money to enroll their children in university preparation classes so that their children could make a better score on the exam. Meskhetian Turks would like their children to gain education in their mother tongue and go to higher education despite the legal difficulties.

Social Interaction and Community Integration

Social networks among Meskhetian Turks can be analyzed under the following two subtopics: 1) family-based networks and 2) gender-based networks.

“Relationships among family and relatives play a key role in the formation of social networks among Meskhetian Turks. Family and relative networks provide both moral and material support. For instance, if someone in the family is grieving a death, then it is essential that members of the community express their condolences, that they pay a visit and that they are supportive. If, for instance, a person was not present at the funeral, they are obliged to visit all the members of the bereaved family” (Tomlinson 2002:181-182).

It is through relatives that people look for find work and accommodations. If someone among the relatives does not have citizenship, does not have the legal right to travel beyond the territory in which he is living, then the relatives visit them. Another means of getting news are mobile telephone communications and exchanging video recordings of family festivities online.

The dispersal of relatives across multiple countries is a problem that frequently came up in my conversations with Meskhetian Turks. Among the interviewees, personally being present at the most important events such as circumcision, marriages and funerals is important. Said Ayse with tears,

Now I have a problem.... I mean, I'm all right really. The only problem is my father lives in Kazakhstan, and my brother lives in Russia. I want them all move to Turkey, this is our homeland but my father is living with my youngest brother, and he has a job there. I cannot guarantee that he will find a job here. My problem is that I've no way of seeing them when I need to. And when I need to,

there's no way of travelling there, it sometimes happens that you get sick or something. I invited them to my daughter's marriage...so that we'd never have a marriage without relatives, especially without grandfather. It costs for them to travel to Turkey. We had our wedding without them but they could watch us online. So you see, that's how the marriage was. So the problem is how to get them all together. Whether it happens or not remains to be seen.

During my fieldwork over two years, I observed that family occupies a very important place for Meskhetian Turks, and the core network is shaped around their extended family. My informants in Istanbul are living in Turkey with their extended family in one apartment and maintain their close networks. The extended family has very strong ties, and a strict hierarchy exists among members. I had three brothers and their families as my informants in Houston. They migrated to Houston from Krasnodar where all these brothers and their families used to live in one household. They told me that the oldest brother has the authority, and he is the decision maker. The rest of the family including his sons and their families, unmarried daughters and the brothers of the oldest man and their families follow his decisions. They also told me that it is a common practice among Meskhetian Turks to see the elderly men in the family makes the decision move from one country or city to another one. They live either in one household or live very close to each other. Furthermore, I observed that all of the grandparents live with their sons, usually youngest son, but they still keep authority over the other brothers and their families.

During my fieldwork I also observed that elderly women have the power over the women in the family and children. They are the ones who determine when and who will get married with whom in the family. Medina, a 27-year-old Meskhetian Turk woman

living in Turkey, stated that she was introduced with the nephew of her sister in law to get married by her grandmother. She also said that her grandmother planned this even when they were children. She also added that:

Matchmaking is one of the primary responsibilities of elderly women among our community.

Also, I observed that elderly women see themselves responsible for ensuring that all of the children are being reared with the ethical and social values of Meskhetian Turks. Most of the group's members repeatedly told me that their family structure has helped them to protect their ethnic identity for years in the exile.

During my fieldwork I observed that family plays a central and pivotal role in the social value system of Meskhetian Turks; hence, its importance is always emphasized. Much attention is paid to family memories, and they passed on down through the generations.

For example, Ilyas, a 34-year-old Meskhetian Turk who has been living in Turkey for around 12 years said:

I remember seven generations of my direct relatives. Although I do not know their birthdays, I do remember their names and stories. Then, he narrated his father's uncle's stories during the deportation from Georgia. My uncles were in the army by the time, and they were among the Soviet troops fighting against Germany. So they were away from Georgia when the deportation happened in 1944. After the war ended in 1945, they returned to the Meskheta region in Georgia with the expectation of meeting with their families, but they could not find anybody. They heard from the other people in the region that all of their people were deported. Then they decided to look for them. One of my uncles was 17 and the other was 19 by the time. They took the train and started to travel to Central Asia. They stopped in Uzbekistan and decided to stop by each and every village until they find their families. It was during the month of August, and the weather was so hot and dry. They did not have any money and food with them. They barely reached a village and saw that a woman was making bread outside.

She cooked one and went home to get something. Once they saw her going home, they took one of the bread because they were so hungry. They started to eat it, and the woman saw them. Once she approached them, she heard them that they were speaking in Turkish, which was her language as well. As she got closer she found out that they were her brothers. They all got in tears that they could find each other.

Ilyas told me this story with all of its details. He had listened to the story from his father who was the youngest of the brothers. He says that he is telling the story to his children many times so that they will remember and pass it on to their children.

Gender has a critical place in understand the social networks of Meskhetian Turks both within the family, relatives and community and outside of their community. The position of the women within the family, relatives and community remains in traditional constructs. During the social gatherings such as weddings, funerals or other collective events, men and women sit separately or when at the same tables sit apart. Brides do not speak to their father-in-law and do not sit with them at the table until they have given birth to a child, preferably a baby boy.

The dominance of the male/father's side of the family and the connections and ties to that side is observed, which the interviewees in both Turkey and the United States emphasized regardless of their ages, professions or educational levels. Meskhetian Turks have a strict patriarchal structure in both the family and community levels. Within this segregated model, women have strong networks with each other and the women outside of their own community. They share their problems with each other and often visit their houses.

In general, the relationship between Meskhetian Turks and the local people is very positive. The networks with the non-Meskhetian Turks were also determined based on gender differences. Meskhetian Turk women meet with the other women and socialize with them. They have very limited social interactions with the non-Meskhetian Turk men. Most of the Turkish people have a great sympathy towards Meskhetian Turks and embrace them without any prejudice. When I was talking to the Imam of the mosque where most of the Meskhetian men go for their prayers, he made an interesting point. He made a comparison between the experiences of Meskhetian Turks and Bulgarian Turks who shared much in common. He said that:

When the Bulgarian Turks were accepted as refugees in Turkey in 1989 and early 1990s, most of the local Turkish people did not like them since they were given houses and competed with the locals in the labor markets. Thousands of people migrated to Turkey in a short period of time and were a threat to the local Turkish people especially in the labor market since the unemployment rate was very high at that time. On the other hand, local people did not react in a similar way to Meskhetian Turks since they were coming from different places in an unorganized way and in small numbers. They had nothing and loved Turkey. Their story was very touching to the locals and they received a great deal of sympathy.

Relations with Political Authorities, Political Involvement and Leadership

The political participation of Meskhetian Turks was mainly limited to the voting by those who had obtained Turkish citizenship, and the group was hesitant to be actively involved in political affairs due to its financial burden such as the high cost of political campaign, advertisements etc. (Aydingün 2009). Paşa Alihan, President of the Center for Defending the Rights of Ahıska Turks in Exile, declared his candidacy for the local elections of November 2014 as a candidate of mayor of his small municipal town in the

city of Bursa as it is shown in figure 8. Although he was not elected, his campaign raised the awareness of the existence of the Meskhetian Turk community and their problems in Turkey. Research has shown that the political engagement of immigrants is one indication of the sense of belonging to the new setting as well as introducing their social agency to the host society (Danahay and Brettell 2008). So Paşa Alihan's political involvement gave courage to the other Meskhetian Turks that they could voice their concerns that and Turkey is a country in which they have the right to be one of the authorities.



Figure 8. Campaign picture of Pasa Alihan

In regards to the political parties with which the Meskhetian Turks sympathize, The National Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) has priority due to its

holistic approach for all of the Turkic communities. The party has been advocating for the groups and their repatriation to Turkey since 2004 in the parliament (Aydingun 2009). Some Meskhetian Turks also sympathize with the ruling party, The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), especially after the acceptance of around 90 Meskhetian Turk families living in Ukraine and settling them with providing apartments and temporary jobs in Turkey (*Hurriyet Daily News*, December 25, 2015). Elderly people have great sympathy for the former president of Turkey, Turgut Ozal, mainly because of his policy towards the Turkish population living outside of Turkey. He welcomed them during his presidency and changed the settlement law in favor of Meskhetian Turks. According to some of the elderly people, if Özal was alive and still in power, all of the Meskhetian Turks could repatriate and gain their Turkish citizenship (Aydingün 2009). Nonetheless, most Meskhetian Turks are hesitant to talk about their political views due to the oppression and easily misunderstood political environment in Turkey.

In regards to power relationships within the Meskhetian Turk community in Turkey, elderly people, especially men, are very much respected. My informants stated that, in the Meskhetian Turk tradition, the oldest man is the head of the group to which belong the families not only of his daughters and sons but also those of his brothers and his brothers-in-law. His authority is both “traditional” and economic within his group. My observation was in line with their information but it must be noted that Meskhetian Turks are living in various countries and they do constitute a relatively heterogeneous population with shared ethnic values.

Meskhetian Turks have established several associations and cultural centers, which have important roles in bridging the Meskhetian Turks with the authorities. Elderly men are very much respected in these associations and centers, and most of the time one of the men who elected by the group of elderly becomes the president. The main responsibility of these associations is helping resettlement in Turkey and voicing their problems to the Turkish community. Meskhetian Turk associations or cultural centers have essential roles in the group's resettlement and solving their problems in Turkey.

One example of them helping the community is when the Turkish police attempted to deport a 33-year-old Meskhetian Turk man due to lack of immigration documents. He was detained in the hospital because he needed dialysis service four times a week and was going to be taken to the Foreigners Branch Police Department. He had come to Turkey in 2010 from Russia and lived with his father in Bursa. Due to his financial difficulties, he could not obtain a residency permit and extend his passport. He was going to be deported to Russia where he did not any place to live in or any insurance. He was being helped by the local community in Turkey to have his dialysis services. When the Meskhetian Turk association released this news in the media and mediated with the authorities, he was not deported and granted a residency permit as well as Medicaid (*Zaman Daily News*, September 11, 2015).

Identity and Belonging

Identity and belonging issues among Meskhetian Turks in Turkey is very much dependent on the legal status of the group in Turkey and the possibility of repatriation to Georgia. Although I mentioned before that Meskhetian Turks do not wish to return, this feeling is mainly due to the disappointment and the hopelessness of being able to reacquire the historical motherland. Given the result of failures in all attempts to solve the issue of repatriation to Georgia, and the hesitant attitude of Georgian government to settle Meskhetian Turks in Meskheta region as well as the ethnic structure of Georgia, mainly Georgian speaking Christians, Meskhetian Turks consider Turkey as their homeland and are looking for options to gain citizenship (Yunusov 2009).

Meskhetian Turks all around the world perceive themselves as belonging to the Meskhetian Turk ethnic group and protect this group with a variety of strategies such as endogamy. They also consider the Meskhetian Turk ethnic identity to one of the sub-ethnic identities in Turkey. Said Mr. Ilyas, one of the elderly men living in Istanbul,

There are “Laz” people in Istanbul who consider themselves Turkish. Also there are Circassians who consider themselves Turkish. So we are Meskhetian Turks, and we are Turks as much as they are. Meskhetian Turks were under Ottoman rule for 250 years. If the eastern border was passed 50 km to the east in 1921 during Edirne treaty between Russia and Ottoman Empire, there would not be any Meskhetian Turk issue, and we would all be living in Turkey as Turkish citizens.

According to Yunusov and his fieldwork in Azerbaijan, Meskhetian Turks associate themselves with Turkey although they say they are brothers with the Azerbaijanis. According to one of the interviewees in Yunusov’s article “We have a lot

in common, however we are real, pure Turks and our language is Turkish. Therefore, the antenna of our TV sets is adjusted to Turkey; we watch mostly Turkish programs and only sometimes Azeri TV program.” (Yunusov 2009: 193).

While the group associates themselves with Turkey, they have a difficult time explaining when they are asked about where they are from, which is the most common question when Turkish people meet someone. Even before asking their name, people ask where they are from to have an idea of the identity of that person. Meskhetian Turks suffer from being misunderstood as answering the question whether they have come from Russia, Azerbaijan or Uzbekistan. They do not want to be related with those groups so they have to explain their historical origin and what they have been through each time.

Religion

An important criterion in the identity of Meskhetian Turks both before and after Soviet Union is belonging to a community that solely professes Sunni Islam. They practice circumcision, celebrate the major religious holidays, Ramadan and feast of sacrifice, and some fast during the holy month of Ramadan. In terms of everyday diet, only pork is forbidden. Alcohol invariably accompanies secular festivities such as marriages or at New Year, when it is consumed after dinner with guests (Kuznetsov 2009).

During my field research both in Turkey and the United States, all of the interviewees regardless of their level of religiosity emphasized the importance of

religion in the Meskhetian Turkish culture and identity and preserving the religious identity. For example, Ilyas, at the Meskhetian Turk Association in Istanbul, stated that “Meskhetian Turks, first they are Muslims.”

Religion has an important place for Meskhetian Turks due to its relevance with their connection to their history, mainly Ottoman Empire. During the oppression by the communist regime under former Soviet Union, religion had been the only tool along with language for them to preserve their ethnic identity.

Elderly people in Turkey are so thankful that they can practice their religion and do not have any fear due to their practices. They were also so happy to hear the muezzin give the *adhan*, the call to prayer, five times a day and have the freedom to be able to go to the mosque whenever they desire.

One of the older Meskhetian Turk men told me how his family suffered under Soviet regime due to their religion:

During the former Soviet Union period we were under pressure due to our wish to practice our religion. First they exiled imams, whom they call mullah. They thought if the imam was exiled, the rest of the population will lose their religion. So they thought if we exile the religious leaders and educators then they will lose their culture. Soviet officials only believe in Father Lenin, and they forced us not to believe in Allah but father Lenin. There is no Allah, they were saying. If they discovered a religious leader or educator, the officials would force him away. So, we would keep our ways a secret. During the month of Ramadan, or even during religious festival Bayram, we weren't allowed to pray. That's why people would keep it a secret, so they wouldn't be punished.

Kamal, a 44-year-old Meskhetian Turk who migrated to Turkey eight years ago from Russia said that:

If we wanted to have a business with Russians, we had to bring Russians alcohol and drink with them. They would tell us, drink, so we know you're not Muslim. If we do not drink, then they would not work with us.

So, even though some of the Meskhetian Turk men consumed alcohol, alcohol was consumed because of pressure by the Russians.

Meskhetian Turks were under oppression during former Soviet Union period regardless of their settlement, Georgia, Uzbekistan or Russia. They either had to limit their religious practices or hide it from the officials. Therefore, preserving their values and strong attachment to their religion became an important part of their ethnic identity.

As Mehmet said,

Our elderly people go to mosque and pray five times a day here. When we were living in Russia, they were not allowed to practice Islam. We all believe in Allah. Russians do not believe in Allah but we kept our religion in our heart and we stayed together because we all believe in Allah.

The dominant religion in Turkey is Islam, and Meskhetian Turks do not feel they need to expend extra effort to preserve their and their children's' religion. Their children are reared hearing the call to prayer five times a day and can go to mosque during the summer break to learn how to read the Quran, the sacred book of the religion of Islam. they all go to the neighborhood mosque and fulfill their prayers with the local people. They can celebrate all of their religious festivals, organizing Iftar dinner for the community, visiting their relatives and neighbors during the eid, in comfort and with no fear of being abducted.

Language

Language constitutes another important component of Meskhetian Turkish identity after religion. Especially the Turkish language has been their distinctive characteristics in Central Asia. The main language of communication within the community itself is an Eastern Anatolian dialect of Turkish. Turkish has more than 50 dialects and Eastern Anatolian dialect of Turkish can easily be identified compare to Istanbul Turkish which is the mainstream dialect used in Turkish media and education. During my interviews and observations, I gained the impression of the importance of Turkish language. Most of my interviewees also specifically stated that language is one of the most important components of Meskhetian Turk identity which was sustained. As Paşa Alihan, head of Meskhetian Turks Association in Bursa, stated in a speech:

Meskhetian Turks had to go through multiple deportation, oppression and even violence, because of their identity, Turkishness. They were dispersed in different countries but they never lost their language. Our language is Turkish language.

Most of the Meskhetian Turks speak Russian and another Central Asian language or Azerbaijan Turkish depending on where they migrated from. On the other hand, younger children only speak Turkish and the local language of their settlement. However, they have borrowed words from Russian in their language. Said, a 48-year-old Meskhetian Turk man:

When we were in Azerbaijan, we had a satellite dish to be able watch Turkish TV channels. We were also watching Turkish news and listening to Turkish music. This helped us and our children to protect their Turkish. Our relatives living in Russia also had a satellite dish for Turkish channels as well.

The importance of preserving their language is also reflected in their view of rearing children and their relationship to the Turkish people and Turkey. They have no longer fear losing their mother tongue in Turkey; yet, some Meskhetian Turk parents would like to make sure their children do not forget Russian due to practical reasons. Because they do not have a lot of chance to practice their Russian, they let them watch Russian movies and soap operas to be able to keep their second language alive.

The only difference that I recognized among my interviewees in Istanbul was the accent difference between the younger and older generation. Some of the group members were also realized this. Said has been living in Turkey for 15 years and he says: “Our language is close to Ardahan (a city located in North east part of Turkey), in Istanbul we aren’t well understood.” The younger generation speaks with an Istanbul accent because they have been exposed to and are interested in watching Turkish movies and listening to Turkish songs. The older generation speaks with a Northeastern Turkish dialect, which is very common in Istanbul, where a great number of people have migrated from different regions of Turkey.

Summary

Meskhetian Turks have experienced multiple deportations and many sufferings and socio-economic problems. In addition to these difficulties, they were at risk of losing their cultural values, ethnic identity and religion. During the exile years, Meskhetian Turks used their ethnic solidarity as a coping mechanism, which also has been a fundamental means of survival.

Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey has either experienced these difficulties or heard from their parents about what they have suffered from. So the majority of the Meskhetian Turks do not want to go back to Russia or repatriate to Georgia due to the possibility of experiencing similar difficulties. All of my interviewees used the term “homeland” for Turkey and explained that Turkey is their ancestral homeland due to commonly shared Ottoman roots, although even more than half of them do not have Turkish citizenship. They all argued that they were always discriminated against due to their Turkish heritage in exile and the only place they see a secure future place is in Turkey. They all expressed how they were relieved in Turkey in regards to preserving the ethnic identity and religion.

On the other hand, in regards to sense of belonging and identification I observed differences between the Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey and the United States. Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey seemed integrated to the society and they consider the differences between themselves and Turks are minor. I did not see any fear of “Turkification” among the group members. Whereas the Meskhetian Turks living in the United States do not identify themselves with the Turks of Turkey although they acknowledge the profound similarities between the cultures. The details will be addressed in the next chapter.

My Meskhetian Turk informants in Turkey stated they also have major problems that they want to be resolved soon. Citizenship is the number one problem that they have in Turkey. According to Meskhetian Turks associations, there are 20,000 Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey that do not have citizenship. They expect the authorities to

change the law in favor of Meskhetian Turks because Turkey is the only place and homeland that they can live in. Another problem that they face in Turkey, which is also related with citizenship, is their children's enrolment in public schools. Due to a lack of a residence permit, enrolling their children in elementary or secondary schools is a big issue. Despite the legal challenges, most of my informants stated that they feel integrated to the society and do not feel as an immigrant coming from another country. It is also important that majority population of Istanbul comprised of immigrants moved from other parts of Turkey. Therefore, it is very common to see people speaking with different dialects in everywhere. Consequently, Meskhetian Turks living in Istanbul could easily fit in the society.

Meskhetian Turks have been very hardworking community in any place that they have lived, and they could establish a prosperous life if the conditions would allow them to do so. So the group would like to gain citizenship rights that would ease most of the problems that they now face in Turkey.

CHAPTER VI

THE UNITED STATES: A NEW AND SAFE HOMELAND AND MULTIPLICITY OF HOMELANDS

Introduction

As it is stated in the previous chapters, a population of Meskhetian Turks living in the Krasnodar Krai region of Russia was experiencing discrimination and harassment due to their ethnic origin. They were unsuccessful in attempts to repatriate to Georgia or Turkey due to the reluctance of Georgia for repatriating any Meskhetian Turks and the unstable settlement laws and standpoint of authorities in Turkey. Ultimately, the United States “government joined the international effort to address the ongoing crisis and proposed an option of resettlement for the Meskhetian Turks of the Krasnodar region in the United States” (Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2009:43). As discussed in more detail in Chapter III, between 2006 and 2009, the United States accepted 12,000-15,000 Meskhetian Turks as refugees who were resettled in 33 different states. The state of Texas helped with the resettlement of 417 Meskhetian Turks. The total population in Texas has grown since then due to internal migrations from other states and new births. The U.S. government provided all refugees with a permanent residency card, and immigration officials provided them with housing in concentrated groups within certain apartment complexes.

As legal refugees, Meskhetian Turks were entitled to a variety of assistances such as housing, English language classes and the ability to gain citizenship after five years of residency. Local resettlement agency that they were entitled to by the government helped them to find a job. These social services were significant improvements in the social and political inclusion of the Meskhetian Turks. The United States arguably represents one of their most stable host countries since the 1944 displacement, making it likely that this group will remain settled in the United States (Reisman 2012). However, compared to Turkey, there is a greater cultural divide with the dominant group. This could therefore be the beginning of another period for the community not only for their settlement but also for their identity reformation.

In this chapter, I provide ethnographic data to address the multiplicity of attachment for the Meskhetian Turks living in the United States by looking at different components of the idea of homeland such as sense of belonging, acculturation, and transnational networks. In addition to this, I analyzed the common idea of taken-for-granted ways of thinking about identity and territory among Meskhetian Turks as a multiply displaced and uprooted community to address the question: how do Meskhetian Turks negotiate their ethnic identity in the United States given the deeply territorializing nature of ethnic identity? As I mentioned in the introduction chapter I use the concepts of Meskhetian Turk culture and ethnic identity interchangeably and with these terms I refer to Meskhetian Turkish beliefs, language, material culture, expressive culture, and practices. The vast majority of literature suggests that identity is always mobile and processural (Malkki 1992; Clifford 1988; Appadurai 1988). For the refugees,

deterritorialization and identity are intimately linked. According to Breckenridge and Appadurai (1989), Diasporas always leave a trail of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment. This chapter illustrates how a diasporic group that has been displaced multiple times can preserve their ethnic identity by maintaining a strong collective memory of their territory and their shared experiences.

Being a Refugee in the United States

Background to the Refugee Resettlement Policy of the United States

The United States did not have a formal refugee policy until 1980, when Congress worked out a formal process for dealing with refugees from conflicts in Southeast Asia. The challenges of resettling various groups, such as the Hmong and Vietnamese “boat people”, served as the catalyst for the late Senator Edward Kennedy to propose the Refugee Act of 1980. This act systemized entry into the United States and standardized the services that refugee entrants should receive. The 1980 Act, which remains in place to this day, also defined the term “refugee” to conform to the working definition used by the United Nations, and, for the first time, made a clear distinction between refugee and asylum status. The act also established a comprehensive program for the resettlement of these newcomers, and, because the United States sees itself as a nation of immigrants, concrete paths to citizenship was built into it. Its provisions gave all Indochinese refugees conditional status for one year, after which they could adjust to permanent resident status and then, as people who were no longer welcome in their last

country of residence, they were expected to proceed to a naturalized citizenship status in five years, thereby establishing their loyalty to their country of refuge (Aleinikoff et.al 2001).

Beginning in 2004, Meskhetian Turks arrived in the United States went through the same process, and by the time I was conducting interviews in Houston, most of my interviewees had been naturalized as citizenship after living in the U.S. for five years. America's refugee policies and legal paths toward citizenship were based on the idea that America would become their permanent country of residence. By enabling the Meskhetian Turks to achieve permanent resident status, the process automatically opened up a wide range of employment opportunities for them and made them eligible for in-state tuition rates at state colleges. At the time of the arrival Meskhetian Turks in the Houston area, the local Non-Government Organizations, YMCA-international, were in charge of resettlement including permanent residency, food stamps, and Medicaid applications as well as enrollment of the children in public schools.

Being a Citizen in the United States

Citizenship means different things to different people. Legal scholar David Weissbrodt (1998: 248) defines it as “a legal status that connotes membership in and a duty of permanent allegiance to a society which arrives with it specific rights and responsibilities.” Several scholars, however, have noticed a general trend of immigrant and refugee decisions to elect citizenship based more on the rights and ease of restrictions, and less, if any, on feelings of loyalty and allegiance (Schuck 1998; DeSipiro 2001; Mavroudi 2008). This presumes that they have stronger feelings toward

the country they left behind. On the other hand, other scholars like Jansen and Lofving (2009: 6) who criticize any presumption that a “refugee’s’ real identity, if they were allowed to be themselves, is their belonging to an ethno-national category territorialized in relation to the homeland.” This is not to say that people have some primordial national identity, but that their identities have, in part, been forged by the nationalizing efforts of their homelands.

For refugee groups, like the Meskhetian Turks who arrived in the United States from Krasnodar Krai, Russia with no nation-state the sentiments that they did carry with them to their resettlement sites were a combination of what Peggy Levitt (2001) refers to as cultural belonging, and a dimension of diasporic ethno-belonging rooted in principles of blood ties and clan connections. This blood affiliation binds their community. Notwithstanding the opportunities given by the host country, such as citizenship, construct ties with the community and the host country. Within the U.S., their belonging to the new host country is strengthened through the opportunity to gain citizenship. Meskhetian Turks naturalize for practical and material reasons, such as ease of travel and fear of deportation. They were eager to process their permanent residency and eventually citizenship with the thought that without citizenship they could be forced, once again, out of one space and in search of another zone of refuge.

One of the requirements of the application of permanent residency card is medical clearance. Meskhetian Turks were willing to complete all the process as soon as possible to guarantee their resettlement in the United States. I was also involved to help the group in this process. One of the Meskhetian Turk women who I interviewed asked

if I could take her family to the doctor's clinic in order to have the medical clearance report to submit their green card application. I said sure, then I picked up all of her family and we went to a small family doctor clinic in a poor Houston neighborhood. The clinic required much paperwork because they worked for immigrants and refugees. We filled out the copious paperwork, and the family took several shots in order to have the necessary doctor's report for their permanent residency cards. Each and every family member was fine with the requirements and pleased that they could be given legal status to stay in the United States. This was only one of the examples of Meskhetian Turks' journey in the process of naturalization in the United States.

Most of the refugees and immigrants in the United States followed the path of citizenship, which is first to gain permanent residency and then after five years to become naturalized for "practical and material" reasons. However, just because citizenship is elected for practical and material reasons, it does not mean it is valued any less by those who elect it. To the Meskhetian Turks who were fleeing persecution, the status of permanence and safety were highly valued.

Malik, a 43-year-old Meskhetian Turk man living in Houston, stated that:

We appreciate the American government that they accepted us. They are giving us citizenship. They are giving us a house, food and jobs. We can go to sleep without any fear of deportation or our houses being seized. Also we do not have any fear that our girls will be kidnapped.

Malik and some of the other Meskhetian Turks in Houston stated to me that they were afraid that Russians would kidnap their daughters since they threatened several of

the families with that. Other than this my informants did not give me any actual case where Russians kidnapped their young women.

Immigrant scholars have noted that those taking citizenship in the United States often do so for pragmatic and legal reasons while often maintaining a place-based sense of cultural belonging to their home country (Brettell 2006; Gilbertson and Singer 2003; Vertovec 2004). The Meskhetian Turk experiences offer a different dimension to these analyses as they reveal practical reasons for adopting citizenship that coexists with an identity that is maintained in an unfixed, stateless, diasporic space of ethnic identity.

Meskhetian Turks in the United States and Preserving Ethnic Identity

Based on my interviews, participant observations and informal observation, most Meskhetian Turks think that their lives in the United States are more comfortable than any other place they had lived before. The route that my interviewees followed after their deportation from Georgia was from Uzbekistan, Russia, Krasnodar Krai and then to the United States. I also had a quite a large number of interviewees who migrated to Russia from Azerbaijan. According to them, living in the United States has ensured that most of their needs including security, equality, and freedom were met. They also mentioned the ability to have a job and education here. Mehmet, a middle-aged Meskhetian man said:

We were working very hard in Russia. We had a field and animal husbandry and used to wake up very early in the morning and work till very late hours. But we were making a very small amount of money since Russians were not paying us enough. In Russia, we could only work at farms, because we did not have permits. Then, Krasnodar authorities restricted working at farms. Other cities gave permits to us, but Krasnodar did not. I think main reason is historical.

Krasnodar was an Ottoman city. When we came Krasnodar, they said that Turks came again. When we arrived in the USA, they did not want to change our identity. Our life was not bad in Uzbekistan. We lived peacefully for 45 years, but problems started at the end of 1980's. We were under pressure in Russia. My father lost his leg in prison because of the Russian government.

Ayse, Mehmet's mother, tearfully shared similar experiences:

Hulya: Which state did you come firstly?

Ayse: Atlanta

H: Why Atlanta?

A: The US government scattered us, and we had to go to Atlanta.

The government also found job for us, and paid money for house and utility for the first months.

H: Why did you come to Houston, Texas?

A: Some of our relatives were settled to here by US government. They said that they were comfortable, and had jobs here. Then, we decided to come here.

H: Are you comfortable at here?

A: Our life is very comfortable and easy. When we were in Russia, we were working at farms, and severe working conditions. I am retired because of my health problems; my daughter-in law is working.

H: Do you think can you find job easily here?

A: If you are hardworking, it is easy to find job in the US.

Ayse also mentioned about how her children's lives are also very comfortable in the United States. She stated that her grandchildren who attend school here are treated like queens.

My grandchildren are attending middle school. The school bus takes them in front of our home, and brings to the door. All of the cars stop, when they are getting on and off. The state government provides food when they are at home. If we compare them to us, they are very relaxed. Sometimes, these relaxing conditions make me afraid for maintaining our identity.

I mainly observed this concern about maintaining their identity among most Meskhetian Turks who have children and arrived to the United States after their thirties. They all appreciated the American government's acceptance of them and providing them security by granting citizenship but they were all afraid that their children cannot preserve their ethnic identity. So in this section breaking down the components of ethnic identity, which Meskhetian Turks in the United States find essential, is reasonable.

Religion

Religion and their attachment to Islam as an important component of the ethnic identity have been mentioned several times by the interviewees. Although they are not strictly observant Muslims, they are devout and most of my interviews mentioned about how religion plays an important role in the process of preserving Meskhetian Turk identity and passing it on to future generations. For example, Ilyas, a 60-year-old Meskhetian Turk man said in one of his conversations with me during the religious festival dinner, "Meskhetians, first they are Muslims."

Hayriye, Ilyas' wife, told me her stories of religious restrictions in Soviet Uzbekistan:

We were not allowed to fast during Ramadan. While we were going to school, if the teachers found out that we are fasting they used to force us to eat lunch. They did not believe Allah. Also we were not allowed to celebrate the religious festival

along with the other Muslims such as Uzbeks. Our grandparents used to pray in private homes with couple of people.

She also told me her story about how they would hide under the sofa when there was a knock on the door. She recounted:

When a group of children including me were studying how to read the Quran, the Holy book of Islam, in one of the imam's house, we used to hide under the sofa if the door was knocked. Every time we used to be afraid of being persecuted due to us studying religion.

The oppression due to their religion affects the degree to which Meskhetian Turks preserved their religion and values.

Religion is one of the most important and common element among the other Meskhetian Turks around the world. They had to hide their religion during the former Soviet Union (Aydingün 2007). Even after the collapse of USSR, due to the discouraging policy toward religion, Meskhetian Turks did not gain religious freedom particularly in Russia. Even though living in the United States has granted them the freedom to practice their religion without any fear, the prejudice against Islam and Muslim people does affect the way in which they live and represent their religion in the United States.

Language

My intensive fieldwork data among Meskhetian Turks in Houston shows that Turkish language has a significant role for Meskhetian Turks. While I was talking to the group, they particularly emphasized about the importance of preserving their language as

one of the essential component of their ethnic identity. Meskhetian Turks experienced multiple deportations and lived in exile for years, yet they preserved their language and passed it on to the other generations.

All my interviewees above the age of thirty speak Russian, Turkish and Uzbek, but the younger generation only speaks Russian, if they went to school in Russia, and Turkish. Meskhetian Turk adults were enrolled in English language courses by the resettlement agencies when they first arrived in the United States. Their children were all enrolled in public schools where they could learn English through ESL classes. During my fieldwork, most Meskhetian Turks, especially those going to school and working, could speak English to a certain extent. Nevertheless, each and every interviewee stated that they learn Turkish as their first language and it is the language that they speak at home and with each other. I observed that most of the middle aged Meskhetian Turks use a significant amount of Russian and Uzbek words while they were speaking. I also recognized that younger generation, adolescents, use some English words while they were talking to me.

The importance of Turkish language and its preservation is also reflected in their perspective of rearing children and their relationship to Turks in Houston. The interviews revealed that Meskhetian Turks see the importance of preserving their language among their children. When I asked Nazhanim, 26-year-old Meskhetian Turk woman who has a 2-year-old son, about language she responded thusly:

Hulya: What language do you speak to your son?

Nazhanim: Turkish.

H: How about Russian? Are you going to teach him Russian as well?

N: No, he can learn somehow.

Nazhanim is aware of the importance of language and its function in the process of transmitting the cultural traits over generation. In addition to that she is willing for her son's first language to be Turkish in order to be able communicate with his grandparents living in the United States but do not speak English comfortably.

According to Oh's interviews collected among Meskhetian Turks living in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, although the Meskhetian Turkish community has, by and large, preserved its native language, recently signs of change are visible among those who live in cities, and especially among those who have higher education. Many Meskhetian Turkish intellectuals point out that the lack of education in Turkish is an important factor contributing to the loss of language, especially among children born and reared in the urban centers of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In addition to that, given that elderly people, who possess high levels of tradition and language, are now aging and passing away, learning Turkish has become more difficult for the younger generation. Although Turkish charities or religious organizations have founded schools and universities in the former Soviet republics and major universities offer Turkish language instruction, these institutions are not designed to help the ethnic revitalization of the Meskhetian Turks (Oh 2006:56-58).

Language has been a very important component of Meskhetian Turks, and they could draw clear boundaries of their ethnic identity with their language and religion during the Soviet period. However, the signs of losing the Turkish have been observed

among the group in Kazakhstan, and this situation could come about in the United States for future generations. Meskhetian Turks speak Turkish at home with their children, yet as I personally experience that since the children spend most of their time at school, they feel more comfortable with English compare to Turkish. They prefer to speak in English with their friends which make English as their first language. I also observed that young Meskhetian Turk children at the age of 8-12 speak in English with each other although their parents' reminded them to speak in Turkish. The similar case with Kazakhstan could happen in the United States as well.

Family Traditions

As I stated before, family has a significant place among Meskhetian Turkish community. Most of my interviewees always referred to family when they were talking about cultural values and traits. Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed place a high value on family, broadly defined to include both immediate and extended family. Meskhetian Turkish families that I observed and interviewed are close-knit in both Turkey and the United States. Many of the group members live close to each other and spend most of their time together. Even when Meskhetian Turks have family members who live abroad, they remain in constant contact with them.

For example, Saida, a 43-year-old woman, lives in Houston with her three children and husband. They moved to Houston with her husband's brothers and their families. Three of her siblings live in Kyrgyzstan. She said that:

Even though I am married, I still miss them. I wish they also could come to the United States. I talk to them over the phone every day, and they want to come to the US but the US government does not accept the Meskhetian Turks living in Kyrgyzstan as refugees. They have to go through the visa process, which is very expensive and does not guarantee that they can obtain visa.

Saida's statement is only one of the examples of indication of strong family ties within the group. In addition to that above quote shows that Meskhetian Turkish informants and especially women both in Turkey and the United States were suffering from being separated from their relatives which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Family Structure

Gender and generation play a significant role in the family structure of Meskhetian Turks. Unlike in the United States, one's generation is not strictly defined by one's age. Instead, it is defined by one's social position within the family. For example, Ali and Nesibe were born in 1964 and both are considered as young among their community. On the other hand, Gulsum who was born in 1966 is considered as older generation. When I asked for the reason, the women explained it to me that Gulsum has grandchildren however Ali and Nesibe have younger children who are not married yet. Gulsum however as having adult children and grandchildren, she is considered elderly in the community, despite being younger than Ali and Nesibe.

Elderly people have a higher status within this community. Based on my observations, I can state that mostly when someone has grandchildren he or she becomes an elder. Among Meskhetian Turks living in Houston, younger generations usually work and elders are expected to hold the guidance role as opposed to meeting the basic needs

of the family. Hence, the concept of generation, particularly between elders and adults, is based on the social status rather than their biological age.

Below is an excerpt from the interview with Ali and his wife Saida. They both talked about the importance of elders in Meskhetian Turkish community:

Hulya: Who takes care of the grandparents in your culture?

Saida: We expect our sons to take care of us. My sons will also take care of us when we get older. When my sons got married, my daughter in laws will live with us.

Ali: The son, the youngest, is with them. But first daughter-in-law comes and lives with the family, after the second son gets married, they can have a separate home but it should be close. We never leave our mothers and fathers alone. On the other hand, it also depends on the daughter-in-law as well. But we raise our girls as respecting elderly people, especially the parents-in-laws. There could be conflicts but that is usually the rare case.

Based on my fieldwork I observed that parents are being taken care of their children without any exception. At the same time, parents take the role of teaching their children and grandchildren and passing their cultural values to the other generations. Adult children usually ask their parents' opinion for most of the decisions. This tradition continues in the United States. For instance, Veli, 47 years old Meskhetian Turk man who migrated to Houston in 2006 told me that, he needed his elder brother's approval before buying his first car in the United States. He stated that their father passed away and their oldest brother took his role. They are living close to each other in Houston and meet on a regular basis.

Even though my informants could not live as an extended family in Houston, they continue spending time all together as much as possible. For example, one day after my interviews, I could not resist the family's insistence on my staying for dinner. The other two elder brothers and their families also joined us. We were about twenty people in a 2000-square foot home. The men were sitting in the living room, and I was with the women in the breakfast area. The girls were helping Saida to prepare the dinner. One of Saida's sisters-in-law brought a bag of homemade Meskhetian Turk bread and Leyla, the oldest brother's daughter, brought Russian Salad. Saida cooked Uzbek plov (rice cooked with carrots and meats), which is a very common dish among Meskhetian Turks. Tea was brewing at the same time and, in a very short of time, the coffee table was filled with sweets, snacks and teacups brought by the girls and women of the family. Everyone was talking, almost all at once. Kamila, Saida's daughter, was not sitting with the crowd and constantly asking if anyone wanted to have anything.

Gender Roles

As it is stated in the previous chapters Meskhetian Turks are patriarchal and patrilocal community like most of the Central Asian and Turkish groups. However, there are subtle differences between the Turkish and Meskhetian Turk culture in regards to gender roles. Traditionally, Meskhetian Turks get married at a very early age, I also observed it many times among my interviewees and they have continued this practice in the United States. Although Turkish culture is not homogenous and there are some practices of early age marriages, it is not common to see women get married before the

age of 21. Meskhetian Turks practice young marriage age and endogamy in order to protect their community members from possible assimilation and acculturation. Certain roles, such as the daughter-in-law's interactions within the family are set and preserving them is important. In order to be able to observe the performance of newly bride identity among Meskhetian Turks, I visited several homes. When I visited Erkan's house, the oldest brother of Saida's husband, I observed the relationship between the daughter-in-law and the parents-in-law.

I was talking to Erkan and drinking tea after I took him and his wife to the hospital. Erkan has serious health problems and needs to go to the doctor in a regular basis. After his doctor's visit, they invited me to have some tea together. We were sitting in the living room and Ayse; the daughter-in-law was preparing the table and bringing the tea for us. After she refilled our teacups, I wanted to ask her a question. However, she did not answer my question right away and she only nodded yes to my question and whispered to me when I asked another question. After the other people left, Erkan told me that "In our tradition the daughter-in-law doesn't speak when the father is in the room. She is the youngest and the newest of the family. So it is her job to listen and learn."

According to Barth (1969), belonging to an ethnic category implies being and performing a certain kind of person. The performance of newly married Meskhetian Turk woman's identity requires her to remain silent and observe and learn the family structure which mentioned above. In order the women to be accepted by and continue to live in the community; it is important to comply with the expectations of the group. As

the daughter-in-law get older and have children, they become more visible and vocal in the family. According to Kandiyoti in her article about classic patriarchal structures, “the key to the reproduction of the classic patriarchy lies in the operations of the patrilocally extended household” (Kandiyoti 1988: 278). Kandiyoti also explains that in classic patriarchal societies girls are given away at a very early age to another family as a bride. In this setting, women are not only subordinate to the men including their husbands and husband’s father but also to the older woman in the house, most of the time, the mother-in-law. Women have an access to the labor power through their married sons. According to Kandiyoti, mother in laws have an interest to supersede the conjugal bond between young couple to prioritize her relationship with her son. Young women on the contrary are interested on evading their mother in law’s power,

The extended family structure of Meskhetian Turks can be seen as a good example of the classic patriarchal family setting. Older women have important contributions in maintaining this system through teaching the young Meshetian Turks the rules of this structure as cultural values and making sure that they get married with a person sharing and maintaining the same set of patriarchal values. When the girls get married, they are expected to have a baby soon and to take care of the household chores. Even though I have not observed the above tensions between the mother in laws and young brides in the community, I did observe the high expectations from the daughter in law by their mother in law such as cooking for a large group every day, making daily bread, cleaning the house etc. In addition to that my informants told me that it is expected them to have baby soon after their marriage.

Meskhetian Turks in Houston emphasize the importance of college education for the upward mobility of their children, mainly through vocational school education. They would like their children to work in better conditions than their parents, who often work as factory workers or house-keeping in hotels. Therefore, they allow the girls to continue their education even when they got married. The husband and his family take the burden of college education payments of their bride. Nonetheless, however, newly-wed Meskhetian women are still expected to have a baby soon after the marriage as well as to fulfill all of the house chores. Referencing to Kandiyoti's argument, I claim that Meskhetian Turk women going to school or working outside are examples of coping strategies in the context of patriarchal bargaining (Kandiyoti 1988).

Comparing to average Turkish family setting, the high expectations from daughter in law is not common in Turkish family setting. It is also not common anymore for parents in laws live with their sons.

The interactions that I observed indicate that Meskhetian Turk family traditions and their preservation and transfer to the younger generations constitute the core of the group's culture. Compared to the relationship with daughter-in-laws and sons-in-laws, the interaction of the parents that I interviewed with their daughters and sons in the same family is slightly different. It is expected children to maintain their respectful interaction with their parent but at the same time they are more intimate and vocal.

Within families, I frequently observed women were allowed to share their opinions if they heard anything new from other Meskhetian Turks or Turks with whom they interacted in Houston. During the dinner that I had with the family, Umida, one of

the sisters-in-law, was talking about the sale in Walmart, which was going to be closed. She said she heard about it from one of the Turkish women, and she spread the word to the family to shop the next day at the sale. Every family member was listening to her and making comments.

Within the family, the men were traditionally seen as the breadwinners, and women are the homemakers. What I observed during my fieldwork is that even though women work, men are the main breadwinners and women's working for supporting the family financially. Women also work long hours with their husbands at urban industrial setting, but they still have to fulfill their responsibilities at home such as cooking bread and dishes, keeping the house clean and tidy, doing all other house chores. If there is a younger girl at home, then she takes care of most household chores after she comes from school. This provides relief for the mother, and she can take a little bit rest after work.

Saida, a middle aged Meskhetian Turk women stated that:

Meskhetian Turk women are stronger I believe. Because we work outside for long hours and get back home and take care of house chores. We never neglect our duties at home. we also take care of our children.

The dialogue below is part of this discussion.

Hulya: So are all of the house chores and the needs of the children under your responsibility?

Saida: Yes, I never questioned about my responsibilities or expect my husband help me. I see some of the Turkish women complain and expect their husbands help them. Our men do not do house chores. Some of the Turkish house wives do not understand why we work this much. As you know many Turkish women in the cultural center (Turkish

cultural center) are not working outside, so they do not understand our situation. They always tell us that we are working very long hours.

Although Saida contradicts herself as saying that earning is man's responsibility previously and preferring to work to pay for mortgage, she wants to emphasize the importance of hard work in another country to be able to build a "good life" for their children. She also stated the clear cut divisions between the men's and women's responsibilities. All of my interviews and observations also confirm Saida's generalizations about gendered roles even though there are some educated Meskhetian Turks women started to work in some of the field such as school nurse, registered nurse, secretary etc. The Turks of Turkey living in Houston also have similar gendered roles to a certain extent at home. I should also repeat that Turkish culture among Turks in Houston is not homogenous but as a patriarchal culture there are distinct gendered roles at home such as taking care of children is mainly the responsibility of the women. However, compared to Meskhetian Turkish culture, these gendered roles are more negotiable among Turks in Houston.

Children

Children have an important place in the need to preserve the culture for Meskhetian Turks. During my interviews with the adult and elderly Meskhetian Turks, they always mentioned about the importance of passing their traditional values to the younger generations and continue Meskhetian Turkishness on. Children are reared with the objective of preserving the culture.

Among my informants, when rearing children and teaching those cultural values and traditions, each and every family member is involved. Meskhetian Turk parents work hard in order to build a life in the United States. In addition to that women have to take care of the house chores. Therefore, grandparents overtake the main responsibility of passing Meskhetian Turkish culture to the new generations. Saida, a 53-year-old Meskhetian Turk woman living in Houston, also expressed her involvement into raising her grandchildren to me:

I always tell the deportation stories as well as our experiences during oppression years under former Soviet Union to my children and grandchildren. Of course we will tell them our experiences. The tragedy that our ancestors suffered kept the Meskhetian Turkish identity alive. Our parents told us those stories. My mother-in-law also told us the stories. She would always talk about her memories in Georgia: "this is how we lived in Georgia, this is how we would go to the mountains, how we would raise animals, go to the gardens...." She would tell me the stories of deportation and how the people, especially women suffered during the deportation in the cattle trains. One of the stories that she told me that during the deportation from Georgia to Central Asia, all of the Meskhetian Turks were put in cattle trains as the mixture of men and women, young and old. The train did not have restrooms and did not give frequent breaks. Sometimes it would continue to move for days. There were women who died just because of not being able to go to restroom. Our women are modest; they could not say their needs and some died due to the serious kidney problems. We grew up with these stories and will pass those on to our children and grandchildren. Our culture and history will keep Meskhetian Turk culture alive.

The deportation in 1944 had a tragic influence on Meskhetian Turks as well as other deported nationalities such as Crimean Tatars. Meskhetian Turks' deportation tragedy and not being able repatriate their original homeland has an important place shaping their identity similar to Jewish identity was constructed around the discourse of Holocaust. The elderly group members are willing to survive and pass on the tragedy stories to their children. Additionally, the collective memory of living through so many

tragedies, 1944 deportation, 1989 pogrom, also serve as a source of distinction between Turks of Turkey and Meskhetian Turks. Despite the numerous cultural similarities and historical origins, the shared memories have significant role in shaping distinct Meskhetian Turk identity which is separate from simply Turkish identity.

Meskhetian Turk history and traditions have been important parts of their ethnic identity and priority to pass on to the other generations. In former Soviet Union and Russia, they struggled to celebrate their religious rituals such as the religious celebration of 'Eid, but, here, in the United States, they can perform those rituals without any fear. Turkish people living in Houston and the facilities that they built are also support resources for Meskhetian Turks in the process of preserving their ethnic identity. However, living in a country in which much of the population has a prejudice against their religion has changed the way in which they represent their religion.

Mustafa an adult Meskhetian man living in Houston told me that:

Our relatives in Turkey think that we are under jeopardy to lose our culture since we live in a Christian country. But we will not, we never lost our culture, tradition, religion under Soviet regime, so we will preserve it here in the United States.

He continued:

The religious holidays are important for us and we take our children to Turkish cultural center where Turks organize "Bayram" religious holiday celebrations. They first pray and have breakfast altogether. After that everybody greets each other. They also organize entertainment for the children which our children like it.

Although the group protects their children within their cultural and communal boundaries, exceptions happen, which are known by the community. When I was talking to Nesibe, one of the Meskhetian Turk girls and her mother at mall while we were shopping for her to buy a dress to wear at weddings, they briefly mentioned two Meskhetian girls living in New York who were living with their boyfriends. One of the girls was dating with a Hispanic boy, and the other was with an African American man. This was viewed as unacceptable to the community and, although everybody knows about them, they never talked about it in public. Nesibe's mother said "It is such a shame for the parents and family. Those girls will want to come back to their family but I do not think the family will accept them. It is such a shame..." So it is very important for Meskhetian Turks to preserve their culture and obey all of the rules of the community.

The Experience of Meskhetian Turk Children and Adolescents in United States Schools

During the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR) and after its dissolution Meskhetian Turks, as a religious and ethnic minority group, experienced horrific circumstances of internal displacement, systemic discrimination, limited educational and economic opportunities in Krasnodar Krai, and violence. Starting in 2004, the United States became the new home for hundreds of Meskhetian Turk children and adolescents. As with other newly arrived immigrant/refugee groups, access to formal education and academic achievement may be the most important indicators of

Meskhetian Turk children's social and economic adaptation and success in the United States (McBrien 2005).

Schools are often the first and the most comprehensive sociocultural institutions in which refugee children participate in official and social discourses (Bal 2009). Access to formal education has been seen by researchers, policy makers, and refugee families as a major tool for refugee children to experience stability, normality, and protection as well as to gain academic, linguistic, and social skills to "make it" in their new homes via upward socioeconomic mobility (McBrien 2005). In the United States, academic achievement is one of the most important preconditions of economic and social welfare of individuals. In a rather liberal view, schools are viewed as institutions that help refugee youth become "educated people," "productive citizens," or "Americans." Eventually, in this view, schools assist refugee students to achieve their economic self-sufficiency, which is the primary aim of the refugee resettlement policies and programs in the United States (Bal 2009: 7).

All of the Meskhetian Turk children were placed in ESL (English as a Second Language) programs when they started school in the United States. Language acquisition has been seen to play a crucial role in identity formations of youth and the development of mental abilities (Portes & Rumbaut 2001). The Meskhetian Turks adolescents that I interviewed were enrolled in a charter school in which immigrant (Turkish) educators played powerful roles. Demographic of the specific school that I conducted my interviews were highly Hispanic and African American students. Out of 627 students, 50 students were Turks from Turkey. There were also 15-20 students who are Muslims

from Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. Although Turkish language and nationality and Islam were not officially sanctioned, they were socially valued and accommodated in those schools. On the whole, Meskhetian Turk students and the school that they are attending with unique and shared characteristics represented the complex nature of universally local identity formation for the Meskhetian Turk children and adolescents. When I was talking to Naz, who migrated to the US with her family when she was 12 years old, she expressed the difficulties that she had to overcome in the first years:

It was very difficult not to speak English and trying to learn. I was in 6th grade when we got here first. All of my classmates were speaking English and I did not understand even a word. There were other Meskhetian Turk and Afghan-Uzbek girls at the same school but they were attending high school and we could not see each other until the end of the day. So I was feeling lonely. My Turkish teachers were talking to me sometimes but I needed a friend.

Given the reality that Meskhetian Turks would like to preserve their sense of community, they all live close to each other, and all of their children attend the same school. When I visited them in their school, I could observe that all of the Meskhetian Turk girls and boys eat lunch together and go to class all together if they have the same class. Although they have Turkish friends from a similar cultural and religious background in the school, most Meskhetian Turk girls and boys would rather stay close to their friends from their own community. Interestingly there was not a close relationship between Meskhetian Turk students and Turkish students. During my fieldwork, there were Uzbek-Afghan students who also speak Russian. Most of the Meskhetian Turk adolescents would rather spend time with them as opposed to Turkish

students. Also Meskhetian Turk adolescent consider Turkish students as being too Americanized since they prefer to speak in English most of the time. Based on my observation, I see a bigger distinction between Meskhetian Turks and Turkish people among younger generation.

There are also exceptions, and Leyla is one of them. Leyla is a 16-year-old, outgoing and popular student in her school. Her best friend is from the Sudan, and they like to spend time together in the school. Because Leyla's parents are conservative and overly concerned about their daughter, they do not let her to go out with her friends unless her grandmother and father approve it. When I visited their house for the first time, she greeted me in Turkish and continued to speak in English with her younger sister. Her mother cautioned her to speak in Turkish. When I interviewed her she preferred to speak in English, although I gave her the option of speaking in Turkish. Given her limited English proficiency, she incorporated Turkish and Russian words into her conversation with me. During our conversation, one of the striking information that I heard from her was when I asked her what her ethnicity was:

Hulya: How do you describe yourself ethnically?

Leyla: I am Russian.

H: How about your parents?

L: They are Russian Turks.

So Leyla identified herself as Russian. When I asked her why she described herself as Russian, she said “we are Meskhetian Turks and most of the people in the

United States do not know who they are but everybody knows who Russians are. I speak Russian very fluently”. I also asked her about being Turkish but she clearly stated to me that “she is a Meskhetian Turk was born in Russia”. Whereas Ayla, a 16-year-old Meskhetian Turk girl in the same class with Leyla that I also interviewed described her ethnic identity as that of Ahiska Turk. Meskhetian Turks call themselves Ahiska Turks to emphasize their Turkishness and the city that they are originated from instead of Meskhetian Turks. Out of all of my interviews with the adolescents from the group, Leyla was the only interviewee who identified herself as a Russian due to her perception of identifying herself with an ethnic group that seemed relatively more acceptable to her than did another.

Meskhetian Turkish children and adolescents are relatively successful in the school and take their classes seriously despite their limited English proficiency. The ones who arrived in the United States at younger ages are more advantaged than the others who came at an older age in regards to English language acquisition, which has directly affected their academic success in the school.

Both Meskhetian Turk adults and children considered Ahiska Turkish as their mother tongue. In their daily conversations, adults and children use Meskhetian Turkish and Russian. Adults also spoke Uzbek, Kazakh, Tatar, and Kirgiz. Meskhetian Turk families watch movies and television series from Turkey and Russia via cable televisions and cyber space channels such as YouTube. Adults and some children followed news programs from Turkey on their televisions or computers.

Meshetian Turk children and adolescents use English when they communicate with their siblings about personal and academic issues like their homework. They read books in Russian and English, played video games in English, and downloaded and uploaded video clips on YouTube in Turkish, Russian, and English. Although the children tended to speak in English with each other, their parents do not allow them to speak in English with them or while they are around. So they maintain their Turkish at home. Also Meskhetian Turk adolescents spend their time with their family or peers from the community any time beyond school. They do not participate in any of the extracurricular activities unless the school requires it.

Upon graduating from high school most young Meskhetian Turk adults prefer to go to community colleges where they can receive vocational training or work licenses that are required for them to continue their occupations. However, some of the girls get married before they graduate high school. Gül was 17-years-old and became engaged in her junior year. When she brought her wedding invitation, which was going to be during summer break after completion of her junior year, I asked her if she was going to stay in Houston to finish her high school.

Hulya: So are you going to stay in Houston one more year to finish your school?

Gül: No, I will move to Colorado with my husband.

H: So, you will be dropping out then, but don't you need to graduate from high school?

G: Yes, I will continue in Colorado.

When I followed up with her during Christmas holidays in 2015, she said would take a break for one year and prepare for the GED exams to obtain her high school

diploma. She said her mother-in-law suggested that she stay at home to meet the expectations of the family. She was also pregnant at the time I spoke to her via phone. She told me that after obtaining her GED, she would pursue a career in nursing.

Malika is another example of someone who took time off before getting into college due to getting married. She moved to Arizona where her husband's parents live and took a two-year break. She had her baby there and came back to Houston with her husband to finish her college. She is majoring in education. She was also one of the exceptions that I observed in regards to living with her parents in Houston along with her husband and baby. She told me that she has one more year to finish the school and until then they will continue living with her parents. Afterwards they will look for a job in the city where her husband's family lives.

Marriage

Marriage rituals and traditions are other important components in the process of preserving ethnic identity. Marriage was one another topic that my informants were referring during the interviews. I attended as many marriage-related events as possible both because weddings were obviously a highlight of Meskhetian Turkish life, but also because of the increased range of potential interviewees present.

Wedding Ceremonies (Toy)

A wedding (*toy*) is the key celebration in Meskhetian Turkish life and, in many respects, represents the continuity and development of the maintenance of relatedness through visiting and the co-consumption of food. Marriage involves the conversion of

unrelated groups of persons into kin. The toy itself is the highlight of a series of events and negotiations, which take place in the preceding weeks and following months.

Marriages are arranged between households, or groups of kin, rather than between individuals.

Family is at the center in the process of choosing the future spouses. The elderly members of the family arrange the couples and based on their approval couples meet. It is very common among the group that the family of the groom aims to find someone who is from a “good family.” Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed do not perceive of a hierarchy of households or groups of relatives and do not seek a spouse for their child on the basis of improving their position in relationship to others in the community.

Although they value economic equality, they do not usually espouse an ideal of equality among themselves, and households are not equal. Brothers, for example, live in houses of starkly contrasting size and number of rooms, but the proscription for sharing money with relatives beyond the household prevents even close kin from feeling a responsibility to improve the economic circumstances of their relatives. Thus financial inequality between households and relatives is accepted, but people are not ranked according to their wealth (Tomlinson 2002).

Gul, a 20-year-old woman migrated to Houston with her family in 2005, told me her marriage story as follows:

They saw me in one of the weddings and my future mother in law liked me. She is also one of the relatives of my grandmother. So they knew each other from Russia. After that wedding they asked my grandmother about the possible marriage arrangement and they all decided to arrange the marriage. I was okay with it but I was still in high school. My husband and his family promised my

parents that I was going to finish high school in Colorado where I moved upon my marriage.

In choosing a household from which to take a bride, or into which to marry a daughter, although wealth may be a factor, it is far from the foremost consideration; equal financial standing of the two households is not required. A “good family,” therefore, can sometimes be one that is well off, but mainly refers to their hospitable and hard-working nature, their moral standing, and the lack of scandal surrounding their relatives. It is always the household and its wider kindred that are under consideration, rather than particular characteristics of the girl in question. The same is true when a girl's relatives assess a marriage offer.

For example, when Nariman's relatives asked for Aygun in marriage, I asked Aygun's mother whether they knew Nariman well. She said, “I knew them even before I was married. Nariman's father is my mother's cousin.” Aygun (and probably her mother) had never seen Nariman, although he had noticed her when she was visiting relatives in his hometown. “Nariman saw her lots of times; he fell in love. Aygun didn't look like that; she has only seen him once, when he came to visit.” Other comments demonstrated that they knew nothing of his personal character, and only that he came from a “good family.”

The relative unimportance of personal characteristics was demonstrated when this wedding took place, and neither side called the couples with their personal names. Aygun was called the bride, and Nariman was called the groom. During the wedding, Aygun was assessed for her beauty. Whether or not the bride is pretty is also important

for the wedding itself, in that all guests discuss this factor, and an attractive bride is an asset to both families. Although the bride and groom's abilities may be reported to the other side (she cooks and sews; he doesn't drink or smoke), rarely does either group have the opportunity to assess the accuracy of these claims until after marriage (a groom who "doesn't drink or smoke" might turn out to do both). Sometimes a mother-in-law asks for the bride to serve tea during a pre-wedding visit. Typically, the girl is extremely nervous, dressed in unaccustomed headwear, and wearing high-heeled shoes, but she actually does little of the serving. A loaded tray is handed to her by one relative, and unloaded at the table by another. The family is as eager as she is to ensure that the bride does not falter, and the event provides more amusement for the groom's family and embarrassment for the bride than an opportunity to assess the girl's skills as a hostess. Rather, like the tying of loaves of bread around her waist during the wedding festivities, this act indicates her capacity for service, and her subservience to her mother-in-law.

Wedding ceremonies are one of the important practices where Meskhetian Turk culture can be distinctly observed. Based on Barth's analysis of performance of identity, belonging to a Meskhetian Turk community implies to perform in a certain way.

Wedding ceremonies are one of the occasions to see the performance of their identity particularly on the way brides behave during those ceremonies. The elderly members of the group make sure all of the rituals are being observed. For example, when I was in Naz's wedding ceremony with my family; the elderly people wanted the bride to hold my son. Since the bride was not talking, I just listened to the elderly women and let her to hold my son for a few minutes. Later on they said that if the bride holds a baby boy,

that means she will have her first child a boy. I also see that elderly members of the group have a key role to keep the customs and traditions alive and pass on to the next generations.

Although cousin marriage is not forbidden, some debate exists as to whether it is desirable. Some people would be happy to give their children to their siblings' children in marriage, in part because their own siblings are thought to be a known factor and thus guarantee a “good” household. Others feel the relationship is too close. One girl exclaimed that her cousins should not marry because “She's already his sister.” However, there is no consensus as to whether cousins should marry, or whether a distinction should be made between parallel and cross-cousin marriages. Meskhetian Turkish women that I used to spend time together during tea gatherings were talking about the practices of cousin marriages in the other states.

Based on my fieldwork in Houston, I observed that the group wants to maintain all of their rituals in Houston so that they can pass on to the next generations. However, when I talked to Nesibe, one of the elderly women in the community, she said that certain changes have occurred in these traditions. For example, “more and more Meskhetian Turks are getting married in hotels or halls they rent, especially here in the United States. Back in the old days our weddings were like men and women assembled in different homes or at least different parts of the house for the wedding celebration. Today this tradition is eroding. Our weddings used take multiple days; we used to cook every day a lot of food. All of the women in the community helped us. Here in the

United States women still get together and cook for the wedding but it is only one night. I think the long distances between the families' location has an effect as well".

Marriage rituals and traditions play important roles in the process of preserving the culture or ethnic identity. There are set norms that each and every group member complies with. When someone breaks the norms, he or she is alienated from the group. I would like to give an example from Bilge's (2012) dissertation because the group has very similar practices across the United States. Bilge (2012: 123-124) told the story of Ms. Ala.

Her son is living with a Mexican woman. The family does not approve of the choice, which led to severing of ties with their son. When their son wanted to marry his Mexican girlfriend, the family refused to approve. The disagreement went so far that, his mother hid his papers and ID to prevent his marriage. Since he's not an American citizen yet, he needs his refugee papers in order to apply for a marriage license. Almost four years later, the couple is still unmarried, however, they live together and they have a three-year-old son. The family was so distraught with his choice that they left Arizona and moved to Washington State. They just recently returned to Phoenix. The mother recently started seeing her grandson, but the father has severed all ties completely.

Ms. Ala: Now look at the child [her grandson], he is not Mexican, he is not Turkish. He can't speak Turkish. Everyone has their own culture, their own language and their own religion. We are very devout to our religion. When he did this, we had to leave and go far away (Bilge 2012: 124).

As Bilge (2012: 124) noted, "These strong convictions are derived from the need to preserve a culture, for which they endured incredible challenges for generations. Norms and values are very clear and diverting from them is not acceptable."

Similar to marriage with a Mexican, Meskhetian Turks do not have a positive look on marriage with the Turks. Despite the similarities between the cultures and historical roots, Meskhetian Turks in Houston consider themselves as distinct group from Turks of Turkey and do not want to open the doors for intermarriages with the Turks. On the other hand, there was an example of Turkish-Meskhetian Turk marriage in Houston. Even though it is not a desirable practice among the group, most of the group members attended the wedding ceremony. Groom's parents, traveled from Turkey, were also present at the wedding. When I asked the bride's mother whether there will be a wedding ceremony in Turkey, she said she does not want her daughter to go to Turkey without her and currently she cannot leave the country since she is in the process of getting her citizenship. Therefore, even though bride's mother allowed her daughter to get married with a Turkish man, she is under the fear of losing her daughter in case of leaving the country without her.

Sense of Community

As a multiple times displaced group, a sense of community has had and still retains an important place in the process of preserving ethnic identity throughout the years. According to all of my interviewees, preservation has been the result of community. Mr. Ilyas, the president of the cultural center in Istanbul Turkey stated that "Meskhetians are strongly tied to each other. They believe in unity. Therefore, we always live close to each other and maintain our communal life."

My informants stated that they had to maintain their strong community ties especially in Krasnodar Krai due to their survival. However, in the United States, there is freedom which has been missed for years. However, being dispersed in the United States is a concern for the group. Therefore, they either rent apartments or buy houses close to each other in order to maintain their community ties. There were also some Meskhetian Turks migrated to the other states in Houston in order to be closer to their relatives.

When Meskhetian Turks were first resettled in Houston in 2004, they all lived in separate units of the same apartment complex. However, once they obtained their permanent residency cards and started to build a strong credit history with working long hours, they started to buy houses. Although they still try to live close to each other, this proximity is not always the case. So they have to interact with their local neighbors. My informants living in houses had neighbors from India, Pakistan, China etc. They also have several American neighbors. They have limited interaction with their neighbors through their kids who translate for them. I observed that they were feeling close to their Pakistani neighbors, I assume due to their shared religion. They also expressed to me that we have some similar food such as somosa but theirs is very spicy.

Meskhetian Turks aim to live together as much as possible and I observed that some of the group members moved out of Houston to other states where they have relatives. They are mainly concentrated in cities so that they can find job easily.

Communal life helps to preserve Meskhetian Turkish culture. My informants also stated that homeland is where the community is. They believe that as long as they live as

a community, they will survive and their settlement will be their homeland (United States) while remembering Georgia as their original homeland and keeping their ties with Turkey through Turkish cultural center.

Relationship with the Other Turks (and Turkic People) in Houston

Meskhetian Turks stated they see themselves as Turkish. During most of my interviews, I recognized that they called themselves Turks. While they were telling their stories of back in Russia or Uzbekistan, they called their group Turks. They also stated that they remained connected to Turkey by knowing almost all Turkish singers, movie artists, soap operas and politicians.

On the other hand, they mentioned that United States was the only place they identify themselves as being Ahiska Turks (Meskhetian Turks) due to the constant interaction with the Turks from Turkey. Some of my interviewees expressed their concerns that the Meskhetian Turks are “Turkifying” in the United States. After spending much time with the Turks, they said that the Meskhetian Turk identity was being repositioned into an identity that more closely resembled those of people from Turkey than the Meskhetians. Turkish group in Houston is not homogenous. They can be divided as conservative and secular based on my observations in Houston. Turkish cultural center is at the core of the conservative group’s process of building a community in Houston. Some of the “conservative Turkish Turks are part of the Gülen movement, a conservative religious movement in Turkey based on the religious teachings of Islam by a scholar focused on altruism and the common good” (Turam 2007:34). The Turkish

cultural center is a place where most of the social gatherings and celebrations take place. Turkish cultural center utilized by the conservative Turks for prayers, rituals as well as for other services such as Saturday school for children where they teach Turkish culture and language. (Reisman 2008). Both of the Turkish groups desire to help the Meskhetian Turks in the United States due to shared ethnic heritage.

When I asked Meskhetian Turks about the Turks of Turkey, they differentiate these two groups as religious and non-religious Turks. Nezaket, a 48-year-old Meskhetian woman who has been living in Houston for 6 years, told me that:

You know we are Muslims and our religion kept us alive as Meskhetian Turks. But the way religious Turks live their religion was like how our religious leaders used to live. Turkish women women cover all of their body, pray five times a day etc. Meskhetian Turks are not as religious as they are and I do not know if we can. I cannot cover my head just like them; if I do I will be like a Turkish.

According to Nezaket, outfit and the degree of religiosity are the indication of being Turkish and Meskhetian Turk. She also told me that how secular Turks are very much Americanized and she also differentiated herself from them as well.

More likely, this assimilation to Turkishness is a result of the active efforts Turkish immigrants from Turkey to assist and provide cultural resources to the Meskhetian Turks in numerous American locations.

Every interviewee stated that they have social relations with Turks in Houston, and all of them were happy to interact with the cultural center members because they enforce religious and cultural teachings. They also stated that they sometimes attend secular Turks' events such as Turkish festivals to introduce the Meskhetian Turk culture and cuisine and sell some Meskhetian Turk food. Female interviewees also indicated

they have Turkish neighbors, and they socialize with their Turkish neighbors regularly. They also stated that they go to Turkish Cultural Center on a weekly basis for tea parties with the Turkish women.

Despite the shared cultural characteristics and values, differences are present between the two communities. These differences are mainly due to the separate history, and that Meskhetian Turks had to co-exist within three cultures distinctly different than their own: Georgian, Uzbek and Russian. The aspects of Meskhetian Turk identity are uniquely acquired from their past social contexts, complex origins and migration history but it is vulnerable without the support of a nation-state. Most of the Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed expressed to me that they are afraid these aspects are being lost or merged into an identity that more closely resembles those of people from Turkey than the Meskhetian Turks. They differentiate themselves from the Turks in terms of the level of religiosity, language (using Russian and Uzbek words), and family and gender relationships.

The differences that interviewees reported are also similarities that they share: language and religion. My interviewees stated that, Meskhetian Turks' three relocations resulted in certain influences from circumstances and cultures amidst which they existed. Meskhetian Turk interviewees pointed out that their language has words mixed into it. They have borrowed words from Russian, Georgian and Uzbek languages. On the other hand, they claim that Turks also have a mixture of Arabic and Latin words in their language.

These differences sometimes make conversations confusing. But after spending sometimes together, we all understood each other. I got used to hearing “mashina” for car and “kholodil'nik” for refrigerator. But I also observed that Meskhetian Turks enjoy speaking in Russian with the Central Asian immigrants in Houston. Some young Meskhetian Turks even said that they could speak more comfortably in Russian than in Turkish.

After language, the most significant difference between the Turks and Meskhetian Turks is religion. Meskhetian Turks living in Houston describe the level of religiosity of Turks as follows:

They know and read the Quran very frequently. They also pray five times a day. Only elderly Meskhetian Turks and religious leaders pray this much in our community. Most of their women cover their heads. Our women cover their heads when they get married but not as much as Turkish women. They are more devout Muslims than us. We want our children learn religion from them but we do not know if we want our children to be devout as much as they since we are living in America.

All of the interviewees appreciate Turks' knowledge of Islam. Said, a 65-year-old Meskhetian man living in Houston, said “We lived in a communist state; we couldn't learn religion as much as Turks. Thankfully, Turks are teaching us.”

Ali, 45-year-old Meskhetian Turk man, also stated that:

Turks do not drink alcohol, and we know that it is not acceptable in Islam but some Meskhetian men drink alcohol during some of the social gatherings. We were always drinking, and it is not that easy to stop it.

Meskhetian Turks have a great respect and attachment to Islam and Islam is intertwined with their cultural identity. On the other hand, they have a way of

understanding and practicing their religion, which has elements of folk culture and practices against the teachings of Islam.

Folk elements have played an important role for Meskhetian Turks in keeping their ethnic identity alive. They have variety of rituals during their social occasions such as weddings, circumcision parties, and New Year parties, among others. The majority of these rituals do not have any religious support or they are not shared by the dominant cultures that they have lived in. For example, during the religious wedding ceremonies, brides would never show their faces until the religious ceremony ends in order to be protected from the evil eye. The group believes that this is rooted in their Islamic belief; yet, this practice is not mentioned in any Islamic textual resources. The group has a plethora of practices, rituals and traditions like this that could be considered as little traditions. The Meskhetian Turks carry these practices forward from generation to generation and they are practicing those in the United States as coping strategies to preserve and maintain their ethnic identity.

Meskhetian Turks are connected with both Turkish groups to a certain extent, enjoying the support coming from those groups. Their relationship with the Turks helps them to preserve their ethnic identity to a certain extent in a country where the language and religion are different than theirs. “Although the involvement with the religious and secular Turks from Turkey has served to bring numerous resources to the group, this involvement also threatens their ability to preserve their unique identity and culture from the proximal host’s ethnicity. The absence of a nation-state and concrete homeland

further inhibits the Meskhetian Turks from firmly asserting their cultural boundaries against a dominant Turkifying force” (Reisman 2008:34).

Summary

My fieldwork was in Houston, Texas. When I asked my interviewees if they experienced social inequalities due to their religion or ethnicity, I usually received a negative answer. My interviewees often mentioned about the positive aspects of living in the United States especially comparing with their experiences in Krasnodar Krai. On the other hand, this does not mean that they consider themselves as part of the society as a stateless community.

Meskhetian Turks have been a closed society and have had very limited interaction with other ethnic groups due to the concerns of maintaining their own cultural values. This helped them not to be assimilated for decades under the Soviet regime. Meskhetian Turks mainly live in the countries in which the majority of the population is Muslim except for Russia and Ukraine. Beside religion, they had a plethora of common characteristics with those groups.

Conversely, the United States has been a very different experience for them. They almost have nothing shared with the larger society. The United States provided a great deal of opportunities for them including citizenship, job, higher education, and security. Considering the assimilation as the merging of two or more groups so that they eventually become culturally and socially indistinguishable and acculturation as those changes in a culture by another culture resulting increase similarities between the two,

Meskhetian Turks are experiencing some sort of adaptation and acculturation and maybe eventually assimilation in the United States.

Based on my fieldwork among the group I observed several indications of cultural assimilations and also acculturations. When I participated in a Meskhetian wedding, the groom and bride rode in a limousine and went to have their picture taken. In one of their pictures, they had a glass of wine in their hands. When I asked one of the elderly women in the community about this, she said:

It is not our tradition that getting on a limousine and being taken a picture with glasses of wine. These are American culture but the young couples wanted to do so. We always continued our traditions and rituals in our weddings in Russia, and we will continue here as well despite these new practices.

Another example is language usage by the people. Even though older people insist in speaking Turkish and do not feel a need to learn English well, the younger generation, especially the ones who arrived in the United States at an early age, speaks English more frequently than their native language because they spend most of their time with their American peers at work or in school.

A subtle change in the family setting seems to be occurring as well. Elder people have an essential role in conserving the culture because the parents are working. However, due to the limited space of houses, grandparents live with the youngest son. Therefore, the others in the extended family have a limited amount of time with grandparents, leading perhaps to living as a nuclear family. The others are exposed to the television and computers, and thus they are more likely to adopt a new culture as compared to Russia.

Furthermore, Meskhetian Turks have only been settled in the United States for a short time. A variety of changes may occur in the community over the years. According to my observations and interviews, I saw a gradual change in the new generation, with speaking English more frequently than older individuals and having friends from outside the community. One of my interviewees, a 17-year-old boy, who wanted his identity to remain anonymous) has a girlfriend that has a Hispanic origin. He told me that:

My parents were so upset when they first found out that I have a Hispanic girlfriend. My mother cried and my father did not talk to me for a long time. But I did not give up, and I am still friends with her.

Additionally, the differences in clothing between generations are another sign of the extent to which acculturation and cultural assimilation is observed in parents and children as well. It is not difficult to see the difference between the styles and colors worn by parents and children. Parents usually allow such a change as long as it is within the limits defined by the Meskhetian Turk cultural dress codes. While parents let children wear jeans, T-shirts and trendy clothes, modest dressing is a must for both girls and boys. Another adaptation strategy by children is to adapt to the popular culture. They get their smart phones, trendy shoes, listen to the popular songs and give the message that they belong to the community at large. During my study, I observed that many children had started listening to American pop music soon after they began school.

Overall, assimilation and acculturation are both dynamic processes. Whether Meskhetian Turks are assimilated or acculturated will be seen in the future more explicitly. The American culture, which is considered to be friendly and respectful, has

had a greater effect on the community compared to the Russian culture, which tried to oppress the ethnic identity of Meskhetian Turks.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Last night when I was working on my dissertation, I was also listening to Jamala's song, the winner song of Eurovision 2016 from Ukraine. The song was about Stalin's forced deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944. She had Turkish lyrics in the song meaning, "I could not spend my youth there because you took away my peace". The song reminded me that even though the people establish their lives in different settings with prosperity, their attachment to their original homeland always persist. Similar to the Crimean Tatar, Meskhetian Turks were deported from their original homeland but always remember it.

This study was conducted with the principal objective of understanding the process by which refugees reestablish their lives in the course of resettlement, and how the perceptions of homeland and ethnic identity within the groups the United States and Turkey were constructed. I examined the often complex and intersecting relationships that accompanied this process by comparing two Meskhetian Turk populations that originated from Georgia but later were deported to different locations. During my ethnographic studies, all of the Meskhetian Turks in both the United States stressed that they wanted to preserve their Meskhetian Turk identity. Most of them consider Turkey to be their surrogate homeland. Meskhetian Turks living in the United States continue their ties with Turkey by watching Turkish television channels, constantly

communicating with their relatives and friends living in Turkey, and socializing with Turks in the United States. Meskhetian Turks relate their ethnic identity with their original homeland, Georgia and fatherland, Turkey. Yet, they do differentiate their identity with the Turks, especially living in the United States. Although the group is aware that they need the support of Turkish community to preserve most of the elements of their culture such as Turkish language, religion etc., they prefer to keep their distance from the Turkish population avoid being Turkified. However, I did not observe the fear of assimilation to Turkish culture among my Meskhetian Turk informants in Turkey.

The link between territory and identity is becoming complex as Meskhetian Turks settle in the United States, which has granted them citizenship and a safe place to live, and they see the differences between their identities and those and people in Turkey.

De-territorialized versus Re-territorialized Identities

A variety of arguments exist in regard to the relevance of home/homeland with identity. Displacement does not lead to culture loss or a crisis of identity. In this understanding, cultural identity is not dependent on presence within a specific place for Meskhetian Turks, as seen in the cases of diasporic communities such as Armenians, Greek Cypriots, and Jews in the United States. Also territory and place do have a role to play in cultural identity. “Territory becomes relevant once more when we recognize that culture and identity are often re-territorialized. It is important not only to focus on the de-territorialization of an identity but also to take it a step further and consider the ways

in which people can re-territorialize their identity in exile” (Diener 2009:45). In addition to that, as it is stated in the beginning with the Eurovision song, original homeland always holds the meaning for the group.

In his critique of Kibreab’s conceptualization of territory, Finn Stepputat (1999) argued that an oversimplified opposition has been made between territorialized and de-territorialized identities.

“...Identity is not necessarily de-territorialized but rather re-territorialized. As has been amply shown during the 1990s, the displacement and migration of people is often accompanied by the development of a strong notion of attachment to certain place or territories” (p. 418).

At the same time, not to mention about the link between place and identity just simplifies the “unique relationship between person and place. What is crucial to recognize is that “place” and Georgia continue to play vital roles in the lives of Meskhetian Turks in Turkey and the United States as a spatially unbound entity: not fixed, and not unchanging, and not totally irrelevant. Place continues to be constructed, re-imagined, and preserved both collectively as a community in exile as well as by individuals” (Diener 2009:45).

All of the research and documents about the Meskhetian Turks has shown that they preserve their identity and attachment to home during and after the former Soviet Union period. The decisive factor in re-territorializing identities is an image of community, not necessarily the present territory in which the community lives. The research on Meskhetian Turks in the United States and Central Asia shows how the link

between person and place can be de-naturalized. “This understanding means that refugees are not out of place, their place is defined by the particularity of their social interactions that intersect at the specific location where they are present” (Brun 2001: 20). Among the Meskhetian Turks living in the United States and Turkey, a strong link of place with memory, loss, and nostalgia continues to exist. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) conclude in *Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference*, de-territorialization has destabilized the fixity of “ourselves” and “others”. But, it has not created subjects who are free-floating nomads. Instead of just stopping at the idea of de-territorialization, we must theorize how space is becoming re-territorialized in the contemporary world (p. 50).

Rather than mitigating the importance of place in a world of movement, a further analysis of the limits of what constitutes place allows for a more holistic approach to understanding its resonance among those who have been violently forced to leave the places that they have come to call their own. Indeed, one major tenet of this current thesis is that despite or perhaps due to the multitude of disparate locations to which Meskhetians have been forcibly or voluntarily moved, place, while its meaning may be contested, never loses its importance.

The research findings do form the basis for discussions of broader issues of importance to anthropology, namely, the concept of belonging and its relevance for migration studies, social industries of identity making, the subjective positioning and rescaling of place by migrants, and the migrants as active agents in these processes. In so doing, this study has produced a number of important insights.

The first is that the context of a specific locality matters in understanding identity preservation and the concept of homeland. The paths to refugee belonging cannot be fully understood without situating them in the institutional structures, histories, and politics of a particular area. The United States and Turkey have very different characteristics, resources, ethnic populations, economies, ideologies, and historical relationships with Meskhetian Turk refugees. The comparative distinctiveness of these two localities had a significant influence on the strategies that the Meskhetian Turks themselves have pursued in constructing their own sense of belonging.

The data in this study demonstrated that Turkey and the United States were not the primary contexts for comparison; rather, the comparison was between one local place and another. Most refugee research does not directly address the place of resettlement itself. While it is clearly understood that nation-state policies are influential, by anchoring this research in locality, several important differences in Meskhetian Turks' form of belonging were revealed. Adopting this approach moves us beyond discussions of refugee settlements in a particular place to what we might learn about how the position of being in a place informs refugee belonging on different scales. This leads us to a second contribution gained from this study.

The refugee settlement programs of the two resettlement sites explored in this study mattered in terms of the types of structural opportunities and forms of social capital available to the refugees. The established and structured refugee resettlement program of the United States provided a more intimate resettlement experience that resulted in more social capital, better access to language classes and public schools for

children, enhanced employment opportunities, and the stability through giving permanent residency and eventually citizenship. By contrast, given the lack of a structured refugee resettlement program in Turkey and Turkey's official position related to the ethnic Turks living outside Turkey (which is keep them where they are), Meskhetian Turks who have recently moved to Turkey have significant difficulties and problems in their resettlement process.

On the other hand, Turkey has an important place for Meskhetian Turks because they ethnically relate themselves with Turks and are unafraid of being assimilated despite the differences between Turkish culture and Meskhetian Turk culture. They have a sense of belonging to inspired by the Turkish flag and national anthem and consider Turkey as their final destination. They all expect and hope to gain citizenship and better their social and economic conditions. Meskhetian Turks living in the United States benefit from a structured refugee resettlement program, and most of them have gained their citizenship. Therefore, they tend to stay in the United States while keeping their ties with the other Meskhetian Turk in diaspora in the United States as well as Turkey. Both contexts have specific structural constraints and opportunities, causing different obstacles and opportunities for refugees.

Another outcome of this research is its illumination of how historical forces and cultural practices shaped relationships and, therefore, created paths to forming a homeland concept. Being displaced multiple times, having had to live under oppression for long years and facing ethnic discrimination influenced the homeland concept of Meskhetian Turks in Turkey but especially in the United States. Forms of

methodological nationalism that are applied standardly to migration research cannot adequately account for the group for whom nationality was not a known part of their social life for more than 70 years. This methodology also misguides policies that define belonging in terms of national loyalties and legal passports. Only by stepping back from the notion of formal ties can we understand why those ties established through citizenship rights do not necessarily bring about attachments of belonging; why formal ties affirm a condition of “being in” but do not automatically translate into feelings of “belonging to” a place. Meskhetian Turks living in the United States were given a variety of benefits and rights, while some Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey suffer from not having legal status, working in underpaid jobs and enrolling their children into public schools. However, all of the Meskhetian Turks that I interviewed in Turkey said that they feel themselves belong to Turkey whereas; Meskhetian Turk interviewees living in the United States did not express their sense of belonging to the United States.

Another important insight offered by this study is that explorations of the Meskhetian diasporic sphere help to illuminate the epistemology of the Meskhetian Turk and to map the shifting contexts of their belonging. The Meskhetian Turk diasporic data suggest that, for some refugee groups, this global space may be the core of their experience not the periphery. It is the place where multiple identifications and belongings get sorted out. Levitt (2001: 196) has argued that, while multiple studies have demonstrated that diasporic networks exist and have revealed a great deal about their characteristics in a specific setting, we as yet do not fully understand their relative weights or how they change in the face of different localized practices or the extent to

which they remain salient beyond the first generation. Few Meskhetian Turk had de-territorialized notions of belonging to Georgia or Turkey, which came with a global web of rights and responsibilities. The vastness of their connections and eager search to infinitely expand them, adds to our knowledge of groups who link themselves to a global diaspora as opposed to groups that remain more restricted to trans-state spaces. I argue that Meskhetian Turkish global connectedness and the constant negotiations that take place across diasporic space concerning what it means to be a Meskhetian Turk are driven, in part, by the claim to a co-ethnicity that can only be realized in the diaspora. In their own imaginations to be a Meskhetian Turk is to be diasporic. However, the data from this research suggests that Meskhetian Turk identities are more locally situated and that the diaspora becomes the space in which those local identities are contested. Therefore, this research calls attention to the more complicated process of reconciling a diasporic identification with a localized one. Thus, I argue that the group identity of Meskhetian Turk people in each field site must be analyzed as convergences of people, place, and perception of a shared past and local positioning, of structure and agency, and of intersections and scale.

Based on my fieldwork over 25 months both in the United States and Turkey, a general idea arose that original homeland the Meskhetian Turks was Georgia and their fatherland as Turkey because they all share the Ottoman heritage. On the other hand, because Turkey's official attitudes towards Turkic people living in the other countries and not granting citizenship to the Meskhetian Turks who have moved recently to Turkey, most Meskhetian Turks, but especially those living in the United States, do not

consider migrating to Turkey in the future. They have created their own community and, with the help of the Turkish population in diaspora, they all believe that they can preserve their ethnic identity. They are also aware of differences with the Turkish people, and they believe that they can fill the gap at home. They are also aware of the possibility of assimilation of their future generations, but they all believe that they can preserve their ethnic identity in the future as they have in the past.

The concept of gender comprised an important part of the research questions of this dissertation as to the extent to which they have an impact on the ethnic identity formation process among Meskhetian Turks. In part that is because “Ethnic identity and culture are transmitted within societies collectively by maintaining and upholding cultural mores of behavior, belief, dress, and other traits from generation to generation” (Chacko 2003: 501).

Meskhetian Turks have three different generations both in the United States and Turkey. There is the elderly who carry and convey the memories about the deportation from Georgia and Uzbekistan, adults who experienced the pogrom in Uzbekistan and the ethnic discrimination policy of the Krasnodar Krai local administration, and the young generation who are growing up in a country with which their parents and grandparents are unfamiliar. The younger generation has experienced and is experiencing more exposure to the host culture, which affects not only their attitudes toward the host culture but also their coping strategies (Avci 2012). Such differences reveal themselves both at the individual and group level. The United States has provided them with many opportunities including citizenship, jobs, higher education, and security. The changing

features of appearance and habits in the United States are more obvious among the younger generation because they are more exposed to the American culture. Their parents and grandparents are aware of the change and reinforce their own cultural characteristics at home and through several activities at local Turkish cultural centers.

Each ethnicity has their own characteristics and, according to the existing literature, differences exist among refugees in terms of the relationship between gender and identity (Ong 2003, Mortland 1994, Franz 2000, Siltanen 2008, Pittaway and Bartolomei 2001). Meskhetian Turk men and women tend to either embrace or resist the host culture in different aspects of life. Although some research argues that men and boys struggle more than women in the adaptation process to a new culture, my fieldwork found that women have more difficulties in the adaptation process due to their separation from their relatives and the emotional burdens of adaptation to new environments both in Turkey and United States. However, with a variety of strategies such as gaining higher education, working outside of home, women adapt to their new setting after a certain period of time and negotiate their new environment in their strict, patriarchal community.

Religion was critical aspect of my dissertation due to its being repeatedly mentioned as of importance to the Meskhetian Turk identity by the groups that I interviewed. Therefore, I investigated how the Meskhetian Turks maintain their religion in the United States and the degree to which it affects the process of ethnic identity preservation. Mentioning the cultural Islam that was developed by the people who used to live under communist regimes was important as well. The little traditions and their

importance as opposed to the big (textual) traditions occupy a central place in the ethnic identity preservation of Meskhetian Turks both in Turkey and the United States. These traditions also play an important role in distinguishing their group identity from other Muslim groups, especially the Turkish population. I expected to find that Meskhetian Turks in the United States would have a different attitude towards their religion and not identify themselves as being Muslim due to the recent erroneous associations of Islam with terrorism in the country. However, the majority of my interviewees stated they felt respected and accepted within American society.

My goal in this study was to shed light upon the experiences of Meskhetian Turks as a multiple- displaced community and to explore their ethnic identity formation process and the degree to which the multiplicity of homelands explained their situation. I set out to focus on their ethnic identity preservation strategies and the concept of homeland both in the United States and Turkey.

Significance of the Study

Meskhetian Turks have been one of the most exceptional populations that have experienced long- term and ongoing exile since 1944. Although several studies exist on their Central Asia and Russia deportations, limited work exists on Meskhetian Turks in the United States. This current research contributes to the theoretical understanding of ethnic identity formation processes and the interdependencies of gender and generation within ethnic identity construction as well as the idea of multiplicity of homelands. It highlights how refugees structure their lives and identities during their interactions with

other groups and during social gatherings. This research expands anthropological literature on refugees and ethnic identity (re)formation by capturing the contextual variability of refugee experiences and the diversity of identifications.

This research document the challenges that immigrants and refugees face during the adaptation process to a new land and challenges of maintaining one's own culture and how these challenges may be experienced with respect to characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and age. This research also presents the challenges of being Muslim in the United States after 9/11 and after the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. Meskhetian Turks were expelled from their homeland and encountered violence by Russians similar to that of Chechens. So, my research contributes to an understanding of the adaptation strategies of refugees, which should be addressed thoroughly after the tragedy in Boston. Meskhetian Turks do not have a nation state and have a limited chance of return to their homeland in Georgia due to obstructionist policies of the Georgian government. However, based on my fieldwork, most Meskhetian Turks consider Turkey as their surrogate homeland or fatherland. Yet, Turkey's political stance towards Turkish people living in other states is that they should remain in their current settlements. So, the ambiguous situation of Meskhetian Turks in terms of having a notion of home/homeland makes them an ideal group through which to explore the quandaries of displaced/exiled community identification.

In the current literature, in spite of attempts to incorporate nuanced emigrational trajectories into the perspectives and theories related to migration and refugees, the scope remains too narrow and obscures or makes invisible groups with complex and

non-linear histories or identities. The exclusion of some groups from theories and the literature on refugees and immigration is part of the larger issue of invisibility and assumptions of national belonging, which I highlighted with a special case. I pointed to a singular group, the Meskhetian Turks, to illustrate the exclusion of the stateless and displaced groups with complex migration patterns in current models of national attachment, group boundary making, communal life, gender and generational differences and identity structuring.

The framework of transnationalism has offered a sustained critique of dichotomous understandings of home and host country as well as the link between the territory and identity. However, the span of the definition of classic concept of transnationalism does not include the groups who are not physically connected with their original homeland such as those who are not sending remittances to their relatives, investing on their homeland, building houses in their original home town etc. due to the lack of territorial attachment to anywhere. Therefore, this research brings another aspect to the study of transnationalism as investigating a group who does not have a nation state but has sentimental attachments with their original and surrogate homeland. Given the lack of territorial connection with any piece of land, the case of Meskhetian Turks challenges the classic definition of transnationalism and brings another dimension which can be called “de-territorialized transnationalism”.

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