

FORCED MIGRATION/EMIGRATION OF ABKHAZIANS TO TURKEY: HISTORY, ADAPTATION, AND PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY PRESERVATION

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Abstract: The article discusses and analyzes the causes of the forced migration (muhajirism) of Abkhazians, the historical and political contexts that led to their choice of the receiving country as the object of migration. In addition, attention is focused on cultural, social, and economic reasons that had a special impact on various aspects of the life of the emigrants.

The colonial interests of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century are discussed in detail, the goal of which was to make the Caucasus an organic and inseparable part of it. For this, a large-scale colonization of the Caucasus was necessary, which could not be implemented without a free land fund (without „unreliable and undesirable“ settlers). This was one of the reasons for the expulsion of a number of ethnic groups in the Caucasus, including the Abkhazians, from their native places and their deportation to the Ottoman Empire.

Along with the historical context, the migration processes that were reflected in the processes of adaptation and identity preservation of migrants are analyzed.

As a result of the research (fieldwork, analysis of scientific literature), it was determined that despite the strict and consistent assimilation policy of the Turkish government over the years, the Abkhazians, through conservation in a foreign socio-political and cultural environment, have preserved not only their history, identity, moral and ethical code, language and its dialects, folklore, but also that part of traditional culture that has been forgotten in their historical homeland.

Keywords: Muhajir-migration, colonialism, history, politics, adaptation, identity.

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Introduction. Relevance of the topic. *Migration processes are a phenomenon that has accompanied human history.* The mobility of people is associated with a number of reasons: economic, political, ecological, social, cultural, etc. Accordingly, the above-mentioned processes were accompanied by the results reflecting a different and multifaceted process. In the footsteps of the development of humanity and the ascent to a new stage of life, the political environment, areas of interest, states' capabilities and power balance, culture, economy are changing, which makes the phenomenon of migration a continuous process and does not lose its relevance in all eras. Accordingly, when discussing the problem, various issues were considered: „What is the reason that determines the movement of the population, the results of this process?“, „Why does part of the population begin to migrate and others remain?“, What are the consequences of migration for the receiving and sending communities? (Migration Theory: 2000) These issues are key when discussing the process and its results.

In general, migration is one of the most significant civilizational problems and is viewed not merely as a mechanical movement of people, but as a complex social process that influences various aspects of political, economic, cultural, and social life.

Transcontinental and transregional migrations are regular processes in the development of civilizations. *One such movement is the deportation (forced relocation) of the peoples of the Caucasus from their historical homeland to the countries of the Near East—a phenomenon that is recognized in the scientific literature as Muhajirism.*

Muhajirism is not just a difficult episode in life, but also a grave national tragedy, which led to a rapid decline in the number of Abkhazians in their own homeland and put the Abkhaz people at risk of physical extinction. (ინაღ-იფა, 1990:145-146).

Accordingly, our goal is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the problem, taking into account both the historical and contemporary contexts. To study and analyze the issues of identity, integration and adaptation of Abkhazian emigrants in Turkey.

Research Methodology. *The empirical basis of this study is grounded in the examination of migration-related issues in Abkhazian villages in Turkey, conducted under fieldwork conditions. Fieldwork was carried out using methods of direct observation and interviews with informants. Qualitative techniques such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were employed. Both group and individual meetings were conducted to ensure a diversity of perspectives. This approach enabled the collection of valuable data, which was analyzed to identify the dynamics and main trends related to the subject under investigation. In addition, relevant theoretical materials from the scientific literature were reviewed and analyzed to provide a broader conceptual framework for the study.*

Discussion of the issue and main findings. As a result of continuous wars in the Caucasus at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries, Russia subjugated the region. Its goal was to make it its organic and integral part, for which large-scale colonization of the Caucasus was necessary, which could not be carried out without a free land fund.

(without „unreliable and undesirable“ settlers). This was precisely one of the reasons for the expulsion of a number of Caucasian peoples, including the Abkhazians, from their native places and their deportation to the Ottoman Empire.

The colonial policy, which included deportations aimed at forced assimilation, turned the Caucasus into one of the most conflict-prone regions in the world during the 19th century. The implementation of military-colonial policies destroyed traditional socio-cultural institutions and led to ideological disorientation of the people.

As a result, in the 19th century, a significant portion of the population of the Caucasus came under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire. In the territories they left behind, significant changes occurred in the region's ethnic map. The Muhajirism became one of the most tragic chapters in the history of the peoples of the Caucasus. The scale of this migration had a profound impact on the geopolitical and ethnodemographic landscape of the region. According to historian Dzidzaria, approximately one million people emigrated from the Caucasus during this period, including around one hundred thousand Abkhazians. (ძიძარია, 1982:98–99).

The result of forced migration was the emergence of a large Abkhazian diaspora in a number of countries of the Middle East: in the Ottoman Empire, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt. There are currently 228 Abkhazian-Adyghe villages in twenty provinces of Turkey (Chirikba, 1995:278). The Abkhazians, Adyghe and Ubykhs, who are known in Turkey under the common name „Circassians“, played a prominent role in the life of the Sultan's court, in the administration and especially in the army of the Ottoman Empire.

The approach of the Ottoman authorities to the settlement of the Muhajirs was characterized by multifaceted aspects: military-political, national and economic. Taking into account the military-political

and national-ethnic aspects, the Sultan's authorities planned to use the Muhajirs in possible external wars and internal conflicts: Balkan – against Russia and the Slavic peoples; Caucasian – against Russia and the Armenians; Mediterranean – against the historical enemy – against the Greeks; Eastern – against the Armenians and Kurds; South – against the Alawites, Bedouins and Druze. From an economic point of view, the Ottoman authorities planned to strengthen the industrial and agricultural sectors with the efforts of the Muhajirs against the background of constant military threats (Гургулия, 2021).

It is noteworthy that the Ottoman Empire subjected the settlers from the Caucasus to a policy of planned resettlement, and this policy cannot be considered in isolation from the internal politics of the empire and the ongoing geopolitical struggle on its territory. In this context, a significant number of Caucasians settled in the Ottoman provinces adjacent to or near the Balkan and Caucasus regions, where the borders between the Ottoman and Russian empires crossed. Thus, in the event of a war with Russia, the Ottoman administration planned to make maximum use of the Muhajirs, who had solid war experience and also a sense of historical revenge against Russia. This was the subject of Ottoman foreign policy. In addition, another factor that influenced the settlement policy planned by the Ottomans towards the Caucasian peoples was directly related to the social structure of this country. The planned resettlement policy towards Caucasians was implemented taking into account possible uprisings among ethnic groups and religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, by the 1880s, the geography of the resettlement of Caucasians in the Ottoman Empire had taken its final form and was concentrated mainly in four regions of the country: Western Anatolia (especially Northwestern Anatolia), Central Anatolia (Circassian line), Eastern Anatolia and the Arab provinces. (Syria, Palestine and Jordan). (Ахиядов, 2023).

The immigrants in the Ottoman Empire faced difficult conditions. They did not have the rights that the local population enjoyed (for example, they did not have the right to vote in court). This explains the attempts of the Muhajirs to return in the period before the First World War. The difficult situation of the immigrants was associated not only with economic and social problems, but also with problems of a political nature.

Although the first wave of Muhajirs was already faced with a number of socio-economic and other problems. They still saw a particular threat in the loss of their identity, *historical traditions and customs*, therefore, they were cautious and took a number of measures to prevent their assimilation into local society. For this reason, they settled and lived in closed communities, trying to preserve their cultural values, secondly, they categorically forbade mixed marriages and thirdly, they united in charitable, cultural and educational societies.

As we have noted, the Ottoman Empire began a policy of maximum assimilation of Caucasians. The Muhajirs, on the other hand, fought for survival, social justice, and the preservation of their identity. The first steps after the exile were the creation of the so-called parliament (Mejlis), which was followed by brutal repressions by the „red sultan“ Abdul-Hamid II (1876-1909). Such harsh repressive measures further deepened the confrontation between the Muhajirs and the local authorities. After the Kemalist revolution, the Circassian Mejlis was reopened (ინგლ-იფა, 1990:18). S. Basaria reports that at the beginning of World War I, the Mejlis sent its deputies to the Congress of the World League for the Protection of Small Nations (ბასარია, 1923: 106-107)

In 1912, Abkhazians and Circassians living in Constantinople formed the Abkhazian-Circassian Committee. The main task of the committee was cultural and educational activities, which were carried out with the voluntary donations of the locals. The committee was able to open a boarding school for 60 people, and also printed books.

In 1918, Constantinople was occupied by the British. The committee practically ceased its activities.

As soon as the Kemalists came to power, the committee building was demolished, the books in it were confiscated and burned.

Before the Turkish revolution, a certain part of the Muhajiri Caucasians represented the military support of the Sultan, enjoying privileges: They were given the best lands, were often nominated for

various high-ranking positions, and the leadership of the Turkish army was often in their hands. The reactionary policy of the Sultan was partly based on their power.

The main purpose of the Muhajirs (men) who migrated to Turkey was to perform military service, which was also the main goal of Ottoman policy. The government gave them relatively large plots of land, but for temporary use. In addition, they enjoyed certain benefits. In particular, they were exempt from taxes for 10 years. The mentioned lands were state property, the ruler of which was the Sultan himself. The immigrants could not sell these plots before 10 years. If the landowner moved to another place before this period, the land returned to the state.

Bourgeois revolution in Turkey, after the overthrow of the Sultan, waged a struggle against external and internal hostile forces. Among them was a part of the Abkhazian-Circassian population, which was a supporter of the Sultan. They lost confidence in the new government and were persecuted as unreliable elements. In 1919, the Greco-Turkish War began, which further aggravated the situation of the Abkhazians in the Ottoman Empire. They were involved in difficult political confrontations between supporters of the old regime and Kemalists. Moreover, fierce battles were fought in Western Anatolia, that is, where the Abkhazians were compactly settled. (Izmit, Bursa, Izmir, Alashekir, etc.). As a result, many Abkhazians died or were forcibly exiled to Greece and other countries. The Abkhazians also arrived in Greece with the Greek army. Living conditions there were also difficult for them. Returning to Abkhazia, that is, to their historical homeland, remained their constant task and dream.

At the end of the nineteenth century, among the Abkhazians living in Turkey, there were only three people with a university education, 5-6 with secondary education (gymnasium), but in the Turkish army there were a lot of officers and generals of Abkhaz origin. Abkhazians prefer to serve in the army, – wrote Inal-Ifa in his work.

In the early twentieth century, ethnic minorities in the Republic of Turkey were subjected to forced assimilation. The official policy of the government was to create a unified Turkish nation. Under the 1932 Language Law, children were prohibited from speaking languages other than Turkish in schools. Under the Surname Law, Caucasians were required to change their surnames (Емельянова, 2015:33-40). After World War II, Turkey moved from a single-party system to a multi-party system, and the country began to form national-cultural associations.

At the modern stage, the settlements of Abkhazian muhajirun are represented in the provinces of Sakarya (center in Adapazari) and Dziuuz. In the first province (province) there are up to 25 Abkhazian villages, in the second – up to 20. Less compact Abkhazian settlements are represented in various provinces: Bursa, Eskişehir, Samsun, Sinop, Bilecik, etc. In total, there are about 200 villages in Turkey where Abkhazians live compactly. (Adana, Amasya, Balıkesir, Bilecik, Bingöl, Bolu, Bursa, Çorum, Eskişehir, İstanbul, Kocaeli (İzmit), Kütahya, Manisa, Sakarya, Samsun, Sinop, Sivas, Tokat, Yozgat, Zonguldak) (Chirikba, 1995:278).

The muhajirs gave their new places of residence the names of the villages from which they came from Abkhazia: Aatsi, Uarcha, Chlou, Daal, Ankhua, Mtsara, etc. (ბასაგია, 1923:106-107).

Almost all Abkhazian surnames existing in Abkhazia are represented in Turkey, moreover, even those surnames that are no longer in Abkhazia today. (Adzba, Akushba, Alatsba, Avkhaa, Ateiba, Baalou, Taskuach, etc.). Abkhazian surnames are traditionally used in the community during interethnic relations. They have no legal force. For official purposes, old surnames were changed or adopted Arabic or Turkish names (ინალ-იფა:1990).

As mentioned above, the Abkhazians living in Turkey are mainly settled in the provinces. From the very beginning, they were engaged in agriculture, gardening, beekeeping and cattle breeding. They grew corn, tobacco, rice, grapes. (although not for wine, but for the preparation of sweets „betmez“), etc. In addition to wheat, barley and corn, the immigrants also brought crops from the Caucasus that were not grown in Turkey: millet, oats. They also grew various vegetables, watermelons, and fruit trees. The Abkhazians also preserved the tradition of horse breeding and horse riding, which was very popular in their homeland.

The events taking place in the region and in the world in general (the First and Second World Wars, various political-ideological processes, the collapse of the USSR, etc.) had a great impact on the attitude of Abkhazians living in Turkey towards their compatriots living in their historical homeland. In their opinion, the proximity to the Soviet Union and, more specifically, to Russia, had an impact on the traditional value orientations of the Abkhazians, which was a violation of Abkhazian moral and ethical norms. The romanticized and idealized image and expectations of the homeland were crumbling, which became even more acute after the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, when disorientation began, the growth of crime and its influence on society (the repatriates themselves), unemployment, corruption, etc. All of this further distorted the perception of their historical homeland and further distanced them, in terms of culture and values, from the original ethnic group from which they were resettled.

The younger generation of Abkhazians in Turkey is realistic about the conditions created. Unfortunately, they speak the Abkhazian language poorly or not at all, but they have a high level of national self-awareness. The Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey is well organized today. Abkhazian cultural centers or clubs (derneks) operate in many large cities of Turkey. Their activities and goals are mainly cultural and educational: preserving the native language, traditions, culture, songs and dances, organizing concerts, festivals and exhibitions, conferences and round tables, publishing various publications, as well as maintaining cultural ties and contacts with their historical homeland and establishing communication and relations with Abkhazians living in different countries.

Abkhazians living in Turkey have relations both with their historical homeland and with their compatriots living in other countries, including Abkhazians of Ajara. Representatives of many clans (Kudba, Aikutsba, Muskhajba, Kishindba, Smirba, etc.) have been connected by relationships and communication with each other for years. They try not to lose their historical roots and cultural characteristics.

Conclusion. Thus, despite the fact that the Turkish government has been strictly and consistently pursuing a policy of assimilation of the foreign-speaking population for years. there were no national schools, they did not have the right to talk about their origin, to carry their own surnames, etc. Abkhazians in Turkey have preserved not only their history, identity, moral and ethical code, language and its dialects, folklore, but also that part of their traditional culture that has been forgotten in their historical homeland.

Despite all the difficulties and problems caused by Turkey's strict policy towards national minorities, the majority of the emigrants have managed to preserve the consciousness of their ethnic individuality and the memory of their historical homeland.

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