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Research Article

**Changing Borders and Women as the Narrator: The Case of Syrian Circassians
in Turkey^a**

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Abstract

Since 2011, with the Syrian conflict, a sizeable portion of the Syrian Circassian diaspora have fled to Turkey. The experience of deportation due to the Syrian civil war exposed the community to the same trauma for the third time. However, as the refugees were forced to leave their country, they experienced different conditions than their Arab and Kurdish counterparts. Utilizing solidarity networks through their kinship relations, the Circassian diaspora appears to have avoided the hardships encountered by other refugee groups at least to some an extent. In the meantime, the diaspora developed new survival strategies in the face of general negative attitudes towards refugees and Syrians. The recent diasporic experience has been generally discussed with regards to issues of social class, ethnic affiliation, and distinction. Yet, the gendered dimension of the recent forced migration has been underestimated or neglected. This study aims to understand whether the women within the Circassian community who migrated from Syria to Turkey generated new forms of roles to meet the social demands of the new diasporic experience. The evidence discussed here is based on fieldwork that was conducted in 2019. One of the significant findings to be assessed in this study is the reinforcement of the patriarchy within the diaspora and the factors that facilitated this process.

Keywords: Syrian Circassians, Forced Migration, Women

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Araştırma Makalesi

**Değişen Sınırlar ve Aktarıcı Olarak Kadın: Türkiye’deki Suriye’den Gelen
Çerkes Kadınlar^a**

Eylem Akdeniz Göker^b

2011'den bu yana Suriye’deki çatışmalar nedeniyle Suriye’de yaşayan Çerkes diasporasının önemli bir kısmı 'ye sığınmıştır. İç savaş neticesinde deneyimlenen zorunlu göç, Çerkes toplumunu üçüncü defa aynı travmaya maruz bırakmıştır. Ne var ki Suriyeli Çerkesler, kendileri gibi ülkelerini terk etmek zorunda kalan, Arap ve Kürt muadillerinden farklı koşullara maruz kalmışlardır. Akrabalık ilişkileri üzerinden kurulan dayanışma ağlarını kullanan Çerkes diasporası, diğer sığınmacı grupların yaşadığı sıkıntılardan bir nebze de olsa kurtulmuş görünmektedir. Bu esnada diaspora, genel olarak sığınmacılara ve Suriyelilere yönelik genel olumsuz tutumlar karşısında yeni hayatta kalma stratejileri de geliştirebilmiştir. Söz konusu deneyim genel olarak sosyal sınıf, etnik aidiyet ve ayırım konularıyla ilgili olarak tartışılmıştır. Ancak son zamanlardaki zorunlu göçün toplumsal cinsiyet boyutu hafife alınmış veya ihmal edilmiştir. Bu çalışma, Suriye'den 'ye göç eden Çerkes toplumu içindeki kadınların yeni diasporik deneyimini verili toplumsal taleplerini karşılamak için yeni rol biçimleri üretip üretmediklerini tartışarak anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Tartışmaya konu olan veriler 2019 yılında yapılan saha çalışmasının bulgularına dayanmaktadır. Çalışmada, ataerkilliğin diaspora içinde pekişme süreci ve bu süreci kolaylaştıran etmenler değerlendirilmesi elzem bulgular olarak ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli Çerkesler, Zorunlu Göç, Kadın

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Introduction¹

A sizable percentage of the Syrian Circassian diaspora has fled to Turkey as a result of the Syrian conflict since 2011. Due to the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria, Turkey—a country with a close border—became home to the largest Syrian community. The group was subjected to the same agony for a third time when they were deported as a result of the Syrian civil war. The refugees, however, had different circumstances after being compelled to flee their homeland than their Arab and Kurdish counterparts. Utilizing solidarity networks through their kinship relations, the Circassian diaspora appears to have avoided the hardships encountered by other refugee groups at least to some extent. In the meantime, the diaspora developed new survival strategies in the face of general negative attitudes towards refugees and Syrians. The recent diasporic experience has been generally discussed with regards to issues of social class, ethnic affiliation, and distinction. Yet, the gendered dimension of the recent forced migration has been underestimated or neglected. The basic motivation behind this study is to understand the invisible actors of deportation due to the civil war in Syria: Circassian women. Not only the women but the Circassian population seeking refuge in Turkey, in the main, has been discredited or underestimated for variety of reasons. The most important factor behind neglect has been Circassians' lack of visibility compared to poor urban refugees from Syria. Another dimension might be the difficulty to associate the image of Circassians with the general image or prototype of the 'Syrian' in the perception and understanding of the ordinary Turkish citizen or the layperson.

For more than 150 years, the Circassian diaspora in Syria has contributed to the development of Syrian society. In 2011, a sizable percentage of the Circassian diaspora in Syria fled to Turkey as a result of the Syrian conflict. The Circassian community's first exile, which occurred in 1864, was brought to mind again by their deportation from Syria. The community was subjected to brutality and mistreatment during the Great Exile (Tsignetun), and because of this, the idea of victimization has been reinforced as a key component of the tribe's identity. In this study, I argue, following Robin Cohen, that the Circassian diaspora in Syria is a good example of a 'victim diaspora': Since their forced resettlement to Ottoman lands, the population has been subjected to the traumatic experience of exile on multiple occasions. After decades of living around the Golan Heights, they were forced to abandon their villages and retreat further into Syria, resettling around Damascus, epitomizing 'an exile within exile.' (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019:104).¹ As a result, the community was subjected to the same pain due to deportation as a result of the Syrian civil war for a third time, which strengthened their sense of victimhood (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019).

What about women? The real invisible subjects of this story were the women. This study aims to understand whether the women within the Circassian community who migrated from Syria to Turkey generated new forms of roles to meet the social demands of the new diasporic experience. The evidence discussed here is basically based on fieldwork that was conducted in 2019. The author of this study has conducted two different fieldworks on Circassians from Syria. The first one was conducted in İstanbul and villages of Düzce between 2015 and 2017. The rationale behind this choice lied in the fact that, the majority of Syrian Circassians preferred

¹“Ethics Comitte Permission obligation has been introduced in every survey (or one of the types of research counted above) conducted after 2020. However, since this study was conducted before 2020, ethics committee approval was not obtained”.

to settle in those regions with the support of community foundations and federations and the kinship networks. Another fieldwork was to be conducted online and face to face in 2019. The earlier research focused upon the underlying dynamics of diasporic experience and the reconstitution of diasporas through processes of victimization. In the mentioned research, whether Circassians' suffering during the forced migration reinforced the feeling of victimization or not has been examined through the lenses of diaspora studies (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019). Specifically, it has been intended to undercover the mechanisms utilized by the Circassians in creating a sense of distinctiveness while interacting with 'Other' ethnic groups, the Arab and Kurdish refugees from Syria, exposed to the same historical experience, that of seeking refuge. In the end, it has been argued that this unique experience, redefined the collective narratives that shaped the collective identities of the Circassians from Syria.

Years after, as a member of the Circassian community, presumably being an insider observer, the author of this study had earlier observations on the new modes of interaction within the community: Circassians from Syria, were developing different senses of distinctiveness also through the mechanisms of interaction with their kinship members. They were comparing and contrasting the identity of Circassian, or Adige identity with the Circassian identity of their kinship members in Turkey. Changing borders seemed to have brought about the transformation of intra-group identities. There were Kurds, Arabs and some other ethnic groups forced to leave their country, Syria and moved to Turkey. Yet, as it has been indicated at the outset, Circassians' position was quite different than their Arab and Kurdish counterparts. Only a minority within the whole group Circassians fleeing to Turkey had stayed in refugee camps and the majority had been located to villages and towns due to their kinship networks. Utilizing solidarity networks through their kinship relations, the Circassian diaspora appeared to have avoided the difficulties encountered by other refugee groups at least to some an extent. In the meantime, they developed new survival strategies in the face of general negative attitudes towards refugees and Syrians. The mechanisms of distinction operating within the Circassian Syrian diaspora, the way these mechanisms impact relations inside the community and establish hierarchies among male and female members deserved to be analyzed.

The evidence discussed here is based on fieldwork that has been conducted in 2019. One of the significant findings to be assessed in this presentation is the presence of hierarchies like "homeland Circassian" and "Syrian Circassian" within the diaspora. In this respect, Circassians coming from Syria, being a smaller and more homogeneous community, keep ethno-cultural aspects of their identity more "alive" and thus see themselves as superior to Circassians in Turkey. Keeping in mind the heterogenous nature of the ethnic groups, in order to reflect the diversity, it has been intended to conduct interviews with fifteen Syrian Circassians through snow-ball method. Depending on the contacts from the previous research, it was easier to contact the interviewees met years ago. It was realized that women were more willing to keep in touch, they were eager to talk, to explain, to define and narrate their stories. This was a new line of research indicating the gender dimension of the story. When the fifteen members of the community was reached eight of which were women, it would be plausible to conduct interviews with these eight Circassian women. Unfortunately, only with two of the participants face-to-face interview could be conducted, others were online (through zoom).

Circassian Diaspora from Syria: Overshouldering the Same Trauma Three Times

As Cohen argues, the development of a diasporic consciousness among community members who hold different ideological and/or political convictions is strongly facilitated by the sharing of a common pain. In other words, the formation of a diasporic identity may be

influenced primarily by a sense of victimization (1997). Yet, one more aspect should also be added to the picture: women experience different levels of victimization. Before focusing upon the unique experience of women in this process, the Circassian experience of victimization and their process of turning into a diaspora should be examined. In this part of the study, the general contours of Circassian diasporic experience will be drawn by with specific reference to their position in modern Turkey.

Circassian exile in 1864 (or *Tsitsekun*, to specifically describe the experience of exile) is the primary determinant of common diasporic identity building. Circassians have been the native, autochthonous people of the North Caucasus and their 'Great Exile,' (*Tsitsekun*) epitomized their expulsion from the ancestral homeland Northern Caucasus. This expulsion was due to the Tsarist Russia's pan-Slavic expansionism and military campaigns. In the collective memory of Circassian people, 1864 referred to the mass exodus indicating their scattering across several countries. After long course of struggles against Russian expansionism, they had to leave their homes and fled to Ottoman Empire. When they have arrived at Ottoman ports of Trabzon, Samsun, İstanbul and Varna, almost one third of the population had lost their lives (Karpat, 1985). This was the initial step in the diasporic experience for the Circassians. (Jaimoukha, 2001). In accordance with the resettlement policies of the Ottomans, they were resettled along borders of the Ottoman Empire. The settlement policy of the Ottoman administration was based on manipulating population dynamics with various methods. For instance, Muslim refugees could well be used as a countervailing force to suppress the local settlers in the areas of contention. In this respect, Circassians seemed to be eligible actors for 'balancing' the non-Muslim population in strategic areas (Zürcher, 2008). They were available agents for military source of the imperial control particularly against the Armenian and Arab populated regions (Dündar, 2001:130-4; Avagyan, 2004). After their uprooting from their ancestral homeland, Circassian people were dispersed to Ottoman lands covering Balkans, today's Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Anatolia. After the World War I, the newly emerging nation-states emerging out of the ashes of Ottoman Empire appeared to be the new settlement units for the Circassians. Inheriting the role of serving as actors in military and security apparatus, significant portions of the Circassian diaspora, most probably having limited alternatives to survive, became members of the bureaucratic or military apparatuses in those states. For instance, Jordan is historically regarded as the prime example of the recruitment of Circassians into the state security apparatus (Shami, 1995). Similarly, in Turkey, Circassians held significant positions in bureaucracy and security instruments.

Many renowned academics have studied the emergence and development of Circassian diaspora in modern Turkey (Kaya 2014; Kaya 2004; Besleney 2014; Doğan 2009; Sunata 2020). It will not be an exaggeration to suggest that this rich body of academic writing on the subject has been parallel to the inner dynamics of the development of the diaspora politics within Circassians. That is, with the emergence of diasporic identity of the community, Circassians began to appear as subjects of diaspora studies. As of 2000s, Circassians residing in Turkey have begun to redefine their identities through the prism of diaspora politics. As it has been noted by Kaya, this period differed from the nineties bearing the mark of minority politics (Kaya, 2014). With the ethno-cultural resurgence and renewal in the urban field, diasporic identity has been the main source and identification of the Circassians (Kaya 2014). This process was encouraged by the increasing interaction with the ancestral homeland, Northern Caucasia, specifically after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War (Kaya 2014). One another, maybe the most significant factor preparing the basis behind this process was of course Turkey's new route to the European Union which was facilitated

after the 1999 Helsinki Summit. Parallel to Turkey's process of Europeanization, Turkey's Circassian diaspora, in the main, preferred to adopt diaspora politics and define their self identity through the lenses of diaspora discourse (Kaya 2005).

In a pioneering article, Kaya has discussed the underlying developments of identity formation of Circassians and their diasporic identities arguing that Circassians in Turkey has been convincing examples of definition of diaspora provided by Safran (1991) (Kaya, 2005). Safran's classical definition of diaspora (1991:83-84) consists of the following characteristics which might well be attributed to Turkey's Circassians (Kaya 2005). Circassians are defined as a people who are dispersed from a center to two or more peripheral or foreign regions; hold a collective memory, vision, or myth; believe that full acceptance by the host country is not possible; regard the ancestral homeland as the true or ideal home and place of eventual return; commit to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland to its safety and prosperity; and maintain a personal or mediated relationship to the homeland in an ethnocentric manner (Kaya, 2005). Obviously, there are recent studies questioning the applicability of the idea of return to the Circassian community in Turkey (Besleney, 2014; Akdeniz-Göker 2018; 2019).

As indicated previously, Syria has been one of the destination points for Circassians expelled from their ancestral homeland in 1864. According to the official records, Circassian population in Syria reached approximately 40,000 (Shami, 1995). Unfortunately, since 2011, a sizeable population has left Syria due to the civil war. For more than 150 years Circassians were parts of the Syrian social and economic fabric. They held distinctive positions in Syrian military and bureaucratic apparatus. When the war erupted, they refrained from taking sides or supporting either of the warring camps (Jaimoukha, 2012).

Sharing a common tragedy, according to Robin Cohen, lays a solid foundation for the development of diasporic awareness among various groups within the community with diverse ideological and/or political convictions. As a result, a sense of victimization may be the most important factor in the formation of a diasporic identity (1997). Based on this theoretical framework, it is possible to hypothesize that the Circassian exile in 1864 (*Tsitsekun*) was the primary determinant of the development of shared diasporic identity. Syrian Circassians occupy a distinctive status compared to their counterparts elsewhere. Unlike the Circassian diaspora in Turkey, they resemble to a large extent the conceptualization of 'victim diaspora' coined by Robin Cohen (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019). Their latest journey to Turkey represented the third exile of the Circassian community in Syria. After their forced resettlement to Ottoman lands, they experienced a second forced deportation during the Six Days War in 1967. Circassians living around Golan heights had to abandon their homes and move to the villages around Damascus. With the Syrian civil war that erupted in 2011, the Circassian diaspora of Syria faced the traumatic experience of exile for the third time (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019). This time, they had to flee their homes in Syria and move to Turkey to seek refuge. The earliest migration to Syria began at the port of Samsun and extended to Uzunyayla in the district of Kayseri, an official settlement place for many Circassians in central Anatolia, eventually ending in the Syrian plains. People abandoned their homes in Syria, followed the trail to Reyhanlı, a town closer to Turkey's southern borders, and hoped to reach the larger cities of Istanbul or Ankara, or provinces nearby. A sizable percentage of the Circassian diaspora in Syria has fled to Turkey as a result of being trapped between two lines of fire, and the influx of Circassian refugees has not stopped. Hoping to escape the conflict zone, they joined the refugee flow from Syria. At the risk of repetition, it should once more be stated that the Syrian crisis was the third time that Syrian Circassians had to flee their homes. A number of factors contributed to their smooth

transition to Turkey. Among these factors, geographical proximity and the lack of visa requirements were prominent. Additionally, social benefits provided by kinship relations in Turkey were of great significance in their preference for Turkey. Moreover, it was not easy to directly move to Caucasia or to Russia. The lengthy red tape process and the unfavourable conditions in Russia have also contributed to their decision to choose Turkey as an option. Some of them had the opportunity to seek refuge in Caucasus republics where they were settled in sanatoriums that provided little interaction with the local population. To recapitulate, by 2011, more than fifty per cent of the Circassian population in Syria left their homes and fled abroad (Goble, 2016). Moreover, among this population, the vast majority have chosen to relocate to Turkey, while the remainder have fled to Jordan and other European countries (Goble, 2016). Overall, most Circassians in Syria have fled their homes, fleeing the violence that has made life unbearable, to neighboring countries, with Turkey appearing to be the first option (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019). Many families in the Homs and other urban areas have lost their homes as a result of military attacks and missile strikes (Kushabiev, 2012). Hundreds of Circassians have been transported to Turkey to be relocated to safe shelters by community associations such as the Federation of Caucasian Associations (Kaffed), the largest Circassian association in Türkiye, as the union of Circassian and other North Caucasian associations from various provinces of the country, and the Federation of Circassian Associations (Çerkes Fed) founded as an alternative federation criticizing the policies of Kaffed. A group of families were relocated into containers near the Nizip town of Gaziantep province, which is close to the Syrian border, in April 2012 by Çerkes-Fed and the International Circassian Association (ICA) Solidarity Committee. According to information verified by Kaffed Crisis Desk, the villages around Düzce, a northwestern city near Istanbul, have replaced the villages around Turkey's southern provinces as the primary places of residence for Syrian Circassians (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019). Activists of the associations and volunteers frequently emphasize that they do not and will not allow Syrian Circassians to remain in refugee camps. For a while, they were hosted in local Circassians' summer houses or flats without having to pay rent. Although temporary, this, to some an extent, alleviated the problems they would experience. In this respect, the role attributed by the ethnic and cultural associations in providing solidarity networks was of vital importance. Syrian Circassians could their distant relatives and keep solidarity-based interaction. Moreover, a vital of element of Circassian culture has presumably contributed to this process. This issue could only be explained by referring to '*vunegoş*' connoting to family names in Circassian language. Even among assimilated Circassians, learning about their traditional family names belonging to their kinship has always been a common practice in order to avoid clan or family endogamy, which is frowned upon in Circassian culture, each member of the community had to be aware of his or her kinship group. This practice, which was historically used to prevent family endogamy, recently appeared to be useful in establishing solidarity networks among Circassians dispersed across different regions and countries. (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019). Syrian Circassians have used the internet to trace their kinship ties and find members of their families and their distant cousins. It would be unfair to attribute the Syrian Circassians' advantages to a single factor, that of the ethno-cultural tissue. Circassians from Syria displayed distinct sociological characteristics when compared to their counterparts from other ethnic or religious communities. At first, almost all had valid passports. As the opportunity of keeping passport indicate, they seemed to belong a societal segment of the population with relatively high levels of income and education (Akdeniz-Göker, 2019).

Circassian Women from Syria to Turkey ²

It has been commonly assumed and underlined that migration is one of the greatest traumas that the individual might experience. Employing the words of migration and trauma in the same sentence does not seem to be common to colloquial speech. These two concepts have been defined in relation to one another in the academic literature as well. Migration, primarily the forced migration, refers not only to the abandonment of the lands or territories once lived, but also to the life-worlds, daily habits, social relations they encompass and cover.

The immigrant or the migrant leaves behind all the concrete relationships established so far with their cognitive, emotional, and experiential repercussions, and steps into new, often unpredictable, insecure, and precarious relationships. It is hardly possible to assume that this process would not be painful. Although they have been facing the pain and agony of migration, until recently, women could not find place and stand for themselves in the migration literature. The visibility of women in migration studies is related to the differentiation of migration *per se* due to the pace of social and economic transformations in the nineties. Unlike previous centuries, it was claimed that immigration became politicized and feminized in this period (Castles and Mark, 2008).

It was first with Morokvasic's thought-provoking work published in 1984 that the discussion of women as visible subjects of migration was to be triggered. Recent studies emphasize that women face difficulties and problems that gender roles put on their shoulders during the migration process, and this process in turn, feeds gender inequality. Migrant women, asylum seekers or refugees tend to find themselves in more difficult conditions adding new burdens on their shoulders. Moreover, this process tends to bring about the reproduction of the gender roles and triggering of the gender inequality.

The first option for the women fleeing conflicts, wars or poverty is labor-intensive sectors (Dedeoğlu, 2011). The levels and dimensions of the exploitation experienced by the migrant woman have been determined by the labor market and the social and legal framework in the host country. Many migrant women work informally as in-home child-care or elder-care providers (Dedeoğlu, 2011; Gökbayrak, 2009). Migrant women in the most precarious jobs face various forms of gender-based discrimination. While migrant women are seen as the main source of unregistered or off-the-books profits, they are subject to lower wages. Mostly unskilled, these migrant women have to survive in poor working conditions and tend to face series of abuses related to gender discrimination (Dedeoğlu 2011).

As it is well-known, a number of factors, such as regional proximity and cultural affinity and/or the very existence of the job opportunities in the informal sector make Turkey attractive to refugees and migrants from the neighbouring countries facing war-like conditions. Most particularly during the nineties, migration to Turkey has been accelerated by the factors related to the job opportunities in informal sectors (Gökbayrak 2009). Migrant women have been employed as cheap labor force in care services, in service sector or manufacturing. A series of conditions related to deprivation and poverty, especially the lack of legal protection prepares the conditions for dependency of migrant women on the employers. This sort of dependency

² It should be stated that this sub-title has been inspired from Mirjana Morokvasic's groundbreaking work published in 1984 (See: Morokvasic, Mirjana, "The overview: Birds of Passages are also Women", *International Migration Review*. Women in Migration. Special Issue 18, no. 4 (1984): 886-907).

creates new aspects and dimensions abuse and exploitation. For instance, women who do not have a residence and work permit are forced to put up with those abuses for fear of being deported.

Number of academics who have produced invaluable work on migrant women have demonstrated the prevalence of workplace harassment and underpayment in their various studies (Dedeoğlu 2011). This framework of insecurity that restrains migrant women is reinforced by the fact that migrant women cannot receive help and support from official institutions, and the impunity of the perpetrators of abuse. This further encourages those responsible for abuse and rights violations. Doubtless, it is essential to build institutional structures for migrant women harassed, abused, or exposed to violence to voice their complaints. Legal texts, conventions stipulating that all migrant women can benefit from protection and prevention mechanisms regarding sexual and domestic violence, regardless of legal status seem to provide the de jure protection. Yet, lack of such de jure protections, de facto mechanisms of abuse, exploitation and harassment seem to function without any restraint.

How will we locate the Circassian women that fled to Turkey from Syria in this picture? This gross question seems to be answered by focusing upon the unique position of the Syrians Circassians in Turkey that has been discussed in the previous section of the study. Compared to their Arab or Kurdish counterparts, Circassians from Syria, in the main, belongs to a rather privileged segment of Syrian society. They had secure jobs left behind and at least valid passports. As indicated above, even affording passport indicate clues about their socio-economic standing.

Needless to say, every forced migration almost always brings with it dispossession. Those Circassians, leaving their homes in Syria were exposed to the traumatic social and economic conditions and faced dispossession in this process. Furthermore, as it has been discussed, the volunteers and activists of cultural association have long provided immediate and essential supports for the most basic needs of the Circassians settled in Turkey. Besides, almost all families were located in houses owned by local Circassians and they were not required to pay rent in turn which enabled them advantageous at least for a certain period of time. Yet, as the fieldwork of this study has shown, this story of solidarity did not last long. In 2019, during the fieldwork, it has been realized that none of the families were living in the villages of Düzce in the houses reserved for them by the local Circassians. Almost all had moved to the city centers and had to pay rent and had to earn a living in the country they could not speak its official language or hardly speak.

One aspect of the fieldwork was striking in the sense that, in contrast to the previous one held in 2015, this time men were not eager to talk but women were willing to raise their voice. It was easier to contact interviewees met years ago thanks to contacts from previous research. This was a new line of research indicating the gender dimension of the story. It was discovered that women were more willing to communicate; they were eager to talk, explain, define, and narrate their stories. Indeed, that was how women appeared to be at the core of the research: Migratory birds were also women (Morokvasic, 1984). Findings have shown that women shoulder the responsibilities and burdens that gender roles impose during the migration process, and this in turn certainly feeds gender inequality. Such was the case for Circassian women from Syria. When fifteen members were reached, eight of whom were women, interviews with these eight Circassian women would be possible. Unfortunately, only two of

the participants were available for face-to-face interviews; the rest were conducted online (through zoom).

Migrant women, asylum seekers, and refugees may find themselves in more difficult situations as new burdens are added to their shoulders, and gender roles can be reconstructed in the migration process, albeit bitterly. This was to be narrated within the interviews, yet the women tended to normalize their roles and new burdens as intrinsic aspects of the tradition (Khabze). They were the most marginalized subjects of the story. Their experiences drawing upon several aspects such as—material, ideological, institutional— have framed divergent experiences of what it meant to be woman, and particularly a Circassian woman.

Not unexpectedly, in close resemblance with the previous research held in 2015, all respondents reiterated that major factor for them for leaving their homes in Syria was bound to insecurity. They had found themselves in the middle of a war as the battles intensified. The main theme reported by the respondents was insecurity. The most pressing issue, however, was the safety of "the sons." As a result, some families initially preferred to remain in Syria and sent their sons as refugees in order to save their lives. The majority of respondents emphasized that they moved to Turkey to protect their sons from the brutality of the FSA (Free Syrian Army) or the Assad regime. Both civil war sides attempted to recruit children from within families. Numerous interviewees asserted throughout the interviews that extreme organizations were increasingly picking them out for attack due to their supposed allegiance to the Assad regime. A few of the responders discussed their own encounters with unfortunate kidnappings. They asserted that some rebel organizations or organizations not connected to the FSA abduct kids and hold them for ransom. Most households had young sons who were eligible for the draft. According to the respondents, when they arrived in Turkey, their sense of insecurity vanished.

Overall, they were pleased that the Turkish government had granted Turkish citizenship to all community members (maybe with a few exceptions). But this time, they had to deal with new survival conditions. This implied a new type of insecurity. One of the respondents (Setenay 1, in late thirties)³, "what I learnt from my latest experience, it is the insecurity that hurts you most. We came here to find a safe haven, because we escaped from insecurity. Unfortunately, insecurity never ends. It turned out to be an integral part of our lives."

The lives of the women have been affected by a variety of factors. Some contended that (Setenay 2), "Men stay at home. They have their retirement salary." But the families could not survive with the retirement salary. Therefore, it was women's turn to work. They look for jobs in precarious informal labour markets as domestic caregivers, sometimes shop clerks and tailors. Setenay 3, narrates a similar story: "I didn't have retirement salary, I was a housewife in Homs." Setenay 4, who studied English language and literature in Syria, stated that it was nearly impossible for her to find a permanent job in Turkey because she could not speak Turkish fluently. If given the chance, she would prefer to relocate to Europe and then return to Syria once the war is over. Setenay 5 expressed similar concerns and stated that she would be unable to find a permanent job due to the language barrier. She emphasized her desire to relocate to any of the regions of the world where he could earn her life. All of the women emphasized the precipitous decline in their standard of living. Their migration to Turkey during Syria's current conflict has resulted in dispossession and a decline in quality of life. All of the women expressed dissatisfaction with their living conditions in Syria prior to the civil war. Again, community networks helped them! They found temporary and sometimes (younger ones) seemingly

³ Fictitious names have been used for all interviewees since they wished to remain anonymous.

permanent jobs in distant relatives' companies, small enterprises. It was at this point those tensions appeared on the surface. In order to provide themselves from the current harsh conditions the women tend to have silently accepted that being a true Circassian meant accepting the conditions and struggling. During the 2019 interviews, it was stated unequivocally that the Circassians from Syria did not want to be associated with the "Syrian refugees" in Turkey. Throughout the interviews, they repeatedly stated that they were Circassian rather than Syrian. This was one of their complaints against the Turkish Circassians. "You know the attitudes and prejudices against Syrians here in Turkey," says Seteney 1. Even so, you (local Circassians) continue to refer to us as "Syrian Circassians." We are all one and the same: we are all diasporans. We are simply Circassians, not Syrian Circassians."

The majority of respondents in the earlier interviews consistently emphasized that their ethnic identity—that of being Circassian—had given them the means to reach stable conditions in Turkey. By doing so, they were able to readily connect with their distant relatives (kinship links) and gain access to the mechanisms of solidarity, which aided their identification with the diaspora. Almost all of the respondents emphasized throughout the earlier interviews that their ethnic identity—that of being Circassian—had given them the means to reach secure conditions in Turkey. They could then profit from the processes of solidarity, which in turn promoted their identification with the diaspora, and readily connect with their distant relatives (kinship bonds). The most recent interviews had shown that being Circassian had also given them a somewhat privileged (or secure) status relative to other Syrian refugees, in addition to being a valuable source of solidarity. In that regard, strengthening this particular aspect of identification appeared to be advantageous and an essential part of their survival strategies in Turkey. One simple conclusion could be drawn: they had given up hope of ever returning. All were granted Turkish nationality. Three of them stated that they had sold their homes in Syria and were now able to purchase apartments in Düzce.

By Way of Conclusion

Recent studies have brought attention to the challenges and problems that women face as a result of gender roles during the migration process, which feeds gender inequality. Women migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees are frequently placed in difficult situations that require them to take on additional responsibilities. Moreover, gender roles are typically maintained as a result of this process, which also commonly leads to the growth of gender inequity. Turkey is attractive to refugees and migrants from bordering nations experiencing war-like conditions for a number of reasons, including regional closeness and cultural affinity as well as the existence of labor opportunities in the informal sector. A combination of variables connected to job prospects in the informal economy has encouraged migration to Turkey, especially during the 1990s. The foundation for migrant women's reliance on employers is set by a number of variables associated to hardship and poverty, most notably a lack of legal protection. Abuse and exploitation take on new dimensions when there is this kind of reliance. Women without a permit to live and work, for instance, are compelled to put up with these mistreatments out of fear of being expelled. By focusing on the experiences of Circassian women who fled Syria and sought refuge in Turkey, this study demonstrated that similar processes can be experienced by Circassian women in different contexts. When Circassians left Syria, they were subjected to horrible social and economic conditions as well as dispossession. As was previously said, cultural association volunteers and activists have long given urgent and crucial help for Circassians in Turkey's most fundamental requirements. In addition, practically all families enjoyed the benefit of not having to pay rent because they resided in homes owned by

neighborhood Circassians. This story of solidarity, however, was short-lived, as the fieldwork for this study has shown. Women carry the obligations and responsibilities that gender norms place on them during the migration process, which leads to gender inequity. For Syrian Circassian women, this was also the situation. When new responsibilities are placed on their shoulders and gender roles might be recreated, however painfully, during the migration process, migrant women may find themselves in more challenging circumstances. The interviews were to reveal this, however the women tended to normalize their roles and new responsibilities as intimately related to the tradition (Khabze). Their differing perspectives on what it meant to be a woman, particularly a Circassian woman, were shaped by their experiences, which drew on a range of institutional, ideological, and socioeconomic influences. The majority of respondents consistently stated that their ethnic identity—being Circassian—had provided them with the means to achieve stable conditions in Türkiye when they first met their distant relatives in this new country. They had simple access to kinship linkages with their distant relatives and solidarity mechanisms, which facilitated their identification with the diaspora. The most recent interviews claim that being Circassians has also provided them an advantage. Yet, this time they seem to realize that this advantage was limited, and gender inequality was to be exacerbated in the given conditions. Referring to the case of Circassian women from Syria, this study demonstrates how the remedies that women who are exposed to migration discover through tradition as a means of solidarity in overcoming the challenging conditions brought on by migration may eventually increase gender-based inequities. In contrast to men, who were less likely to speak up in this study, women were willing to raise their voices. Women were found to be more vocal; they wanted to communicate, explain, define, and narrate their experiences. The study on the gender roles of migrant women included the Circassian women as ‘the migrating birds.’

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