

Dagestan Diaspora in Turkey: Ethnographic Review

Maisarat Musaeva*

One of the most dramatic consequences of the Caucasian war (1817—1864) is the eviction from the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire of almost entire population of Adighe peoples and a significant part of the Dagestanis, Chechens, Ossetians.

There are more about 60 Dagestani villages in Turkey located in 12 vilayets (Tokat, Sivas, Yalova, Balikesir, Canakkale, etc.) which were founded in the second half of the XIXth century.

Let's begin with ethnographic review of the largest, consisting of approximately 400 households (families) village Gyunei Koi of Yalova vilayat known as “Küçük Dağistan” (Small Dagestan). The ancestors of the inhabitants of this village moved from almost 40 linguistically different Dagestan villages (Kikuni, Chirkei, Sugratl, Ashilta, Khadzhalmakhi, Khunzakh, Karata, Andy, Kische, Shapih, Tsudahar, Akusha, Zubutli, Miatli, Mehelta and others). According to the folk stories, the village was founded by Sufi Sheikhs Mohammed Hajji al-Madani al-Kikuni and Sharafedin al-Kikuni.

The mausoleums (türbeler) of these two Dagestanis are sited on a hill, in the middle of the village cemetery and are used as the place of pilgrimage (ziyarat) of Muslims, which in the last two decades are also visited by the visitors and tourists from Dagestan and Russia.

A common language for all the villagers was (and still is) Avar, more precisely the generally understood, literary norm of the language known as “Bol-Mats”. The villagers did not divide themselves into Avars or Dargin, but prefer to be called “ma'arural” (Mountaineers) or “dagistaniyal” (Dagestanis).

The other village Chiflik Koy is located near Güney-Koy, in the outskirts of Yalova city. This village can be considered as a typical sample of the “intermediate” urbanization of rural migrants through their involvement into urban social

* Candidate of Historical Sciences, Leading Researcher of the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography, Dagestan Scientific Center, Russian Academy of Sciences, Deputy Editor of the Journal History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Caucasus, Makhachkala/THE REPUBLIC OF DAGESTAN, maisarat@yandex.ru ORCID: 0000-0001-8210-1638

infrastructure. Chiflik Koy became the center of attraction for the Avars from Eastern Turkey. At present, there are for about two thousand Avars, both from the areas of Mush (mostly), Kahraman Marash, Sivas and Tokat, and from the villages (Esadiye, Sultaniye, and above mentioned Güney Koy). In general, the Avars resettled to Chiflik Koy from Mush and Kahraman Marash are considered as more religious and better preserved their language and ethnic traditions.

During the trips to Turkey, we had chances to meet with representatives of different generations of Muhajirs. All of them remember their Dagestan origin. Elders know the names of their ancestors, the year and place of the exodus. Some of them visited the Caucasus and met with their relatives or fellow villagers. In rural areas, the older generation tries to speak their ethnic language, remembers old customs, although most of them have already been significantly transformed under the influence of Turkish culture (especially wedding and funeral rites). Many of them note that a significant outflow of young people to cities for study and work, started since the second half of XX. century, leads to a gradual loss of mother language. The cultural and educational organizations of Caucasian diasporas are trying to prevent this process by all available means, including periodically organize meetings and parties of young people so that they can communicate.

It is known that any attempts of Muhajirs to establish contact with their historical homeland were strictly limited by the Russian Empire and severely prohibited by Soviet authorities. Only after collapse of the USSR and radical changes in the Russian society representatives of the diasporas have got the opportunity to establish ties with their compatriots in their historical Homeland¹.

One of the most frequently discussed problems concerns with the loss of ethnic languages of Diasporas both in the towns and in many rural settlements where the population is decreasing due to migration to cities. Before the mass urbanization of the last three decades diasporas had better conditions for using their ethnic languages and for practicing their customs and rituals (such as the feast of the first furrow (Otsbay), their culinary preferences and so on.

On the same time, respect for elders and women, hospitality and mutual assistance, other traditional ethic and etiquette norms, as well as ethnic and historical conciseness are well preserved. The traditional elements are noticeable also in the material culture, particularly in food and cookery. Wedding customs

1 Magomedkhan, Magomedhanov, *Dagestancy v Turcii: Etnodemograficheskie Posledstviya Kavkazskoj Vojny*, Mahachkala, 1997.

and ceremonies are of particular interest. In rural areas the wedding ceremonies retained the traditional scenario, which in many respects, is comparable with one that is practiced Dagestan.

For quite long-time preferred age for marriage was for men from 18 to 22, and for women 16–20 years. *Kalym* was not practiced for a long time, since in the historical homeland such a “payment” for the bride was not used by majority of the peoples of Dagestan.

A widespread form of marriage is wedding by collusion. However, there is a significant difference between traditional collusion and the forms of collusion practiced by urban residents both in the North Caucasus and in Turkey.

Traditionally the matchmaking team included the most entrusted and respected relatives, neighbors, friends. The conversation began with allegorical expressions, which contained a hint of the purpose of the visit: “Our partridge did not fly to you?”, or “Do not know where we can get the most expensive brocade?”, “Will not you let the tired travelers get a break?”. The matchmakers visited the parents of the bride several times, until they get the consent for the marriage. If the girl did not like the “applicant for her hand”, her refusal had to be announced through the intermediary. she should not say him or matchmakers about it directly. Otherwise, it could be considered as an insult. When the agreement is reached, the parties agree on the terms of the wedding.

A motivation of parents forgiving consent to the marriage of their daughter was often determined by the desire to have a rich groom. When choosing a bride, in addition to her beauty and modesty, physical health was considered. This, to some extent, was a guarantee of the ability to bear many children.

In rural areas, both in the past and now, young people have more opportunities to meet, get acquainted with each other (at a wedding, at public events, agricultural work, etc.). Virtually, in the urban social environment young people can get acquainted with their peers in a variety of situations (during studies, at work, in cafes, at parties, etc.). But in reality, without accidental coincidences or specially created situations, the young representatives of Diasporas have very limited opportunities to get acquainted with each other’s.

In Istanbul several times a year the Diaspora activists charter for young marriageable age fellow countrymen of North Caucasian origin a pleasure boat which usually drives tourists to the Bosphorus. The program of the meeting consists of:

- a) A meeting of acquaintances and first-time visitors, small group conversations, explicit searches for brides (young men come with mothers);
- b) A light stand-up meal (toast, pies with tea, coffee or cola);
- c) The Caucasian dances, accompanied by accordion and traditional rattles. Dancing, of course, is the most interesting part of the whole event. Young people with striking accuracy reflects all the charms, grace, expression of Circassian dances, Dagestan and Chechen “lezginka”. They dance skillfully, beautifully, freely. The night tour of the Bosporus continues, as a rule, for more than four hours, and this is a real opportunity to acquaint yourself, to look closely or to strength an acquaintance that may grow into a desire to create a family.

However, let us return to the topic of matchmaking and wedding.

After a detailed discussion of the candidacy of the groom and agreement of both parties regarding the date of marriage, the wedding “spring” began to be developed in full force, but “step by step”: solemn matchmaking, engagement, religious (Nikyah) and secular marriage registration procedures, wedding.

In Turkey as well as in a number of Oriental countries in the time between the engagement and the marriage has to be performed a female ritual “henna gece” (henna night). In Dagestan before the wedding time girls hold “sewing clothes” party, but the “henna gece” was practiced only among the Kumyks, Azeris and Nogais.

From the engagement (Nishan), which took place in the house of the bride till the marriage it could take, depending on the circumstances from a month to a year.

At the time of the engagement, the bride and groom exchanged some things (he gave the bride a ring, a dress, a breast button of silver or a kerchief, she could give a shirt).

Currently, both in Dagestan and Turkey, the bride is wearing gold jewelry brought by the groom as his first gifts and an expensive handkerchief, but in return the bride does not receive anything.

The engagement ends with refreshments. Usually, liquid sherbet (milk, diluted with honey) and lamb pilaf were served. After this ceremony the bride is called “wrapped in a scarf”. Since that day, she must observe the habit of avoidance (restriction of communication with the groom’s relatives), a custom for most Dagestan peoples very conditional².

2 Sakinat Gadzhieva, *Sem'ya i brak u narodov Dagestana v XIX – v nachale XX v.*, Moskva, Nauka, 1985, s. 154.

Although today the process of choosing a bride takes more time, and all the rest activities are perceived as a symbolic design of the already solved issue, wedding concerns are for the future newlyweds, for their parents, relatives, friends very serious. Everyone who takes part in the preparations for the wedding, has his own role, which he is warned about in advance.

“There is a bride without a dowry, but there is no bride without a wedding ceremony”, says the popular proverb. It was believed that a girl who married without observing all the rites, as well as the young man who married her, may be unhappy in family life.

The rite of the “henna gece”, which we mentioned above, is actually a girls’ party, a rite, which is considered a sad holiday, because it is a last day before the wedding, when the bride says goodbye to her home and her friends. Her hair is bloomed and combed. Then her hair and hands are colored with henna. The same procedure is carried out with the bride’s closest friend. Sadness accompanying the ceremony, gives its way to fun (games, songs and traditional dances), which continues until the morning.

Before the wedding ceremony, on one of the Friday nights (preferably secretly) takes place the “Nikah” ritual which is well-described and, in general, similar for all Muslims.

The most solemn act of the wedding is the transfer of the bride from the parents’ house to the groom’s house. Traditionally this was practiced in the evening time, whereas at the present time the bride is transported in the daytime. When the bride is escorted from the house, the brother, if she has it, sometimes instead of belt puts on her wedding dress a red ribbon, as is customary in Turkey.

As the informants say, in the past, and in the countryside nowadays, her waist was bandaged with an elegant belt. In rural areas at the wedding guests, especially the distant ones, are fed; the menu necessarily includes pilaf, cooked meat and baked bread, flour halvah. All this is very similar to how weddings are held in the mountain villages of Dagestan.

In the city at the wedding, they serve only salted and sweet shortbread cookies, cold juices and drinks (cola, mineral water). The bride and groom cut a huge, in several tiers, cake, which is distributed to guests.

It should be noted that the wedding, both in the city and in the countryside, increasingly acquires external, inherent in Western countries (the exchange of

wedding rings, wedding attire of the bride, the motorcade of newlyweds, traveling around the city, the village, etc.) features.

However, music and dances at weddings in rural areas are traditional. In cities, as a rule, are popular Turkish collective dances.

The wedding cycle is over, the young couple are visited by the bride's father's house, and subsequently, alternately, after the invitation, the close relatives of the bride and groom. The parties in honor of the newlywed's end, as in the past, with mutual congratulations and gifts.

In conclusion of this short review, we should say that the ethnographic characteristics, customs and ceremonies of the Dagestan Diaspora have many common features with the traditions of the peoples of the North Caucasus and Turkey. It is well-known that Dagestanis have a quite immanent attitudes towards the political system of the country of residence, towards being useful citizens of the state. However, unanimity did not absolve the Muhajirs from their duties, obedience to the law, civil and political loyalty, from the need to convince themselves, their neighbors, fellow citizens, their compatriots in the Caucasus that they are people of high moral repute, admirable citizens of the new Homeland. It should be noted that the North Caucasian and Dagestan diasporas perceive with enthusiasm and gratitude the positive political attitudes of the Turkish government towards strengthening the diasporas' diverse ties with their historical homeland, encouraging the activities of the historical and cultural funds of the diasporas to preserve their cultural features. Of course, they are satisfied with their socio-economic status, level of education, representation in the prestigious spheres as military service, science, industry, medicine, administration ext.

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