

Being without Belonging: Seattle's Ahiska Turks and the Limitations of
Transnationalism for Stateless Diaspora Groups

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Abstract

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Within transnational and diaspora populations, there are subsets of groups that are stateless and have been displaced multiple times and have complex origins and migration histories. Existing frameworks of transnationalism and diaspora literatures assume national attachment and do not anticipate or properly theorize the complexity of stateless diasporas. The Ahıska Turks typify these limitations and can serve as a case study of the exclusion of groups with complex origins. The US-based Ahıska Turks are a segment of a diaspora and are refugees that have been through three displacements or forced migrations. The Ahıska Turks live in simultaneity, existing in the fluid and context-based social world between incorporation into the US and enduring transnational attachments outside of it. I use qualitative research methods to map the networks and relationships that comprise the social field of the Ahıska Turks in Seattle. The Ahıska Turks negotiate the identity and boundaries of their group in different social contexts by emphasizing language, culture, group history, and Ottoman roots. While the group has found ways of “being” transnational in their social field; they have a harder time “belonging”, in part because the path to belonging is neither straightforward, nor uniform in the absence of a nation-state and recognized nationality. This work demonstrates the relative invisibility of groups with complex origins and migration trajectories in the transnational paradigm. Additionally, this paper illustrates the impacts of sociopolitical instability, increased dispersion, and community fragmentation on the Seattle-based Ahıska Turkish identities and boundaries.

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Introduction

Early theorization of nationalism defined groups by their place of origin, citizenship, or residence and did not allow for flexibility or multiple attachments resulting from migration, changing political control and influence, or inter-group mixing. Criticisms of the classic approaches to nationalism have given rise to newer theoretical stances on issues of nationalism, group membership, and assimilation. Recognizing that individual and group identities are fluid, more than the sum of their parts, and are not formulaic has allowed for new theoretical perspectives and models of identity, ethnicity, and nationalism. The newer theories of migration, transnationalism, and diaspora have moved beyond limiting perspectives on nationalism to incorporate identities of individuals and groups broader than the citizenship or residence that they maintain.

Despite attempts to incorporate nuanced migrational trajectories into these newer perspectives, the scope is too narrow and obscures or makes invisible groups with complex and non-linear histories or identities. Diaspora groups, transnational immigrants, or minority populations within different nation-states all have complex origins and can illustrate the shortcomings of the theoretical models that intend to incorporate the complexity of their circumstances. The exclusion of many groups from theories and literatures on transnationalism and diasporas is a larger issue of invisibility and assumptions of national-belonging, which I am looking to highlight. Knowing how groups of complex origins structure, negotiate, and maintain identity serves to improve these theories. I use a singular group, the Ahıska Turks, to illustrate the exclusion of stateless groups with complex migration patterns in some current models of national attachment, group boundary making, and identity structuring.

The Ahıska Turks come from the Caucasus, a mountainous region surrounded by the Black and Caspian Seas, Russia, Turkey, and Iran. The bordering seas and mountainous interior have served to protect small groups from outsiders, fostering distinct enclaves of ethnic, linguistic, or religious distinction, making the Caucasus ethno-culturally complex (Zürcher 2009: 13). Numerous empires have attempted to incorporate this important and diverse region into their fold, influencing and complicating the layers of and claims to identities. Most recently the Soviet Union attempted to do so, adopting strategies of nation building that led to national and ethnic claims that sparked numerous post-Soviet wars (Zürcher 2009). To avoid the simplification of those groups involved in political conflict, Zürcher argues that nations and ethnic groups need to be deconstructed as collectives (2009: 40).

The Ahıska Turks: in Diaspora from the Caucasus

This paper examines the dialectical processes of ethnic identity and boundary negotiation in a singular group, the Ahıska Turks¹, who live in varying social contexts, some of them contentious. The Ahıska Turks are a diaspora group. In the nearly 70 years since the initial displacement from the Caucasus homeland in present day Georgia, the Ahıska Turks have been divided and displaced again and again as segments move or are moved to different nation-states. They are stateless and have a limited chance of return to their homeland in Georgia. There is a portion of this group living in the US as refugees from Russia, where they endured systematic and institutional violence and discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. The complexity of the Ahıska Turkish circumstances typifies those of many multiply-displaced groups and is exemplified in two passages, included below.

¹ My research is mindful that, while the Ahıska Turks are a category of people, I cannot assume that they are a group without interacting with them. Upon early research, I concluded the label of “group” is appropriate for the Ahıska Turks in Seattle and I discuss them as such. This label cannot be applied for all communities of Ahıska Turks worldwide.

Both excerpts are from an interview with two siblings in their 40s, Matt and Mary². The content of both quotations reveals the complexity of the group identity and the influences of social location and context. In short, these excerpts capture why this group is interesting for research and can further understandings of ethnicity and boundary making for groups with complex origins. First, Matt responds to a question about how his American co-workers understand his national and ethnic identity by dialoguing a sample encounter. Mary follows up with a narrative of a recent exchange, which she also dialogues.

Matt: Every time they ask, “What’s your nationality?” I say, “I am Turkish”

“Oh! You’re from Turkey?”

“No, I am not. I have never been in Turkey.”

“How come?”

“Well, because I was born in Uzbekistan, but my parents were in Georgia and they moved from Georgia to Uzbekistan. And I was born there, then to Russia, then to here.”

“Ok, so, who are you?”

“I am Turkish from Russia, but was born in Uzbekistan. That’s what I am.”

Mary: (*laughing*) Very international.

Interviewer: And then they probably don’t know where Uzbekistan is...

Mary: Some people, they didn’t know Uzbekistan, they ask “Pakistan?”

“No, not Pakistan. It’s very different, Pakistan and Uzbekistan.”

Yesterday, we were in Wal-Mart store, together [*she indicates her cousin visiting from Uzbekistan, also present*] and I told her [*the clerk*], ‘we bought too much presents’ and she ask me,

“Oh, you prepare to go [on] some trip?”

And I tell her “No, no, no, we buy present for her. She came from Uzbekistan.”

And she ask me, “Pakistan? Uzbekistan?” [*Mary laughs*]

Mary and Matt explain the complex and for many Americans, confusing, origins of their past and group history. Although Matt and Mary answered honestly about their origins and past locations of residence, it does not clarify *who* exactly they are to people who operate in a national or ethnic “groupist” mindset (Brubaker 2004).

² All names have been changed, for a full discussion of the process of naming see pages 29 and 30.

I followed up by asking Matt if being spread across many countries had impacted or affected the unity of the Ahıska Turks or their core values.

Interviewer: Do you think that, even though everyone is spread out, that the group values will still exist?

Matt: I think the main idea is to be [the] same no matter where you live. But in real life, I don't think they are same. Because, as I told you, living in Uzbekistan then living here [was different]; and [the] same thing in other countries. The place where you live makes [the] final adjustment because you live there. Here [are the] main rules, here is the way the government goes, the way that the law works. And if you're [a] good citizen then you have to follow them, right? I think that element makes [the] final adjustment, because there is something you can do here and some things you can't do there. In general, all Turks like to follow the basics.

Interviewer: You don't sound especially worried that the group will fall apart now it's spread around... and that's because of how you're raised?

Matt: Yeah, yep.

Interviewer: And so the hope is that, when your kids get older, they'll raise their kids the same way?

Matt: That's the hope.

Matt expresses a hope and belief that the values communicated to him during his upbringing, which he actively teaches his children, will foster continued social cohesion. However, he also concedes that being part of a new cultural and situational context has a major impact on how people interact in their social world. While Matt is not actively frightened of a loss of culture, he is aware of the possibility that life in the US will affect identity and boundaries. Matt and Mary's experiences typify those of transnational, diaspora groups; yet transnational and diaspora theories are unable to capture the reality of the Ahıska Turks and others. While the models of the transnational perspective strive for flexibility and openness to complex groups, they are founded on assumptions of easily defined and contained national or ethnic origins. In the coming sections I explain the aforementioned theoretical models, my research questions, the merits of the Ahıska Turks as a case study, and their group history. I then articulate my research methodology, findings, and a discussion of the findings, concluding with contributions to the field, other

groups with similar circumstances, implications of the research, and possible research going forward. Before further discussion, I must make a note of the nomenclature of the Ahıska Turks.

Nomenclature

Previous research on the group that I have so far referred to as the Ahıska Turks uses the term “Meskhetian Turks” instead.³ Both Meskheti and Ahıska refer to the region of their homeland in Georgia. “Meskhetian Turks” is a Soviet designation and is not preferred by the group, who are more likely to call themselves Ahıska Turks. “Meskhetian Turks” is used most commonly in previous research, media, and legal documents, stemming from the widespread use of it by Soviet authorities. “Meskhetian” is more likely to be used by those who see this group as Georgians who converted to Islam rather than as Turks who moved to the area at some point during the Ottoman Empire’s reign. “Ahıska Turks” emphasizes the Turkishness of the identity and is therefore preferred by the group (Aydingün, et al 2006).

Ahıska Turks have repeatedly had labels applied to them as parts of discriminatory or xenophobic policies at worst, and misunderstandings at best; meaning that group labeling is an important issue. In an effort to maintain the identity of my respondents as they wish to be defined and to capture their voices, I will use Ahıska Turk or Turk. However, when discussing previous research that used the term Meskhetian, I will use Meskhetian/Ahıska to be consistent with both naming conventions. It should be noted that use of the term Meskhetian is not considered offensive, only outdated and mismatched with in-group designations. Some group members were only vaguely aware of the Meskhetian label as connected to their group. For clarity’s sake, when

³ Meskhetian or Ahıska Turks are sometimes called Muslim Meskhetians, Muslim Georgians, or simply, Turks. Throughout their history, various official and unofficial designations have been applied to the group in an effort to further delegitimize their claims as an independent group with a distinct history, culture, and right to sovereignty. Some incorrect titles include Azerbaijanis, Uzbeks, or Tatars, which have resulted in inaccurate demographic understanding of the group’s population, spread, and migration history (Trier and Khanzhin 2007).

I discuss ethnic Turks from the Republic of Turkey, I make this distinction either by saying ethnic Turks, Turkish Turks, or by including the individual's nation-state of origin.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Groupism

Deconstructing collective groups requires the recognition that they are constructed at all. Brubaker distinguishes “groupism” as “the tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis” (2004: 8). Social constructionists are still guilty of groupism and reify groups by failing to differentiate them from categories. A group is a “mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity for concerted action... it should be clear that a category is not a group. It is at best a potential basis for group-formation” (Brubaker 2004: 12).

Andreas Wimmer (2008a) is one of the scholars redefining groups, ethnicity, boundaries, and nationalism. Wimmer's dense and comprehensive multi-level process model of ethnic boundary making accounts for the complexity of identities that are formed or maintained in the modern era. Wimmer argues against assuming that memberships in groups alone are criteria for a singular collective purpose or a signifier of social cohesion. He argues ethnic categories are socially constructed and shift with context, allowing individuals to assert agency and contest or enforce the best fitting “ethnic labels” (Wimmer 2008a: 981). For groups that are a bounded collectivity, their ethnic identity is arrived at through a dialectical exchange between how individuals conceive of themselves and what others believe they are (Nagel 1994: 154). Ethnic boundaries are negotiated by group members (Nagel 1994) and do not necessarily foster separate

groups when there is mutual agreement on who is in or out (Wimmer 2008a: 981).

Understanding the dialectical process of identity and boundary negotiation in groups undergoing social change can clarify the influence of varying social context, particularly in social environments of conflict or contention.

Transnationalism and Diasporas

Perspectives on immigration have undergone an overhaul from the classic approaches that rigidly adhered to national and linear assimilationist definitions. The new paradigm of transnationalism is more flexible and captures the nuances and complexities of the events and experiences of immigration. Transnationalism emphasizes the complex social relations of immigrants who maintain connections to the places of origin and settlement (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1995, 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Portes et al. 1999; Faist 2002; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). Immigrants today are increasingly described as transnational because their daily social actions and relationships span international borders and their national orientation is usually towards more than one nation-state (Glick Schiller, et al. 1999: 73).

Modern immigration trends and globalization are cited as the reason for increased diasporas and transnational migrants (for a critique of these claims, see Friedman 2005). The meaning and scope of diasporas have also shifted with the transnational paradigm. Once defined as a few distinct groups with specific experiences of exile, such as the Jews or Armenians (Cohen 1997), diasporas are changing in definition and scope. The new criteria for diasporic groups are those with an enduring (although not necessarily permanent) exile, a presence abroad, or a loss of homeland. They are spread through two or more territories and communicate with other transnational segments of their group (Van Hear 1998; see Safran 1991 for another option

of diaspora criteria). In previous conceptions of diasporas, the homeland was always associated with nostalgia, positive, or current memories. In new literatures, the homeland can be remembered for social limitations or repressions too.

Diasporas are a place for cultural molding and “hybridic” identities, making them better at capturing ethnic groups’ realities than other labeling options, such as transnational. Diaspora can be a preferable descriptor for certain group usually called refugees or transnationals (Weingrod and Levy 2005). Invoking the term diaspora can mean a rejection of “the path to assimilation into the dominant majority” (Weingrod and Levy 2005: 17). The Ahıska Turks fit the reformed definitions of a diaspora, which describes their circumstances better than refugees and transnational. Much like transnationalism, diasporas challenge and transform the exclusivity of nation-states and have the potential to move society towards recognition and acceptance of differences (Pattie 2005). As a concept for describing transnationals, diaspora better explains the Ahıska Turks global spread, but is guilty of groupism by likening the diaspora as a bound collective. I use diaspora to convey the spread of this group but do not make assumptions about the full diaspora (meaning those Turks in other locations) having the same processes of identities claims making and boundary negotiation.

Simultaneity: Being and Belonging in a Social Field

In line with the arguments of other transnationalism scholars, Levitt and Glick Schiller reject that society is bounded exclusively within the borders of the nation-state and reformulate the concept of society⁴ to steer away from nation as the ultimate categorization. This allows migrants to exist easily within “multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields” without incurring loss of importance or participation (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1003). These

⁴ In lieu of the vague concept of society, Somers (1994: 626) describes the “relational setting” of the actor to capture the ways that institutions, public narratives and social practices are related and create a place where identity is formed.

scholars argue nation-states and transnationalism are not opposite or contradictory. They reconcile the existence of both through their proposal of simultaneity. Simultaneity is characterized as the center point on a gauge between incorporation into the new state and enduring transnational attachment. Simultaneity is fluid, context based, and represents the combination of assimilation and transnational connection (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1003).

Simultaneity is possible for transnational and diaspora groups of complex origins. However, the very definition of the term makes a nationalist assumption in its implication of membership and attachment to a sending country. Many groups live within the physical borders of nation-states that do not reflect, include, accept, or validate their origins or national attachments, if they have them at all. The assumptions of simultaneity are a poor fit for certain groups like the Ahiska Turks, but the approach it offers is useful in structuring research.

The theoretical stance of simultaneity requires a social field approach of study. The social field is “a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1009). The above definition incorporates Bourdieu’s description of the social field as social relationships with fluid boundaries that are structured and enforced by those struggling for social position (Jenkins 1992: 86). Social relationships vary by site and social network; therefore individual researchers must operationalize the social field of their work through an analysis of the strength and influence of the embedded networks and transnational relationships (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

When analyzing a given social field, the researcher must recognize and distinguish between ways of being and ways of belonging. Ways of being are the actual social relationships and practices that individuals engage in, as opposed to the identities associated with their actions

(which individuals either choose or have attributed to them). Meanwhile, ways of belonging are practices that signal or enact an identity that shows conscious connections to a group that are concrete, not symbolic (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1010). In other words, transnational ways of being mean that an individual has social relationships and practices that span borders and they only become a transnational way of belonging if the individual recognizes and highlights this as part of who they are. An individual's belonging is similar to the dialectical process of ethnic identity negotiation that Nagel describes. Ethnic identity and boundaries are determined by establishing who is a member, what their designated ethnic category is, and then the ascription of that category by the self and others (1994: 154).

Constructing Identity, Boundaries, and Traumas through Narrative

Individuals have agency and choice when it comes to identifying with an ethnicity, but they are also constrained by social structure. As Nagel explains, “ethnic identity is *both* optional and mandatory, as individual choices are circumscribed by the ethnic categories available at a particular time and place (1994: 156).” The location and meaning of ethnic boundaries are negotiated and transformed regularly by group members and outsiders. Ethnicity itself is built from identity and culture, which are the basis from which boundaries are constructed and meaning is produced (Nagel 1994).

Wimmer's (2008a) multilevel process model on the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries delineates how groups construct and maintain boundaries. He explains under what conditions boundaries shift (through expansion or contraction) or modify (through transvaluation, positional moving, or blurring) (Wimmer 2008b). Expansion and contraction of boundaries occur as groups react to their context and setting. Because the Ahiska Turks do not have access to a central political arena and their “radius of action remains confined to immediate

social spaces” we might expect them to adopt strategies of boundary contraction (Wimmer 2008b: 1036). Or, because their group is in diaspora and spread out, we could expect to see expansion to shift categorical distinction towards inclusivity so all Ahıska Turks in all social locations could claim group membership.

Wimmer’s model (2008b) outlines how changes in boundaries can result from three major events in the field of characteristics: exogenous shifts, endogenous shifts, and exogenous drifts. Boundaries are both made and remade from exogenous shifts, which are macro to micro events, such as forced migration. And boundaries are unmade by endogenous shifts, defined as micro to macro events like voluntary mass migration. In contrast, the exogenous drift occurs when some actors employ different strategies of boundary making from their peer groups. This tactical move influences an unmaking or remaking of boundaries for segments of the group, but not necessarily the whole; such as in the varying forms or rates of adjustment across generations in a new social context, which Zhou’s research shows can cause tension (2001). As shown in the examples, the shifts and drifts that can trigger changes in boundaries may stem from culturally traumatic events, which impacts and shapes collective identity (Alexander et al. 2004).

Cultural traumas are socially constructed. An event is not inherently traumatic, even if we suspect that it could be trauma generating, which Sztompka calls “traumatogenic” events (2004: 158). Events that have the potential to cause trauma are only traumatic once a group imagines or remembers it as such (Alexander 2004). Cultural traumas have the ability to shape collective identity and therefore collective boundaries. Andrews enforces this relationship with the claim that collective political narratives are “inherited” and “reshaped” by individuals to adapt to current social conditions in their surroundings (Andrews 2007: 208, read from Nesbitt-Larking 2011: 8).

Spector-Mersel (2010) discusses how narratives and phenomena will construct, not reflect, reality. The narratives and stories invented in this process give individual actors agency and meaning, and also allows them to form personal identities. Narratives are not incorporated into the self directly; they are mediated through social institutions. National, community, or familial identities are created from common or public narratives. Actors comprehend what a “worthy” life is from narratives and they align their goals and aspirations with community standards of what is or is not good based on common narratives (Spector-Mersel 2010: 208).

Somers cautions that failure to incorporate phenomena or experiences, such as cultural traumas, into existing narratives or symbolic representations can result in powerlessness or despair (1994). Therefore, narratives can serve as the link to comprehending how trauma can influence group identity and boundaries. The absence of a nation-state makes these processes less transparent. Narratives are the bridge between these obscured processes of construction in group of complex origins and the expression of their boundaries. Individuals are likely to employ narratives to make sense of trauma producing events that occurred or are occurring in their relational setting, particularly if the event resulted in the group’s complex origins and transnational attachments.

Research Questions

The Ahıska Turks' social field and narratives are a case for understanding the fit of the theoretical models of identity and boundary construction as well as capturing the practices of simultaneity in diaspora communities of complex origins. Using qualitative research methods and analysis, I take an initial look into the social field, simultaneity, and narratives of the US-based Ahıska Turks, guided by the following questions:

- What networks and relationships comprise the social field of the Ahıska Turkish population in the US?
- How have potentially traumatic events of the past significantly impacted group identity and boundaries?
- How do the US-based Ahıska Turks be and belong in their social field?
- How do cross sections of identity, such as age, generation, gender, and/or culture fluency, affect practices of simultaneity, enactment of boundaries, and orientation toward the larger categories of Ahıska Turks outside the US?

The next section substantiates how the Ahıska Turks illustrate the short-comings of transnational and diaspora models of belonging for groups of complex origins. The justification is followed by a brief but comprehensive history of the Ahıska Turks. Knowledge of Ahıska group history and culture is necessary in order to understand the narratives used to convey information about experience, boundaries, and transnational social fields.

Research Community: the Ahıska Turks

Within diaspora populations, there are subsets of groups that have been displaced multiple times, from homeland to an initial host country and from that first host country to a new host country. Such a migration pathway is one example of what I have been referring to as “complex origins”. The Ahıska Turks have complex origins, the majority of whom have been displaced twice (and for a segment of the population, thrice). The initial forced displacement from their homeland Georgia in 1944 brought them to their initial host site in Uzbekistan, where they were then displaced again after 45 years, in 1989, to a second host site in Southern Russia (or in some cases to other former Soviet states). A sizeable portion of the Russia-located segment of this population has immigrated as refugees to a third host site, the United States, from 2004-6. The Ahıska Turkish group history of displacement and diaspora are wrapped up in the socio-political climate of World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Before further exploring group history, I will first discuss why this group is an appropriate community with which to work on research centered on the narratives of trauma and transnational simultaneity.

Previous Scholarly Work on the Ahıska Turks

The Meskhetian/Ahıska Turks have been the focus of a handful of previous academic works, which include (but are not limited to) an edited volume where each chapter details a different destination country or theme of diaspora and a focus on their being at a “crossroads” (Trier and Khanzhin 2007). There are also a small number of published articles covering the following topics: summarization of group experiences (Aydingün, et al. 2006); description of population transfer (Payin 1992); and a legalistic detailing their ethnic discrimination and resettlement (Swerdlow 2006). Additional articles discuss different aspects of identity, including their exclusion from citizenship in Russia (Koriouchkina 2009) and the construction of identity

in Southern Russia (Tomlinson 2005; Kuznetsov 2007). The Meskhetian/Ahıska Turkish conceptions of home, homeland, and repatriation, are explored both generally by Uehling (2007), and in Azerbaijan by Ray (2000). Finally, an unpublished Master's Thesis discusses the ethnic identity of the Tucson-based refugee group and has similar findings to my research, to be discussed at greater length in the findings section of this paper (Coşkun 2009, included with permission from the author).

The Ahıska Turks are a group of these complex origins in the midst of major changes. Prior to the United States refugee program, the group's central focus was reunification and repatriation in the homeland. The move to the US represents a further fracturing of the group but also increased security for individuals and the group through opportunities such as education, citizenship, and stable employment. The move to the US has also complicated the once popular vision of repatriation. Migration, assimilation, and abandonment of repatriation to the homeland are exogenous and endogenous shifts that do not affect all Ahıska Turks equally. These factors have the potential to impact the group boundaries and the direction of their political aspirations depending on specific social circumstances. The different experiences and opportunities of each group of the Ahıska Turks can represent an endogenous drift within the wider population. Such shifts and drifts could lead to contracting boundaries that break categories into more specific groups, or alternatively, expanded boundaries to account for the range of social contexts of the entire category.

Another kind of an endogenous drift especially pronounced in US setting is that generations have differential rates of incorporation and assimilation. While the entire Ahıska Turkish community has been a minority community in their relational setting; each generation has been born, raised, or come-of-age into a different social context than their parents. Meaning

there is great variation in cultural fluency. Generational differences present an added layer of complexity and possibly tension in the formation of relations with peers and social space (Zhou 2001).

The Ahıska Turks embody transnationalism. It is common for families to stay connected while spread across several nation-states. They are also firmly a diaspora group; the host locations of the Ahıska Turks are mainly countries of the Former Soviet Union, plus the United States and Turkey. They have not lived together as a population in one place since being expelled from their homeland, which they are unable to return to because of obstructive policies by the Georgian government. In each of the countries where the Ahıska Turks have lived, they have incorporated aspects of those cultures and developed attachments to them. Such processes of assimilation make their origins and identity complex and not uniform across the Ahıska population. Although the Ahıska Turks' specific story is unique, the geo-political trends that lead to their circumstances are not. There are numerous other groups that are in diaspora and do not belong to a nation-state or have not constructed a national identity from their ethnic identity.

Transnational, diaspora, or minority groups excluded from nationalist discourses are cases that problematize the fit of models meant to move beyond nation-state groupings and incorporate their complexity. Exclusion from these models reveals both the depth of their invisibility and the importance of using such transnational outliers to better map the reality of the social world. Continuing to break away from the deterministic, primordialist perspective on nationalism, ethnicity, and identity requires continued research on groups who regularly negotiate their social location, construct and re-construct their identity, and revise their group boundaries in changing social contexts. The coming section articulates the Ahıska history and to show how they continually have had to construct and reconstruct identity boundaries.

Ahıska Turkish History

The Ahıska Turks are spread, in significant numbers, across nine countries. Each country that they live in has a unique set of political, social, historical, and cultural factors that create a new set of challenges and circumstances for them as a minority population (for a detailed series of research pieces on their experiences in each country, see Trier and Khanzhin 2007). While the majority of Ahıska Turks dwell within host countries in the Former Soviet Union, Turkey, or the US, a small minority was able to return to the Ahıska homeland in Georgia in 1999 (Sumbadze 2007). The estimated 2006 population break-down by country is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1.

2006 Estimated Population Numbers of Meskhetian/Ahıska Turks, By Country⁵

350-400,000	<i>Worldwide</i>
150,000	Kazakhstan
90-110,000	Azerbaijan
70-90,000	Russia
50,000	Kyrgyzstan
40,000	Turkey
15,000	Uzbekistan
13,000 ⁶	United States
10,000	Ukraine
600- 1,000	Georgia

(Aydingün, Harding, Hoover, Kuznetsov, and Swerdlow 2006)

⁵ These numbers are a rough estimate because, as previously stated, the Ahıska Turkish population has been difficult to account for due to the flattening of ethnic categories in the Soviet census.

⁶ This number represents the 2007 estimate, communicated to me personally by Steven Swerdlow, who worked on the Meskhetian/Ahıska Turk refugee program. The differences in the 2006 citation's estimate of 11,000 can be explained through the fact that the refugee program was still open in 2006, but closed in 2007. The 2007 number is likely to be out date because this group, like many refugee groups, has experienced a jump in fecundity upon arrival in the US.

Displaced Populations of the Caucasus during the Soviet Union

From the beginning of the Soviet Union through the death of Stalin in 1953, roughly six million people from the lands of the USSR were deported to Central Asia, Siberia, and the Far East. These millions of involuntarily resettled people comprise twenty different ethnic groups. Of these twenty groups displaced in population transfers, eight were deported in their entirety. The reasons for this vary from alleged “preventative measures” (Trier and Khanzhin 2007) against “untrustworthy populations” (Aydingün, et al. 2006) to else as collective punishment against “collaboration” with neighboring countries that the Soviet Union was fighting or planned to fight. However, “collaboration” in this case was committed through sharing ethnic ties across borders and not through formal means (Trier and Khanzhin 2007).

Exile from Ahıska Homeland in Georgia

On November 15, 1944, a secret resolution (see the annex of Trier and Khanzhin 2007 for the document in full) ordered the deportation of the entire Muslim population of the Georgian regions of Meskheta, Javakheti, and Ajara to Central Asia (Trier and Khanzhin 2007). With only hours warning, the Ahıska Turks were ordered by Russian soldiers to pack a week’s worth of belongings while they were “temporarily” moved from their homes before being allowed to return. The deported populations were loaded onto cattle cars of a slow, industrial train and embarked on an 18-day train journey that left the majority of them in Eastern Uzbekistan, although some families were dropped off in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan en route where they remain today. Over 92,300 Ahıska Turks made this initial train journey, and the total number of deportees was 120,000 after 30,000 soldiers fighting for the Soviet Army were also deported from active duty. Thousands of people died on the train journey, with estimates ranging up to 17,000 (Trier and Khanzhin 2007; Aydingün, et al. 2006). My interview respondents who

survived recall the freezing cold, the tiny coal furnace in the center of each car, and the attempts they made to keep warm by stuffing newspaper into the cracks between the planks of the wooden train walls.

Upon arrival to Uzbekistan, the deportees were unloaded into housing structures, dubbed ‘special settlements’ where they were confined to limited areas and guarded by local authorities; described by my respondents as imprisonment. Refusal to obey local authorities and follow rules of confinement was punishable by 15-20 years hard labor in a Gulag (Trier and Khanzhin 2007) or physical violence, as my respondent Osman described witnessing. The first eight years in Uzbekistan were the most difficult, worsened by the poverty in the region.

New freedoms were allowed for the Ahıska Turks in 1953, after the death of Stalin and execution of Lavrentiy Beria, the person in charge of the mass deportations of the 1940’s and the head of NKVD (the KGB predecessor). The changes to the circumstances improved for all populations that were transferred and there were renewed hopes of returning to the homeland. By February of 1956, five of the eight groups deported in their entirety had been allowed to repatriate to their homelands⁷, while the Volga Germans, the Crimean Tatars, and the Ahıska Turks have remained displaced and in diaspora. There are works that draw parallels between the experiences of the Meskhetian/Ahıska Turks and Crimean Tatars (Uehling 2007), future work could make further comparisons in the negotiations of boundaries, being, and belonging in these three diasporas.

Although the Ahıska Turks were no long confined to special settlements, they were not able to return to Georgia and they were still stateless and struggling for social viability in their new host country. Despite these hardships, they were able to find relative economic success and

⁷ The Karachai, Kalmyks, Balkars, Chechens, and Ingushs were able to return to their homelands around this time (Trier Khanzhin 2007).

stability and integrate into the Uzbek economy and culture (Aydingün, et al. 2006; Chikadze 2007).

Impending Collapse of the Soviet Union and Loss of Stability in Uzbekistan

While the Ahıska Turks managed to find some security in Uzbekistan, they still had fewer rights than the ethnic Uzbek population. Relations between Uzbeks and Ahıska Turks varied, most of the respondents in this research report issues and tensions while focusing on an overall accepting population, bonded together in their shared Turkic identity. The languages and aspects of the culture, particularly that pertaining to Sunni Islam, have commonalities. For some Uzbeks, commonalities bridged the groups and provided unity, for others it did little to appease xenophobic and nativist feelings of anger at the Ahıska Turks, particularly as nationalism increased. Indeed, these feelings led to conflict and tension, which persisted before coming to an explosive and riotous climax in early June of 1989. During these events, 103 people died, 1,011 people were injured⁸, and 757 houses, 27 state properties and 274 vehicles were burned (Chikadze 2007:119; Aydingün, et al. 2006). The result of the pogrom was the immediate evacuation by the Russian army of 17,000 Ahıska Turks to Central Russia (Trier and Khanzhin 2007; Aydingün, et al. 2006) and a full 50,000 migrating to Russia by September (Chikadze 2007).

The pogrom was prior to the disbanding of the Soviet Union into fifteen distinct republics (including Uzbekistan), but the policy changes led to large-scale nationalist movements in many republics were already in place. The Uzbek nationalist movement began in the early 1980's (Hale 2007: 105). Such nationalist movements were particularly threatening to the numerous ethnic minorities within the contested borders of the Soviet Republics, because the majority of

⁸ Not all were Turks, a sizeable portion of the victims were Uzbek.

groups often use ethnicity as the basis of nationalist unification and claim to territory (Zürcher 2007; Hale 2008). Some of these nationalist movements resulted in wars, while others resulted in conflicts on scale of riots like the one against the Ahıska Turks in Uzbekistan.

There are four major versions explaining why the pogrom occurred, which Chikadze (2007: 119-120) describes as: 1) escalation of vandalism from a May incident, 2) economic reasons connected to Turkish economic success, 3) a power struggle between criminal mafia groups (both Turkish and Uzbek) or 4) a nationalist power struggle resulting from the loosening of Moscow's grip on its republics. There are also political explanations of the violence, which vacillate, depending on your political perspective, between an anti-government plot and alternatively, a government plot (Chikadze 2007: 120). The majority of my respondents subscribed to the second explanation and stated simply the violence was because the Uzbeks were "jealous". Only one family explained that it was a Russian government plot where the Russians corralled the Turks and incited the Uzbeks to act violently. In this reframing of the pogrom, the Russian government had been hoping to spur mass migration of Ahıska Turks to Southern Russia so the Turks could use their agricultural and mechanical skills to develop the poor region.

While tracing reasons for riots is an entire area of research in and of itself (for more, see Horowitz 2001), the inclusion of this historical and traumatic event is meant to illustrate that the Ahıska Turks in Uzbekistan lived in uneasy circumstances and suffered greatly when power shifted, nationalism increased, and the Soviet Union fractured. Minority populations not fully secure or integrated into their host society are at risk in times of uncertainty and social change. Recognition of this instability was allegedly part of Soviet government's rationale for the second transfer of the Ahıska Turks to Russia in the wake of the Uzbekistan pogrom. However, few of

the subsequent actions of Russian authorities reflect a genuine concern for the well-being of the Ahıska Turks. On the contrary, the circumstances of the Turks in Southern Russia reflect systematic institutional discrimination, and the pronounced lack of security because of their statelessness.

Institutional Discrimination in Southern Russia

The regions of Russia where the Ahıska Turks emigrated are just north of the Caucasus and their Georgian homeland. Of the Ahıska Turks in Southern Russia, those in the state of Krasnodar faced a set of social conditions that have been described as a “soft ethnic cleansing” (Aydingün, et al. 2006). The Russian-nationalist, xenophobic political leadership in the state of Krasnodar took measures to systematically enforce the statelessness of its minority populations, including the Turks. A particularly striking example of the disenfranchisement was described to me, through a translator, by Osman, who was in his 70s and born in the Ahıska homeland, then part of Russia. After being denied an identity card with “Turk” listed as the nationality and being repeatedly told, “there are no Turks in Russia” by authority figures; Osman brought in his Russian birth certificate with “Nationality: Turk” printed on it as evidence for his case. The document was torn away from him by the authorities and not returned.

By actively working to publicize the group as “illegal migrants” that threatened Slavic livelihood, Krasnodar officials enforced a Soviet-era system of residency permits, without which the Ahıska Turks and others were barred access to owning property, having identification documents or passports, working legally, obtaining healthcare or social security benefits, attending institutions of higher education, and registering births, marriages, and deaths (Swerdlow 2006). Other active efforts of discrimination include implementing classroom segregation, passing legal ordinances that punished others for the hiring Ahıska Turk. Officials

also influenced xenophobic Cossack paramilitary groups to adopt tactics of vigilante control, including raids and random acts of violence against private citizens, as well as the regular corralling of Ahıska Turks for identification checks, harassment, and intimidation (Swerdlow 2006; Aydingün, et al. 2006). Narratives of such power displays and random acts of violence were shared by most respondents.

The already once displaced group actively sought refuge and asylum from dozens of countries. In 2000, the US offered refugee status to the Ahıska Turks living in Krasnodar specifically (and not other regions of Southern Russia) on the rationale that they were not involved in illegal activities, were well educated, and had skill sets in manufacturing and agriculture. However, the standards for admittance into the program were strict and only about 13,000 refugees came to the US from 2004 to 2006. They currently reside across 35 states (Swerdlow 2006; Aydingün, et al. 2006). The community members who did not qualify to emigrate, or opted to stay in Russia, continue to endure statelessness and the hardships of being a targeted community. Those remaining have the added disadvantage diminished numbers and visibility and therefore less representation and increased insecurity.

Anecdotal reports indicate that the depressed economic climate and shift in population demographics has worsened the degree and severity of discrimination in Southern Russia. One of my respondents, Rayanna, described a recent scenario that shows this. She explained that the local government had prior knowledge of the heavy floods in July 2012, which made international news. Authorities refrained from disseminating warning that heavy overnight rains could cause the rivers to flood. Hundreds of people drowned in their sleep and the damage was extensive. The Russian government provided aid to the region unevenly, favoring the Cossacks over Turkish or other minority groups. This kind of discrimination is routine. Rayanna's

description of this event and subsequent government inaction is supported by international news sources; the New York Times ran three articles describing the floods and the nativist fear-mongering by local Cossack politicians (Herszenhorn July 2012; Barry July 2012, August 2012).

Methodology

Given the limited scholarship on the Ahıska Turks, there is much to be gained from sociological research conducted with this community. Research on the Ahıska Turks will add to group-specific knowledge, as well as make contributions to transnational and diaspora literatures, particularly concerning the limitations of these literatures for stateless, displaced, and complex origin groups. Research focusing the Ahıska Turks in the United States is especially important given that there is virtually no published scholarship on this group since their arrival to the US, beyond Swerdlow's (2006) legal detailing of their discrimination and resettlement.

My research draws from the group of a few hundred families that were relocated to the Seattle metropolitan area.⁹ This small community came to Seattle as legal refugees; entitling them to six months of financial assistance, initial housing, English language classes, and the ability to gain citizenship after five years of residency. These social services are significant improvements in the social and political inclusion of the Ahıska Turks. The US arguably represents their most stable living situation since the 1944 displacement, making it likely that this group will remain settled in the US, if not the Seattle-area specifically. Washington state ranks in the top five for numbers of refugees per person in the state and the Seattle area has a significant number of immigrants and refugees¹⁰ and services for these groups (Coşkun, et al.

⁹ The research discussed in this paper was conducted with the permission and approval of the Institutional Review Board at the author's university.

¹⁰ In a 2004 report by the Brookings Institution, Seattle ranked 5th on a list of refugee intake cities and was cited as a new refugee and immigrant destination (Singer and Wilson 2007).

2010). It is also one of the top secondary settlement locations, meaning refugees and immigrants leave their initial host city for Seattle after living in the US for some time.

The navigation of social spaces is nuanced and difficult to map. Levitt and Glick Schiller articulate that researchers need to map and analyze the social field that they are researching prior to conducting further research. Although there are multiple ways of examining the social field of a particular group, Levitt and Glick Schiller discuss the particular strengths and merits of ethnography (2004). Participant observation and interviews can “document how persons simultaneously maintain and shed cultural repertoires and identities, interact within a location and across its boundaries, and act in ways that are concert with or contradict their values over time (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004: 1013).” Given that narratives are a likely tool for conveying the impact of events and context on identity and boundaries, qualitative data acquisition and analysis is the most appropriate approach to research with the Ahıska Turks.

Data Acquisition and Analysis

I entered the research community with a general awareness of the Ahıska Turks’ tumultuous history and an academically and theoretically informed stance on why that history might affect group experiences today. However, to minimize the bias and expectations I bring into the field sites and to identify important and recurring aspects of cultural identities as they play out, I take a grounded theory approach to my field sites (Charmaz 2001). Grounded theory informed the approach I took with interviewing and coding; analytic categories emerge from the data and shaped further data collection and interviews were semi-structured (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). In order to build the interview protocol and focus my research, I conducted a brief pilot study, which consisted of a meeting with Jeff, a friend and advocate of the Seattle Ahıska

community who is of Turkish national origin. Jeff brought me on two initial extended family visits as an introduction to the community and where he served as translator.¹¹

From the pilot study, I began a snowball sample that led to interviews with more families, developing and honing my focus and protocol based on their responses. This adaptive process allowed me to obtain the richest data and responses from the community as I began to understand their social field and perspectives on their community. Outside of Ahıska Turkish community members, I also had a handful of interviews with other advocates of the community to broaden and deepen my understanding of the group's past experiences that were less likely to come up in interviews, such as the process of applying for refugee status or the reception into the local communities of Turkish immigrants from Turkey. In total, I interviewed fifteen people, attended several community events, and acquired nearly 150 pages of field notes, 100 of which were transcriptions of interviews from audio recordings.

I relied on three primary methods of gathering data; participant-observation, individual interviews, and family interviews. Participant-observation took place at a variety of field sites such as community and cultural events and celebrations, as well as in-home family visits with community members. Participant-observation of family and community gatherings allows me to develop a sense of the subjects in their daily lives and environments. I am able to take notes on physical space, cultural practices/repertoires, interactional dynamics (both interpersonal and between persons and culture) and finally, I am able to witness how my subjects carry themselves and interact in their communities. Observations within the community are in contrast to their interactions with me as a researcher and outsider, which provided important insight into their

¹¹ During the pilot study I realized that the Ahıska Turks have an orientation towards Turkey and it would be difficult for me to sort out the meanings of Turkish identity as separate from Turkey if a Turkish Turk was translating. As a result, I relied on Ahıska youth to translate or used a non-Turkish American fluent in Turkish translator.

negotiations with social spheres and boundaries and switching of repertoires. Observations alone are not enough to understand identities and how they are navigated. Directly asking subjects how they navigate their transnational social space developed my specific understanding of Ahıska being and belonging.

Individual interviews with members of the Ahıska community were less common than the family interview, and more often were employed in follow-up after family interviews. Most individual interviews occurred with people who have worked with the Ahıska Turkish community in the US and could provide a broader context and different framework for their experiences in the US.

The majority of data comes from family interviews. They are small, group interviews conducted with multiple family members in the same time and place, often in their homes. While I suggested meeting in coffee shops or libraries, I always allowed the respondent to select the place of interview. Because Turkic culture firmly enforces hospitality, every interview request resulted in an invite into the homes of the respondents, which naturally gave rise to the family interview and richer field notes of observations. These family interviews were group conversations guided by the interview protocol and centered around meals, which were important sources of understanding the cultural orientation of my hosts.¹² In accordance with cultural traditions and polite social manners, I often brought a small gift such as a box of chocolates or cookies.

¹² My own cultural knowledge in understanding the orientation of Turkic and Ahıska Turkish cultural repertoires come from having lived in Turkey for five months and, more importantly, an intensive language and culture course in Uzbek, courtesy of a US Department of Education FLAS fellowship. These experiences have helped me interact respectfully and perceptively in the Ahıska culture and make note of their customs and orientation. Additionally, it granted me the language ability to follow along, roughly, with my respondents before translation. This enabled me to both double check the translation and also to understand which words they used to describe themselves as a group (e.g. nation and people) and how they differentiated from other groups, such as Turks from Turkey.

The merit of a group interview format within a family is three-fold. First, it allows for the inclusion of the voices of the elderly community members who do not speak English but have younger family members who are able to translate for them. This allows for a more natural and comfortable form of translation than with a formal translator. Second, it gives younger children the ability to be included in the conversation in a safe and comfortable environment, and allows them to easily remove themselves from the conversation too. Third, it allows me to understand the intersections of age, generation, and gender on perspectives, ways of being and belonging, and, most interestingly, on interactional dynamics.

The data from multi-generational family interviews provided insight on family interactions perspectives. Given that the passing on of cultural repertoires and collective history are both informal and not organized, points of contention or disagreements concerning historical events or drawn conclusions are to be expected, which added to my understandings of the social field within family units. For example, a husband and wife disagreeing about the importance or meaning of “homeland” or the behaviors of youth as they listen and react to stories of grandparents or even whom the family defers to for an answer to a question are all important pieces of data, along with the actual verbalized response.

The data that informs my conclusions and understanding of the Seattle Ahiska social world is gathered directly and indirectly. In addition to interviews, participation, follow-up emails, and phone conversations were all data that were directly acquired. Indirect data comes from observations of interaction, customs, cultural practices, and even public relics such as Facebook profiles, blogs, and YouTube videos recommended to me by respondents. These indirect sources of data are especially useful in understanding being and belonging of different community members, as well as the different avenues of simultaneity practices and

performances. Much like narratives, indirect data sources allow individuals to locate themselves in a complex and layered relational setting when direct verbal expression would be difficult, particularly for English Language Learners and recent immigrants to the United States.

All data from direct and indirect sources were compiled into field notes with interview transcripts and contributed to my understandings of the group, guided my interview protocol, and informed my formal coding scheme. I used open coding to discover the themes of my data and the mechanisms and processes of identity negotiations. I noted when narratives were used to convey these processes. The themes I identified are used to develop a focused coding scheme (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011).

Findings

All names have been changed and many pseudonyms were chosen by the respondents. Choosing names increases agency and voice and aids in understanding my respondents' orientation toward naming conventions. Pseudonym choices range from American names to traditional Turkish to traditional Muslim names¹³. If there was an interesting story attached to a respondent's name or nickname, I tried to preserve the meaning of their naming by choosing an analogous pseudonym. For instance, Mehmet abbreviates this Turkish given name to Matt, an Americanized nickname that sounds like part of his full name. Similarly, Matt's youngest son, who was born in the US, was named by his grandfather according to traditional practice. The grandfather chose the name of a city in Turkey that sounds similar to a popular American name; which is how Turks and Americans referred to this young child. An analogous pseudonym for the child would be a given name Denizli, (after the Turkish city) who goes by Deniz, pronounced

¹³ Traditional Muslim names are not necessarily mutually exclusive from traditional Turkish names, but they have separate origin and are distinct.

Dennis. Matt expressed delight that his family was able to adhere to tradition and still use a name that is recognizable and familiar to Americans because he could honor traditional culture while incorporating and blending aspects of new culture into it.

Naming conventions are just one example of how American culture is being incorporated into Ahıska Turkish customs. Indeed, there are small cultural clues throughout the Ahıska repertoires that reveal how the group has picked up cultural practices and ways of being from each of the locations they have lived in. An expert on both Caucasian and Central Asian cultures who worked as a human rights lawyer on this case communicated their surprise, when first meeting Ahıska Turks, at how Central Asian the Ahıska cultural orientation was. At the end of year celebration at the Turkish language school, the young children on stage receiving awards greeted congratulatory handshakes from Turkish immigrants from Turkey in the traditional Central Asian fashion, with their left hand across their abdomen and with a slight bow.

Narratives

The semi-structured design of the interview protocol meant that respondents had a considerable amount of freedom in deciding how to answer questions. The use of narratives, individual or public, to explain group experiences was common in all interviews. Public narratives were especially utilized when conveying events of discrimination or trauma, usually told as happening to a generic Turk, not someone personally known to the interviewee. Taking a narrative approach to explain events conveys trauma as well as group values and characteristics, both of which establish the location and strength of group boundaries. Narratives are a tool for revealing how exogenous events impact group boundaries.

Despite being forth-coming about wanting to meet with Ahıska Turks about their past and their experiences in the US, my respondents often expressed some confusion about what I

wanted to know, not seeing their group history as especially noteworthy or interesting. This lack of clarity about my interest resulted in the interesting finding; it was clear that many community members felt only elders were qualified to share the story of displacement despite widespread knowledge of the events. When details of the displacement were shared with me from someone who was not an elder or direct survivor, they always qualified their accurate retelling with statements about not knowing much about what happened and suggesting I speak with an elder.

It is uncontested among all respondents that the elders are the most focused on past traumas, and the impact of the displacement is weakening with each generation. There is widespread belief that, as Matt says, “everyone knows what happened.” Margo, who is twenty, said simply, “we all know the stories, even the little kids know already.” Yet, there is still worry that the youngest generation does not know or understand the meaning of group experiences. Many parents feel the duality of concerns that come with the task of remembering and teaching group tragedy to their children while also trying to preserve their innocence. Charting orientation toward memories of the past and socializing children into Ahiska history helps illustrate the composition and placement of boundaries in action.

The young people’s apparent lack of knowledge about what happened is not necessarily for lack of interest, but perhaps lack of opportunity. Reyda, the 10-year-old granddaughter of Osman, sat on the floor to listen just outside the room where her grandfather, father, uncle, Jeff, and I all sat. When she was discovered, they invited her to sit on the couch at the edge of the room where she sat and listened with unusual patience for a child of her age. They explained that the kids do not often get to hear these stories and are curious to know more.

I asked Matt how he approaches these stories with his children and he explains, “it’s [the] children’s right to know their history.” But Matt also tries not to “make a point of it... even what happened in Russia, we’re not trying to talk about it again, again, again. I mean, especially with kids.” When I asked if the kids asked about it, he responded, “Sometimes they do, yeah.... my oldest was like 3 or 4 years old, she didn’t feel it. But older kids knew.” After Matt said that his young kids do not have memories about what happened in Russia, he goes on to explain that knowing and especially feeling the discrimination has translated into a deeper internalization of group values as he articulated them. Matt worries that, despite his active efforts to teach these values, his children are not internalizing them as deeply as he would like because, “life here [*in the US*] is really easy.... [it is] harder to keep your child more responsible.” Matt cites the difficulty of life in Uzbekistan and Russia as a reason for his closeness to his family and community as well as his adherence to group values, such as respect and hard work.

Ahıska Group Values

Matt was able to directly articulate group values without narrative when I asked him. “What exactly [does] it mean to be Ahıska Turkish? I think being responsible, that’s number one. Being reliable to friends, that’s number two... Respect to elders and be respectful to others, and be hard-working.” The importance of family, hard work, education, and respect were echoed in narratives, statements, and observations in every respondent and occur repeatedly in field notes and transcripts. I also noted the presence and use of social capital in narratives and direct answers. Respondents describe arriving to the US and immediately taking the English classes,

working towards occupational certifications in technical careers, and sharing information about jobs and hiring with friends in weekly informal gatherings of men in a gender divided space¹⁴.

The Ahıska Turks possesses social capital in the form of skills sets and knowledge that fosters success and value in diverse economies, perhaps because of starting anew in three different social, economic, and environmental locations. Jeff explained to me that they buy houses to fix them up and resell them. They also buy, fix, and resell cars, and are known for this by their non-Turkish neighbors in their apartment complexes.¹⁵ There are different ways to succeed, through formal and informal markets, as well as through education, which is heavily emphasized as a group value.

Educational and financial success can sometimes be competing values. Ahıskas have differing strategies for success in these categories based on gender. It is common for young women to get more schooling and the young men to leave school earlier than their female counterparts to begin working. The occupational/educational dynamic is succinctly characterized in two quotations, the first from Jeff, stating that, “ladies get more education.” The second from Fatima, an Ahıska mother of grown children, who explains that, “all our boys drive trucks.” The network of Ahıska young male truck drivers means these jobs are easily attainable and popular. Fatima’s family demonstrates this dynamic; her own son is a truck driver, while her daughters are or were in college and the older one is married and has a child. Very young ages for marriage hamper the abilities of the young women to take full advantage of educational offerings. Margo

¹⁴ Matt was unsure if the women had similar social gatherings and discussion of employment in their separate gendered spaces.

¹⁵ While some Ahıska Turks in Seattle have bought houses and moved, many still live in the original apartment buildings they were placed in upon arrival, meaning there are many Ahıska Turks all together in single apartment complexes.

explains that sometimes marriage happens at age 16.¹⁶ Jeff is frustrated that many of the young women are married so young because they leave college to have children, instead of finishing out their degrees. Most couples are pairings within the community, though some men marry Azeris or Russians. Margo reports some of the Turkish girls date American boys, although this makes their parents angry. It is unlikely that couples of Turkish men with American women is as taboo, since Fatima assured me that next time I visited “we’ll have Turkish guy for you!” an offer I politely declined. I took this offer to mean acceptance by Fatima and her elderly mother, Zeynep, who originally suggested the idea in Turkish when I asked about marriage ages.

Young marriage age and intra-group marriage are a way of keeping the group connected and boundaries firm in the face of assimilation. All interviewees brought up the challenges of incorporating into an Americanized lifestyle. Adjusting upon arrival and maintaining boundaries and identity in young people were recurring challenges. Still, all respondents reported being very happy in the US and Steve explained, through Jeff, feeling “more complete on a daily basis.” Mary says the US is a “dream come true.” They all see their move to the US as permanent and express a desire to have the rest of their family that is still living in Uzbekistan, Turkey, or Russia, join them in Seattle. Only Margo expressed a desire to return to Russia, despite later conceding that, “there is not good life there right now...they [*her friends*] say ‘oh my God, you guys moved and there is no life after you guys!’”

Show her transnational attachments, Margo also discussed the possibility of moving to Turkey, where she was preparing to spend several months with family soon after our interview. She also explained that the young kids learning the Turkish language from ethnic Turks was not

¹⁶ Engagements happen at 16, but often the couple waits until they graduate from high school before being married.

a problem because “maybe we’re going to end up living over there.”¹⁷ Although such a move is unlikely, Margo considers it a possibility, in part because she (and those in her generation) lives in simultaneity, and in part because she feels that they did not change much about how they lived when they arrived in the US. Rayanna agrees and reported through an American translator “she didn’t do anything differently. She’s never been to an American’s house. She doesn’t know what an American’s house looks like, so that’s why when people come to her house, they say, ‘this looks like a Turkish house’¹⁸”

The sense that little has changed may seem contradictory to the expressions of happiness in the US. Indeed critics of transnationalism may use these statements as evidence that the group has not yet assimilated. Rather, dual sentiments that nothing has changed and everything is better should be taken as evidence of transnational simultaneity. The Ahiskas are happy because they are able to be transnational and practice their culture and make identity claims freely while also incorporating US customs and cultures into their own.

Being and Belonging

Being transnational is not especially difficult for the Ahıska Turks. Their relationships and networks span international borders, but in variety much different from the transnational literature, which has not been constructed with diaspora communities in mind and can be a poor fit (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001) The Ahıska Turkish statelessness and diasporic conditions inhibits their expression of being and belonging as a transnational group as defined by literature and theory. While belonging was theoretically very important, it occurred few times in coding,

¹⁷ Similarly, Matt described these schools as a place where kids learn “the real Turkish language, not the Ahıskan.”

¹⁸ Indeed, like all the houses I visited on interviews, Rayanna’s house was extremely Turkish in its set up and decorative style.

unlike being, which was a major and recurring theme. Belonging is not as straightforward as being; with no national territory, flag, anthem, or relics that are universally recognized as being Ahiska by insiders and outsiders, there is no way to publically and recognizably “belong”.

Belonging becomes exceedingly difficult for diaspora groups that do not orbit around “the homeland” as a dominant and driving idea of unity. The only evidence of belonging that I observed was among the young adults who moved to the US in their teens. The following excerpt is from an interview with Margo after I asked if she would return to Georgia if she could.

Margo: Because, you know, right now, Georgia[n] people, they take their [*meaning her grandmother's*] house and stuff... they build a new house instead.

Interviewer: Yeah. And so even if they gave money or land, would it...

Margo: In Georgia? ... There is no more Stalin so, who's gonna... Georgia won't give us... They won't give us. No.

Interviewer: So there's not a desire to move back?

Margo: No, because Georgia people won't give us back

Interviewer: If you went to visit would it feel like your land still?

Margo: (*translates to her mother, Fatima, and grandmother, Zeynep, who replies in Turkish*) Yeah, if she sees something familiar... It's been 70 years, you know...

Interviewer: Yeah. Do either of you feel attached to Georgia? Like it's a place that's yours?

Margo: Yeah, I do, actually.

Interviewer: You do?

(*Fatima speaks quickly and pointedly in Turkish*)

Margo: My mom says that she wants to see it too, but... You know, in Georgia it's called Kavkaz¹⁹. And right now our young people they just put in the name on the shirt, they [are] saying that, “Oh, Kavkaz.” Even me, I love Kavkaz. I want to be there. But it's not in my hands, you know? Because it's our country.

Margo demonstrates the way to belong is through drawing a visible and public national connection to Kavkaz, the Georgian homeland, which she feels both distant from and close to. She describes Kavkaz as “our” country, alluding to a belief of group national belonging attached to the land specifically, but not exclusively. Kavkaz is a label numerous groups can enact and for Turks to use it is to acknowledge the multiple claims to the Caucasus regions, identify with the

¹⁹ Kavkaz means Caucasus in Russian.

distinct cultures of this region, both of which counter Soviet era racial classifications of Turks as racially black and different than Caucasians (Coşkun 2009: 87). No other respondent espoused Margo's view, although one of her Facebook friends has a graphic mimicking the famous "I love NY" graphic with a heart, except it says, "I love Kavkaz".

As Margo's friend on Facebook shows, the internet is one realm of belonging and publically enacting identity. For those who do recognize the symbols of belonging, the internet is a solution to geographic isolation for stateless diaspora belonging. There are some blogs and YouTube channels for Ahıska Turks; most share songs, images, videos, and their group history with insiders and outsiders. Those who publish these forums of identity live all over; some are in the US, others in Turkey, Azerbaijan or Uzbekistan. These sources are oriented toward the displacements and look backwards to Georgia and towards repatriation, which was not a popular viewpoint among my respondents. Only one of my respondents directed me to a YouTube channel of a Soviet newscast of the 1989 Fergana pogrom, so that I could see how bad the destruction was. The video is eight minutes and shows exceedingly gruesome images of burned and maimed corpses in the street while the journalist somberly describes the scene in Russian.

The Internet has opened up new avenues of "belonging" to Ahıska identity; it remains private in the sense that it cannot be easily displayed and exists primarily in the tubes and channels of the Internet, and not tangibly outside of it. The limitations of the terms "being" and "belonging" for stateless peoples and those whose stories are often invisible are made clear through the difficulty for Ahıska Turks in belonging publically and visibly for outsiders. Although Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) looked to move beyond the nation-state as the ultimate grouping of people, their concept loses utility for those without a nation-state and clear, obvious nationalist symbols.

Homeland, Discrimination, and Blame

The homeland is the basis for the limited avenues of belonging, and is also closely tied to boundaries. The homeland and the trauma of its loss do not formulate the central components of group identity, contrary to my expectations and theoretical weight. Perhaps this is why group members do not blame or hold grudges against those who have wronged them. They openly acknowledge faults in the injustices suffered, but most everyone maintains the philosophy that Margo summed up with the words, “you live your life” and Matt explained deeper, “I’m not keeping [in my] heart bad memories. They don’t do any good for you, right? Just start living another life. Turn another page and start writing again.”

Steve explained that because his generation did not know Stalin, they could not hold onto anger or frustration. Jeff translated his next statements, a disagreement between Steve and his wife Mary about the homeland. “He says that ‘if they take me back to Ahiska maybe I will not like it’, he’s never been there. It’s in the mountains... But she says that we need a homeland, the homeland. That was our homeland and we should not say it like that.” In multiple respondents I saw differing opinions on the purpose of the homeland and whether they would like to return to Georgia, if given the chance. Women performed the kinship work (di Leonardo 1987) of maintaining the symbolic and nostalgic connection to the homeland; while men made a practical assessment of why returning to Georgia from the US would not make sense. The men have been able to turn the page and start writing a new life without cultivating memories and connections to Georgia to a greater degree than the women have.

Matt explains that an Ahiska return to Georgia would be a poor choice because of his perception of Georgian policies and economic difficulties. “I might be wrong but the basic point is ‘you ok to be back if you change your nationality, become Georgian.’” Matt goes at length

describing how they would be returning to the places of their parents or grandparents that no longer exist and they would have to change their names to Georgian names, converted from Islam to Christianity, speak Georgian and take a Georgian passport.²⁰ Matt's emphasis on the place changing from his grandparent's time shows that, for him, it is the people and not the land that make the homeland.

Matt compares a hypothetical return to Georgia to the US. While he concedes that he has had to learn English, he also states “nobody in USA telling me ‘hey, change your name, I don’t like it, it’s too long or sounds weird.’ Nobody telling me ‘hey, Muslims not good, go to Christian.’ It’s like, main point which makes me really angry, *how can they tell you what to be and what to change and what not to change?*”²¹ As he spoke, Matt became emotional for the first and only time in our interview. He felt both incensed that Georgians, who share an equal but not greater claim to the land, have asserted their ability to control Ahıska fate by stipulating return to homeland as what is perceived as erasure of group identity. Identity is embodied in names, language, religion, and the freedom to belong, and are central aspects of maintaining Ahıska group boundaries. The land itself is secondary to the thought of losing these boundaries and ability to be and belong as Ahıska was perceived as extremely threatening to Matt. Consequently, he rejected Georgia as a viable option and instead seeks to live where he could maintain his group identity, despite some concerns and worries over the US affecting his children’s connection to their Turkishness. Perhaps after years of struggling to maintain identity in the face of discrimination makes return to a different social landscape even more difficult to imagine.

²⁰ In this instance citizenship and belonging to Georgia as a nation is synonymous with compromising Ahıska national belonging.

²¹ Italics indicate strain in voice.

The discriminatory events described to me are part of group and personal history. They describe the difficult start in Uzbekistan, the physical violence, the systematic and institutional exclusion, and the slurs thrown at individuals in their day-to-day lives. An example of discrimination explained in a conversation between me, Jeff, Mary, and her husband, Steve. Mary and Steve told a story from their childhood about their father intervening in a school yard conflict with Uzbek peers only after learning that the intolerant viewpoint of the children stemmed from the parents. Jeff translates that, “her grandfather said [*to the parents*] if I hear again these slurs, you know like ‘go back to Caucasia’ or these types of things, then ‘I will down you!’” This rather disturbing encounter illuminates the inter-group tension and specific traumatic events. The depth of their father’s commitment to ideals of tolerance (at any cost, even threats of violence) and protection of group members and children is evident and gives some insight to how boundaries were maintained in harsher social climates.

Hearing this narrative impelled me to ask if being called “Caucasian” was upsetting because the term was offensive or because they were being marked as outsiders. Jeff translated that, “No, it’s not. He’s not taking as an offense. ‘Go back to Caucasia’ he says he felt discriminated, if somebody tells me that I am Caucasian, then that’s my race, we are Caucasian. You know, white skin, dark hair.” In a rather frank manner, Jeff shows that the source of the discrimination was the unwelcomeness, not the place of origin as Caucasian, which is a racial descriptor and an identity that Steve subscribes to. Racially motivated discrimination was not absent in their accounts of discrimination. Immediately after Jeff’s translation, Mary tells me that, “In Russia, Russian people they called us ‘you black people, you black people’.” Jeff likens the Cossacks, who called the Turks black, to red necks, in an effort to divert blame from all Russians.

Margo also shared the widespread use of this insult with me, as well as stories of her mother being attacked at school as children yelled, “Go back to Caucasia!” Although racially motivated slurs carried weight and offense, the sentiments of “go back to where you came from” appear to be more upsetting, based on the type and length of the narratives devoted to sharing these stories versus those of being called “black.” Narratives of being welcome were also shared with me and blame was doled out to generic perpetrators and not the entire group the offenders belonged to. The hardships and discrimination are attributed to only some people and authority figures. Given this history, it is unsurprising that kids are not told specifics, especially since blame is decoupled from the traumas.

Composition of the Ahıska Turkish Boundaries

As previously discussed, Matt worries about his children’s identity getting lost because of boundaries breaking down; concerns echoed in older generations. Uzbeks and Russians helped maintain boundaries by “othering” the Ahıska Turks. In the absence of these groups, Ahıska identity must be defined and maintained by the group itself. In my fieldnotes there is a recurring theme of context affecting group identity, cultural repertoires, and enactment of boundaries. All interviewees agreed the youngest generations were different and that they were worried about the future of the group as time passes. However, there are not formal ways of enforcing identity.

Matt is a concerned parent²² who has worked hard to teach culture, language, and boundaries. His active efforts were clear when his 8 year-old son Jason²³, came into the room from biking outside and circled the table greeting each adult traditionally and respectfully.²⁴

²² Observations at community events make it clear that Matt engages in active parenting and he intervenes in his children’s actions and socialization to a higher degree than many other parents in attendance.

²³ Like his younger brother Deniz, Jason’s Turkish name sounds like the Americanized one he goes by.

Matt describes the boundaries he set for retaining culture in his own family.

Even in my family, you are watching your kids; they [are] picking up [the] new language really fast. And sometimes, what I discover is, right now for them to communicate and talk in English becomes easier than your own Turkish language. And my oldest daughter, she already forgot Russian. But she was speaking Russian! ... She understands it but can't speak it. And you [are] kind of watching like [it is] time to do some limits. 'Alright guys, let's do this, let's talk in Turkish in home. And street and school is all yours... but for family purposes, let's keep practicing your own language.' Because I really want them to be able to speak their own languages ... It never hurt to know multiple languages. 'Know your own language; you [are] welcome to pick up any other languages.' For example, my daughter wants her next language to be Spanish.

While Matt laments the loss of Russian language, he also supports the learning of Spanish, evidence of the influence of the US context on cultural repertoires.

The simultaneity of the everyday lives of the Ahıska Turks are epitomized in their dual interest in Russian, a language representing past experiences, and Spanish, a language of utility only in a US context. Like Matt's kids, Rayanna's adult children are learning Spanish in addition to the five languages²⁵ they speak fluently. However, her three year-old grandson is learning Russian along with English and Turkish, despite that it is unlikely this US-born child will ever live in Russia. There is also evidence that language is an avenue for group boundaries.

The incorporation of multiple cultures into Ahıska culture is not problematic for the maintenance or assertions of cultural boundaries. The boundary of Ahıska Turkishness is remarkably flexible, expanding, and comprised of nuanced and complex layers. The Ahıskas do not use rigid categories or experiences to mark membership in the group, meaning boundaries are not contracting from endogenous shifts. Instead, there are layers of boundaries, each flexible and defined by different characteristic of the group, an expansion of boundaries from exogenous

²⁴ Greetings were in traditional Uzbek style, not Caucasian, further evidence of importance of context on customs and the Central Asian bend of group cultural repertoires.

²⁵ Among the five are: Turkish and the Ahıska Turkish dialect are counted as separate, along with English, Russian, and Azeri, also quite similar to Turkish.

shifts. Group values and practices form an important boundary that captures the group members regardless of age, gender, or context of upbringing. Language, religion, and community traditions are each equally important elements of a different layer of the group boundary, but are distinct from customs and values. The changing boundary is expanding and incorporative; aspects of culture and identity from Uzbekistan, Russia, and now the US are part of the culture and have produced meaning for the group.

The homeland of Georgia and the Ottoman Turkish are also part of group identity and therefore boundaries. Ahıska claims to both Georgian and the Ottoman histories form a foundational grounding level of identity, which allows them to freely associate with other Turkish groups. Rayanna,²⁶ who is Azeri and not Ahıska, shared a narrative about a very, very old relative of hers, capturing their perspective on their ethnic roots and a pan-Turkic identity as well as her own. The following are Rayanna's words through an American translator.

Translator: She's saying because their [*her children's*] father is Ahıska, they've always considered themselves Ahıskas and they've... never really considered themselves Azeri.

Interviewer: Is she an Ahıska Turk now too, for having Ahıska kids? Can she be?

Translator: She's saying she would never sell out [*her*] nationality! ... The two cultures are separate and if she ever said that she was part of the Ahıska Turkish community, she'd feel like she was selling out her mother and father's identity.... She's saying because she understood the language and she knows how to make the food and she welcomed them into her home, and because her children are also Turkish, they always accept her as one of them.... She's saying whether you're Turks of Atatürk or you're Azeri Turk, or you're Meskheta Turk, you're all Turkish at some level. Everybody goes back to the same roots.... Her father's grandmother lived to be 115 and she always said the same thing, that they were Turkish and this came from Ottoman times... they were always saying that they were the same thing, even if the branches spread in different directions.²⁷

²⁶ Rayanna is not ethnically Ahıska, she is Azeri. Her ex-husband is Ahıska and her kids consider themselves Ahıska. I was referred to her by a Turkish immigrant from Turkey who had assumed her to be Ahıska without ever checking with her or recognizing her distinct Azeri patterns of speech. This provides some insight on the construction of an ethnic Turkish hierarchy within the Turkish community, with this Turkish Turk placing himself higher on the ethnic ladder than Ahıskas or Azeris, who are seen as the same.

²⁷ Ellipses represent breaks of Rayanna speaking Turkish and the translator clarifying.

Although a notion of a pan-Turkic identity exists within Rayanna's perspective, she fervently enforces her ethnic Azeri identity and boundary. Rayanna draws a distinction between Azeri and Ahıska culture, but also states that she is easily able to be in the Ahıska community although she rejects belonging in favor of maintaining Azeri as her primary identity. A duality of belonging to Azeri and Ahıska identities is not possible for Rayanna to conceive of without feeling disloyal to her family and Azeri nationality. The Ahıska Turks are less rigid with their boundaries and distinctions between groups; they accepted Rayanna as one of them because of her cultural knowledge and familial connections. Some respondents feel both Ahıska and American while continuing to hold Uzbekistan or Russia (depending on their age) as places of origin and attachment in a complex and simultaneous way. Simply put, like many other transnational and diaspora groups, they are happy in the US while missing the place they were raised and think also of the homeland in Georgia.

Discussion: Symbolic Homelands and Diaspora Relationships

Symbolic connection to past places of residency can fit into a wider model of diaspora. Levy (2005: 68) criticizes the "solar system model" of homeland-diaspora relationships where the communities in various other nation-states rotate around the homeland, like the planets around the Sun. The criticism extends to the homeland-diaspora dichotomy that is often constructed in diaspora literatures. The binary of homeland-diaspora relies on language and definitions from nationalism and assumes a "natural belonging of the majority of the state's citizens to their nation and territory, and demands an exclusivity of belonging (Levy 2005: 91)". This language is ill fitting of a community like the Ahıska Turks, who do not have natural, exclusive, or agreed upon belonging within the group or from outsiders.

The Ahıska Turks are in need of a new model of belonging. In Levy's case study, the Moroccan Jewish diaspora develops a "symbolic" homeland in Morocco and a "real" homeland in Israel. The symbolic homeland became an "ideational entity" where the diaspora can direct its nostalgia and longing (Levy 2005: 90). For some Ahıska Turks Georgia has become a symbolic homeland, a starting point for identity and space for nostalgia but not repatriation. Even those who would return, like the women or elders, attachment forms a nostalgic symbolic base, not an active desire to live on the land. Unlike the Moroccan Jews, the Ahıska Turks do not have a "real homeland"; instead they have two symbolic homelands. The Ahıska Turks trace their Turkish roots to the Ottoman Empire, which is also a place for longing and nostalgia on an ethnic and not national basis. Georgia functions as a homeland and physical place to direct their memories and experiences, while the Ottoman Empire is their symbolic ethnic homeland and place of origin.

Tracing connection to a symbolic homeland that no longer exists in time or place, but rather as a location in history, might seem limiting. However, it is actually a mechanism for expansion and flexibility in identity for a stateless group with few formal connections to other nationalities and nation-states. Orienting group boundaries to incorporate Ottoman Turkish roots creates connections to wider groups and gives deeper historical relevance to the Ahıska Turks complex origins and claims of historical connection to the Caucasus. This also allows for the bonding and bridging to other groups, which is a form of social capital and maximizes flexibility. The concept of being tied symbolically to a place no longer in existence certainly defies the nation-state paradigm of thought and expands the connections that diasporas draw between places and groups, across the linear notions of time.

The concept of incorporating dead multi-national empires into discussions of identity has implications for simultaneity and transnationalism. Simultaneity can be expanded to mean dual

and simultaneous connections to places across borders and temporal conceptions of space. One of the first things Mary told me when I explained that I wanted to know about her past was an attempt to articulate this connection. “I’m Turkish too, but I’m not from Turkey. [It] is my country, my grandma’s granddad’s country. We live before, many, many years before, in Georgia. My Grandma’s grandma and granddad, they came from Turkey to Georgia.” Defying assumptions of national attachment to national entities that are current is abstract and difficult to conceive of or convey in a native language; attempting to communicate this importance in a second, third, or fourth language is even more difficult, if possible at all.

Coşkun (2009) had similar findings in Tucson’s Ahıska community, a connection to Ottoman identity and a rejection of Turkey’s policies, coupled with an interest and focus on Turkey as a close match to the Ottoman identity. Yet Turkey did not accept the Ahıska Turks as a refugee group and the Ahıska Turks that do live in Turkey are not citizens. Margo explained that the Ahıskas do not have full social acceptance, something she knew based on how the Turkish Turks acted towards her and her relatives.

Turkey’s Immigrants’ Influence on the Ahıska Turks

The connection to Turkey is especially interesting because non-Turkish, non-Ahıska advocates of the Ahıska community expressed concern that the Ahıska Turks are “Turkifying” in the US. Meaning the aspects of Ahıska identity that are uniquely acquired from their past social contexts are vulnerable without the enforcement of a nation-state; these aspects are being flattened and repositioned into an identity that more closely resembles those of people from Turkey than the Ahıska. There is a chance that this orientation towards Turkey is the reflection of others, such as Americans, likening the Ahıska Turks to Turkey because they do not understand their complex origins and migration history. This would be an example of ethnic

Turks from Turkey serving as the “proximal host”, meaning the racial/ethnic group that the Ahiskas are linked with by others. The Ahiskas can choose to reject or assimilate to their proximal host group (Mittelberg and Waters 1992). More likely, the Turkification is a result of the active efforts Turkish immigrants from Turkey in assisting and providing cultural resources to the Ahıska Turks in numerous US locations. These Turkish immigrant groups represent Turkey’s dominant and oppositional cultural groups, the secular and the religious. Both circles of Turkish immigrants from Turkey feel a strong desire to guide the Ahıska Turks in navigating the US’s social spaces.

The religious Turkish Turks that work with the Ahıska Turks are part of the Gülen movement, a conservative religious movement in Turkey based on the religious teachings of Islam by a scholar focused on altruism and the common good (Turam 2007). Gülen schools exist all over the US and are the sole source of Turkish language and cultural education for the Ahıska Turks in Seattle and likely in other cities. Every family I spoke with had a child, niece/nephew, or grandchild enrolled in the schools, though few knew what the Gülen movement actually was when asked directly if they had heard of it. In contrast, the secular ethnic Turks are fiercely opposed to this group, labeling them as religious fundamentalists. The secular Turks work hard to incorporate the Ahıska Turks into their own events such as the annual Turkish cultural festival in Seattle.

The Ahıska Turks are connected with both sides of the Turkey’s immigrant communities, enjoying the resources available to them without becoming deeply enmeshed with either. The involvement with the religious and secular Turks from Turkey has served to bring numerous resources to the Ahıska Turks, but threatens their ability to maintain distinct identity and culture with the proximal host ethnicity. The absence of a nation-state and concrete homeland further

inhibits the Ahıska Turks from firmly asserting their cultural boundaries against a dominant Turkifying force.

Conclusion

Despite their active efforts to capture complex social worlds beyond the nation-state, transnationalism and diaspora literatures fall short of fully theorizing the circumstances of thrice displaced, stateless, or diaspora populations. Although diaspora literatures are being expanded, the extant models of homeland-diaspora relations do not capture the Ahıska reality, nor does the more incorporative symbolic homeland model that Levy (2005) proposes. Similarly, the concepts of being and belonging as transnational assume a nationality with tangible national products that often result from nation-states. Stateless populations have difficulty fitting into this model, in part because outsiders are not able to recognize their group membership and instead ascribe identity and belonging to them. Attributing meaning to cultural artifacts and groups is especially difficult when a foundational claim of identity is toward a collapsed multi-national, multi-state empire such as the Ottoman Empire.

The foundation of identity and boundaries in symbolic connections to a state and culture that is no longer in existence or available are outside the common transnational theoretical assumptions of national attachment and belonging. As a category, they are outside the scope of theories of transnationalism, but not those of identity, attachment, or boundaries. Relative invisibility in modern theories' assumptions of national belonging are not unique to the Ahıska Turks; rather, they are one case of many like them. The Ahıska Turks defy models of homeland-diaspora relations with emphasis on multiple symbolic homelands, one no longer existing and the other no longer available.

There are numerous examples of other groups that could benefit from expanded theoretical perspectives that account for statelessness, diaspora, and transnationalism from complex origins and migrations. To name just a few: the Hakka in China, Szeklers in Transylvania, Circassians, Jews, Hmong, Tamils, Armenians, Gujarati, and Sikhs and Punjabs in Kalistan. Other groups to include are immigrants from pre-nation former colonial empires, such as Indonesians with mixed European descent living in Netherlands (called Indos), as well those from former multi-state entities like the Ottoman Empire, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Past groups that had their identities placed under ill-fitting categories include the Sicilians becoming Italians upon arrival to the US or Alsatians being understood as either German or French upon arrival to the US in the 1880s. These groups would find themselves similarly excluded from theories of transnationalism and national belonging.

The implications of creating a model of homeland-diaspora relations that can account for attachment to places no longer in existence or existing beyond nation-state borders can help structure language and conclusions that better reflect the reality of the identities that many individuals and groups have formed to reflect their complex circumstances. My research in this paper has been able to further explore concepts from transnational and diaspora literatures, as well as add to group specific knowledge about the identity and maintenance of identity by the Ahıska Turks in the US. The challenges and successes of the Ahıska Turks illuminate some of the issues facing immigrants who have complex, layered group histories and backgrounds of displacement and national exclusion. Their exclusion from theory is another example of their invisibility. While the Ahıska Turks' experiences reveal areas for development in the newer paradigms of transnationalism and diaspora literatures, it pushes these theoretical stances to better reflect the reality of groups in the modern world.

I argue that being stateless and a diaspora community tests the efficacy of these theoretical concepts and expands group specific knowledge. Maintaining contact and research with the Ahıska Turks going forward is important to see how these early trends play out as their security and cultural fluency increases in the US. This paper far makes a strong basis for comparative work between different immigrant groups of complex origins or, alternatively, different immigrant groups in the same social context, namely Seattle. The Ahıska Turks in the US have managed to maintain and negotiate their identity and boundaries in different contexts and relational settings, and show how their expressions, attachments, and stances vary by generation, age, and gender. More broadly, the impact of socio-political instability, institutional insecurity, and structural violence on the composition of boundaries and identity in groups has implications for research and policy in post-conflict societies. Understanding challenges and circumstances of transnational diaspora groups can help in creating incorporative policies that ensure statelessness is not an enduring circumstance or limitation on the expression of group identity or reason for continued invisibility.

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