

# The Past as a Resource for the Slave Descendants of Circassians in Turkey

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This article explores social memory of Circassians of Turkey.<sup>1</sup> It asks if the past can serve descendants of Circassian slaves as a resource. Can they empower themselves by re-counting history, which is seemingly more likely to disempower them? To tackle these questions, I look at oral histories of three different sets of Circassians (the modernist intellectuals of an urban ethnic organization, wealthy nobles and well-off slave descendants of an Anatolian plateau) in the light of Ardener's concept of mutedness. The comparison shows that the first two oral histories served complementarily to mute the people of slave origin. Nevertheless, some individuals belonging to this category related their own empowering history, partly appropriating this articulate framework.

## *Introduction*

Over a million Circassians (*Çerkes/ Adige*) were exiled when the Russian conquest of the North Caucasus became decisive in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the result of the century-long process of military campaigns and colonization aimed at settling the Cossacks.<sup>2</sup> These predominantly Muslim refugees were settled in the Ottoman territories. Uzunyayla in Central Anatolia was one of their first settlements.<sup>3</sup> Uzunyayla is a plateau fifty kms in diameter, located at 1,550-1,630 m above sea level, stretching from the Pınarbaşı district of Kayseri province to two neighbouring districts of Sivas province. Circassians originally founded seventy-one villages there.

<sup>1</sup> Parts of the materials in this article have been included in my unpublished Ph.D. thesis on the political aspects of social memories of Circassians in Turkey (Miyazawa 2004). My research in Turkey (September 1997- April 1999) was partly supported by the Central Research Funds from the University of London and by the Additional Fieldwork Award from the School of Oriental and African Studies. I briefly returned to the area in the Summer of 2004. I am grateful to Fethi Açıkel, Zeynel Beslenyev, Prof. Chris Hann, Nancy Lindisfarne, Prof. Michael Meeker, Lina Mufti, Seteney Shami, Prof. Richard Tapper, Prof. Sami Zubaida, as well as the editor of this book, Ildikó Bellér-Hann, for giving me valuable comments on earlier versions of this current work.

<sup>2</sup> In this article, I use the term "Circassians" as a generic category encompassing descendants of displaced people from the North Caucasus, of which the *Adige* is a major group. Circassians are called *Çerkes* by Turks. I underline Circassian (Kabardian) words, as in *Adige*, when they appear the first time, to distinguish them from Turkish words. As for the Latin transcription of Kabardian words see [http://www.kafder.org.tr/bilgibelge.php?yazi\\_id=380](http://www.kafder.org.tr/bilgibelge.php?yazi_id=380).

<sup>3</sup> Habiçoğlu 1993: 167-9.

During my research in 1997-1999, approximately ten thousand Circassians were still living in sixty-two of these villages and the district town of Pınarbaşı. The villagers were engaged in grain cultivation and animal husbandry. The Kayseri Caucasus Association (*Kayseri Kafkas Derneği*) estimated that twenty-five to forty thousand Circassians were living in the urban centre of the province.

Among Circassians who settled in Uzunyayla, Kabardians, one of the major groups of the *Adige*, were the most populous. They were joined by both *Adige* (Hatukoys and Abzehks) and non-*Adige* groups, the latter including Abazas (Ashkharwas and Ashwas), Chechens and Karachay Turks. Some scholars call the Kabardians “aristocratic” Circassians since they had the most elaborate status hierarchy of any peoples of the Caucasus.<sup>4</sup> The most important categories were the princes (*pssi*), the nobles (*werkhs*), the freemen (*lhxukhel*) and the slaves (*pssil* and *uneut*).<sup>5</sup>

The master-slave relationships among Circassians were perpetuated in Anatolia, where the exploitation of slaves even intensified among the exhausted refugees. The Ottoman government relied more and more on Circassians in Anatolia for the supply of *cariyes* (female domestic slaves), as it gradually restricted the trade of slaves, nevertheless resisting the total abolition of slavery.<sup>6</sup>

I started my research in Uzunyayla with an interest in reconstructing the history of the re-formation and transformation of a Circassian society in the diaspora.<sup>7</sup> While many of the local nobles, or *werkhs*, were very articulate about history, I had difficulty eliciting historical accounts in Üçyol village (a pseudonym), the central location of my research, where more than half of the population were said to have slave origins.<sup>8</sup>

Actually, some of the residents of Üçyol were willing to speak about the past, but I could not initially recognize their stories as history. Why was this the case?

<sup>4</sup> Quelquejay 1962: 22.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term “slaves” for Circassian bondmen with some hesitation. According to one of the early monographs on Circassians, *pssil*’s (those attached to a lord) were of Circassian origin and almost their masters’ partners with their own personal assets: *uneuts* (“domestic slaves”), on the other hand, were descended from war hostages of different ethnic origin and were not allowed to have separate households (Baj 1995: 109-110, originally completed in 1921). The difference between these two social categories was not upheld in Uzunyayla, where locals commonly talked about slaves in general terms (*khejer*; *köle*). They did not have a concept of serfs inseparable from the particular pieces of land, though it might be more appropriate to consider *pssil*’s as serfs.

<sup>6</sup> Erdem 1996; Toledano 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Prior to my research, I had spent two years in Kayseri (1994-1996). I had many contacts with members of different Circassian associations in Kayseri and beyond. Stories I heard from them shaped my understandings of Circassians.

<sup>8</sup> There was a vigorous dispute in Uzunyayla over how the status categories should be defined and which family belonged to which group. Current ideas of noble and slave status seemed to have little to do with people’s historically factual origins. To categorise different families into separate status groups, I follow generally accepted reputations. Reification of speakers’ identities has seemed inevitable in my attempt to enable the voiceless to speak.

I suggest that there was indeed a “history”, with its own form and message, in what they told me. This raises the question of how the past might have served as a resource for those Circassians who supposedly had no history to tell.

To tackle these issues of silence of Circassians of slave origin, I employ the idea of muted categories that Ardener proposed for discussing the cultural mechanism by which subjugated groups are deprived of their voice.<sup>9</sup> Only a limited number of people have the ability to be articulate in any given society, whereas others are inarticulate.<sup>10</sup> Ardener’s concept of articulation refers to the capacity of commanding language, including both the ability to perceive things and express oneself clearly as well as a claim to authority which demands that one be listened to by subordinate others. The latter, whose voices cannot be fully realised, remain muted.

How were the *Üçyollus* (the people of Üçyol) muted by the articulate narrative of Circassian history? To answer the question, I compare three different sets of oral history produced by Circassians. These are the Oral History formulated by urban-based Circassian ethnic organizations, the History told by *werkhs* notables who originate from Uzunyayla, and the “history” related by those wealthy *Üçyollus* who are descended from slaves.<sup>11</sup>

To examine these different verbal representations, perhaps, the following issues could be considered. Who spoke with authority? What resources authorised their voice? How were these resources distributed? What events were recognised as historically significant? What social boundaries were stressed? How were the shared pasts emphasised at the cost of people’s voice?

This inquiry will show that Circassian *werkhs* imposed silence upon slave descendants. On closer examination, however, we find that the latter were certainly relating a kind of history, even if it did not share a narrative with *werkhs* History. It is the specific contents, forms, meanings and motivation of this muted history, which need examining.

I shall explain how people from affluent, former slave families were appropriating *werkhs*’ historical narrative as a resource for constructing an empowering version of their history. De Certeau draws attention to the everyday practice of “making do”, in which subordinate people cope with difficult situations by skilfully using the resources at their disposal to produce positive meanings and experiences.<sup>12</sup> I shall show how *Üçyollus* were “making do”, resisting the dominant mode of knowledge production that silenced them, to raise their own voices with some success.

<sup>9</sup> Ardener 1975b.

<sup>10</sup> Ardener *ibid.*: 130.

<sup>11</sup> I refer to Circassians as an “ethnic” group and use the term “nation” to refer to the Turks.

<sup>12</sup> de Certeau 1988: 29-39.

By this I am also responding to Ardener's insight that researchers often participate in the muting of subordinate groups.<sup>13</sup> A number of studies have been written by non-Circassian as well as Circassian researchers on Circassian ethnic organizations in Turkey.<sup>14</sup> It is illuminating that these works make almost no reference to the different Circassian status groups. These works discuss modern modes of social organization without examining the influences exerted by traditional Circassian organization. I hope that my examinations of both rural and urban Circassian voices may, however modestly, redress the neglect and open a new field of investigation.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Oral History of Circassian Modernist Intellectuals*

#### *The Caucasus Association and its Historiography*

In this section, I briefly look at the historiography of Circassian intellectuals, limiting my account to an Oral History Programme promoted by the writers of a Circassian magazine. *Nart* is a bimonthly opinion and art magazine, published by the Caucasus Association (*Kafkas Dernegi*; *Kaf-Der* hereafter).<sup>16</sup> I use the materials that appear in this publication selectively in order to present one of many different strands that constitute the historiography of modernist Circassians. By doing so, I am taking the risk of homogenizing the historical awareness of different members of *Kaf-Der* who embrace diverse political beliefs.

First, I will briefly summarise the activities of Circassian organizations, so that I can later analyze how the Oral History Programme is in line with the broad outlines of the historiography of Circassian intellectuals.

Circassians began to found ethnic organizations from the onset of the constitutional period, beginning with the foundation of the Circassian Union and Mutual Aid Association (*Çerkes İttihad ve Teavün Cemiyeti*, founded in 1908).<sup>17</sup> More recently, there has been a resurgence of organizational activities parallel to the democratization of the country that started in 1984. The number of Circassian organizations has since increased during the 1990s. In 1993, the Ankara-based *Kaf-Der* was founded as an umbrella organization, under the leadership of the Ankara North Caucasus Cultural Association, known to have been a centre of leftist Circassians during the 1970s. *Kaf-Der* grew to have more than forty

<sup>13</sup> Ardener 1975a: 72-74.

<sup>14</sup> Bezanis 1994; Shami 1995; Toumarkine 2000; Ertem 2000; Kaya 2004, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> See Bellér-Hann (1995: 500), for a comparative work on different historiographies of Laz on the eastern Black Sea coast.

<sup>16</sup> Thirty-six issues were published between 1997 and 2003. Its publication was resumed by *Kaf-Fed* in 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Taymaz 2000 is a useful source on the history of various Circassian ethnic organizations in Turkey.

branches nation-wide. In 2003, the Federation of Caucasus Associations (*Kaf-Fed*) replaced *Kaf-Der*, further incorporating some other associations that had formerly kept distance from *Kaf-Der*.<sup>18</sup>

*Kaf-Der's* principle activity included the preservation of culture and the promotion of mutual aid.<sup>19</sup> *Kaf-Der* also demanded the public recognition of Circassians as a discrete ethnic group of non-Turkic origin with its own culture and history, negotiating the restriction of the Turkish Republic's doctrines.

The active members of *Kaf-Der* were mostly urban middle-class intellectuals serving in such fields as the bureaucracy, law, business and education. They could safely be regarded to have internalised the Republic's ideologies, since they succeeded in acquiring relatively high positions within the existing state structures. At the same time, many key members of *Kaf-Der* seemed to be of established (i.e. *werkh* or freeman) families, whereas people of slave origin still appeared hesitant to play active roles in Circassian organizations.<sup>20</sup>

The Circassian intellectuals produced their historiography partly in relation to the official state discourse of Turkish history. The national political elite of Turkey equated modernity with Western modernity, epitomised by the nation-state, whose principles included centralization of power, secularism, democracy, homogeneity within the state boundaries, and national economics.<sup>21</sup> The Turkish Republic found the legitimacy of its rule in its departure from the old regime of the Ottoman sultan. The new nation-state restored two different sets of memories.<sup>22</sup> One was the Turkish national past in Central Asia, which placed the Republic in an evolutionist narrative, stretching from primitive tribal organization, passing through absolutism-feudalism, and culminating in a modern nation-state. The other was a myth that linked Turks to the ancient civilization of Anatolia, designating Anatolia as the homeland of the Turks. The Circassian intellectuals' historiography was shaped partly by virtue of being incorporated into this Turkish nationalist historiography.<sup>23</sup>

Muhittin Ünal's book titled "The Roles of Circassians in the Struggle for Turkish Independence" (1996) deserves a closer look. An ex-bureaucrat retired from the Ministry of Education, Ünal has served as president of *Kaf-Der* since 1996,

<sup>18</sup> Fifty-seven Circassian associations in Turkey are members of the *Kaf-Fed* (January 2008, [www.kafkasfederasyonu.org](http://www.kafkasfederasyonu.org)).

<sup>19</sup> See *Nart* (2001 Vol. 26: 13) for the principles of *Kaf-Der's* activities.

<sup>20</sup> My observation is restricted to Circassians of Uzunyayla origin. The most numerous *Adige* groups in Turkey, that is, *Shapsughs* and *Abzeks*, are known for their democratic attitude toward traditional social classes. Certainly, many individuals from these groups have been playing important roles in Circassian associations.

<sup>21</sup> I have found Yeğen 1996 and Mert 2001 useful to thinking about the roles that the particular concepts of modernity have played in forming national as well as ethnic identities in Turkey.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis 1975: 11-13.

<sup>23</sup> See Houston 1999 and Hirschler 2001 for Kurdish parallels.

and was elected president of *Kaf-Fed* in 2003. In this book, he presented Circassians as having actively participated in the Turkish Republic from its very beginnings.<sup>24</sup> He stressed Circassian contributions to the foundation of the Republic by underlining that many people around Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (the founding father of Turkey) were of Circassian origin. He dissociated Circassians from other non-Turkish groups that had organised separatist movements during the late Ottoman period and early Republican years.<sup>25</sup>

In this respect, Ünal presented a historiography that did not oppose the state's status quo, but instead underscored a recognition-loyalty reciprocity between themselves and the state. He was seeking a "public" history of Circassians that was acceptable to the state.<sup>26</sup> He presented a picture of Circassian history that could be shared by the great majority of active members of *Kaf-Der*, though his personal political views—he is known as an Atatürkist, close to the CHP—may have hardly represented the whole spectrum of diverse political ideologies embraced by other members.

At the same time, *Nart* writers saw Circassians as representatives of a past that the Republic rejected. For instance, they often referred to Circassians in Turkish terms associated with the past "tribal" organization of the Turks, i.e. *asiret/ kabile* ("tribe"), *boy/ klan*, ("clan") and *sülale* ("lineage"), rather than seeing these units for what they often were, that is, dialect or family based groupings.<sup>27</sup> Further,

<sup>24</sup> He initially intended to publish this book with the Turkish Historical Society, originally founded under the patronage of Atatürk to promote the study of Turkey and Turks (personal communication).

<sup>25</sup> The book was published during the period in which the separatist Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK) was threatening the country.

<sup>26</sup> Modernist Circassians shared the concern of the early Turkish nation-builders to present their own people as ancient and civilised, firmly rooted in human history as well as in the territory. See Atalay 1998: 14; Bağ 1999; Özveri 2000a, 2000b and Ögün 2001.

<sup>27</sup> See Özbay 1997a: 27; Hirka 1998 and Canlı 2002: 31. In the Ottoman official discourse, the stereotyped picture of *asiret* as uncivilised nomadic people in the Anatolian hinterlands living in part on theft and brigandage facilitated the promotion of the policy of the forced settlement of semi-nomadic populations. See BOA, *İrade-i Meclis-i Vâlid*, No: 20949 (23 *Şa'bân* 1278), for the implementation of the policy in Uzunayyla, where this went hand in hand with settling Circassian refugees (<http://kafkas.org.tr/belgeler/belge1.html>).

It is interesting to note that all these different levels in the presumed "tribal" structure are referred to by a single term in Kabardian, *lhepkh*. According to John Colarusso, *lhepkh* (lit. "blood-frame"), which originally meant clan, has been generalised to any human grouping felt to be linked genetically (personal communication). Kabardians in Uzunayyla most commonly use the term *lhepkh* to distinguish *Adige* from other peoples from the Caucasus that settled in the region (e.g. Abaza). They also use the same term to distinguish themselves from other groups within *Adige* (e.g. Hatukoy). *Lhepkh* is also used interchangeably with *unaghue* in reference to extended family or lineage, though the former tends to be used to emphasise prestige and loyalty. The lack of enthusiasm shown to mark separate levels of human grouping taxonomically may indicate that, historically, Circassians did not have an elaborate tribal organisation, assumed by Circassian writers. By contrast, Circassian intellectuals more often use *lhepkh* for Turkish *millet* ("nation") or *halk* ("people", "folk") in nationalist discourses, as in *Adige/ Çerkes lhepkh* or *Kafkas lhepkh* (pl.).

Circassian modernist intellectuals normally described Circassians as characterised by “feudalism” (*feodalizm*), by which they meant a well-defined, hierarchical structure of different social classes, sometimes likened to the “caste system” (*kast sistemi*).<sup>28</sup>

These self-images conceived Circassians in the very terms that the early modernists of the Republic associated with the Ottoman peripheries in their efforts to insist on the superiority of the new Turkish nation-state, modelled upon centralised, modern states in the West. The Circassian intellectuals frequently relied on the imagery of the primitiveness in describing Circassians’ present social conditions. They presented Circassians as not having altered much over a long period.<sup>29</sup> By doing so, they reified Circassians as the “other” of the state, unable to share the temporal space with the state.<sup>30</sup>

### Nart’s *Oral History Programme*

Here, I aim to analyse the Oral History Programme as a particular instance of the Circassian intellectuals’ historiography examined above. The *Kaf-Der* published a special issue of *Nart* (November–December 2002) devoted to oral history. It featured over ten short writings and interviews by many active members, such as some established writers of Uzunayla origin including Ö. Özbay as well as the above-mentioned M. Ünal. Diverse historical themes that *Kaf-Der*’s modernist members regarded as especially significant for Circassians were discussed in the issue.

“The North Caucasus Oral History Project”, conducted by the Youth Commission of the Istanbul North Caucasus Cultural Association (now the Istanbul Caucasus Cultural Association, a member of the *Kaf-Fed*), deserves a closer look. Its outline publicised in this issue, defined oral history as “the recording of

<sup>28</sup> See Huvaj (1997: 11, 2002: 9–10); Alparslan (2002: 44).

<sup>29</sup> See Karaerkek (2002: 44), for instance. Educated Circassians often perceive the current state of their society as “semi-feudal” (*yart-feodal*), acknowledging the lingering influences of the past social division.

<sup>30</sup> Fabian’s (1983) insight that “otherness” is produced by manipulating temporality is valid here. See Vali (1996: 45); Yeğen (1999: 567), for the roles of both state and Kurdish nationalist discourses in reifying Kurds as the “other” in their relation to the state. Another domain in which the internalization of the state ideology by educated Circassians is obvious is their frequent use of the idiom “guest” (*misafir*) in characterising the Circassian diaspora in Turkey. The use of this idiom conveys the idea that Circassians’ presence in the territory of the “host” (*ev sahibi*: “house owner”, i.e. Turks) is temporal and inauthentic, though tolerated. This articulated sense of “rootlessness” suggests that Circassian intellectuals are compelled to cope with what Ingold calls the “genealogical model”, deeply implicated in the discourse of the Turkish nation-state. It is an assumption that privileges rootedness as the source of authenticity and legitimisation, especially essential for “the state’s sovereign entitlement to defend and administer its territory in the name of the nation” (Ingold 2000: 151).

knowledge left from the past, obtained as a result of appropriate questioning and direction”, and having as its source “persons at the highest position in terms of both age and knowledge, [with whose death] the knowledge would be lost”. It continued that it was essential to “find informants in the field with the highest capacity for reflecting and representing the specific local conditions”.<sup>31</sup>

The outline provided a list of subjects to be studied: (1) informants’ backgrounds, (2) “migration” (*göç*) from the Caucasus, (3) the physical environment of settlements in both the Caucasus and Turkey, (4) customary law, (5) marriage, and gender interactions, (6) table manners, (7) language, (8) the custom of fosterage (*atalık*), practised among noble families, and (9) the Turkish Struggle for Independence that led to the foundation of the Republic. Several further questions were listed under each of these nine headings. The subject that received the most attention concerned Circassian customs. Only two subjects related to historical events were addressed, both of which belonged to too remote a past to have been experienced firsthand and to be remembered by living generations of Circassians.

Other research topics also received some attention, including the “lineage” names, the “coats of arms” (*arma*) that only noble families owned, and the names of villages named after their founders or lords. The outline also mentioned that this project concerned “local history”, with these research topics to be adjusted to the local contexts.

*Nart* also organised a “Contest of Family History Writing”, publicised in the March-April 2003 issue. The advertisement of the contest stated that the aim of pursuing family history was to learn more about Circassian history. This objective was also highlighted in the several proposed subjects of research, all of which actually concerned the one-and-a-half-century-old “exile” (*sürgün*).<sup>32</sup>

*Nart* writers sought to recover family history and local history by means of oral sources. Their recognition of the need to collect and record experience-based testimonies of human history should be welcomed, given the fact that Circassians did not hand down their own history in written forms, independently of official histories of Russia or Turkey. The Programme had empiricist objects, seeking to reconstruct what actually had happened.

Elders, especially those elders who had grown up in the “guest room”, were mentioned as knowing this objective truth.<sup>33</sup> In the past, the ostentatious social life in the guest room was the symbol of the aristocratic culture of wealthy *werkhs*. It was assumed that History would be lost for good once these *werkhs* elders, who had learnt it while serving the guest in their youth, had passed away.

<sup>31</sup> Aycan 2002: 17 (translation by E. Miyazawa).

<sup>32</sup> The proposed research topics included the social class to which one’s family had belonged before the forced migration.

<sup>33</sup> Alpan 2002.

The *Nart* writers produced a static image of history through the Oral History Programme. First, the Programme was interested in timeless cultural values epitomised in ethnic customs and an inflexible social hierarchy.<sup>34</sup> Both culture and structure were presented as features that set Circassians apart as a distinct group, transcending the experiences that related to the actual social conditions. This Oral History froze the past as a permanent condition.

Second, the Programme highlighted the Circassian Exodus and the Turkish Struggle for Independence. This resonated with the fact that the *Kaf-Der* members yearly held an anniversary ceremony to commemorate the displacement, and also sought to present Circassians as firmly integrated within the Turkish state.<sup>35</sup>

However, the arbitrary selection of these contents excluded many aspects of social history and failed to acknowledge the importance of the lived experiences over the last eighty years. This Programme was oriented to the past, rather than aimed at exploring the multifaceted links between the past and the present.

As such, it was far from a study of personal life history of the living generations of Circassians, for whom living in the Turkish nation-state as members of an ethnic minority group constitutes an important part of their experiences of modernity. Their crucial everyday events encompass, for instance, their participation in party politics and the market economy, as well as their accommodation to the modern legal and educational systems, which in part touch upon the issue of the use of Circassian languages in the public sphere. The ways in which they have been coping with these issues play no part in the historical narrative promoted by the Programme.<sup>36</sup>

The *Nart* writers constructed this Programme in an effort to recast the Circassian past in a new image appropriate to a modern setting. The acceptability of this history was directed also toward Circassians themselves. This could only be achieved by editing out “inappropriate” stories from historical accounts actually given by selected informants.

For instance, there was an insistence that “anachronisms” (*anakronizm*) be eradicated.<sup>37</sup> Given *Kaf-Der*’s nature, it is safe to assume that the stress on social divisions was not considered appropriate for a shared Circassian history. The

<sup>34</sup> The aim of the *Kaf-Der* included the collection, analysis and preservation of “Circassian cultural values” (*Nart* (2001) Vol. 26: 12).

<sup>35</sup> The Russians declared their victory in the Russo-Circassian War on 21 May 1864. Tellingly, the representatives of various Circassian organizations in Turkey visited *Anıt Kabir* (Atatürk’s mausoleum in Ankara) after a ceremony held to commemorate the 133<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Forced Migration in 1997 (*Nart* (1997) Vol. 2: 5).

<sup>36</sup> More and more Circassian parents are giving Circassian names to their offspring. Circassians often talk about how these parents successfully dealt with civil servants at local branches of the Registry of Birth Administrations unwilling to register children with non-Turkish names.

<sup>37</sup> Yançatalor 2002.

Programme accepted a hierarchy between different status groups as heritage, without questioning the *werkhs'* monopolising of political power, wealth, social privileges and honour.<sup>38</sup> However, the memories regarding the ruling class's exploitation of the lower classes and the conflicts between different groups had to be suppressed so as not to be articulated publicly.

In short, the Oral History Programme sought a modified image of society. Some princes and nobles led the tribal groups. Society was divided into many classes, whose harmonious relationships with one another were predetermined on the status basis. There was no class struggle. This denial of social conflicts gave the impression that there was no history at all in the Programme. This Oral History was unable to recognise people as agents who were aware of social contradictions and actively contributed to the production of historical events.<sup>39</sup>

The Programme suppressed multiple voices. Surely, any history presented by a non-Turkish group offers a "non-official" (*gayri-resmi*) alternative to the state's discourse. However, its reification of Circassian identity and ethnicity was not in line with recent works on oral history in different Turkish and Circassian settings.<sup>40</sup> These works aim at recovering the multiplicity of viewpoints and experiences that were suppressed by the homogenizing modernist project. In contrast, the voice of the ethnic intellectuals, raised through the publication of an opinion magazine, had silenced many other voices among the Circassians.<sup>41</sup>

### *The History of Werkh Notables*

Two different versions of the oral history in Uzunayla are to be compared in the rest of this article. I first look at a coherent story of history as recounted by elders of renowned, wealthy *werkhs* families, including many individuals from families known as "lords" (*ağa, bey*) believed to have founded the villages in which they settled (hereafter I use History for this *werkhs* History). They were the primary informants selected by the Oral History Programme. However, unlike the sanitised history promoted in the Programme, these privileged speakers recounted a narrative of an imaginary "class struggle" between *werkhs* and slaves, which resulted in the fall of *werkhs*. I then examine the process by which the resulting History muted the voices of slave descendants that represent alternative versions of Uzunayla oral history.

<sup>38</sup> See also a report by a group of *KafDer* Ankara Branch commissioned to study the traditional Circassian way of life, including social classes (Di Xabze 2000: 35).

<sup>39</sup> See notes 53 and 54 below.

<sup>40</sup> Neyzi 1999; Shami 2000a; Öztürkmen 2003.

<sup>41</sup> See Ertem (1999) and Shami (2000b), for the mutedness of Circassian women. The comparison between two different muted categories of Circassians is an interesting subject to explore.

For the secular modernists of the ethnic organizations, the Circassians in Uzunyayla stood for the past in the two opposing senses that the past always bears in its relation with the present. On the one hand, they were considered to have preserved Circassian customs in near-original forms, thus serving as an important source of traditions.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, they had a reputation for “backwardness” (*çağdışı*). Their cultural conservatism was interpreted as excessively influenced by Islamic religiosity, by competition between prominent figures, and by discrimination against the descendants of former slaves, especially persistent in the choice of marriage partner. Circassians in Uzunyayla epitomised the past, reifying the otherness that urban intellectuals turned Circassians into in order to contrast them with the modern state.

Among local Circassians, the only meaningful status difference was that between *werkhs* and slaves. Locals rarely claimed free-class origins (*llxukhel*) for their own family, and they were seldom referred to as having such an origin. People were compelled either to claim *werkh* status for themselves, or to remain silent about this title. To avoid being judged as slave offspring, they needed to demonstrate commitment to a “noble society” (*werkh toplumu*), actively recounting History in this public sphere.

*Werkh* elders were strongly motivated by the objective of maintaining their precedence over members of former slave families. Many *werkhs* had lost their wealth, whereas the latter had gained significant social influence, in the last one hundred years since slavery disappeared from Anatolia. For *werkhs*, using the past as a symbolic resource to retain social influence was perhaps more important than it had ever been. The issue of who was entitled to represent history, more than what had really happened, was at stake in the process of coming to terms with the past social injustice.<sup>43</sup>

The privileged local informants were certainly eloquent in telling their version of history. They regarded themselves as “masters of speech” (*söz sahibi*) endowed with “a right of speech” (*söz hakkı*), hereby claiming the authority to present “oral history” (*sözlü tarih*: “history articulated in speech”). According to them, one must be of *werkh* origin, first of all, to become “a possessor of words”, but this status needed to be supported by both power and social experiences. The local notables supported their narrative with both types of resources, i.e. economic and symbolic. They formed a homogeneous group, sharing the same viewpoint from which they looked at Circassian society from above. They strongly identified themselves with the *werkh* class, a well-defined position that enabled them to talk about History decisively and coherently.

<sup>42</sup> See Ünal 1998: 46. Huvaj stated that Uzunyayla had been a “little Caucasus” a few decades before (1998: 16).

<sup>43</sup> See Hodgkin and Radstone 2003: 1.

They claimed that “the right to speak” was not merely a customary right, but was supported by abundant practical experiences in the local community. The important public space representing *werkhs* society was symbolised by the guest room. *Werkhs* elders always claimed that they had acquired their knowledge in this site of communal commensality. The experiences gained there supported their authority as bearers of History and their self-confidence as social actors.

These speakers claimed that they monopolised knowledge. They recognised knowledge as significant only when it was articulated in *werkhs* society. The capacity to know was identified with the capacity to speak “comfortably” (*rabat*). To “narrate” (*anlatmak*) was a causative action that made others “understand” (*anlamak*). The success of this causative action depended on a social authority that forced others to accept their arguments. Backed by both their ascribed high status and their acquired social experiences, wealthy *werkhs* elders strongly felt that they were able to impose their own representation of history, and so, to silence any contesting voices.

In contrast, the *werkhs* speakers considered slave descendants unable to recount History because the latter were not full social beings.<sup>44</sup> They were called people who “don’t mix in society”, “struggling with their own works”. Without access to the valued public space, they were denied the capacity to possess valued knowledge, let alone to relate their versions of the localised Circassian history.

When I was visiting elders of well-known *werkhs* families, I sometimes saw some other men keeping silent throughout my conversation with the elders. Similarly, knowledgeable *werkhs* who were answering my questions often did not ask others sitting at the same dining table about what they knew. Later, I was told that these men were neighbours from ex-slave families. Though present at the site of knowledge production, they were not producers of oral history.

To legitimate the situation, *werkhs* described them as still suffering from “trauma”, caused by unspeakable memories of their ancestors’ past hardships. These people were assumed to have an “inferiority complex” (*kompleks*), unable to feel comfortable in the presence of others. They were liars who could not tell the truth.

I now turn to the specific contents of History, highlighting the social distinction stressed by it. The *werkhs* considered the account of one’s birth as a major constituent of History. I was often said to be studying people’s “roots” (*kök*) or “origin” (*köken*). *Werkhs* presented their nobility as *asalet*, a word implying root and origin. They characterised their families as families “with roots” (*köklü, asıl*).

<sup>44</sup> Many *werkhs* said that slaves remained slaves until their masters manumitted them, even after they had been administratively freed through legislation by the state. The persistence of symbolic slave status was applied to the descendants of former slaves. See Patterson (1984: 42), for a comprehensive study of representations of slaves as non-persons as a means for facilitating and legitimizing slavery.

By contrast, those who descended from former slaves were said to lack History. They were “rootless” (*köksüz*), separated from their birth families, owned and traded by others in the past. The “uprooted” did not have a history worth mentioning. Here, the past was a burden for them, rather than a resource. *Werkhs* told me not to ask those people to teach me some History since it would hurt them.

*Werkhs* presented History in terms of a *werkh*-slave dichotomy, as if only a “class struggle” constituted the history that mattered. They described descendants of freed slaves as “rebels” (*isyancı*), accounting most events that shook Circassian society as having originated in slave rebellions.<sup>45</sup> The winners were always slaves.

According to the *werkhs*’ “trauma” theory, their opponents always took the opportunity to revenge themselves on the former ruling class. The “rebellious spirit” was seen as the driving force of History. This assumption brought teleology into the *werkhs*’ historiography, as examined below.

The *werkh* History stressed three events as turning points more than displacement from the Caucasus: “the Great Mobilisation” (*Büyük Seferberlik*), the foundation of the Turkish Republic (1923), and the end of the horse trade in the late 1950s. The alternation in the mode of organising society and the replacement of primary social actors were mentioned at all these moments.

*Seferberlik* was known to have led to a sudden switch of leading groups among local Circassians. Locally, *Seferberlik* referred to an extended period of hardship and dispersion, stretching well beyond the First World War (1914-1918) to incorporate the Yemeni War in 1904 and the Turkish Struggle for Independence (1919-22). A few thousand local Circassians were believed to have been killed on the battlefields.<sup>46</sup> *Werkh* youths, who readily participated as “cavalcades” (*süvari alayı*), were annihilated, which left the arena to slaves, who escaped military service as their birth was often left unregistered.

Slavery was very often misrepresented as having been legally abolished when the Republic was founded.<sup>47</sup> Freed slaves, now able to use their own labour for themselves, worked hard and ascended materially. The *werkhs* lost manpower and declined. Also, the end of the purchase of horses by the military in the late 1950s led to the growth of slave descendants’ influence. *Werkh* families had their

<sup>45</sup> The defeat of the Circassians by the Russians was attributed to the betrayal by slaves who hoped for liberation by the Russians. The Communist Revolution in Russia, locally considered to have caused the Circassians’ forced migration, was portrayed as a slave rebellion. Slaves themselves were sometimes referred to as “proletarians” (*proleter*) or even as Bolsheviks.

<sup>46</sup> It was said that a few thousand soldiers conscripted from Uzunayla died in the disaster of Sarkamış (January 1915), in which 90,000 soldiers froze to death.

<sup>47</sup> The Ottoman government did not completely abolish slavery, nor was any law concerning the abolition of slavery enacted during the Republican era (Erdem 1996: xix). The trade of Circassian slaves was universally banned in 1909 (*ibid.* 151).

heyday in the early Republican years when they supplied the Turkish Army with horses.<sup>48</sup> *Werkhs* lost their most important income source due to the motorization of the army, while some former slaves, mere shepherds at first, accumulated wealth through the sheep trade.<sup>49</sup>

The theme of the *werkhs'* decline and the ex-slaves' ascendancy was repeated at these three points to construct a coherent narrative. Certainly, different explanations were given for the transformations that Circassian society underwent at each of these points. Nonetheless, the *werkhs*-slave dichotomy served as a constant framework from which *werkhs* drew significance, lending History a paradigmatic force.

This theme was elaborated at many different turning points in order to generate a narrative of the fall from a Golden Age to a Dark Age.<sup>50</sup> *Werkhs* insisted that only an indefinite period continuing from the past in the Caucasus was worth writing about. This unspecified time was presented as an age in which Circassian society was firmly structured and the Circassian code of conduct (*Adige xabze/Çerkes usul*) governed the protection-service relationship of separate classes.

Circassians referred to the totality of their customs and values as *Adigaghe* (*Çerkeslik* / "Circassianness").<sup>51</sup> By *Adigaghe*, *werkhs* often referred to the system of rights and obligations governing the relationship of different social classes as well as that between age groups. Circassian tradition was impossible to separate from the customs by which the wealthy class had dominated Circassian society.<sup>52</sup> *Werkhs* lamented that most of these customs had been lost. They presented the glorious days of the Circassians as having ended with the decline of the *werkhs*, an event that took place in an unspecific past.

The *werkhs* History was unable to grasp actual social contradictions and oppositions, which are among the major factors that produce history. It interpreted Circassian social structure as a volatile matrix of conflicts, though static in itself. This simplified *werkhs* - slave distinction did not do justice to the substantial class divisions between the rich and the poor. This History was transformed into an imaginary struggle between social categories that often lacked economic and po-

<sup>48</sup> Horses branded with family emblems (*damga*) were a status symbol of nobility.

<sup>49</sup> Many Circassians despise shepherding to the present period, considering it to have been slaves' work.

<sup>50</sup> According to *werkhs*, labour migration to Germany was an opportunity for the poor to become rich, whereas *werkhs* who relied upon what resources they had went bankrupt. Enthusiasm for education, for which Circassians were reputed nation-wide, was attributed to the struggle of slave descendants to raise their social standing. Many *werkhs* understood the increased commitment to Islam among the locals as a reflection of the slaves' intention to gain social prestige.

<sup>51</sup> See Ertem (2000: 300-301) for an ethnicity-centred redefinition of *Adigaghe* among the members of a provincial Circassian organization.

<sup>52</sup> Huvaj (2002: 10) stated that *Adige xabze*, also called *werkhs xabze*, carries clear marks of the "feudal period" to the present day.

litical substance. Actual people were denied agency and responsibility for historical events taking place under specific conditions.

Thus, History remained silent about recorded riots of slaves in Uzunyayla. According to official documents, local slaves occasionally opposed their masters violently.<sup>53</sup> These events have been purged from *werkhs* collective memory. Slaves were not necessarily the socially weak. Some slaves successfully struggled for their own liberty. In spite of this, slaves have not been recognised as the agents of history up to the present day. This distorted imagination has caused some grave events to be forgotten.<sup>54</sup>

There was another domain of forgetting necessary to construct History. This coherent oral history was related by using the first person plural pronoun “we” to indicate authorship of the narrative. The *werkhs* constituted a socially but not necessarily an economically distinct class. The title of *werkhs* did not always correspond with one’s actual economic and political power. Those whose economic position did not match their high status often identified with the better-off sections of their kin group. The forgetting of past poverty as well as silence about present hardship made it possible for *werkhs* to present their families as corporate groups that owned slaves collectively and shared honour.

For *werkhs*, their social group and Circassian society was one and the same thing. Hence, their decline was interpreted as tantamount to the decline of the Circassians, who lost autonomy in their relation with the state. Members of former slave families were not regarded as constituent parts of this community. The general improvement of the standard of living among the poor section was not evaluated positively. It was denied any significance whatsoever for History. Thus, a relatively large section of Circassian society remained muted, unable to find a significant narrative in which to locate their experiences of empowerment over the last half century.

The History of the local *werkhs* and the Oral History of the urban intellectuals had so much in common, that the latter appears to have been produced in large

<sup>53</sup> The governor of Sivas province, to which Uzunyayla belonged till 1926, looked for help from the Porte in the face of strident demands by armed slaves for freedom in 1878 (Toldano 1998: 101-103). The slaves demanded that the government give them land so that they could buy back freedom. They knew that this policy had been successfully implemented in some other regions in Anatolia. A report of a British consulate in Kayseri on this riot mentions that, according to the governor of Pınarbaşı district (called Aziziye to 1926), there were two thousand slaves in Uzunyayla, including five hundred able-bodied men (British Parliamentary Papers, 1881, Turkey No. 6: 6).

<sup>54</sup> A local notable sent a letter to the Circassian Union and Mutual Aid Association in 1908. He reported armed clashes between the *werkhs* and slaves, who had made a public decision to fight for freedom. He called for governmental intervention as the only solution. In *Nart*, the grandson of this notable wrote that the government had decided to abolish slavery partly in response to this letter (Dumanıç 1999). In an elite historiography, a single letter written by a notable *werkhs* man is sufficient to appropriate slaves’ long-term struggles for freedom and better life conditions.

part by sanitising the former. Actually, these two sets of historical discourses were linked to each other. Circassian intellectuals were often first-generation migrants who travelled back and forth between urban centres and rural areas. They disseminated their modernist ideas to the rural areas, in which they learned the local discourse of history. Also, younger members of Circassian associations, including university students in provincial towns, further facilitated the exchange of historical thoughts. These two articulate historical discourses seemed to be serving complementarily to form a condition in which the voice of slave descendants cannot be easily heard.

Also, my own research, which had been informed by my prior contacts with many association members and which sought articulate, oral history, enhanced the slave descendants' mutedness. Since I did not speak *Adigelze* (the Circassian language), my research often took the form of semi-structured interviews in Turkish. Mostly, I made notes of the meta-language with which *werkhs* discussed their own history and society.<sup>55</sup> I could not learn sufficiently "the common sense of the past" articulated and circulated in everyday conversations that people had among themselves in their own language.<sup>56</sup> The accounts of History that I gathered thus made some people speak, as seen in this section, while silencing others as will be discussed in the next section.

### *The "History" of Slave Descendants in Üçyol*

The "history" that *Üçyollus* recounted has to be understood in its unequal relationship to these two dominant modes of making sense of history, especially History of the local *werkhs*. Üçyol in the 1990s was emerging as a centre of local social activities.<sup>57</sup> It was one of the largest and most affluent villages in Uzunayla with a considerable amount of arable land. While its population had decreased by half in between 1965 to 1997, Üçyol had been less affected by urban migration that began in the 1970s and during my stay had the largest population of any of the villages of Uzunayla.

Wealthy *werkhs* from other villages sometimes called Üçyol "Slave Village" (*Khejjer Khuajje*), while telling me that I was unfortunate to have settled in the village, where I would not find anybody who could teach me the "real" history, i.e. History.<sup>58</sup> More than half of the current residents were perceived as descendants

<sup>55</sup> Ardener 1975a: 74.

<sup>56</sup> Popular Memory Group (1982: 210).

<sup>57</sup> I settled in Üçyol on the recommendation of members of the Pınarbaşı branch of *Kaf-Der*, who highlighted its accessibility to both the district town and the remoter villages in Uzunayla. Üçyol was also the most populous Circassian village in the region. The branch opened in 1997, but became defunct in 2003.

<sup>58</sup> *Kejjer* is a Circassian word of Turkish origin (from *kaçmak*: to run away), initially denoting a "runaway" slave.

of former slaves, since most *werkhs* families had left the village. Many of its better-off people were of slave origin.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, I did experience difficulties in making *Üçyollus* relate history. Almost nothing was known about their ancestors' difficult journey. The title of *werkhs* could seldom be heard. The past of one's own family was barely re-counted, while the lower origins and past hardships of other families were mentioned with some hesitation.

*Üçyollus* seemed conscious of the *werkhs* History. Still, *Üçyollus* avoided talking about certain themes, such as the opposition between *werkhs* and slaves, and the decline of *werkhs* that proceeded parallel to the ascendance of slaves. They often refused to dwell upon these subjects by saying "Do not get mixed up with history", or, "Do not stir up the past". Here, history was categorised as "bygones" (*geçmiş*), that is, an over-and-done-with time that had passed without retaining its relevance to the present. People considered it "inappropriate" (*émk'u*) or "shameful" (*beynape/ ayıp*) to talk about the past.

The absence of any stress on two of the three events marked in *werkhs* History enhanced my impression that History was not articulated in this village. Only the *Seferberlik* was equally stressed. *Üçyollus* believed that their village suffered the greatest loss. This period represented the end of an age. Some prominent *werkhs* families, losing all male members, died out. The wealthiest men had lost their property, and an intra-village feud ended. The foundation of the Turkish Republic, associated with the emancipation of slaves, was not highlighted. Neither did the end of the military horse trade carry any importance. This silence was especially significant, given the fact that Üçyol was one of seven villages in Uzungayla to which stallions were sent from the state-owned depot in Sivas to mate with breeding horses owned by the locals.

*Üçyollus* did insist on continuities with their ethnic past through *Adige xabze*. They said that the principle of "Respect for the senior, love for the junior" lay at the foundation of Circassian society. Here, the Circassian code of conduct often centred on the service-care reciprocity between the old and the young. The observance of this etiquette perpetuated the traditional order of their society, which was the principal constituent of *Adigaghe*, redefined here in ethical terms. Through *Adigaghe*, people gained access to an idealised past in which age, but not social class or wealth, was the primary criterion of social differentiation.

Nonetheless, *Üçyollus* were telling their own histories. To understand what they said and why they said it, the narrators must be socially identified. To locate the positions from which narrators constructed different histories, three criteria seemed significant: (1) birth; (2) wealth; and (3) place of origin, i.e. *yerli* ("of the place") or *xexes* ("alien settlers" who came from other villages). *Üçyollus* could be classified into three categories of speakers: (1) *yerli* "non-slaves", composed of

<sup>59</sup> I use ownership of a tractor as a criterion for measuring relative wealth.

both *werkhs* and freemen; (2) wealthy *yerlis* of slave origin;<sup>60</sup> and (3) the needy (*fakir fukara*), including *yerlis* of ex-slave families and *xexes*.

I shall examine the “history” of the Land Reform in the 1950s related by *Üçyollu* speakers of the second category. According to “non-slaves”, the ancestors of these wealthy families (six households from two separate families) escaped military service during the *Seferberlik* by marrying widowed women or by serving the village as shepherds or watchmen,<sup>61</sup> and made their fortunes while manpower was in short supply. These families were referred to as “*nouveaux riches*” (*yeni zengin olan*) with all the phrase’s negative connotations.

Üçyol had benefited greatly from the Land Reform, and *Üçyollus* recognised the land distribution as a watershed in village history. The Land Distribution Commission, founded according to the 1945 Law on the Distribution of Land to Farmers, distributed 3 million hectares of tillable land nation-wide to 400,000 farming families, improving life in the Anatolian hinterlands.<sup>62</sup> The Commission distributed arable land to 3209 adult males in the Pınarbaşı district.<sup>63</sup> The standard amount of land to be distributed varied from village to village.

Among Circassian villages, the commission came first to Üçyol in 1951. The standard land granted here was among the highest (225 *dönüms*).<sup>64</sup> At least eighty-nine men benefited. The black soil here was the most fertile in Uzunyayla, suitable for lucrative wheat production. The total of distributed lands accounted for more than half of all the land currently cultivated by *Üçyollus*.<sup>65</sup>

For *Üçyollus*, the beginning of the present was more significant than the end of the past. The new tractor-based method of agriculture also started in the 1950s. Only twenty out of seventy households possessed tractors during my research, seen as “rich” by the rest of the villagers, who managed to remain in the village by renting out the land that they received mainly from the distribution.<sup>66</sup> This period, in which the foundations of the current social organization were laid,

<sup>60</sup> The census of the village, in which the oldest record dates to 1321 H. (1903-04), does not show that any of these families had really been slaves. Their ancestors – if they had ever been owned as slaves – seemed to have encountered freedom at an earlier date. The census records twenty-four *gulams* (male slaves), often accompanied by their families, as well as two *cariyes* (female slaves). Only nine households descending from four of these male slaves remained in the village during my research. Other officially registered slave families had vanished without a trace.

<sup>61</sup> Locals said that those who married widowed women were exempted from the draft since these women needed to be protected.

<sup>62</sup> Keyder 1983.

<sup>63</sup> Köy İşleri Bakanlığı 1968: 78.

<sup>64</sup> Locally, 1 *dönüüm* was equal to 1,000 square metres.

<sup>65</sup> *Üçyollus* quoted twenty-five thousand *dönüums* (including fallow fields). According to the recent work of the Office of Land Registration and Ownership, the total arable land in the village is approximately forty-five thousand *dönüums*.

<sup>66</sup> On average, tractor owners were cultivating 500-700 *dönüums* a year per head. Before the mechanization of agriculture, even the wealthiest men farmed at most 100 *dönüums* with five pairs of oxen. Grain cultivation was never a source of wealth then.

was more accentuated in collective memory than the wartime period in which the previous social organization had been destroyed.

However, expressions of appreciation were barely heard. Those who benefited from the Reform seemed to be hesitant to express appreciation for fear that this could be taken as a sign of their own near-slave destitution in the past.

Many people were resentful that they had lost out through the distribution. Disapproval was unhesitatingly expressed about the fact that *xexeses* benefited greatly, receiving land within the village boundaries. Üçyol's abundant land and rich soil had attracted many people from other villages to settle there around the 1950s, working as agricultural labourers or shepherds for wealthier families.<sup>67</sup> Many *Üçyollus* said that the great majority of these *xexeses* were the poverty-stricken of ex-slave origin. They either turned to their maternal relatives or married into the households of widowed women. According to my tentative statistics, thirty of eighty-six beneficiaries were *xexeses* (including nine *werkhs* and three individuals of non-Circassian origin), receiving almost forty percent of the distributed land.

The “*nouveaux riches*” most vociferously grumbled that strangers had become *Üçyollus* by obtaining land within the village boundaries. A man (b. 1942) from one of the wealthy former slave families told me a story of his late father (b. 1916), the village headman who had protested strongly to the commission's delegates about the distribution.<sup>68</sup> He related:

My father opposed the delegation very strongly. Everybody in the village protested against the distribution. My father even went to Ankara. Some villages gave him some allowance. At the Ministry of Agriculture, my father petitioned officials not to give land to those who had nothing to do with the village. They turned him down. The delegation gave him the worst land in the village as punishment. It is too stony to grow anything. The worst land was given to the best. The best land was given to the worst. Their land is very fertile, close to the village, and each plot is large.

The speaker's family had once been one of the wealthiest in the village, though their power and wealth has diffused since. The speaker's grandfather (b. 1880) escaped military service during the *Seferberlik*. He was blessed with five sons (the eldest being the speaker's father). The family accumulated wealth by working industriously for three generations, mostly engaged in the sheep trade. The speaker was explicit in expressing antipathy toward a highly reputed *werkhs* *xexes* family:<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> According to the population censuses, Üçyol's population increased during the five-year period between 1950 and 1955 by almost 40 percent (İstatistik Genel Direktörlüğü).

<sup>68</sup> The headman made two regional record bridewealth payments in the 1960s, first for the wife of his youngest brother and then for the wife of his son (the speaker).

<sup>69</sup> This family descended from two brothers who, after their higher education (*Darılfünun*) in Sivas, settled in Pınarbaşı before *Seferberlik*. They served as judge of a criminal court and financial director of the district. They founded a new village on land purchased in the district before. Partly because of the discord that developed between them and other Circassians looking after their farm, they sold off the whole village to a group of Alevi Kurds in

They sold off all the land they had in a different village, and came to this village. They had relatives working in ministries and the parliament. They heard from these relatives, “The delegation is coming first to Üçyol. Go and settle there.” Now they are selling off their land in this village. They cannot settle in one place. They should not.

In recounting the fifty-year-old event, the speaker produced a narrative of “history” within the framework of the *yerli-xexes* opposition. According to him, all the villagers protested against the state policy of giving land to the newcomers. The speaker used the resistance against the infringement of the village boundaries to express the villagers’ moral superiority vis-à-vis those outsiders who came later.

Of this *xexes werkh* family, an elderly man (b. 1928) from another affluent, *yerli* former slave family said that they used their connections with Circassian bureaucrats in Ankara to bring the commission first to Üçyol. The speaker also claimed that this *xexes* family tried to sell off the land to Kurds and to bring them to the village, to disperse the Circassian population, as they did in their previous village. This allegation demonstrates how the locals still looked at the *xexes* with suspicion.

These speakers may have had special motives to underline the Land Reform as a historical turning point. *The werkhs* recognised that these former slave families had accumulated wealth during and after the *Seferberlik*. The second speaker’s grandfather (1848-1926) was mentioned in the village as having become wealthy by selling off a girl to the slave market in Istanbul. These well-off speakers did not talk at length about how their ancestors had become wealthy. This silence helped them shift the crucial turning point away from the early years of the century to the mid-century. This operation allowed them also to shift the primary social distinction away from that of *werkhs* and slaves to that between *yerlis* and *xexes*. By doing this, they concealed the context of their economic and social ascendancy within a forgotten past and obscured their own slave origins.

They opened up a narrow narrative space to present themselves as the “wealthiest” (*ağa*), “influential” (*ilerigelen*) or “best” (*en iyi olam*), no matter what their origins. They also claimed to be among the first groups to settle in Üçyol. They stressed that they were firmly “rooted” (*yerli*: “of the place/ ground”) in the soil of the village, imposing the sense of “rootlessness” on *xexes* (“aliens”), as if to compensate for the same image with which they were represented in *werkh* History.<sup>70</sup>

They appropriated the dichotomous framework that *werkhs* used in producing their History, while transforming its contents to express their own social and historical awareness. These wealthy speakers did not re-examine its ahistoricity, nor

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the late 1940s. This resulted in a dispersion of all Circassians from the village. They settled in Üçyol in 1949, counting on many *werkh* relatives for support. Six male members received a total of 1,500 *dönüms* in the village.

<sup>70</sup> The “genealogical model” (see fn. 30 above) is implicated in both History and “history”, expressed in the domains of ancestry and territory respectively.

did they challenge its legitimacy. They delegated history to the unquestioned past, just as *werkhs* produced a timeless past to maintain their symbolic precedence over slave offspring. Producing such “history” has allowed them to acquire a clear voice in relation to those still in need, regardless of whether they were co-villagers or *xexeses*.<sup>71</sup> Certainly, the past served as resource for them.

Just like the social categories of *werkh* and slave, those of *yerli* and *xexes* do not reflect actual economic conditions. The slave descendants voiced their resentment by identifying themselves as *yerli*, a category that they claimed to be the rightful beneficiaries of the Land Reform. The social opposition that they presented played down the real conflict of interest between the landholders and the landless within and beyond the village. The stress on the village boundaries projected a distorted image of social conditions to the advantage of the former. The speakers here kept the scope of their accounts firmly within the village boundaries, and hereby presented “history” as different from, and both shallower and narrower than, *werkh* History.

Before concluding this section, I briefly look at different alternative “histories” that other actors related in order to counteract their mutedness and powerlessness in difficult conditions.<sup>72</sup> A number of *Üçyollus* presented themselves as *werkhs*. Still, they were reluctant to elaborate History. They seemed to lack a positive self-image and the motivation to assert *werkh* status, due to their past poverty. They related history at best as “non-slaves”, an indirect identity, but not as *werkhs*. They could not position themselves decisively enough to present a particular version of history as their own.

Actually, these “non-slaves” wavered between two different pasts, History and “history”. They seemed to have a good reason for going along with rich slave descendants by complaining that *xexeses* received land within the village boundaries. To be sure, they borrowed the *werkh*-slave dichotomy of *werkh* History to claim their precedence over the “*nouveaux riches*”. Many of the speakers were, however, among the impoverished who had greatly benefited from the Land Reform, and were unwilling to talk about it at length. Since they could not persuasively impose the rich-poor dichotomy onto the *werkh*-slave framework, their arguments were compromised.

Finally, *Üçyollus* belonging to the third category of speakers represented the past poverty as shared by all villagers. Those who were still poor and needy, including *yerli* slave offspring and *xexeses*, re-counted memories of a community in which people, though impoverished, helped each other on equal terms. They represented the past as a time when everybody had observed *Adige xabze*, pre-

<sup>71</sup> Only two in twenty *xexes* households remaining in the village owned tractors during my research.

<sup>72</sup> I have given a fuller discussion on the alternative pasts presented by *Üçyollus* in my Ph.D. thesis (Miyazawa 2004: 126-138, 153-167).

senting themselves as principal carriers of traditions. They looked critically at the present in which people no longer helped each other and customs were no longer followed. The impoverished redefined *Adyghaga* in egalitarian terms, relating the communal memories of “our time” to produce empowering images of the past for themselves. However, most people, perhaps, including the speakers themselves, were aware that such an affective community did not exist in the real past of their village.<sup>73</sup>

### Conclusion

In this article, I have examined whether and to what extent the descendants of Circassian slaves could use the past as a resource to empower themselves. To answer the question, I have placed historical memories that people in an affluent “Slave Village” re-counted at the point where two articulate discourses of history met. The History of the *werkhs* and the Oral History of the urban intellectuals presumed the same *werkh*-centred view regarding the past social conditions of Circassians, though constructed with opposing ends in mind. They complemented each other with the result of muting the descendants of former slave families. Various “muted” speakers in Üçyol faced obstacles in relating the pasts. Certainly, *werkh* History was hardly articulated in the village.

Nevertheless, they were struggling to produce moments in which they were empowered by relating their pasts in different images. The past served as a resource for the descendants of Circassian slaves, to varying degrees. The capacity of turning the past into a resource was unevenly distributed in line with the material resource that one had at hand. Voices demanding to be heard were reconstituted as the material conditions changed. Different histories that people recounted were not equal.<sup>74</sup>

Social boundaries were repeatedly redrawn, as different pasts were constructed, thus shifting the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. *Werkhs* committed themselves to a shared memory of *werkh* History, forming an imagined community of former slave owners. By contrast, the descendants of former slaves never imagined themselves forming a community that shared the same history. They were divided by material conditions, unable to raise a collective voice. They did not embrace a shared slave identity as a basis of meaningful social actions. The

<sup>73</sup> The poor and needy frequently described the past as a time when they took all the girls in the village to wedding parties. However, wedding parties in the past do not seem to have been a social space shared across status boundaries. According to a man in his late forties from the above-mentioned *xexes werkh* family, now living in Germany, *werkh* families in the village did not participate in the wedding parties of former slave families in his youth. The absence of girls from wealthy *werkh* families in dance parties was still observable in and outside Üçyol even during my research.

<sup>74</sup> Appadurai 1981.

set of oral histories examined in this article showed that giving voice to the voiceless was unlikely to happen without the redistribution of material resources.<sup>75</sup>

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\* The family names in parentheses are Circassian lineage names traceable to the Caucasus. Some Circassian writers use them alongside their Turkish family names.

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