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NOTORIOUS SUBJECTS, INVISIBLE CITIZENS: NORTH CAUCASIAN RESISTANCE TO THE TURKISH NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN NORTHWESTERN ANATOLIA, 1919–23

For contemporary Istanbulites, a trip south, across the Sea of Marmara, poses nothing exceptional or treacherous. The southern shore is often a day-trip destination for those seeking to relax or sightsee in the port towns of Yalova or Çanakkale. The Marmara’s southern coast is also a stop on the road to warmer, more comfortable climes farther south, such as the holiday resorts of Kuşadası or Foça. The region stands in sharp contrast to the farthest reaches of eastern Anatolia, such as Van, Diyarbakır, or Mardin, where an insurgency by Kurdish guerrillas continues to claim lives.

Yet, the tranquillity and stability of districts straddling the Marmara’s southern coast were not always so ensured. In the not so distant past, during the Turkish War of Independence, this strip of coastline, stretching today from the old garrison town of Çanakkale to the industrial quarters and gecekondu of İzmit and Adapazarı, was the scene of bitter intercommunal fighting. Between 1919 and 1923, local gangs and militias fiercely contested the loyalties of towns and villages of the south Marmara.¹ The struggle mirrored the greater conflict over the future of Anatolia, a conflict that pitted the National Forces (Kuva-yi Milliye) under Mustafa Kemal ( Atatürk) against the loyalist Ottoman government in Istanbul and British and Greek occupational troops. Before war’s end, at a time when the Nationalists appeared down and out, plans for a separatist state in the south Marmara began to circulate among provincial notables in the region. The great Nationalist counterattack against the Greek army along the Sakarya River, followed by Mustafa Kemal’s entrance into İzmir, formally put an end to these plans and solidified the south Marmara as an integral and secure part of the emerging Republic of Turkey.²

Nationalism, intercommunal violence, and separatism are deeply ingrained themes within Ottoman and Turkish historiography. In the case of Anatolia, however, any discussion of these themes is largely confined to a select group of “usual suspects.” The charge of treason (ihanet) has particularly been reserved for Armenians and Anatolian Greeks (Rum), who are often associated with nationalist insurgencies in eastern Anatolia, the Greek occupation, or the irredentist designs of the Allied Powers.³ In more recent years,

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Kurds and Kurdish nationalism have received increasing attention as a source for violence in the provinces (again, specifically in eastern Anatolia), reactionary politics, and separatism.4 Yet none of these groups instigated the violence and separatism seen in the south Marmara during the War of Independence. Furthermore, the revolt against the National Movement in this portion of northwestern Anatolia did not ultimately lead historians and administrators in the Republic of Turkey to brand whole communities as traitors to the nation. Instead, consciousness of intercommunal violence and separatism in the region has seemingly vanished from the collective historical memory of contemporary Turkey.

This article surveys the origins and immediate results of this brief separatist movement in the south Marmara.5 At the center of this story is the evolution of the region’s North Caucasian diaspora, a population that has resided in this portion of Anatolia since the mid-19th century. Unlike Armenians and Greeks, the North Caucasians of the south Marmara are largely Sunni Muslims. More strikingly, North Caucasians (colloquially known as Circassians) were historically counted among the highest-ranking and influential members of the Ottoman elite.6 Yet with the outbreak of the Turkish War of Independence in 1919, thousands of North Caucasians in the south Marmara took up arms against Mustafa Kemal’s National Forces in open rebellion. By 1921 members of the Circassian elite from the contemporary provinces of Bursa, Çanakkale, Kocaeli, Sakarya, and Balikesir banded together to appeal to Europe for the creation of a Circassian–Greek state in the region under the aegis of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points.

This essay seeks to answer two questions. First, why did Circassians in this corner of Anatolia make such a violent turn away from the post-Ottoman state and embrace Greek occupation and the prospect of Western intervention? Second, what is the historical and contemporary significance of such a movement?

**EXCEPTIONAL IMMIGRANTS: NORTH CAUCASIANS DURING THE LONG 19TH CENTURY**

The rebellion by separatist Circassian forces unleashed during the War of Independence was rooted in three historical experiences. North Caucasians’ arrival en masse into the south Marmara after the mid-19th century caused massive social upheaval as land rights, settlement, and communal relationships were redefined throughout the region. The second major turning point occurred with the mobilization of North Caucasians during World War I. The wartime Ottoman government recruited from the North Caucasian diaspora for the Ottoman clandestine service, the Special Organization (Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa). Rather than integrating Circassians into Ottoman society, the wartime policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) strengthened the autonomy of local North Caucasian notables and paramilitaries, who collectively held a tenuous and apprehensive relationship with the Young Turks. The defeat of 1918 was the final straw for many of these Circassians. Despite claims to the contrary, local Circassian leaders in the south Marmara understood the rise of Mustafa Kemal’s National Forces as nothing more than a stalking horse for the remnants of the CUP, whom they blamed for the ruined state of the economy and the nation.
At first, resistance to the National Movement among Circassians in the south Marmara took the form of a popular rebellion led by an aging Circassian gendarme named Ahmet Anzavur. As a local notable with strong ties to the sultan’s palace, Anzavur levied a series of populist demands against the Nationalists and mobilized a broad coalition of Circassians as well as immigrant Albanians, Bosnians, Pomaks, and local Alevi. The failure of this overwhelmingly peasant rebellion, and the coming Greek occupation of 1920–22, led many Circassian notables to seek an alternative venue to oppose the CUP’s return to power. A decision to lobby for a joint Circassian–Greek state in the south Marmara during the winter of 1921 was not based on a popular, populist, or even mass nationalist effort. Rather, the prospect of an autonomous Muslim Circassian entity in Anatolia represented an alliance of political convenience between Western occupation authorities and several successors of Anzavur who sought to maintain their own provincial positions of influence. The collapse of this second attempt, in 1922, to forestall the CUP’s apparent return to power in the south Marmara resulted in the exile and death of thousands of Circassians from the region.

The relationship between the peoples of the North Caucasus and the Ottoman state was engendered long before their mass exodus to the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century. Untold thousands of Caucasian (particularly Adige and Abkhzian) men and women sold in the slave markets around the Black Sea were employed in the harems, palaces, and barracks of the Ottoman Empire. Many ascended through the ranks of the Ottoman state, becoming some of the most powerful figures in the empire. The Russian invasion and resulting expulsion of tens of thousands of people from the northwest Caucasus transformed the nature of this Circassian diaspora in the Ottoman Empire. Although the final number is difficult to ascertain, scholars have estimated that as many as 2.5 million North Caucasians entered Ottoman lands between 1859 and 1914. By the outbreak of World War I, the Circassian diaspora was as large or larger than the total number of Kurds living in the Ottoman Empire.

A specific set of agendas drove the concerted placement of North Caucasian refugees in the Ottoman Empire. The regions most densely settled by these immigrants largely constituted areas of high strategic value for the Ottoman state. This included the south Marmara, a basin that enveloped the capital and its lines of communication with the Anatolian interior. In other zones of settlement, such as Kosova, Bulgaria, and eastern Anatolia, Istanbul planned to use the “warlike” North Caucasians as a buffer population against its main military adversaries, Russia, Austria–Hungary, and the Balkan states. Coupled with their services as loyal military auxiliaries, these Muslim refugees helped to dilute the number of indigenous Ottoman Christians in regions such as the south Marmara.

The arrival of Circassian refugees greatly unsettled the provinces of Karesi, Kala-i Sultaniye, Hüdavendigar, İzmit, and Adapazari. New villages were constructed to accommodate these newcomers. In other cases, older villages and neighborhoods were appropriated to make way for this influx of refugees. Either way, the settlement of Circassians resulted in the confiscation (or theft) of vast tracts of land from their original owners. Material support for these refugees (which often came in the form of providing food, seeds, and agricultural equipment) also came at the expense of local inhabitants. Above all, Circassian settlers gradually became synonymous with banditry, theft, and violence. Reports from local Ottoman officials consistently mention the prevalence of
paramilitary activity among rural Circassians. Whole villages were implicated in the support and recruitment of gangs that robbed wealthy merchants on the main roads, stole land, or carried out murders for hire.

The social dislocation that followed the establishment of these largely poor North Caucasian communities did not subside with the turn of the 20th century. Tensions between the native population and immigrant Circassians continued well into the war period and defined the local politics of such counties as Biga, Gönen, Manyas, Adapazarı, Karacabey, and Kirmasti.

Although many refugees continued to live at the economic and social margins of the region, some members of the North Caucasian diaspora did integrate into the administrative and economic life of the south Marmara, at various levels. Some migrant families rose to local prominence in certain districts (such as the Maan, Koç, and Bağ families from Abkhazia in İzmit/Adapazarı) and were appointed to positions in the provincial administration. A select number of this local elite obtained still higher-status positions in Istanbul, often through relatives who lived and worked in the capital. Many more North Caucasians contributed to essential sectors in the local economy, particularly by raising and selling horses. Others found work as foot soldiers in the private armies of wealthy notables or as independent bandits. Some who chose the paramilitary life entered the state security service, joining the local police force, for instance, or the military.

More than any internal ethnic or linguistic differences, class and social status defined the North Caucasian diaspora in the south Marmara. A British consular report written at the end of World War I characterized the North Caucasian diaspora in Anatolia in the following way:

Constantinople and the other towns have developed another class of Circassians. Their loyalty and influence of lady relations [such as consorts or wives] in the Imperial Harem raised many of them to high places in the army and Palace. Among the leading families of Constantinople and Cairo a considerable number are, at any rate, by origin, Circassian. In sentiment they are Turkish—often more Turkish than the average Turk—and they do not think of themselves as a separate people.

It is from among the less reputable classes of town-dwelling Circassians that many of the assassins, secret agents and other “fedais” [militiamen/paramilitaries] of Turkish politicians have been recruited. Their courage and devotion suit them for such [work], and in the hands of people like the Committee of Union and Progress individual Circassians can be dangerous instruments.12

This anonymous British observer was correct in many regards. The North Caucasian urban elite were counted first among equals in the capital and other towns in the Ottoman Empire. They attended school alongside non-Circassians and shared the same loyalty (or disloyalty) to the Ottoman state as other members of the elite. On the flip side of this equation were lower-class North Caucasians. Whether they lived in town or in the countryside, the “less reputable” Circassians constituted a recruiting well for the military or gendarmerie (and, later on, the Ottoman clandestine service). It is this segment of the socioeconomic spectrum that created the most negative popular perceptions of the North Caucasian diaspora.13

However, the class divide among Circassians was more nuanced than the British diplomat observed. More than income or occupation, education lay at the heart of the class divide in Ottoman society. Education created social networks that helped advance professional prospects and gave access to influential circles of power in the capital and
the provinces. It also elicited and changed cultural tastes, from dress to behavior to systems of belief.

At some point during the turn of the 20th century, Istanbul took note of the martial potential of the Circassian diaspora living in the south Marmara. During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamit II (1876–1909), the Ottoman state exhibited keen interest in tying its North Caucasian population to the state through military service. One plan called for drafting North Caucasian agricultural slaves in exchange for the promise of emancipation (and a monetary settlement with their owners). While in the army or the gendarmerie, North Caucasian officers and men were made to feel privileged and unique. They were organized into special units of the gendarmerie and the army, and were allowed to wear “native dress” (notably the kaipak, a large fur hat, as well as a long overcoat with bandolier). Most importantly, it appears that many units comprised members of the same extended family, who were settled in the same village and placed under the command of a regional or “tribal” notable.

However, this recruitment policy does not appear at all indiscriminate. Central to the recruitment of North Caucasians into the state’s security services were filial and professional networks. We see the inner workings of these networks with establishment of the Special Organization, which privileged the south Marmara as a particular source of recruitment into its ranks. Hüsamettin Ertürk, one of the founders of the Special Organization, states in his memoirs that Circassian “privates and officers” from Gönen, Adapazari, and Kandıra were specifically recruited for service in Iraq. Yet many of these same Circassians, men employed in some of the most vital and secret aspects of the Ottoman war effort, later took up arms against one another with the outbreak of the Turkish War of Independence.

Elements of testimony presented before the 1919 Istanbul Military Tribunal reveal some details of the state’s recruitment policy in the south Marmara. In a telegram, Musa Bey, the governor (mutasarrıf) of Karesi, made the following observations about conscription of “paramilitaries” in the liva of Balıkesir:

The enterprise is being undertaken as far as those two hundred individuals wanted who can work as paramilitaries [çetecilik yapabilecek], who are prisoners and Circassian . . . Of the Caucasian races, only Circassians exist in Karesi. There are no Lezgi, Chechens, or Georgians. There is practically no one who speaks Russian or who knows and who has travelled in the Caucasus . . . It is possible to acquire several hundred—three hundred, four hundred—Circassians like those [who have the qualities previously mentioned] if they are being sought for belligerency [muhariplık] or paramilitary action [çetecilik] at either the front or the rear of the army. If a limited number of individuals are being sought for propaganda purposes, there exist five to ten men who can speak and negotiate with the Caucasian villages . . . These individuals, whose names and places of origin are listed, are well-respected and are able to negotiate.

This document alludes to more than the violence inflicted upon the civilian population of eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus and who is responsible for such acts. Correspondence of this type reveals that local administrators, in this case Musa Bey, were acutely aware of the kind of men wanted for such an operation and where and through whom they could be attained. In other words, the men chosen to take part in such a suggestive task as “paramilitary action” were not acquired at random; they were known, either through reputation or suggestion, and thus came under someone’s jurisdiction or authority.
Those responsible for drafting these foot soldiers into the CUP’s secret war against the British, Russians, and Ottoman Christians were largely leaders of private militias in the south Marmara. We know the names of several local strongmen employed by the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa: (Ançok) Ahmet Anzavur, (Süngülü) Davut, Şah İsmail, (Maan) Ali, (Maan) Şirin, Çerkes Bekir Şitki, Çerkes Reşit, and his brother Ethem. Yet these figures were most likely only middlemen for much more influential Circassian officers based in the capital. Each of these individuals listed was recruited by or served under Circassian officers with close ties to the CUP. (Ç’ince) Hüseyin Rauf Orbay, secretary of the Navy, was an old comrade of Çerkes Reşit. Şirin and Ali had served with Eşref Kuçubaş, founder of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa. Ahmet Anzavur entered into the Special Organization with the assistance of Yusuf İzzet (Met Çanatuka) Paşa, whom he met through the Şimali Kafkas Cemiyeti (North Caucasian Association), a group composed of prominent North Caucasian immigrants such as Rauf Orbay.17

When defeat in 1918 brought these men home from war, hardship and bitterness greeted many from the south Marmara. Starvation was rampant, forcing many, such as in Mudanya, to collect grass for food.18 The region became the point of departure and the repository for tens of thousands of refugees. Armenians, Greeks, Bosnians, and Albanians from İzmit, Adapazarı, Balıkesir, Lapseki, Orhangazi, Armutlu, Mudanya, and Ezine were forced from their homes and deported to points in southern and eastern Anatolia. Ongoing Allied assaults compelled tens of thousands of refugees to seek assistance from the Ottoman government, with many relocating to the south Marmara. Desertion from the Ottoman army and the withdrawal of mounted gendarmes from the south Marmara resulted in a dramatic increase in theft and banditry in the years 1917 and 1918.19 As Istanbul’s control over the region waned, whole towns and counties fell under the influence of provincial notables, paramilitary leaders, and other strongmen.

The Origins of Disenchantment: Circassians and the Beginning of the Turkish War of Independence

The CUP had long prepared for the possibility of the empire’s defeat and occupation.20 A postwar insurgency against European occupation almost immediately followed the Modros Armistice in November 1918. This campaign, led by CUP officers and their provincial retainers, first manifested itself in the south Marmara in the environs of İzmit and Adapazarı.21 Although principally directed against British occupation, the main targets of the CUP’s first offensive were Armenians and Greeks returning from exile.22 Greece’s occupation of İzmir transformed the direction and organization of this insurgency. By November 1919, six months after the first landing of Greek troops on the shores of the Aegean, Mustafa Kemal consolidated his control over this resistance and renamed it the National Forces.

A few Circassians in the south Marmara answered the Nationalist call to arms against the Greeks. In the weeks after the occupation of İzmir, Çerkes Ethem, then only a low-ranking and little-known Special Organization officer and paramilitary leader, was recruited into the National Movement through the efforts of his brother Reşit, Rauf Orbay, and Bekir Sami (Günsev).23 The Nationalists secured another Circassian paramilitary from Manyas, named Takiş Şevket, through the intercession of Rauf Orbay’s brother-in-law, Aziz Bey.24 In both cases, the interlocutors between the Nationalists and these
local Circassian strongmen were also Circassians and individuals with strong ties to the CUP. In other words, their recruitment into the National Forces was a continuation of the wartime recruitment policies of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa.

In the months between May and November 1919, the emerging leadership of the National Movement undertook a concerted effort to recruit other paramilitary leaders in the mold of Ethem and Takıç in districts such as Karacabey, Kirmasti, Bilecik, İzmit, and Biga. According to the evidence available to us, the Nationalists had few comers. Among the Circassians who had returned to Biga from their service in the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, the consensus was purportedly against joining the National Movement (as it had been declared an uprising by the sultan and the sheikh ul-Islam). 25 The forced requisitioning of foodstuffs and other matériel by the Ottoman army and Nationalist troops contributed to this antipathy. Generally speaking, much of the population had grown “sick of war.” 26

Of all the factors leading to revolt in the south Marmara, Nationalist interference into local disputes involving North Caucasians was critical in turning many away from the National Movement. In the winter of 1919, a Pomak gang leader named Kara Hasan (or Black Hasan) took over the town of Biga and asserted himself as the de facto boss over the district. 27 Hasan’s play for local authority directly clashed with the designs of a rival paramilitary force under the command of Çerkes Neşet, a North Caucasian. In a temporary alliance of convenience, Hasan, with the backing of both local notables and Nationalist sympathizers, drove Neşet from the county and decimated his gang. 28 Nationalists took a similar antagonistic posture toward a group of Laz and Georgian paramilitaries in the environs of Karamürsel and Değirmendere in a dispute with an Albanian militia previously under the employment of Talat Paşa’s brother-in-law. 29

The greatest crisis occurred between July and November 1919, when two rival cliques of notables in Karacabey and Kirmasti mobilized against one another in a dispute over the office of deputy administrator (kaymakam vekili) in Karacabey. Initially a clique of Albanian notables (who had immigrated from Ottoman Macedonia) captured the position for themselves (after the first appointee, a Circassian, was driven out of town by Albanian militiamen). With a local Albanian now deputy administrator, Circassian notables retaliated by organizing a massive campaign of raiding against Albanian-owned farms and businesses. Again, the Nationalists, who were more interested in maintaining unanimity among Muslims in the region in the face of Western occupation, sided with the Albanians and demanded the return of all property stolen by the Circassians. 30 One Nationalist commander (possibly against the wishes of the high command) even attempted to arrest a group of Circassians involved in the conflict in the Karacabey/Kirmasti region. Circassian paramilitaries in Karacabey killed the arresting officers before they could their hands on the suspects and then drove Nationalist troops out of town. 31

Despite this humiliation, Nationalist district commander Bekir Sami (Günsev) maintained in his official correspondence that the Circassian paramilitaries responsible for the Kirmasti fiasco could still be brought into the Nationalist camp. At that point, however, many North Caucasian provincial notables took these clashes with the Nationalists as dark signs of things to come. In addition to day-to-day hardships and the fearful prospects of yet another war, Circassian paramilitaries and other local notables read Nationalist support for their provincial rivals as an indication that the Young Turks-turned-Nationalists planned to destroy them as they had the Armenians and Greeks.
This was not an unfounded fear. As early as 1917, a CUP official had circulated the idea of deporting all Circassians and Georgians from the provinces of Karesi and Hûdavendigar to reduce the threat of banditry in the region and free up land for other immigrants and refugees (Talat Paşa personally overruled the plan). At war’s end rumors continued to surface that all North Caucasians would be deported “like the Armenians.” The violent clashes between North Caucasians and the National Forces around Karacabey and Kirmasti even led two prominent Circassian notables to approach Bekir Sami (Günsiev) to confirm whether “the Turks” (i.e., the CUP/Nationalists) were planning to destroy Circassians because of their “unity” (ittiḥad) and “solidarity” (ittiḥak).

Circassians who raised these deportation fears understood the reasoning and implications of such a policy. The tightly knit Circassian diaspora of the south Marmara was in many ways governed by an elite and by customs imported from the North Caucasus. Because of this “unity” and “solidarity,” Circassian villages and districts were able to resist the Young Turks’ centralizing efforts. Although counted in principle among the loyal Sunni Muslim population of the empire, Circassians exercised the same manner of communal autonomy and provincial influence as Armenians and Greeks. With the outbreak of war, such autonomy (which could lead to sedition) was not to be tolerated. As foot soldiers and lieutenants in the CUP’s war of extermination against Armenians and Greeks, these notables, as well as others, well understood that deportation meant near certain death.

A LOYALIST’S REVENGE: CIRCASSIANS AND THE UPRISING OF AHMET ANZAVUR

As tensions in the south Marmara between North Caucasians and supporters of Mustafa Kemal reached a fever pitch in late October 1919, a man soon to champion popular dissent in the region made his first appearance at a horse race outside of Manyas. On 25 October, Ahmet Anzavur, a retired gendarme and landowner from Biga, appeared before a crowd of Circassian spectators and declared his intention to march on Balikesir in order to arrest (or kill) Nationalist commander Hacim Muhittin (Çarklı). In the days following this speech in Manyas, Anzavur declared in person and in letters that he had been sent to northwestern Anatolia by the sultan and that he would lead his own army, at no cost to the population, against the Greeks. The Nationalists, he argued, must support him in this venture; otherwise they, too, would be considered an even greater threat to the caliph and his sublime Islamic state.

Ahmet Anzavur represents an older class of provincial notables who led the charge against the Kuva-yi Milliye. Born in what is today the autonomous Adige Republic in the Russian Federation, Anzavur came to Anatolia during the great Circassian migration of 1864. Illiterate in Turkish, he was nonetheless appointed by Abdülhamit II to the Makriköy (Bakırköy) Gendarmerie (reportedly through the influence of his sister, who was one of the sultan’s concubines). His career reached its apex in 1911, when Anzavur, leading his unit of Circassian volunteers, pursued and captured the feared bandits of Çakırcahi in the vilayet of Aydın. Sultan Abdülhamit II awarded Anzavur numerous laurels, including a jewel-encrusted sword and several Circassian wives. Thereafter he settled in Biga and became a large landowner. After his patron was removed from
office following the Young Turk Revolution, Anzavur was ostracized by the CUP and eventually relegated to retirement. Nevertheless, Anzavur, like hundreds of other North Caucasians, served in the Ottoman clandestine service during World War I and at war’s end still carried considerable weight among the North Caucasian diaspora in the south Marmara and at the sultan’s palace.

During the first two weeks of November 1919, Anzavur toured the provinces of Karesi, Kala-i Sultaniye, and Hûdavendigar and called upon the population to join him in his march on Balikesir. Although the number of his recruits fluctuated from week to week, hundreds of North Caucasians, as well as Albanians, Pomaks, Kurds, Bosnians, Çetmi, and other immigrants and marginalized peoples, chose to ride with him. This first campaign abruptly ended on 15 November 1919, when his forces were routed by a Nationalist column commanded by Çerkes Ethem.

For the following two months Anzavur and his lieutenants laid low but continued to tour the Circassian villages of Karesi. When a second revolt broke out in February 1920, Anzavur’s largely Circassian army was joined by rebellious Pomaks from his native county of Biga. Within two months, this combined rebel army took the former Nationalist strongholds of Biga, Bandırma, Karacabey, Kirmastı, and Gönen, and executed or killed several prominent Nationalist field commanders. At this hour of crisis Çerkes Ethem again rode to the Nationalists’ rescue and defeated Anzavur’s men in battle outside the village of Yahyaköy (near Susurluk). After the battle ended on 15 April 1920, Anzavur and his close associates took flight and sailed back to Istanbul.

Anzavur took to the field one month later outside of İzmit in support of a third anti-Nationalist rebellion (begun by North Caucasian immigrants in the environs of Düzce and Adapazarı). This time, he and his Circassian allies served in a subordinate role to Suleyman Şefik Paşa, the commander of the loyalist Kuva-yı İnzibatiye (Disciplinary Force). Anzavur was again defeated that May and returned to Istanbul a second time, with a broken leg. Anzavur’s third return to the south Marmara cost him his life in the spring of 1921, when pro-Nationalist guerrillas assassinated him outside the town of Karabiga.

There is little doubt that Anzavur was sent to the south Mamara at the behest of Sultan Vahdeddin and the Liberty and Understanding Party leadership in Istanbul. The subsequent moral and financial support given to Anzavur’s insurgency by the Istanbul government led Nationalist commanders at the front and in Ankara to call the Circassian “an English tool” and a patsy for the duplicitous sultan. These accusations are in part true. Anzavur did apparently receive some kind of support from the British High Commission in Istanbul, and he certainly served the selfish interests of the palace. However, to stop there is to lose sight of the overarching motivations that compelled Anzavur and thousands of other Circassian (and non-Circassian) supporters to gamble with their lives in the revolt against the National Movement.

Anzavur’s campaign of 1919/1920 struck a taproot of popular discontent with the Young Turk wartime government. According to Anzavur, the policies of the CUP regime had plunged the empire into a needless war and brought suffering to the poorest members of society. In one letter to his followers, he writes,

It is known by everyone that orderliness is the most important duty of the state and nation, since everywhere that one finds perfect security, [one finds] the justice of Islam . . . [T]he wicked
Unionists and Freemasons are the ones who have brought forth the marauding and banditry to this Islamic government for the last ten years . . . In the time when the children and women of martyrs were eating grass and earth and dying of hunger, [the Unionists] took official possession of their homes. In the time when those traitors in the military offices were having helva and lamb feasts, they were taking houses as bribes . . . I wish to try all of those who pray five times a day so that they will be accountable to God . . . I ask this: who is it that denied to us the religious sacredness of the exalted peace of the Prophet and the Kabe [Ka'ba] to which Muslims pray? Who is it that cast Muslim children into the sea at the Straits of Çanakkale? Who is it that destroyed these children in the Caucasus Mountains, in the deserts of the Arab lands, in Iran, in Janinna and in the mountains of Romania? Are they not the young Freemasons who today gave documents to a hundred thousand Muslim women and girls in Istanbul and made them into prostitutes? . . . I shall pursue those vile men who have besmirched the caliph and the Muslim state. I shall be a protector of the government and a slave according to the just decrees of our şeriat [shari‘a].

In this summation, the culprits for the people’s suffering were not only members of the former CUP government in Istanbul, but also their allies in the provinces. For Anzavur, the men who now filled the ranks of the National Movement were the very same people responsible for wartime hardships. This conclusion was not all that far-fetched for those who followed Anzavur into battle. The same military recruiters, mayors, merchants, and gendarmes from the wartime CUP administration had only changed hats in demanding now greater sacrifices in the name of Mustafa Kemal and the National Movement.

Anzavur’s message reached out to the most marginalized groups in society, particularly poor immigrants and refugees. More importantly, his rhetoric was a deliberate attempt to stake a deeper claim to Islamic symbolism as a source of legitimacy, viability, and justice than that of the National Movement. His means and aims were not strictly political, however, but social. Central to Anzavur’s insurgency against the National Movement was the promise of plunder. In addition to local government offices, Anzavur’s men repeatedly raided the properties of tax collectors, military recruiters, merchants, and large landowners. The economic tensions Anzavur unleashed are epitomized by the capture and execution of the Nationalist commander of Biga, (Köprülü) Hamdi. Hamdi, upon arriving in Biga in January 1920, demanded an exorbitant amount of material support from the district. In celebrating his death, one of Anzavur’s lieutenants, a Pomak named Gavur Imam, stated that Hamdi had tried to snap off the necks of the people. Yet now it was he who had his neck snapped.

For Anzavur and other local notables, there were even deeper personal reasons for taking up arms against Mustafa Kemal. Anzavur was a man of the provinces, with most of his wealth invested in the small town of Biga. With no formal education, he had no place in the CUP state, where high party officials were by and large educated in a Western manner in the empire’s finest schools. In his letters, Anzavur repeatedly alludes to the Unionists almost as a body of foreigners, who, like the Freemasons, possessed customs and values alien to his own. The possibility of a Nationalist victory clearly represented to Anzavur the continuation of the CUP regime in one form or another, thereby ending any chance that he or his family would continue to hold any position of influence in the state. The only option remaining for Anzavur was to seek the assistance of the sultan’s palace, an institution also threatened by the possible return of the CUP (now seemingly under the command of Mustafa Kemal).
Anzavur’s assassination did not end the troubles facing the National Movement in the south Marmara. Within two months of Anzavur’s retreat from Karesi, Greek forces stormed out of their beachhead in Aydın and pushed Mustafa Kemal’s ragtag forces east beyond the Sakarya River. By September 1920 the provinces of Kala-ı Sultanıye, Karesi, Hüdavendigar, and İzmit were placed under a joint Greek and British occupation. Intercommunal violence escalated dramatically during the following two years. Deliberate acts of ethnic cleansing and massacre by Greek troops and allied local forces accounted for a great deal of this surge in violence. In Bursa, Greek occupation forces purportedly killed 822 individuals, and in Karesi and İzmit, several Circassian gangs were implicated in attacks on Muslim and Christian civilians.\(^{52}\) In Biga, a gang belonging to Ahmet Anzavur’s son, Kadir, waged a bloody campaign against Nationalist guerrillas and Ottoman officers implicated in his father’s death.\(^{53}\)

The “treason” committed by these Circassian partisans clearly angered the commander of Nationalist guerrilla forces operating in Karesi, Akıncı İbrahim Ethem. Circassians joining the Greeks, he argued, were driven by a desire to “crush the Turks” as well as by the opportunity to “fill their purses.”\(^ {54}\) As Muslims siding with a Christian enemy, such acts of treason were even more unforgivable. “You are either a Muslim or an infidel,” he exclaimed to the population of one Circassian village. “I cannot understand [how] one remains between the two.”\(^ {55}\) The defection of Çerkes Ethem in January 1921 brought out the full ire of İbrahim Ethem as well as other members of the National Movement. Although Çerkes Ethem’s sedition was driven by personal conflicts with the high command in Ankara, one Nationalist saw his departure as representative of all Circassians:

The Circassians are the ones who have brought disaster upon us. While we were fighting, they would do no other thing other than sell their homeland. Now they are corrupt to the basest level, surrendering to the Greeks while they fill up their saddlebags. The penalty for them is the bullet.\(^ {56}\)

This opinion of Circassians also appeared at local levels. In reporting on (Anzavuroğlu) Kadir’s activities in Manyas, the head of the local gendarmerie said about Circassians in general:

Any place that they were accepted into our kind homeland, these refugee Circassians would threaten, “Give over the cash box otherwise I will kill you,” before attacking a house and stealing.\(^ {57}\)

Evidence and statements such as these suggest that many within the Nationalist camp, particularly in the south Marmara, linked Circassians, crime, treason, and apostasy.

**ONE LAST GASP: REASSESSING CIRCASSIAN SEDITION**

As the National Forces dug in behind the Sakarya River during the winter of 1921, a conspiracy of Circassian notables began to coalesce in the south Marmara. On 24 November 1921, twenty-two Circassians met in a coffeehouse in the middle of İzmir. They were largely drawn from the south Marmara towns and counties of Adapazari, İzmit, Karamürsel, Kandira, Bilecik, Geyve, Bursa, Gönen, Erdoğan, Bandırma, and Balıkesir. There were also representatives from Hendek, Düzce, Manisa, Aydın, Eskişehir, and Kütahya. Many of the men had been at the forefront of Anzavur’s resistance movement, while others may have remained in the background of the 1919/1920 uprisings. Even
Çerkes Reşit, once a central figure in the Kuva-yi Milliye and the CUP, took part in the meeting, as well as his brother Ethem.58 At the end of the meeting, the men, calling themselves representatives of the Association for the Strengthening of Near Eastern Circassian Rights (Şark-ı Karib Çerkesleri Temin-i Hukuk Cemiyeti), released a document entitled “The General Statement of the Circassian Nation to the Great Powers and the Civilized World.” It reads in part as follows:

This meeting, which is in the form of a congress, undertakes its national rights as a minority based on the national rights as determined by the national principles accepted and declared by the Great Powers at the end of the Great War. The representatives ask for their national demands with the declaration that the Circassians will seek refuge under the Allied Great Powers and its partners, in particular the Greek government, who agreed among themselves to force the acceptance [of these rights] of the losing states . . .

The population of Circassians today residing in Anatolia is at the very least two million. Circassians defend and maintain their national traditions through language, customs, feelings, and civilization . . . They are in the contemporary family of civilizations and are a part of the white race and the distinguished Aryan family . . .

Thirteen years before with the institution of constitutional rule, the Turkish administration became bereft of correct policies. Now filled with feelings [stemming] from Turkism and Turanism, Turkish administrators followed at this unique moment in history a false policy of terrorism, by means of Turkification, towards the various Ottoman nationalities. With the destruction of the nationalities and the destruction of the vital security of non-Turks, the Circassians were stirred with a just grievance coming from a pure desire of self-preservation. Because of these continuous calamities, Circassians have [moved toward] a national goal of self-preservation and commit themselves to armed resistance against the mass murder of the Circassian nation.

Because of this, Circassians have lost thousands of their precious children. Their property and animals have been stolen and their villages burned. In short, Circassians have been and continue to be in a state of defiance in this war despite being allotted no sanctuary and the destruction and seizure of their property . . .

After seeing that they will not be saved, Circassians decided correctly and naturally to join the Greek army, which promises to preserve them, in the occupation zone. (There is no doubt that Albania and the Arab States similarly sought in foreign saviors well before.) These Circassians, who have struggled for a year and a half and who have saved thousands of innocent Muslims and non-Muslims from mass murder, should be praised for their services . . .

The understanding Greek government, which is included in the highest levels of civilization and humanity among nations, recognizes no difference among Circassians, Armenians, and especially Rum. It has provided for the welfare of Circassian immigrants and refugees in the form of substance and settlement . . .

The goals of this petition are:

A – Recognition of our national existence.
B – To make known that the secular Circassian nation lives in constant danger.
C – To advance the demand that the Circassians wish to live as an element of peace under Greek protection in order to protect the Circassians of the Near East from the sins of the Turkish administration.59
In closing the document, each undersigning participant identifies himself by clan name (such as Pşev, Çule, Ançok, or Bağ) and the locality he represents. Although the group makes no exact territorial claim, the likely core of this autonomous region was centered on the district of Bahkisır, just south of the Marmara coast.  

The declaration, which was later sent to representatives of Britain, Greece, and France, is striking as a dramatic departure in the political and rhetorical representation of the Circassian resistance in the south Marmara. Gone were the populist pretenses that defined Anzavur’s campaign against the Kuva-yı Milliye. Rather than attempting to forge a coalition of other dissident groups, such as Pomaks, Çetmi, or Albanian immigrants, the authors of this appeal negated the existence of other groups in the south Marmara (with the exception of the Rum and Armenians) and argued strictly from the North Caucasian position. Like Anzavur, participants of the congress placed themselves at the center of a long history of abuse that intensified under the reign of the CUP. Yet, Anzavur never presented himself, officially at least, as the leader of a strictly Circassian movement, nor as a proponent of separatism.  

The very notion of a petition to the Great Powers indicates that delegates at the congress understood the international implications of their struggle. In laying their claim, the authors of this document understood that there was a higher power, greater than Great Britain or France, to which they could appeal: international law. Thus, the policy of Turkification and the violence of the Kemalist movement were more than acts of cruelty and inhumanity; they were violations of the “civil and political rights” of the Circassian “minority.” Their demand for protection, and by extension autonomy, directly alluded to the twelfth of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points. The petition suggests that Circassians were justified in their claims because they were distant peers of the European powers. They were, as the document states, “white Aryans” from the highest strata of “civilization,” forcibly exiled to the Orient. Although Muslims, Circassians remained committed to a secular (and seemingly democratic) system of government. This assertion highlights the contrast to the archetypal “fanatical” and “despotic” Orientals, a caricature often seen in the Western press and political debate.  

In short, the changing political climate in the south Marmara between 1920 and 1922 inspired these dissident provincial notables to undertake a new approach to old problems. Upholding their local authority and influence remained at the core of their opposition to the Nationalists, but the onset of occupation changed the outlets and venues for expressing this opposition. The Kuva-yı Milliye was gone, and the Ottoman government in Istanbul, which functioned under the supervision of British troops, was at best powerless in the south Marmara. A year into the occupation, these Circassian notables appeared to believe that the writing was on the wall for the Ottoman Empire and that their collective fates rested in the hands of the Greeks. The battle was now for the future of the region and the role that the Circassian elite would play in that future. Like the struggle undertaken by the Nationalists, this was a fight to be won not only on the battlefield, but also at the negotiating table. Like the Mûdafaa-i Hukuk, the primary bureaucratic agent of the National Movement, the Association for the Strengthening of Near Eastern Circassian Rights was not a popular organization in the truest sense of the word. It was a body comprising local notables not popularly chosen or elected. Evidence suggests that the Circassian communities these notables claimed to represent were informed of their decision only after the congress had adjourned.
British field reports do suggest some local consensus among Circassians from the south Marmara who desired the establishment of an autonomous Circassian state under Greek protection as early as October 1920.63 Greek occupation authorities, for their part, consistently demonstrated sensitivity to the demands of North Caucasian rebels and purportedly planned to relocate some Circassian notables to Thrace to act as their “Cossacks” along the Ottoman–Greek border.64 Nevertheless, British officers in the field as well as in London looked upon the declaration issued by the Circassian congress as somewhat of a farce. Sir Horace Rumbold, head of the British High Commission in Istanbul, categorically stated that Circassians deserved no special treatment as a “racial minority” in Anatolia and that Greek protection was an impossibility because many Circassians lived in territories not under Greek control. One desk officer in London commented on the side that it was “pretty clear that [the association’s statement] is Greek propaganda.” All seemed to agree that “nothing special” could be done for Circassians and that ultimately they (as well as Greeks and Armenians) had to rely upon a general government amnesty in the war’s aftermath.65

KILLING ANZAVUR’S GHOST: CIRCASSIAN RESISTANCE AND THE BIRTH OF THE TURKISH REPUBLIC

A massive Nationalist counterattack in September 1922 put an end to the congress’ separatist ambitions. Mustafa Kemal’s forces swooped down upon the south Marmara with a bloody vengeance, purportedly executing thirty-three notables for treason in Susurluk alone.66 Several members of the Association for the Strengthening of Near Eastern Circassian Rights, including its leader, (Çule) İbrahim Hakki, went into exile on the Greek island of Midilli (Lesbos) or fled across the border, into western Thrace.67 By spring 1923, perhaps over twenty thousand North Caucasians were living in makeshift refugee camps in Greek territory. Some of these men, including (Anzavuroğlu) Kadir Anzavur, continued to plot their return to the Anatolian mainland. Kadir and several others, trained and backed by the Greek crown, sent at least three armed expeditions into the south Marmara in 1923 in hopes of raising a new rebellion against Ankara.68 All efforts undertaken by these displaced Circassians failed.

By June 1923, the Ankara government decided to strike at the roots of this continued resistance. Between May and November 1923, approximately 10,000 North Caucasians, inhabiting a total of forty-three villages in the vicinity of the towns of Gönen and Manyas, were forcibly deported to eastern Anatolia.69 Almost a year later, in April 1924, the Grand National Turkish Assembly compiled a list of twenty-eight Circassian notables from Gönen and Manyas—“traitors to the fatherland” (vatan hainleri)—and stripped them of Turkish citizenship. Although no specific charges were levelled against them, it can be surmised from the parliamentary minutes that they were implicated, along with participants of the congress at Izmir, in having participated in acts of collaboration and resistance during the War of Independence.70

Circassians, like other Muslim “minority” elements during the first decade of the Turkish Republic, were the focus of a deliberate campaign of suppression. Caucasian languages and even the epithet “Circassian” (Çerkes) were banned from public use.71 State interior services carefully monitored the whereabouts and actions of migrant Circassian laborers and North Caucasians in the south Marmara who were known to possess
arms as rumors of a Circassian rebellion continued well into the 1930s. After the death of Atatürk, however, North Caucasians were officially rehabilitated. Since 1950, a variety of North Caucasian diaspora organizations (dernekler) devoted to education and foreign-policy activism have emerged. Radio and television broadcasts in Adige, the most common language spoken by Circassians, have recently begun in Turkey. Only in very rare exceptions is the history of “treason” among Circassians revived in a public forum.

Miroslav Hroch, in a seminal work on the social origins of nationalism in Eastern Europe, describes a phenomenon he calls “disintegrating nationalism.” According to Hroch, a nationalism that “fails” is one that never progresses into a mass movement due to the late development (political or economic) of the bourgeoisie as an active promoter of national consciousness. It is tempting to look at the case of the Circassians of the south Marmara in such a light. An embryonic movement based in Istanbul did attempt to promote North Caucasian nationalism among the diaspora of the Ottoman Empire. Many groups, such as the North Caucasus Association (Şimali Kafkas Cemiyeti), were largely concerned with contemporary affairs in the North Caucasus. Meanwhile, other Circassians within elite circles in Istanbul were successful in establishing Adige-language publications and schools during the years before World War I.

Yet these efforts had little to do with what occurred in the south Marmara during the Turkish War of Independence. Anzavur made no pronouncements about Circassian nationalism. British and Ottoman accounts similarly suggest that the Association for the Strengthening of Near Eastern Circassian Rights had very little influence upon the constituents it claimed to represent. Political insecurity among the elite and popular social and economic discontent were the crucial factors that drove North Caucasians in the south Marmara to reject Mustafa Kemal’s National Forces.

CONCLUSION

Although the question of why North Caucasians were officially “rehabilitated” after 1950 is beyond the scope of this essay, one must ask why this history of “treason” and “sedition” in the south Marmara did not earn Circassians the same scarlet letter now carried by Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds in Turkey. Furthermore, why has the south Marmara, the site of intense antistate opposition during the War of Independence, remained peaceful while Kurdistan continues to burn with violence and oppression? The answer to these questions may lie in part in the nature of the Circassian resistance that occurred between 1919 and 1922.

Rebellion in this region was a strictly local affair, not buttressed by nationalist agitation or aims. The tensions that exploded with the uprising led by Ahmet Anzavur were long in the making, the product of frictions that first emerged with the settlement of North Caucasians in the south Marmara. Wartime policies of the Young Turks exacerbated economic dislocation among Circassians. Poverty, hunger, political alienation, and the fear of extermination à la the Armenians were concerns that defined the mood of many North Caucasian communities along the Marmara coast. When the situation turned violent in the fall of 1919, popular discontent among Circassians found its voice in Anzavur, a fellow Circassian who shrewdly fanned similar grievances among other marginalized groups in the south Marmara. With his death, Circassian notables who had supported Anzavur in the hopes of combating the CUP turned Nationalists continued...
the struggle on their own. Their assertion of national rights and the desire for autonomy was still grounded in the provincial politics of the south Marmara during the Young Turks era. Ankara punished with death or exile to eastern Anatolia all those Circassians who had supported Anzavur or the Near Eastern Circassian Association—or who had simply resided in rebellious districts (such as Gönen or Manyas). When members of the Near Eastern Circassian Association were finally killed, exiled, or disenfranchised, their plan for provincial autonomy died with them.

To acknowledge these events and actions openly through state ceremony, public education, or incendiary literature would raise difficult questions about the official narrative of the Turkish state. In a nation supposedly created with the active consent and mass participation of Anatolia’s “Muslims and Turks,” why did some Muslims reject Mustafa Kemal’s bid to liberate Anatolia? What further complicates this question is the fact that Circassians of the south Marmara were not peoples at the geographic margins of Anatolia (such as, say, Kurds living in the environs of Hakkari), but communities located a short distance from the seat of the Ottoman Empire. Many Circassians who participated in the uprisings and attacks against the National Movement, such as Çerkes Ethem, Ahmet Anzavur, and Eşref Kuşubaşı, belonged to the most loyal and elite families of the Ottoman state. Probing the anti-Nationalist activities of these individuals raises doubts and questions about relationships among those who served the Ottoman Empire to the bitter end and those seen as midwives to Turkey’s nationhood.

Most important, to castigate “Circassian treason” during the War of Independence would certainly offend descendents of those North Caucasians who did remain loyal to the CUP/Nationalist coalition that took power in 1923. Rebellion and separatism, for example, did not mark the evolution of the dense North Caucasian communities found in Sivas, Kayseri, or Maraş. As several North Caucasian scholars have noted, many of the most decorated and trusted officers responsible for the Nationalist victory were of Circassian heritage. The recent participation of members of the North Caucasian diaspora in the formation and promotion of Turkish policies in Abkhazia further demonstrates the visible roles Circassians continue to play in maintaining and supporting the viability of the Republic of Turkey. I contend, however, that fealty among these segments of Anatolia’s Circassian diaspora, like the phenomenon of separatism, results from local conditions, networks, and anomalies.

We can draw two discrete lessons from Circassian resistance to the National Movement during the Turkish War of Independence. First, we must liberate ourselves from approaching Anatolia as a monolithic whole. The Circassian insurrection in the south Marmara reminds us of the intricacy and diversity of Anatolia at the provincial level. Second, we must look at resistance to Kemalism as a phenomenon that supersedes sectarian or ethnic divides. Class, political economy, and provincialism drove Circassians, as well as many others, to fight against the ascendancy of Mustafa Kemal. We must correct our lenses in order to move beyond dogmas of Turkish nationalism and to embrace new insights into the multiplicities of Anatolia.

NOTES

1There is no province or district colloquially or officially known as “the south Marmara” (Güney Marmara Bölgesi). In using this term, I primarily focus on the Ottoman/Turkish districts of Kala-i Sultanîye/Çanakkale, Karâşî/Balâkesîr, Hüdâvendîgar/Bursa, İzmit/Kocaeli, and Adapazâr/Sakarya.
A substantial body of memoirs, documentary studies, and scholarly work has been produced in the decades following the Turkish War of Independence. The most central is Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk’s) _Nautuk_, the thirty-six-hour speech delivered during the Republican Peoples’ party convention of 1927. Since Atatürk’s death, few works (most notably those of Erik Jan Zürcher and Taner Akçam) have deviated from the tone or conclusions of this state-sponsored narrative. See, for example, Taner Akçam, _From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide_ (New York: Zed Books, 2004); Doğan Avcıoğlu, _Millî Kurtuluş Tarihi, 1838–den 1995’e_ (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1995); Yusuf Çan, _Millî Mücadele’dde İznit Sancağı_ (İzmir: İzmit Rotary Kulubü, 1993); Şerif Mardin, “Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution,” _International Journal of Middle East Studies_ 2 (1971): 197–211; Kâzım Özalp, _Millî Mücadele, 1919–1922_ (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basmevi, 1985); Stanford Shaw, _From Empire to Republic: The Turkish War of National Liberation, 1918–1923: A Documentary Study_ (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basmevi, 2000).


See, for example, Tuncay Özkın, _ÇIA Kûrtleri: Kûrt Devletinin Gizli Tarihi_ (İstanbul: Alfa Basım Yayın, 2004).

This study resonates with a broad range of work on the origins of intercommunal violence during the immediate pre- and postindustrial period. Rather than view the history of Circassian resistance to the emerging Turkish nation-state as the product of some primeval or inherent tension or strife, this essay seeks to place the violent and pseudonationalist strains of North Caucasian resistance within the contexts of local politics and the pressures of a modernizing, centralizing state. Several works have influenced this turn in my approach. See, for example, Anton Blok, _The Mafia of a Sicilian Village. 1860–1960: A Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs_ (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974); Ranajit Guha, _Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India_ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Ussama Makdissi, _The Culture of Sectarianism: Community History and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon_ (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000); Gyanendra Pandey, _The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India_ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

I have chosen to use “North Caucasian” and “Circassian” interchangeably. Although I recognize that there are certain discrete differences between the two terms (Circassian tends to refer to Adige-, Ubih-, or Abkhazian-speaking peoples), Ottoman and Western documents generally apply “Circassian” to all peoples of the North Caucasus.

Kemal Karpat, _Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics_ (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 69; Ehud R. Toledano, _Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East_ (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1998), 84. According to Toledano, anywhere between 595,000 and one million Circassians came to the Ottoman Empire between 1855 and 1866. Karpat estimates that up to two million North Caucasians, mostly Adige, came between 1859 and 1879. After 1879, Karpat approximates the number of Caucasian refugees around half a million.

Karpat, _Ottoman Population, 57_. Karpat, in his study of demographic trends during the last century of Ottoman rule, reckons that the Kurdish population of Anatolia stood at one and a half million during the 1880s. Although perhaps a conservative estimate, Karpat’s figure emphasizes the enormity of the Circassian diaspora in the Ottoman Empire. Why the legacy of North Caucasian resistance in the south Marmara remains largely absent from contemporary public consciousness becomes even more curious in light of the profound impact that Kurdish resistance in places such as Dersim has had on the transition from empire to nation-state in Anatolia.


PRO/FO 371/3418/199234, 3 December 1918.

Ibid.; Toledano, _Slavery and Abolition_, 106. Speaking of Circassian colonies in the Ottoman Empire, the reporting British officer in this file states flatly, “Their [the Circassian communities’] influence is merely
local, but, inasmuch as they are lawless and vindictive, it is real. They are most fanatical, and, as such, can always be relied on by the Government at Constantinople . . ."


İzeti Aydemir, *Muhacireteki Çerkes Aydınlar* (Ankara: n.p., 1991); 9; Sefer Berzeg, *Türkiye Kurtuluş Savaşı’nda Çerkes Göçmenleri*, Cilt II (Istanbul: Ekin Yayıncılık, 1990) 9, 34. Founded in 1914, the Şimali Kaftas Cemiyeti was an organization formed to promote the CUP’s interests in the North Caucasus. Through the actions of this committee a rebellion was sparked in Ajaria (in southwestern Georgia) at the start of World War I (an action Yusuf İzett was instrumental in fomenting). See Arsen Avagyan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Kemalist Türkiye’nin Devlet-İktidar Sisteminde Çerkesler* (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2004), 134–39.

BOA.DH.ŞFR 75/156, 15 April 1917.

BOA.DH.ŞFR 89/61, 61-1, 12 July 1917; BOA.DH.ŞFR 89/105, 16 July 1917; BOA.DH.ŞFR 92/155, 14 October 1918; BOA.DH.ŞFR 96/85, 8 February 1919; BOA.DH.ŞFR 96/122, 9 February 1919; BOA.DH.ŞFR 96/330, 27 February 1919; BOA.DH.ŞFR 97/351, 31 March 1919.


PRO/FO 371/4157/62437, 5 April 1919.


“Pomak” is a term applied generally to Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Large numbers of Pomak immigrants and refugees from the Rhodope Mountains settled in the county of Biga.


BOA.DH.EUM.AYS 9/38, 22 May 1919; BOA.DH.EUM.AYS 16/27, 19 July 1919; BOA.DH.EUM.AYS 18/119, 8 August 1919. This conflict between Albanians and the Yetimoğlu family from Georgia appears to have been a continuation of tensions that emerged in World War I. By July 1919, it was reported that the two sides had come to a truce.

BOA.DH.EUM.AYS 9/38, 24 May 1919; BOA.DH.EUM.AYS 34/24, 4 March 1920; BOA.DH.KMS 55-2/56, 16 September 1919; BOA.DH.KMS 55-3/20, 4 October 1919.

BOA.DH.KMS 55-3/29, 30 October 1919.

BCA 272.11.11.32.25, 10 November 1917.


Ibid., 96.

Ibid., 97–98.


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42 BOA.DHEREUM.AYS 39/37, 26 April 1920.
43 BOA.DH.KMS 60-2/10, 19 April 1921.
44 İğdemir, Biga Ayaklanması, 59. Most of the ammunition and money that fuelled Anzavur’s insurgency against the National Forces in the south Marmara came, by Anzavur’s own admission, from Istanbul.
48 A case in point of how this rage manifested itself in the south Marmara can be seen through the experiences of Mehmet Rüstü, an anti-Nationalist trader of lumber and agricultural goods. He was instrumental in organizing rebel activity in Biga, yet his home fell victim to Gavur İmam’s raiding Pomaks after the battle for Biga. In a letter sent to the Interior Ministry, Mehmet Rüstü argues that he played a mediating role during Biga’s occupation and had fled the town for Istanbul before the fighting broke out, on 16 March 1920. Ironically, his home was looted a second time by the Kuva-yi Milliye upon his return from the capital. See BOA.DHEREUM.AYS 40/18, 6 May 1920.
49 İğdemir, Biga Ayaklanması, 34. One villager complains, “Should a tax be one tree in eight or one chicken in eight? But Hamdi Bey would do this. One ox from seven households is enough and one sheep from each household is more even. But he said to give the Kuva-yi Milliye the hundred sheep that are in your possession. Is it really supposed to be like that?”
50 Ibid., 13.
51 Keep in mind that the political nature of the National Movement was actively debated in the Istanbul (particularly loyalist) press. Considering the personalities that followed Mustafa Kemal into Anatolia, many assumed that the Kuva-yi Milliye was simply a repackaged version of the CUP. See, for example, “Harekat-ı Milliye—İthatat ve Terakki,” Alemdar, 6 October 1919.
52 Canip Bey, Bursa’da İşgal Günlüğü (Bursa Vilayetinde Yunan Fecayi) (İstanbul: Düşünce Kitabevi Yayınları, 2004), 245.
53 BOA.DHEREUM.AYS 54/30, 19 June 1921; BOA.DHEREUM.AYS 55/65, 21 August 1921; BOA.DHEREUM.AYS 57/10, 23 October 1921; BOA.DHEREUM.AYS 62/11, 2 July 1922.
55 Ibid., 285.
56 Ibid., 32–33.
57 BOA.DHEREUM.AYS 10/28/14/77, 13 August 1921. This document suggests that the organization and intentions of the Near Eastern Circassian Association was known three weeks before the commencement of the meeting.
58 BOA.DHEREUM.AYS 10/28/14/77, 13 August 1921. This document suggests that the organization and intentions of the Near Eastern Circassian Association was known three weeks before the commencement of the meeting.
60 PRO/FO 371/5171/13982, 16 October 1920.
62 Fahri Görgülü, Yunan İşgalinde Tarih (Mustafakemalpaşa: Mustafakemalpaşa: Yeni Müteferrika Basmevi, 1960), 50. According the account given by a retired gendarme, the declaration was secretly circulated to small meetings of Circassian notables after the İzmir congress.
63 PRO/FO 371/5171/13982, 16 October 1920.
64 Ibid.
65 PRO/FO 371/6580/13914, 13 December 1921.
66 Zülfikar Ali Aydın, İkinci Susurluk: Bir Kasaba Cinneti (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2002), 50.
67 Riza Nur, Hoyat ve Hatıratım, Cilt III (İstanbul: Atınça Yayınları, 1968), 952; PRO/FO 371/7919/14155, 12 December 1922.
68 BCA 30-10.105.688.9, 12 May 1923; Emrah Canikli, Bâki İlk Selam (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2004), 212–13; PRO/FO 371/7919/14155, 12 December 1922; Mehmed Fatgeryef Şöenu, Çerkes Mes’elest (İstanbul: Bedir Yayınevi 1993), 62–64.


Söner Çağaptay, “Crafting the Turkish Nation: Kemalism and Turkish Nationalism in the 1930s” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2003), 218–21.


A fairly outspoken Nationalist defender of North Caucasians was Hakkı Hami (Ulukan), Sinop’s representative in the Ankara parliament during the War of Independence. During a session on 3 November 1922, Hakkı declared to thunderous applause on the floor of the assembly that “Turks and Circassians were close relatives” (*Çerkeslerle Türkler et trànak olmušlardır*). By the same token, those North Caucasians who sided with the Greek army forfeited their devotion to Islam and became Christians (*tanassar etmi*). *T.B.M.M. Zabit Ceridesi, Cilt 24* (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1960), 367; Muhittin Ünal, *Kurtuluş Savaşında Çerkeslerin Rolu* (Ankara: Tavak Matbaası, 2000), 140–41.