Circassian Encounters: The Self as Other and the Production of the Homeland in the North Caucasus

Seteney Shami

ABSTRACT

Diasporas are an increasingly important phenomenon in the 'era of globalization'. Transnational networks structure and restructure economic exchanges, familial bonds, cultural identities and political mobilization. This article examines one such diaspora, which traces its origin to the North Caucasus, the Circassians. The break-up of the Soviet Union has enabled some people to journey back to their 'homeland' and even take up residence there once again. Through such journeys and the encounters that accompany them, notions of identity, history, culture and tradition are challenged. This has the dual effect of fragmenting ethnic identity while simultaneously transforming the 'homeland' from an abstract concept to an everyday reality. The ensuing interplay between nation and diaspora is translated by different individuals in different ways. Three narratives of journeys to the homeland are presented here, showing the complex motivations and consequences of such journeys. Ethnographies of globalization thus reveal that concepts of 'ethnicity', 'nationalism' and 'ethnonationalism' have to be rethought in the context of shifting borders, transnational encounters and the production of diasporas.

INTRODUCTION

Soviet studies today is a field in search of a territory, one whose boundaries have been temporarily designated as the 'post-Soviet space'. This awkward term implies that the societies and states concerned are in a condition of open-ended transition. Yet, it also reveals that, in spite of the reams of analysis concerning the transformation and fragmentation of state, society and economy in the post-Soviet era, the framework of analysis continues to be inward-looking and operating with conceptions of regional blocs, monolithic systems, and bounded territories. This is not to deny that there is much continuity in the relations and structures that characterize the parts of what was once a political entity. This entity, however, never embodied a coherent and seamless system, and the inability to interpret present-day phenomena and to find different terms, spatial and political, to guide such

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interpretations is as much a reflection of past conceptual inadequacies as of present empirical complications.

One neglected facet of the break-up of the Soviet Union and its accompanying geo-political changes, is the emergence of self-conscious diasporas who locate their historical 'homelands' in this region. Situated in different countries of the globe, members of these diasporas are increasingly involved with their newly-accessible homelands through a variety of social, political and economic relations. One of the lesser-known examples of such diasporas is that of the Circassians who, together with the Chechens, Ossetians, and a myriad others, trace their origins to the North Caucasus which currently encompasses several small republics within the Russian Federation. Since 1992, the independence wars waged by the Abkhasians against the Georgians and the Chechens against the Russians as well as smaller and associated conflicts, point to the volatile politics of nationalism in this region. These politics have galvanized and implicated diaspora populations in various ways.

Concepts of boundary and border, identity and ethnicity, territory and diaspora all need to be re-examined in the new global context. Globalization, according to scholars engaged in drawing future scenarios, is an accelerating process of disappearing borders, and the free flow of goods, ideas and people. In a world of 'crisscrossed economies, intersecting systems of meaning, and fragmented identities' (Rouse, 1991: 8), nationalism is particularly challenged and national boundaries are increasingly transcended by transnational bonds and identities. Many see in these newly formed linkages, the end of nationalism as a mobilizing sentiment as well of the nation-state as a form of political economy.

It is important to note, however, that it is actually existing nationalisms and states that are threatened, and that what threatens them is not only supra-national solidarities, but also emergent nationalisms, often called 'ethno-nationalisms'. Rather than shelving these 'new' nationalisms as problematic but atavistic symptoms of a 'transition', they should be seen as integral to, and a result of, the production of transnationalism. For example, diasporas, which link populations transnationally, are often produced through a discourse of nationalism. Conversely, nationalism is increasingly being produced by diasporic, or at least by mobile and dispersed, peoples.

In this way, diasporas are interpolated between nationalism (movements which seek to form bounded territorial states as embodiments of nations) and transnationalism (linkages which form solidarities and reciprocities across, and in spite of, national boundaries). Are diasporas then to be seen as a product of globalization? a denial of globalization? or both? Finally, what is the space occupied, from this global perspective, by peoples who have hardly been recognized historically as constituting peoples, as befitting states or as shaping nations? As marginal as they may seem in the arena of shifting global alliances and forces, their lives shed a particular light on processes of globalization and identity construction.

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THEORETICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL VACUUMS

'Ethno-nationalism' has emerged as a central explanation for the changing and confusing struggles over statehood, political representation and identity that have marked the post-Soviet era.[1] The guiding assumption behind this term associates the collapse of universalistic ideologies with the rise of particularistic identities (see Laclau, 1994). Ethnic identities are regarded as latent forces somehow kept at bay by hegemonic superstructures. In an ideological vacuum, identities that were submerged, emerge once again. This 'vacuum theory' ignores theoretical reconceptualizations of ethnicity and nationalism which give us, if not a better grasp, then at least a better appreciation, of the unstable and elusive quality of identity and the politics of its construction over time.

Ethnicity and Nationalism

Recent theorizing would appear to have laid to rest representations of nationalism as a mechanistic reflection of a primordial ethnicity which provides the basis of cultural cohesion (for example Smith, 1991). Yet the difficulty of accommodating ethnicity in transnational perspective points to the insufficient problematization of the relationship between nationalism and ethnicity. Benedict Anderson's assertion that 'Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson, 1991: 6) and his reminder that '... nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind' (ibid: 4) opened up the horizons of research and usefully contested the necessity of nationalism. In general, however, the scholarly rush to study nations tended to focus on the *mode* of representing the nation, on the techniques of the imagination. Theoretically and empirically, this focus neglected the place of ethnicity within the national imaginary, non-national types of communities (religious groupings, dynasties, tribes, classes ...), and those peoples who had not produced 'successful' post-colonial nationalisms.

Ethnicity and nationalism are intersecting sentiments and ideologies, and both refer to forces of belonging, community, identity and loyalty. Generally, however, they have been analytically situated at different societal levels. Ethnicity was observed through 'minority' cultures while nationalism was interpreted through state ideology. In this way, the former has often been de-politicized while the latter was de-culturalized. Since the creation of any

1. The term is also often used to describe minority politics in contemporary Western Europe. Yet, the potentially interesting comparison in this realm between Western and Eastern Europe is hardly ever made. Rather one finds parallel literatures and an absence of dialogue. See Appadurai (1996) for a wide-angled conceptualization of ethnic violence and the blurring of the distinction between the West and the non-West in this regard.

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nation is necessarily based on the silencing of competing identities, threats to nation-building and state-building were seen as primarily located in the realm of ethnicity and the varieties of localism expressed through 'the trope of the tribe' (Appadurai, 1996: 159). Ethnicity was relegated to the 'minority' and denied to the 'majority' (Williams, 1989), and therefore ethnicity and nationness were seen as diametrically opposed sentiments. One expanded and produced its politics at the expense of the other.

While studies of nationalism tended to displace ethnicity, anthropological approaches, developed within a wider critique of culturalism, have emphasized the constructed nature of ethnic identification, its shifting nature and malleability according to context. However, these studies, in turn, rarely addressed how the wider context is informed, and ethnic categorization determined, by the nationalist ideologies of the encompassing states (Williams, 1989). Ethnic communities and nations, and ethnicity and nation-ness, are both imagined around sets of symbols which differentially emphasize common ancestry, consanguinity, historical immemoriality, linguistic particularity, cultural continuity, and social solidarity. Nationalism and ethnicity are therefore intertwined and also often imbricated with religious adherence and practice. Their imaginative techniques, and the symbols they deploy, however, articulate in different ways with the political expression of community, and with concepts of sovereignty and territory.

For nationalists, the concept of sovereignty holds central place and the state is the primary political expression of community (cf. Anderson, 1991; Conner, 1994). The kind of boundaries created by territory, and more specifically borders, makes possible a discourse that seeks integrity and sovereignty in the translation of an ethnic group into a nation by way of the state. Yet this transformation in the nature of the political community does not erase ethnicity or assimilate it completely. While the nation is conceived of as a fraternity, a horizontal comradeship (Anderson, 1991) that is formed historically, ethnicity continues to be conceived of as an extension of self, perceived as biological and germinal. Being 'natural' rather than historical, ethnicity is seen as 'logically' prior to the nation and its perpetuation is not predicated on statehood. Such a conceptualization allows for the 'group' to exist even if it is de-territorialized, but this should not imply that ethnic identity has no geographical or territorial component. Ethnic identity has a location, and it is constructed in reference to a point of origin, however abstract or unreachable or buried in time that space may be. It is therefore important, in the interpretation of ethnicity and nationalism and their relationship, to problematize the linkage between geography and identity and to investigate the notion of 'territory'.

Nationalism, particularly in non-Western societies, has been mostly addressed in terms of modernization, nation-building and post-colonialism. In these interpretations, the presence of a modernizing state was a given, although the success or failure of these states in mobilizing the loyalties of their populations was seen to vary. What is now troubling to the older

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paradigms is how to interpret the phenomenon of nationalism *sans* state, or at least in the absence of the political, economic, ideological construct of the nation-state. Locating analysis at either the 'level' of the communal or the national, therefore, obscures possibilities of emergent political configurations and new forms of identity, especially those being produced not in the modern world context of colonial and post-colonial state formation, but in the post-modern global context of transnationality.

Ethno-nationalism and Transnationalism

Suny, a historian of Georgia and Armenia, points out that the prevailing view after the collapse of communism was to see 'current nationalisms as eruptions of long-repressed primordial national consciousnesses, as expressions of denied desires liberated by the kiss of freedom (what might be called the "Sleeping Beauty" view)' (Suny, 1993: 3). It is important to note, however, that the conflicts of the Caucasus, Central Asia and the former Yugoslavia are rarely represented as beautiful awakenings. Rather, the images invoked by primordialism are those of violence, primitivism and revenge.

What, if not these images, does the 'ethno' in 'ethno-nationalism' add to the term? This qualification emerges from an opposition that is drawn between 'ethnic nationalism' and 'civic nationalism' (cf. Ignatieff, 1993; Szporluk, 1994). Through this dichotomy, the former is naturalized and seen as necessarily violent and retrograde and opposed to cosmopolitanism, while the latter is described as being based on territory and not ethnicity, as being democratic and rational and having 'greater claim to sociological realism' (Ignatieff, 1993: 7). Although the pivot of the distinction appears to rest on the form of national identity under construction, the overwhelming pre-occupation is actually with the question of democracy in the post Cold War era and in the post-Soviet successor states. The form that nationalism takes, the dichotomy between 'ethnic' and 'civic' forms, is validated and explained through their differential articulation with democracy, itself portrayed as an ideal form of political representation. Ignatieff (1993), for example, argues for the impossibility of democracy in states based on ethnic nationalism as opposed to civic nationalism. Laclau (1994), on the other hand, asserts that it is possible, if not probable, that a democratic universalism that is cognizant of the rights of particularism may emerge out of the collapse of the older universalizing ideologies.[2]

This type of discussion takes a psychological approach to ethnicity, centring around processes of identification (cf. Laclau, 1994), and relegates the cultural and social construction of identity to a residual process. It empties 'civic'

2. A more interesting view of the possible articulations of ethnicity, race and democracy, albeit in the very different context of Britain, can be found in Hall (1991). See also Appadurai (1996) for a definitive critique of the 'primordialist thesis'.

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nationalism of its ethnic component and negates the historical and ideological construction of ethnic identity. It therefore evades the question of whether nationalism and ethnicity, as ideologies and practices, can be delinked. Furthermore, such approaches are still informed by conceptions of the necessary congruence of state, territory, polity and political representation.

A further simplification arises out of accepting the self-proclaimed non-national nature of the former socialist states and the laying to rest of the 'national question' through local territorial representation. 'Ethno-nationalism', therefore, is particularly employed to explain instances where the new/old nationalist sentiments do not coincide with recently defunct administrative boundaries. Expressions of communal solidarity are portrayed as reflecting sentiments existing prior to the socialist states and outlasting them. The dimension of religion (particularly Islam) lends added weight to these identities with all its implications of permanence and force (see Singh, 1995).[3]

As a result, the space ('vacuum') created by the disarticulation of borders and sentiments is filled by the concept of 'ethno-nationalism' which is represented as a natural (primitive, anarchic) and hence not cultural (civilized, democratic) project. The coining of the term ethno-nationalism, and its identification as an emergent phenomenon, arises out of the past neglect of how the two types of identity (ethnicity and nation-ness), that represent two different styles of (imagined) community, can be mutually constitutive of one another. The 'vacuum', I would suggest, lies in our theories rather than in the lives of the people who are the subjects of our interpretive authority.

Theories of globalization and transnationalism should alert us that interpretations of 'ethno-nationalism' cannot be situated only in the ideological sphere but also need to take into account the shifting of borders and the differential access to territory. The process needs to be examined not only as the downfall of ideologies but also at the more prosaic level of the breakdown of totalizing state structures that helped determine ethnic identity through legal categorization, administrative procedures, and the restriction of mobility and access to territory. A historical analysis of concrete situations focusing on whether, and how, ethnic identification is produced by precisely these universalistic ideologies and the practices associated with them, appears to be in order. This is especially the case with the 'new' peoples who do not produce the dominant narratives and who are only just entering the global imagination through violent means and seemingly mysterious ends. The

3. Positioned as I am in Middle Eastern studies rather than Soviet studies, it is fascinating and disturbing to see the assimilation of these areas into the realm of Islam and Orientalism. The predominant identification of Islam with the Middle East leads to interesting permutations such as calling the Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia 'The ex-Soviet Middle East' (Hooson, 1994: 138). Furthermore, despite two decades of powerful arguments for more sensitive and historically informed interpretations of Islam in the Middle East, essentialism holds sway in the post-Soviet space.

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nationalisms coming into play cannot be simply explored within the space occupied by the populations now interrogating old boundaries. Rather, the contemporary configurations of past diasporas and population dispersals also have to be taken into account.

A PEOPLE AND THEIR GEOGRAPHY

The Circassians, or the *Adyge* as they name themselves, trace their descent from the indigenous peoples of the North-West Caucasus. Pushed out by the Tsarist Russian expansion into the Caucasus, and encouraged by the Ottoman Empire, large numbers of Circassians, possibly up to 1.5 million, left for the Ottoman domains (see Berkok, 1958; Karpat, 1972, 1990). Mass migration started in 1864 (Karpat, 1985) and the immigrants were settled by the state in order to form agricultural communities in various parts of the Empire, first in the Balkans and later in Anatolia and the Syrian Province (Shami, 1992). Today, the Circassians form communities of different sizes and characteristics in some Balkan countries and in Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Palestine/Israel.[4] In the Russian Federation, they live primarily in the three newly formed republics, previously autonomous regions, of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Adygeia, as well as in some villages and towns within the republic of Ossetia and others linked to the administrative districts of Krasnodar and Sochi.[5]

Secondary migrations to Germany, Holland (mainly as labour migrants from Turkey) and the United States (New Jersey and Orange County, California) adds to the list of major locations where Circassians live today.[6] Circassians are Muslim except for those in the Ossetian Republic who comprise four Christian villages and one town. In addition to Circassians, other North Caucasian groups such as the Chechen, Daghestanians,

4. It is difficult to know the number of Circassians in these countries. Impressionistic sources put the population in Turkey at around 1 million (Andrews, 1992), 50,000 in Syria, 30,000 in Jordan and 2000 in Palestine/Israel. The figure for Turkey is probably underestimated. In the Balkans, a few villages are reported in Albania, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Bulgaria.
5. The Circassian/Adyge population in the Caucasus can be estimated by adding the numbers given for the Cherkess, Kabardians and Adygei populations based on the 1989 census. This totals 476,900 in Olcott (1990) and 499,372 in Teague (1994). However, since these figures do not include all those who might identify themselves as Adyge outside the boundaries of these republics and do not include the villages tied to the Russian regions mentioned above, the total is underestimated.
6. Another Circassian presence, but of a different and complex order, is in Egypt. Here individuals and families tracing their ancestry to a rich mixture of Circassians, Turks, Bosnians, Albanians etc. (from the Circassian and Turkish Mameluke slave dynasties of the thirteenth–sixteenth centuries, as well as later Ottoman influxes), represent the remnants of a 'creolized' ruling élite, now marginalized by half a century of nationalism, socialism and 'open-door' capitalism. Interestingly, here too, events in the post-Soviet space have touched lives and revitalized interest in the search for 'pure' identities.

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Ossetians, Abkhasians and Ubykh also formed part of the nineteenth century migrations and are found in the same countries of the Middle East. Convergence between different groups took place in the places of settlement. For example, the Abkhaz and Ubykh are usually glossed as Circassian/Adyge in the communities outside the Caucasus. Intermarriage between the various groups outside the Caucasus also blurs distinctions between them while reinforcing their common identity *vis-à-vis* the 'majority'.

While a Circassian identity persists in these various localities, its cultural content and socio-political parameters differ according to context.[7] In Turkey, for example, the large number of Circassians means that they are found in every walk of life, in urban as well as rural areas, leading to complex permutations of identity. Turkey is a country which has witnessed, and continues to develop, an extremely powerful nationalism. This nationalism is based on a Turkish ethnicity, representing itself as secular but including a not-so-subtle imbrication of Islam, and is reproduced forcefully through education and the media. For Circassians and others who conceive of themselves as non-Turkish, assimilation into a Turkish identity is a clear option and one which, over the generations, vast number of Circassians, especially in the cities, have taken. Some simply retain a memory of a Circassian origin with a rather hazy conception of what that 'means' or where Circassians are 'from' and whether they have a 'language' or a 'culture'. Others have been active in forming associations which advocate right-wing nationalist politics or, more recently, Islamist programmes. During the turbulent decade of the 1970s the politics of identity in Turkey produced two dominant formulations among Circassians. The *devrimci*, or revolutionaries, argued that the betterment of Circassian rights would be achieved through a socialist revolution in Turkey. The *dönüşcü*, the 'returnists', on the other hand, advocated a return to the Caucasus. They accused the right-wing groups of simply promoting the state's assimilationist policies. Their reply to the *devrimci* group was that by the time Turkey became socialist there would be no Circassians left, that is, the historical memory, the culture, the language would have disappeared. Circassian associations in the cities and the towns of Turkey played an extremely important role in developing this platform, mobilizing rural migrants and especially young people. While the *dönüşcü* saw themselves as leftists, their programme was essentially Circassian nationalist and a number of them migrated back to the Caucasus after 1989.

In Jordan, a completely different scenario of identity politics plays itself out in a context where Circassians are largely a middle-class urban community with favourable representation in government bureaucracy, parliament and the military. The dominant trend was articulated in 1979 by a thirty-five year old Circassian man as follows: 'What the Circassians need to

7. For more ethnographic detail on some parts of this and the following section, see Shami (1995).

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do is to become a tribe, because this is a country of tribes and they have to find a leader who can nag the government for them and put the benefit of the Circassians foremost'. The perception that tribalism is the predominant political idiom and process in Jordan led in 1980 to the formation of a Circassian–Chechen Tribal Council. In one of the early organizational meetings, a speaker pointed out the basic aim of the Tribal Council: 'We want to unite the two tribes, to be like the others'. Tribalism was not the only vision of the future within the Circassian community, but for a while it became the prevailing, if contested, one. The dominance of one particular conception of Circassian ethnicity and the ability of the holders of this conception to translate it into organization is directly related to hegemonic discourses and political practices at the national level. A variety of colonial and state-building practices and policies led to the increasing 'modernization' of tribal identities as a constitutive component of Jordanian national identity (see Layne, 1994). In addition, tribes were becoming institutionalized. All the major Jordanian 'tribes' now have a Tribal Association, and of course all those that have an association thereby prove that they are a major tribe. The tribe, thus constituted, aims to create political consensus and to act as a redistributive centre for resources. These tribal associations are officially registered with the state and have headquarters in the various cities.

In Jordan, Circassian identity presents itself paradoxically as tribalism, while in Turkey it takes the form of minority politics. Both communities imagine themselves as unambiguously 'Circassian' but the formulations, content and discourses of this identity and the constructions of the past and future that they espouse are divergent. For example, the Circassians in Jordan who advocated the 'tribal solution' emphasized that the reason for the nineteenth century mass migration was religion and the desire of Circassians to live in a Muslim society. This leads them to seek integration into their current societies. Conversely, the *dönüşcü* Circassians in Turkey emphasized that their ancestors had been expelled from their homeland and had been pawns in the political machinations of the Russian and Ottoman Empires. They conclude, therefore, that a return to the homeland is imperative.

Although these identities were constructed in constant reference to a space, a 'homeland' in the North Caucasus, this space was devoid of geographical detail, of territoriality. Cut off from the Caucasus by 130 years of history and boundary construction, Circassians of the Middle East were only dimly aware of the Circassians in the Caucasus and the trickle of emigrants who came after 1917 and after World War II gave accounts of forced Russification. In the Caucasus, the Circassians having failed to qualify as a 'nation' instead became the titular nationality in one republic and two autonomous regions. The three 'nationalities' that were formed, Cherkess, Adygei, and Kabardian, were minorities within their republics and today constitute only between 10 and 48 per cent of the inhabitants of each republic (Teague, 1994).

Contacts between the inhabitants of these three republics were at a minimum throughout the Soviet years and divergences marked the evolution

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of language and identity. Disjunctures were created and maintained by a politics of philology. For example, the three 'nations' were regarded as speaking different 'languages' and separate Cyrillic-based alphabets were devised for each one. Today, many Kabardians state that they are not Adygei and when speaking Russian or English will refer to their language as Kabardinian as opposed to Adygeian. When actually speaking this language, however, they will refer to it as *Adygebze* (the tongue of the Adyge) and to their traditions as *Adygekhabze* (the customs of the Adyge).

Other markers of identity also exhibit interesting ambiguities. In Soviet times, the various republics and 'nations' all had their folklore dance troupes and every local village and town had youth dance groups that served as a recruiting site for the official troupes. The Caucasians (especially the Kabardians and the Georgians) were notably successful in winning all-Union contests and representing the Soviet Union abroad. Folklore was thus elaborated and celebrated and research was conducted into dance forms, as well as into local customs that could be symbolically performed through dance. Yet Circassians in the Caucasus today argue that this was not a celebration of identity or a perpetuation of tradition because the performers in these groups were not necessarily Circassians. The majority in fact were not, but could be Russians, Armenians or any individual on the basis of skill rather than ethnicity.

Soviet studies paid little attention to the micro-politics of the construction of identity in the Soviet period, in spite of an initial extensive literature on 'the question of the nationalities' (see Szporluk, 1994). These tended to focus on the nationalities that were embodied in the republics of the Union (for example, Azerbeijan, Armenia, Georgia, etc.) and generally ignored the varied peoples within them as well as those within 'Russia' such as the peoples of the North Caucasus (Olcott, 1995; Suny, 1995). The impact on ethnic identity of Soviet practices of deportation, collectivization, the creation of enclaves and the severance of people and territory, was also overlooked (IOM et al., 1996). With the explosion of ethnicity and the 'emergence' of 'new' peoples, attention has been riveted to retroactively understanding processes and limits of sovietization and Russification.

As Singh points out '... no existing theory of nationalism is founded on the Soviet experience and applying current theories, blindfolded, to the Soviet and post-Soviet states may not leave anyone the wiser' (Singh, 1995: 199). Scholars have moved from arguing that the Soviet state successfully sovietized (with its implied Russification) the various 'nationalities', to arguing that sovietization was simply unsuccessful leading to the persistence of ethnic and religious identities, themselves seen as unchanged.[8] This

8. Also see Teague (1994: 48) for an argument that it is regionalism or localism and vested interests rather than nationalism that is currently operating in the Russian federation. While this reduces the 'primordialism' of the prevailing arguments, and introduces the pragmatic aspects of the current conflicts, it evades the question of identity construction.

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persistence is seen as the result of the 'inherent' strength of ethnic identities especially when reinforced with religious identities which are commonly perceived as 'stronger' than ethnic ones. It is in the feminist literature that more interesting ways of conceptualizing ethnic/religious and national identities are being formulated. The 'woman question' and the domestic sphere have been identified as important sites for resistance to sovietization and for the 'perpetuation' of ethnic and religious identities (see Lubin, 1982; Massell, 1974; Tett, 1994; Tohidi, 1996). In general, however, not only do the 'national' labels and categories of analysis remain those of the Soviet state, but also the continuous construction of identity and the sites of its production are given little attention. In this way, the 'black box of primordialism' (Appadurai, 1996: 139) remains unpacked in the post-Soviet space.

SHOCKS: ENCOUNTERS WITH THE HOMELAND

The Circassian homeland in the Caucasus has now become directly accessible to the communities outside for the first time in 130 years, although in Jordan and Syria a trickle of students had been going to study in the Caucasus since the 1970s and a series of 'official visits' were taking place between officials of the Soviet republics, folklore groups, and leaders of Circassian organizations. Since 1989, however, large numbers of Circassians from all the countries they live in, have been going to the Caucasus, usually during the summers, to visit, to find long-lost relatives and home villages. A World Circassian Association and an International Circassian Academy of Science have been established, which have had a series of conferences and meetings attended by delegates from all the communities abroad. In addition, an estimated 200 families have migrated back, largely from Syria and from Turkey, and a few from the US have settled in the republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and in Adygeia. The Caucasus has become a site for many encounters: of people from the diaspora communities with the homeland, but also of the various diaspora communities with one another. These encounters engender lively debates about future possibilities and scenarios and throw into relief the variety of identities that have emerged in diaspora.[9]

The most salient sentiment that the encounter of Circassians from the diaspora with the homeland is engendering is one of shock. Ethnicity is suddenly experienced not as a fact but as a contradiction. To emphasize the 'suddenness' and disconcerting effect of such encounters is not to imply that

9. My sustained fieldwork has been in Jordan, Turkey and the Caucasus although I have also often visited Circassians in Syria and the USA and, in the Caucasus, one now meets Circassians from all countries. Still my main sources of information are from the three fieldsites. Also, as is clear in the following discussion, my focus is not so much on the Circassians of the Caucasus as on the experiences of the diasporans in their encounters with the homeland.

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a homogeneous, unified conception of Circassian identity existed in any locality prior to the encounter with the homeland. However, new and unexpected disjunctures have emerged that lead to a new questioning of identity. Previous, older contradictions had been routinized: Why did we leave the Caucasus, were we pushed out by the Russians or pulled in by the Ottomans? Are we primarily Circassians or Muslims, and how does this inform our relationship with Arabs and Turks? Does intermarriage lead to the disappearance of community or to the consolidation of alliances? How can we have political clout through participation while preserving our cultural integrity? These questions had not been resolved but the debates around them had settled into well established grooves. Different questions and different grooves had appeared in the different localities, but the distinctions by locality were seen by many Circassians as expressions of a common (though not collective) endeavour for the perpetuation of a naturalized ethnicity. Encounters with and in the Caucasus are marked by a heightened awareness of contingency and choice as well as mixed emotions.

As Circassians journey to the Caucasus, the experience of locating and contacting their kin is overwhelming.[10] The excitement, warmth and joy of these occasions is experienced as a deeply moving encounter. In the hotels of Nalchik and Maikop, particularly in the summer, bus-loads of Circassians arrive from various countries and meet one another and look for their kin. When word spreads that a group is arriving from Jordan or Turkey or elsewhere, people converge on the hotel lobbies to ask whether there is anyone from this family or the other. As the evening wears on, the space in front of the hotel begins to look like a big party. Someone may drive up in a car and start selling liquor from the boot. Next someone brings out an accordion and all join in a *djeg*.[11] Subsequently, the 'found' relatives from the diaspora are taken to the 'home' village. There follow days of feasting, dancing, and visiting of all possible relatives. There is usually also an attempt to locate the house, or more usually the location or plot of land where the house of the common ancestor who had emigrated once stood.

After this first discovery of commonality, however, more intensive contact and ensuing visits bring the discovery of divergence.

Definitions of ethnicity have suggested that the ethnic community is conceptualized as an extension of the self. In other words, a common ethnicity is experienced or expected to constitute a 'sameness', a familiarity. However, the more salient experience of most of those who journey to the Caucasus, men and women, is generally one of shock, of non-recognition and the encounter of 'the self as other'. The self, in addition to being

10. Relatives are usually identified through common family names or through the village of origin, if the memory of the latter was retained. The genealogy is generally constructed through a presumed sibling relationship in the generation of the emigration.
11. The word *djeg* means dancing but also contains the meaning of 'games' as well as weddings, as the main context for dancing and games of skill.

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conceptualized in abstract terms of cultural characteristics or symbols of identity, is also perceived as having particular physical characteristics, of being linked to a particular kind of body. Circassians coming to the Caucasus from the outside soon come to feel estranged at all levels of this encounter.

First, and most problematic to their ethnic identity, is the statement that 'they' (Circassians in the Caucasus) do not look Circassian (unlike 'us'). Circassians in the Caucasus see themselves as dark ('the dark Southerners') and are described as such by the Russians, while Circassians in the Middle East are seen by Turks and Arabs as fair and beautiful (a vestige of their historical relationship to Ottoman courts and harems). Therefore, Circassian visitors from the Middle East see themselves as blond and the locals as dark. This perceived physical difference is not accepted as a reasonable diversity within a common biologically-imagined ethnicity but as an opposition, a difference. Aspects that are perceived as cultural rather than biological are also not recognized by those coming from abroad. The language is hard to understand, since Russian, Arabic and Turkish have made their impact respectively and in the Middle Eastern settlements different dialects have converged while in the Soviet republics they diverged. Equally shocking, Circassian dances are unsettlingly different. People known to be very good dancers in Jordan or Syria suddenly seem awkward and clumsy in the Caucasus. While dance is a main and subtle vehicle for courtship, young men and women are unable to communicate their admiration and feelings for one another when trapped in the unfamiliar melodies, tempos and motions. More generally, marriage customs, food, hospitality and reciprocity are misunderstood by both sides, and behaviour and expectations at such occasions are fraught with difficulties and feelings of social awkwardness.

The list goes on, but the most important element underlying these various aspects of the alienation from the self, as experienced by the returnees to the Caucasus, is the lack of trust. Alienation translates into mistrust. This is not a mistrust of particular individuals but of the situation and the society as a whole, which they describe as 'immoral'. This is not helped by the upheaval that these societies are undergoing, the general lawlessness, increasing poverty and deterioration in standards of living and safety, accompanied, apparently, by a concomitant rise in divorce, in alcoholism and domestic violence.[12]

In addition to these disconcerting relations with the Circassians of the Caucasus, those coming from the various countries on the outside also experience difficulties in finding commonalities with one another. Reactions to the current political situation in the Caucasus, and visions of the future,

12. I cannot say with any certainty that violence and alcoholism have increased or claim the relationship of such phenomena to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some Circassians in the Caucasus asserted that this was the case.

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tend to differ according to the country from which the individual comes. Some Circassians from Syria, for example, are positive about the communist past of the Caucasus and decry the present as the disintegration of a powerful system. Many coming from Turkey tend to advocate 'Westernization', arguing, for example, that the Cyrillic alphabet used for writing Circassian should be replaced by a Latin one. Circassians from Jordan often stress the need for religious education and some contribute money for the building of mosques in their villages of origin.

For those families who have migrated back, socializing tends to take place amongst those who come from the same country. They may even on occasion refer to each other as 'the Turks', 'the Syrians', 'the Jordanians' and to the Circassians of the Caucasus as 'the Russians'. As one young woman who emigrated from Turkey said, 'We left Turkey not to become Turks, only to become Turks here'.

Clearly, the coming together in the very location where Circassians expect to find commonality and a naturalized ethnicity, instead generates an experience of difference, disjuncture and a sense of rupture. This is hardly the portrait of ethno-nationalism displayed in scholarly or popular representations.

In spite of these highly divergent and problematic relations, however, one can also discern a number of emerging arenas that provide the space for exploring commonalities and unifying discourses. The most obvious arena for integration that has emerged is the World Circassian Association. Disagreements arise within this forum and long discussions reveal that those from outside the Caucasus tend not to appreciate the difficulties experienced by the three tiny Circassian republics in re-negotiating their links with Moscow.[13] Still, however, the meetings take place, one after another. Although little programmatic action is adopted, and less executed, the meetings provide the opportunity for the development of a common discourse, one with clear overtones of nationalism. In the July 1993 meeting of the World Circassian Association at Maikop attended by several hundred people, one delegate from the Adygeia Republic was given a standing ovation as he said:

> Now that we are [finally] meeting, we have hope that we can get closer together . . . We have to do everything to help them [those in the diaspora] to come back. We should help them settle here, it is enough the problems they have had [in the diaspora] . . . [The Russians] don't consider us important because we are few. We are few not from our own actions, but because they made us few.[14] We want Russia to be a democratic country. We should not be reluctant to respect other peoples [nations] but we expect to be respected in return. The war being waged [in Abkhasia] is an oppressive war. Finally, we send our greetings to our parents who are in diaspora [and look forward] till when we will be one big family and one people [nation].

13. The war in Abkhasia (1993) and the war in Chechnya (1994–6) clearly demonstrate the complexity of the relationships between the non-Russian peoples within the Russian Federation and the CIS.
14. The reference here is to deportations and exile during the Stalinist period.

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Given the divergent and fragmentary conceptualizations of present realities and future scenarios, however, could the Circassians, across the localities within which they find themselves, in any way be seen as fragments of a nation? Even a brief description highlights the permutations of Circassian identity engendered by different contexts as well as by the encounters with, and in, the Caucasus. The homeland that the Caucasus presents to its diasporic descendants, is itself a fragmented and contested terrain. Circassians within the Caucasus are scattered, divided by borders, interspersed with other ethnic groups and have experienced successive displacements and exile. Arguments abound about where the centre of gravity lies for Circassians and to which republic or city the diasporans should migrate back. Clearly, current ethnic identification is not simply an intensification, or a 'violencing' of an older persistent identity.

To understand the new constructions of Circassian identity, it is not enough to examine conceptions in one locale or even to compare across a number of locales. Rather, the socio-political relationships and cultural representations linking the multiple locales and the homeland with one another should be seen as constituting a field of transnational intersections. An emphasis on transnationalism shifts the focus from how these identities are imagined to how they are organized.

A powerful example is the war in Chechnya, which started in December 1994. The implications of this conflict for the Russian Federation and its political leadership are generally well examined by international journalists and commentators and some attention is given to the ramifications in the rest of the Caucasus. However, how the conflict is perceived by the Caucasians themselves and how Caucasian diasporas outside the region may react or contribute to such perceptions, is given little attention. During the crisis over the hostages taken by Chechen fighters in Daghestan in January 1996, the parallel dramatic hijacking of a Turkish ferry-boat in the Black Sea was represented in the media (and by Russian officialdom) as the 'spreading' of terrorism 'across borders' and the hijackers were labeled as 'Chechen sympathizers'. The roots and conditions of such a 'sympathy', that several of the hijackers were not Chechen but of other North Caucasian groups and that they were Turkish nationals and residents was hardly noted. Rather than a 'spread across' borders, such simultaneity of political action and expression in different locations should lead to a re-examination of notions of borders and the arenas of political action.

Hardly existing in a vacuum, therefore, constructions of identity and the concomitant politics are taking place in a global context characterized by ambiguously articulated but powerful ideas and by very specific skeins and relationships attaching people to one another and to particular spaces and places. This global context is marked by shifting boundaries which bring into question matters of personhood and belonging to social groups. The geography of identity, the linkage between territory and belonging, becomes

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important to conceptualize in addition to its modes of articulation, textualization and persuasion.

ROUTES AND JOURNEYS, LIVES AND NARRATIVES

As the encounters in the Caucasus produce emergent discourses, similarly the recurrent journeys back and forth to the Caucasus produce an emergent geography. Tracing the routes that have opened up between the Caucasus and the Middle East, and observing who travels along them, highlights the intersections between identities, territories and boundaries. Shifts in identity are not simply reactions and counter-reactions to 'contexts', whether local, national or global, but are also continuously constructed through meaningful encounters brought about by different forms of mobility. These pathways to identity, the routes and journeys that transform selfhood and ethnicity, have changed dramatically for Circassians since 1989. Conceptualizing the formation and transformation of identity through pathways implies that, in addition to the encounters at the point of arrival, the journey itself constitutes a meaningful experience of, and for, identity.

In the travels undertaken by Circassians to the Caucasus, the mode of transport (bus, ship, plane), whether the travellers come individually or as families, whether they travel as part of organized tours or along their newly-discovered kin networks, all these mark the experience of the journey and its interpretation. The difficulties of travel and access make the routes to the homeland particularly fraught with symbolism. Visas continue to be a complicated process at Russian embassies. International scheduled flights entail a difficult transfer to domestic flights and at least one ominous night in the volatile city of Moscow. The planes that fly directly to the cities of the Caucasus from Istanbul, Damascus and Aleppo are charters with random schedules and unpredictable booking policies. Getting onto the plane and finding a seat is often a matter of the 'survival of the fittest' and may entail physical scuffles. Buses may have to traverse war zones, often break down and entail long border waits. Unreliable hotel reservations en route may mean sleeping out in open fields or beaches. Ships are overcrowded and equally unpredictable and when the travellers arrive at ports they are faced with few amenities and unsavoury hotels as well as further inland journeys by bus or train to get to the principal cities. Seemingly arbitrary and indecipherable 'regulations' at border points makes each crossing an adventure in negotiation, bribery, confiscation of belongings and extraction of fines and taxes.

These difficulties, while not getting less in any formal sense, are being tamed over time into some sort of predictability through frequent travel, through making connections with people who can help at the various junctures and through the slight improvements in the quality of hotels and eateries. At the same time, however, the increasing insecurity in the cities and the continuing wars in the region still make each journey undertaken an

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adventure and a calculated risk. The conditions that face travellers en route to their homeland accumulate into a collective experience that feeds into a sense of community, a sense that is being continually transformed by these experiences. People trade stories of difficulties and achievements and flaunt their current expertise and abilities. They exchange useful information on helpful intermediaries, what foods to carry and how to obtain necessities. By now, reactions, responses and perceptions have formed that create expectations and frame understandings even for the first time traveller.

At first, it would appear that the frequent travellers to the Caucasus fall easily into distinct categories. It seems possible to dissect the political, economic and cultural dimensions of transnationalism through 'the' motive informing the journey. For example, 'militants' seek to invigorate ethnic solidarity by encouraging a return migration from the diaspora locations back to the homeland. They are active in forming associations that transcend borders, they bring together a variety of people in different locations and are vocal in a variety of forums concerning regional political events. In the meantime, 'traders' are exploring the new markets and commodities made available through the opening up of borders and 'transition economies'. They range from itinerant entrepreneurs and 'suitcase peddlers' to founders of large-scale import–export companies. 'Scholars' are equally active travellers seeking to explore new terrains of knowledge. Those from the Caucasus re-examine notions of culture, tradition and language by investigating the 'mutations' that have occurred in the diaspora, while those from the Middle East journey in search of the roots and authentic origins of contemporary cultural forms.

A closer look at individual life histories, however, reveals the difficulties of isolating and classifying the activities and identities of the sojourners. Even with the formation of collective approaches to the homeland, the people who journey back and forth, their motivations, aims, representations and the kinds of landscapes they construct as they travel these circuits vary significantly.[15] The countries that they come from, the class and gender politics that they embody also frame their encounters. Narratives of these journeys are one way of looking at the intersection of individual particularities and the connections to the collapse of states, regional blocs and empires.[16]

Consider, for example, Emine's journey from a provincial Turkish town to the city of Nalchik in Kabardino-Balkaria. Emine was a high school teacher and in her mid-thirties when she decided, in 1992, to return to the Caucasus. In explaining her decision, she starts from her childhood and youth. She says that as she was growing up she never thought much about being Circassian.

15. This idea of landscapes constructed and circuits travelled is inspired by the work of Roger Rouse (1991, 1995) on Mexican migrants in California.
16. In the following accounts, 'Emine', 'Engin' and 'Omar' are pseudonyms. I have tried to give a feeling for their own style and emphases in the narratives and the key Turkish, Arabic and Circassian words they used.

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They did not speak Circassian at home because their parents wanted them to do well in school and not be 'confused' by different languages. She had Circassian friends but also Turkish friends and she thought of herself as being both. When she went to Ankara to study at the university in the early 1970s, she was influenced by leftist student politics. She also began to go to the Circassian Association regularly because she had no friends in Ankara and because her older brother was an active member. She gradually saw that what was being said in the association about the importance of the return to the Caucasus was logical. She therefore broke off with her *kashen*, her Circassian boyfriend, after a discussion in which he said that he would not return to the Caucasus even if it became possible. She felt that she could not marry someone who was not a *dönüşcü*. Although she had other *kashen*s, she is still single and says, 'Well, you also cannot marry someone simply because he is a *dönüşcü*'. She adds:

> I knew when I became a *dönüşcü* that it may mean my remaining single, and I definitely knew that this would be the case when I immigrated here. But my being here is a model for others; they can see that it is possible to return. There are many families who have migrated and they have small children. I regard them all as my children and the ones that will be born here will be my children as well and that satisfies me.

Emine says that her parents were not very nationalistic but that she and her two brothers were and would never marry a *yabancı*, a foreigner, a non-Circassian. Her mother had been against her coming and settling in the Caucasus but her brothers supported her and were also planning to come. Emine reserves her anger for association activists who appeared to be strongly *dönüşcü* when in Turkey and sought leadership on that basis and now were finding all sorts of reasons for not emigrating. She says that it is clear that what they were really seeking was their own political promotion in Turkey and not the benefit of the Circassians.

Emine describes how she and two others, a woman and a man, had first come to the Caucasus by bus. They had to walk across the Turkish border and take another bus because at that time buses did not come through the border. So they had to carry everything with them. A friend waited at the Turkish border to make sure that they got through, that the Turkish police did not give them any trouble. At the Russian border, the customs official was surprised by how much they had in their luggage and wanted to charge them customs. They told him that they were not trading (as he had assumed) but that they were immigrating. He was so taken aback at the thought that he just let them through with no trouble.

With her savings from Turkey, Emine bought a flat in the city from an elderly ethnic German woman who was returning to Germany.[17] She lives off

17. Germans migrated to the Volga region, the Caucasus and other parts of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century. Their return has been greatly facilitated by Germany and

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her savings and her share of the family farm and businesses in Turkey while trying to establish some sort of enterprise with other returnees from Turkey. They have imported equipment and goods from Turkey for their various ventures (an ice-cream making and vending machine, a teashop, a sheet sewing workshop) but so far have not been successful. She attends the meetings and rallies of the Circassian associations but is frustrated by the lack of energy and plans for working towards independence from Russia.

Emine has clear ideas on what should be done to build a Circassian society in the Caucasus. Once, when I said that as an anthropologist I studied contemporary societies, she said that there was no contemporary Circassian society, it has yet to be formed. In order to do this, Circassians from the diaspora should come back to the Caucasus. They should settle in the city of Nalchik, rather than Maikop, because in Nalchik Circassians have more weight as they are a more significant percentage of the population. In Maikop and the Adygeia republic (where they constitute only 22 per cent of the population) they would just melt among the Russians. She said that at this point in time they needed to focus on one place, to increase the Circassian population there and get a republic: once every town had become part of the Circassian republic, then it would not matter where people settled. Since Emine herself is Ubykh, she should actually settle in the city of Sochi,[18] but says that if she did that, it would have no meaning at all. Her real homeland is Sochi, with Nalchik in second place, but Nalchik is better: there are more job opportunities and life in general is better among the immigrants. In Maikop there were lots of fights. Emine said that she thought it was in the Russian government's interest to get people to settle in Maikop where the immigrants would melt into the wider society. Again, once a Circassian republic has been formed, the official language is Circassian and so on, it will not matter who marries whom because the children will be Circassian (by nationality and citizenship). At the present time, however, there is a need for chauvinism and Circassians should only marry each other.

When Emine first came to the Caucasus, she and others were able to obtain residence permits without much difficulty, however obtaining a passport and Russian citizenship was another matter. After an appearance on a local television show where she and two other 'returnees' complained that their homeland was not making them feel welcome, they embarrassed local

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they constitute one of the major groups of migrants out of the Russian Federation, numbering 850,000 since 1992 and 1.4 million since 1961 (IOM et al., 1996).

18. The Ubykh are traced historically to the western coast of the Caucasus. They were decimated by warfare and then deported en masse in the nineteenth century. Scattered in the countries of resettlement, they merged with other Adyge groups and their language is no longer spoken. The coastal areas were the first to be cleared by Russian settler-colonialism with the inhabitants either deported or pushed into the mountains. Sochi, a famous port and spa city in Tsarist and Soviet times, is administratively within the Russian republic and not in Adygeia.

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authorities into providing them with citizenship. As she says, 'When I came here, I gave up my Turkish nationality forever'.[19]

Emine says that she has adjusted quite well to living in the Caucasus, but that she does not like living alone. She misses her family and the movement of people in and out of the house. She does have good friends, however, who always look out for her and never leave her on her own. After the first year, Emine was spending at least three or four months of each year in Turkey. Her widowed mother needed her, she said. Although Emine had tried to persuade her mother to come and live with her in Nalchik, her mother said she was too old for the rigours of life in the Caucasus. Emine's help was often needed, and she was called to Turkey to supervise the harvest, or because her sister-in-law was giving birth, or because her younger brother was getting married. 'I want to be in the Caucasus winter and summer', she says, 'but so far it has not been possible'.

Unlike Emine and other returnees, some travellers to the Caucasus, especially those who are engaged in import–export activities, do not deploy the language of absolute return but see themselves as straddling two places and building bridges between them. Engin, for example, is in his early forties and owns five companies in several cities in Turkey. In 1993, he and a relative were attempting to establish a base in the Caucasus. They formed a company with capital raised from five relatives and were exporting leather, wood and PVC and importing commodities. They have hopes of eventually winning contracts to set up telecommunications systems, and build roadworks and tourist facilities.

Engin emphasizes that his goal in these activities is not profit since he was doing very well already in Turkey. He describes the hardships and frustrations of trying to establish a business in the inefficient and 'corrupt' environment of the Caucasus. In spite of these difficulties, Engin sees it as his duty to try to help the economy of his homeland and to introduce its inhabitants to modernity. He is willing to risk the capital of $100,000 that he and his relatives have jointly formed, but not more, towards this end. He is planning to open stores in the Caucasus that are clean, bright and modern, run through modern management techniques and providing guarantees and maintenance services. He wants to establish an honest and prosperous enterprise and train people in proper business techniques '... so that everyone can see this and say: here is what the people who came from Turkey did.'

In explaining his decisions, Engin says, 'My father lived all his life completely as a Circassian.[20] I am half a Circassian but trying to be one [whole]. I owe it to him and the way he lived to try to do this'. To fulfil his obligation to his father, Engin will try to perpetuate the Circassian identity of his own

19. In Turkish 'Türk vatandaşlıgımı gözden çıkardım': literally, 'I eliminated my Turkish nationality from my sight'.
20. In Turkish: 'dört dörtlük Çerkez idi': literally, 'He was a four over four Circassian' — that is, in the full meaning of the word, totally, 100 per cent.

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children, but, he says, he does not agree with those who say that one should drop everything and migrate back. He will not bring his family to the Caucasus as it is not fair to his wife and young children. She does not speak Circassian and has her environment in Turkey — what would she do here? The children do not speak Circassian either and they are studying in good schools. He will not move them away from Istanbul but, in the Caucasus, he will establish a base for his children that will enable them to choose, when they come of age, whether or not to return to their homeland. Business is what he is good at and what he can contribute to the homeland. If he succeeds, others will follow and his children will have the alternative, when they are eighteen or so, of remaining Circassian if they wish, or becoming Turks.

Engin thinks those who say that the Russians could be removed from the Caucasus are simply naïve. Over the past century, Russians have been settled in between the Circassian territories in a deliberate attempt to divide the Circassians. Moreover, Kabardino-Balkaria does not have the economic ability to demand independence, unlike Chechnya which has oil as well as weapons manufacturing plants. But there are great opportunities in the Caucasus. Engin describes the difficulties of life in the village in Uzunyayla in central Turkey where he was born: 'The situation of our villages is terrible. Everyone is leaving, or else one person sacrifices himself and remains for the land and the rest go to the city. The villages are emptying ... It is winter for eight months and you have to squeeze the four seasons into the remaining four months ... Although we were from the lucky ones with more land and close to the river yet I do not remember a single winter that we started with some money saved, just food for ourselves and the animals'. He continues, with tears forming in his eyes:

> My father was always up before the dawn breaks ... My mother used to work till after everyone was asleep. There were times when I would wake up in the morning and find her asleep sitting in the kitchen because she was too tired to go to bed. She should go straight to heaven for the way she worked for us so that we would be fed and clothed ... Here it is like a heaven, the earth here is so giving, you just have to plant and wait, there is no need for irrigation or anything. If you mechanized agriculture a little, it could produce incredibly. They just need a little technology ... If (and when) they begin to distribute land, then the peasants of Uzunyayla would come. They would sell what they have and come because what they have is worthless anyway. When you tell people about the land here, they listen to you as though it is a fairy tale — they cannot believe it because they have not seen anything like it. A peasant cannot afford the price of a ticket. Every person who can, like me, should pay the expenses of one peasant to come here. And when they see what is here and they tell the people (and they will believe it from the peasant more than from me) they will all come back.

In his home in Istanbul, with his family around him, Engin eloquently elaborates the same points he had made in Nalchik. His seven-year-old son, however, when asked if he would like to live in the Caucasus, simply purses his lips and responds with a long, wet and negative 'tttuuutt'.[21]

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21. A sound signifying 'No' which is well understood in all of the Middle East.

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These two lives, Emine and Engin, illustrate how the politics and economics of the 'return' to the homeland are translated and refracted through the lives of individuals into a prism of expressions and representations. Regardless of their own attempts to classify themselves as one 'type' or the other, the narratives of such individuals supply a rich array of reasons and legitimations of their journeys to identity. These journeys start within Turkey and the pathways that they forge to the Caucasus are informed by earlier transformations and ruptures.

Emine starts out from a comfortable accommodation of her Circassian and Turkish identities until her journey from town to city in Turkey 'makes' her a *dönüşcü*. Only, however, if she finds the conditions to maintain and perpetuate Circassian identity will she stay in the Caucasus. Although she had given up her Turkish passport initially, she eventually re-obtained it in order to facilitate travel and her stays in Turkey. Engin, on the other hand, moves from the wholeness bestowed by his peasant parents in the village to the industrial sector of Istanbul which fragments his identity and that of his children. His vision of the homeland is that of economic prosperity and opportunity, of telecommunications systems and roadworks that will connect, though not conjoin, physical, external and internalized divides.

A store which sells candy and processed foods, washing machines and electrical appliances imported from Turkey and which was established in downtown Nalchik in 1995 is a site for the production of these kinds of connections. Established by Circassian businessmen from Turkey, and employing returnees and locals, it is called Elbruz/Bosfor in reference to the prime geographical landmarks of the two countries. Elbruz is the highest mountain in the Caucasian range and historically an insurmountable barrier to the invading imperial armies of the south. The Bosphorus straits in Turkey, while dividing Asia from Europe, have historically been a passageway and trading route. The store, and the goods within it, geographically, economically and symbolically link the two locations and simultaneously invoke barriers and routes, boundaries and passageways.

NATION OR DIASPORA?

The ambiguities of ethnicity and nation-ness in a transnational world are particularly clear with returnees who state that they are back to stay in the homeland, and argue that it is the duty of all Circassians to help forge a national entity in the Caucasus. These nationalists themselves are forced to be transnational. This is not only because of the diasporic nature of the potential constituency of this Circassian nation, but also due to the nature of the 'transition economies' on which this nation is to be built. The only economic space for returnees to the Caucasus is in trading and entrepreneurial activities. The only comparative advantage for those who have little capital comes from exploiting social capital, which in this context means

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kin networks. Thus it is only through forming transnational trading networks based on trust and reciprocity emanating from, and legitimated by, kinship and common ethnicity, that these returnees can insert themselves economically into the homeland. These networks are not easily created, however, in the context of the complex and sometimes adverse relations and reactions that are resulting from the encounters between Circassians. Newly discovered kinships in the Caucasus are often not able to sustain rapid commodification. Similarly, older kin networks may crumble under the weight of their new functions and the intensified and magnified obligations resulting from the expanded and fragile extension over space.

The interplay between nation and diaspora also appears clearly in the issue of residence and travel. Returnees and frequent travellers to the Caucasus attempt to obtain residence permits in the republics of North Caucasus that give rights to own property and to work. There are rather lengthy bureaucratic procedures to obtain these permits, but associations in the Caucasus help those from the diaspora to obtain them on the grounds of their Circassian ethnicity. Citizenship and a Russian passport, on the other hand, are obtained only with great difficulty. While all returnees were vocal in their criticism of the difficulties of obtaining Russian citizenship, they were reluctant to jeopardize their other passports and citizenships, given the uncertainty of the future. In addition, most returnees from Turkey, now 'resident' in the Caucasus, seek to obtain 'migrant worker' Turkish passports. This gives them certain tax breaks and enables them to move goods and hard currency across borders without paying customs dues. This is particularly useful for the export–import activities in which most of them are engaged.

The economics and politics of identity, however, do not capture all of the moments of transnationalism that are to be found in the Caucasus today. The value of a Russian passport, and the ambiguities of transnational identities, emerge in an unexpected way in the narrative of Omar, who came to the Caucasus from Jordan in 1993 at the age of twenty-three.

When asked about his reasons for coming to the Caucasus, Omar was hesitant at first and then began speaking rapidly and continuously. He said that he was here in the Caucasus because he wanted to get a Russian passport to go to Saudi Arabia to study Shari'a in Medina. To explain this startling statement he had to go back a few years to a major turning point in his life.

After he finished high school, Omar worked on the Maan–Aqaba railroad in Jordan.[22] One night he was sitting and drinking with the other workers, as they did every night, when one man started talking about religion and asked: who will get up and pray with me? Omar was the first to get up and pray and after that he stopped drinking and became religious.

22. This in itself is an unusual and rare occupation in Jordan, given that there is only one track in the whole country with a once-weekly train — the one that Lawrence of Arabia is famous for blowing up.

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He did not join any organizations or Islamic movements. He used to go from home to work to the mosque and that was all. He started to read in the magazines that came to Jordan about Afghanistan and how the Muslims were being killed there, women and children. There were pictures of people with their limbs cut off. He took a plane and went to Peshawar, by himself, where there was another Circassian that he knew from Amman. The very first night he was there they brought in somebody who had lost a leg. Omar felt shaken and thought that it would be one thing to be wounded or to die but how would he feel losing a leg? A few months later the same man was playing football. They fitted him with a plastic limb and he was left with only a slight limp.

Omar joined an organization funded by Saudi Arabia. He spent six months being trained. They would wake up for the dawn prayer, then have fifteen minutes of exercises (which he always tried to avoid), and then breakfast. They were trained on tanks, automatic weapons and mines and how to forge passports. There were specialists from all over the world to teach them these things.

He stayed for a year and a half but then left because someone he respected told him that the organization was funded by Saudi Arabia, the CIA and the Mossad. He went to his Amir[23] and asked him. The Amir said it was true about Saudi Arabia and the CIA but not the Mossad. They had not sunk so low, he said.

Another thing Omar did not like was that the organization he belonged to was a rich one and they would get fancy food and blankets. Hot meals came to them at the front lines, whereas those who were from Bangladesh and were doing exactly the same thing would hardly get any food. Why should there be this kind of differentiation? When the trucks with food came, it should have been divided amongst everybody and not according to which organization they belonged to. He gained 25 kilos there.

On the way back to Jordan, Omar passed through Saudi Arabia and decided that he wanted to study Shari'a. He wanted to study in Medina where there are shaykhs who teach the real religion and not that of the state and the state cannot do anything to them even though they kill a few of them every year. He liked Medina very much but as an Arab he had to wait a year to be accepted into the school. He came back to Jordan. There was nothing to do — there was no work. He was sitting one evening with his parents, joking, and his mother said, why don't you go to Russia? He thought that this was a good idea since, as a Russian, he would be accepted immediately to study Shari'a.

Now he had been in the Caucasus for six months and he still didn't have the passport. He was such a fool: if he had registered in the school back then

23. Amir literally means 'prince', 'leader' and is commonly used in Islamic organizations to denote section leaders especially of youth groups.

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he would have been accepted by now. Instead it had been six months and he still hadn't got the Russian passport. He discovered that there was no way to get the passport except to get married. He was going to marry a girl in Maikop, everything was arranged and then her grandfather died. This meant, 'according to their customs', that she could not get married for six months. He came to Nalchik and found another woman to marry: she was thirty-seven years old and a lawyer, and had an adopted son Hajmurat.[24] Then her grandfather also died. He told her that he would not wait six months. Now, it had already been three months and she said that soon they would get married.

I asked whether she would be willing to go to Saudi Arabia. Omar answered that in the Caucasus, girls were willing to marry anyone just to get out of the place. He knew a prostitute who was willing to go to Saudi Arabia and wear a veil and everything just to get out. The girl he wanted to marry in Maikop also had a child, a girl whom she gave to her parents to raise. She said that her parents made her get married very young and then she divorced. This was according to what she said, but her word was not very trustworthy.[25] She was probably a prostitute, otherwise who were all these people who kept coming in and out of her house? How many cousins could one person have? Coming in and out constantly.

Omar said that he had lost everything here. He lost 25 kilos. He had one drink and then it was all over. He managed to hold out for four months, but a person is made of flesh and blood and he surrendered to temptation. But he still prays. If he forsakes that as well he will no longer be a Muslim.

He said he had to go pick up Hajmurat from kindergarten. He said goodbye and left.

Three and a half years later (in January 1997), I had a chance encounter with a friend of Omar's in a shop for musical instruments in Amman. He had come in with three Circassian musicians from the Kabardinka folklore group of Nalchik who were performing in Amman and wanted to buy recorders. He said 'Do you remember that day we met in Nalchik there was that young man with glasses? He was martyred in Chechnya. Well, I guess he was martyred . . . we have to say he was martyred. You know he used to drink and pray, drink and prostrate himself'.[26]

What does a short life like Omar's, spent in restless movement between various countries and border zones, prey to contingencies, earnest whims and random strategies, tell us about nationalism and ethno-nationalism? Omar

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24. Haji Murat is the name of a Caucasian hero in Tolstoy's 1896 novel with the same title. Haji means one who has undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca. Here the title and the name were collapsed into one name for the little boy.
25. In colloquial Arabic: 'ala dhimitha wa dhimmitha wasi' jiddan': literally, 'according to her conscience and her conscience is very broad'.
26. In colloquial Arabic: 'yishrab wa yisjid, yishrab wa yisjid': literally, 'drinks and prostrates, drinks and prostrates'.

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stumbles across Islam on a railway track in Jordan. Travelling to Afghanistan to fight for Islam, women and children, he learns that passports can be forged and limbs can be replaced by technology. The route to the passport that he needs in order to seek true Islam goes through his ethnic identity. As a Circassian, he can transform himself from an Arab to a Russian for the purposes of acquiring Islam. The Caucasus for him is not a homeland, it is just a stopover, a transit way station. En route to Islam via the Caucasus, he is overcome by the place, its women and children. He has one drink and 'loses everything'. Finally, in Chechnya, he loses his life for the cause of Chechnian Islamic nationalism, though he is neither a Chechen nor a nationalist and perhaps no longer really a Muslim.

CONCLUSION: THE PRODUCTION OF DIASPORIC SPACES

It is not only the mobility of people beyond national boundaries that transforms identity but the problematization of the nature of boundaries and borders that creates the possibility for, and may impose, a condition of post-nationality. This condition is marked by the production of 'diasporic public spheres' and 'nonterritorial principles of solidarity' (Appadurai, 1996: 147, 165). Badie (1995) argues that the transcendence of the nation-state means that territoriality can no longer be regarded as the prime regulator of the international order. The resultant 'disorder' is marked by 'the end of territories', by a transition from territory to space, or to 'aterritoriality' (Badie, 1995: 14). In the case of 'ethnoscapes', however, perhaps in a different way than for 'mediascapes', 'technoscapes' and other post-modern landscapes (Appadurai, 1996: 33), there continues to be a place for territory and geography. This is particularly clear in the production of diasporic spaces.

The breakup of the Soviet Union meant, among other things, that 'In December 1991, Soviet citizenship ceased to exist leaving 287 million people in need of a new identity' (IOM et al., 1996: 17). In addition to the effect on the millions inhabiting the ex-Soviet space, the shock-waves engendered by these critical changes have spread into very local situations around the world and have affected small and scattered populations, whose histories are connected in numerous ways to that geographical region. While the experience of many of these groups is sometimes of little consequence for global politics, they themselves experience it as momentous.

Shapiro (1994) suggests that an 'ethics of post-sovereignty' may be generated through privileging the 'moral geographies' of peoples whose histories have hitherto been marginalized. In the post-Soviet space, the current '164 ethno-territorial disputes and claims' (IOM et al., 1996: 4) indicate that 'The end of ideology and imposed centralization has meant the return of geography, just as it signals the return, rather than "the end" of history' (Hooson, 1994: 134). Ethnography further reveals that while transnationalism has certainly transformed identity politics making them more fluid and

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less bounded, the geographies upon which these identities are inscribed continue to exercise the coerciveness of territoriality.

For Circassians, more than the fall of Soviet communism per se, it is the sudden porousness of borders and accessibility of territories that had been largely closed to them, that has been of transformative importance to concepts of ethnic identity. While the collapse of powerful ideological systems and the apparatus that sustained them is dramatic, yet equally dramatic have been the struggles over borders and boundaries. For many Abkhasians, Chechens, Circassians, Daghestanians and Ossetians in Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Holland, Germany, the United States and so on, the accessibility of their 'homelands', together with the conflicts within and around them, has had a galvanizing effect. It has transformed them from minorities encapsulated within their respective states into self-conscious transnational diasporas which seek to re-interpret their history, their present spatial distribution, and their connections with their various localities as well as with the homeland. The North Caucasus is now an arena for a variety of transnational encounters that question and contest past and present alignments of community, identity, and loyalty.

When the homeland was inaccessible it formed a point of reference, an explanation for what made Circassians distinctive from others and similar to one another. It was perceived of as a space out of time, a space that stood for the timeless qualities of Circassian ethnicity. Furthermore, it stood for the immemorial past. Its geographical features, its boundaries and divides were vague and ill-defined. The encounter with the homeland has brought this space back into time and has made it into a territory. It has also changed its quality as a referent. From being a highly abstract point of origin that did not directly inform present-day conditions, the accessibility of the homeland means that any future scenario for the emergent diaspora must necessarily be formed, to some degree, in relation to the Caucasus. At this moment, to remain as scattered minorities appears as the end of community, either by 'becoming Arabs', 'becoming Turks' or 'remaining Muslims'.

All this supports Clifford's generalization that 'Diasporic language appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse' (Clifford, 1994: 311). Clifford points out that diasporic discourses are polythetic and that 'diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist' (ibid: 307). The examples of Circassian ethnic politics in Turkey and ethnicity as tribalism in Jordan show that minority discourses, though constructed in reference to a 'majority', are not exclusively nationalist either and are never unified. The interpenetration of minority and diaspora discourses, the way they inform and implicate each other, shows up in the narratives of individuals as they seek pathways to identity in the contemporary global order.

While stressing the multiple attachments of diaspora populations and their accommodation to host countries, Clifford attempts to widen the concept of 'diaspora' from connections 'articulated primarily through a real or symbolic

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homeland' (ibid: 306). Taking seriously, however, his suggestions to study 'specific, discrepent histories' (ibid: 302), 'roots *and* routes' (ibid: 308, emphasis in the original), 'travelling rather than dwelling' (ibid: 313) and 'the routing of diaspora discourses in specific maps/histories' (ibid: 319), indicates that the homeland cannot easily be disarticulated from diasporic circuits.

The homeland, for the Circassians, is now being produced through the routes that link it to the locations of the diaspora and the journeys and encounters that take place along these routes. While the transformation of the Caucasus from space to territory has made it accessible imaginatively, difficulties of transportation, visas, border crossings, residence permits and living conditions quickly dispel any romantic notions of an in-gathering. Furthermore, the fragmented and complex identities of the diaspora and the variety of motivations in the journeys to the homeland do not translate into a primordial ethno-nationalism. Still, the impact of the access of the homeland on the sense of collectivity and community is fundamental. The ethnic community is now visualized as comprising intersecting transnational networks and specific nodes, with the Caucasus itself presenting the main arena for interaction.

Such a view of 'globalization from below' (Clifford, 1994: 327) rescinds simplified distinctions between retrograde 'ethnic nationalism' and cosmopolitan 'civic nationalism'. Deviating from a self-acknowledged bias for North America and the Atlantic (Appadurai, 1996; Clifford, 1994) also reveals new arenas, sites and terrains of post-nationality. The life histories and trajectories of individuals travelling the routes to the Caucasus show the contemporary confluence of nationalism, ethnicity, commodification and globalization. This confluence is marked by disjunctures in ethnic identity, shifting classifications constructed by individuals as to their aims and motivations, and the material and discursive production of diasporic spaces.

As long as borders are tight and exclude physical and imaginative transgressions, the ideologies and politics of identity may be equally introverted. In an emergent transnational and post-national era, however, our understandings of nationalism and 'ethno-nationalism' must keep up with the times. Looking beyond and travelling beyond the national boundaries within which they had been (imaginatively) encapsulated, has had a particular impact on Circassians: while it has expanded the geography and space of their identity, it has also reinforced the sense of diversity by locality. The question that is now posed to the newly formed diaspora is not only 'how', but also '*where* can one be truly Circassian?'. Geography is transformed but loses none of its centrality in the definition of identity. The force of history, as constructed and mediated through memory and imagination, acts upon diasporas through specific geographies and territories. In the new geography of Circassian identity, the 'homeland' in the Caucasus emerges as a pivotal place. The globalization of the Caucasus with its social, economic and political complexities, presents the Circassians of the diaspora not only with revelations of their pasts but also with visions of their futures.

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Seteney Shami is a Jordanian anthropologist who obtained her degrees from the American University of Beirut and the University of California, Berkeley. From 1982 to 1995 she taught at Yarmouk University in Jordan, and was the founding chair of the Anthropology Department. She has been a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, Georgetown University, the University of Chicago and Stockholm University. She is currently director of MEAwards (The Population Council, 6A Mohamed Bahie Eddine Barakat St., Giza, Egypt), a regional research programme in population and the social sciences based in Cairo. Her research interests include ethnicity and nationalism, urban politics and population displacement in the Arab countries, Turkey and the North Caucasus.

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