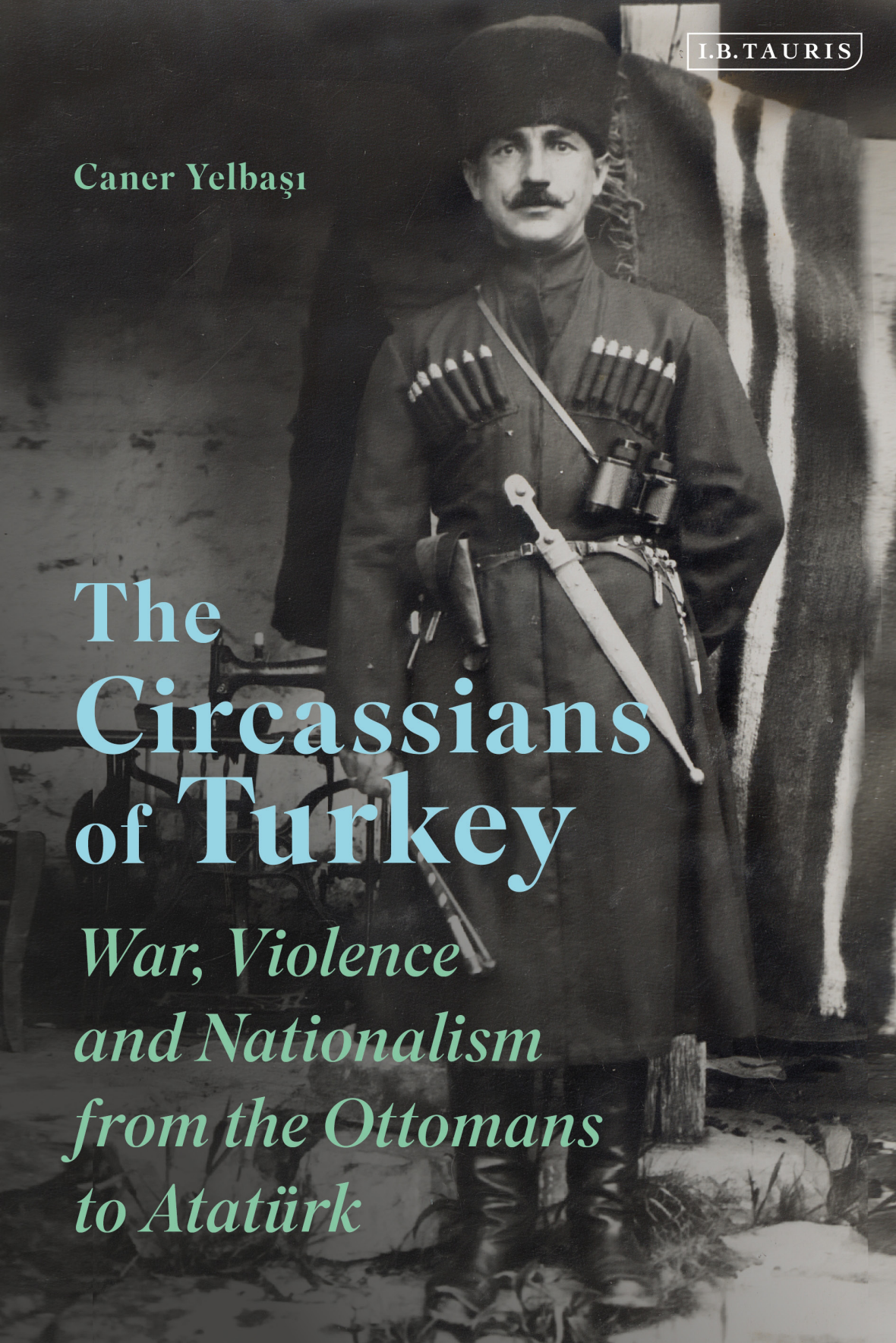


I.B.TAURIS

Caner Yelbaşı

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*War, Violence  
and Nationalism  
from the Ottomans  
to Atatürk*



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LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

I.B. TAURIS  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK  
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

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First published in Great Britain 2019

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Cover design: Adriana Brioso

Cover image: Adapazarı-Düzce region, South Marmara or Greece where a group of Circassians were deported from Turkey due to their anti-Kemalist activities during the Turkish-Greek War of 1919–22. From the author's private collection.

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-7883-1447-3  
ePDF: 978-1-8386-0017-4  
eBook: 978-1-8386-0018-1

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

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## Acknowledgements

I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Benjamin C. Fortna, for his encouragement and guidance in addition to his sustained support and confidence in me. I feel incredibly lucky to have him as my doctoral supervisor. I would also like to thank Professor Konrad Hirschler, Professor Erik Jan Zürcher, Professor Eugene Rogan, Dr Angus Lockyer and Dr Ryan Gingeras for their valuable comments on this book. I am grateful to two referees for their comments and detailed suggestions.

I have benefitted from the help of Zeynel Abidin Besleneý, Sefer Berzeg, Muhittin Ünal, Baki Çule, Sedat Reşad, Ahmet Vedat Güneş, Mustafa İmam, Murat Paşşu, Bekir Yılmaz, Dr Yorgos Dedes, Gamon McLellan, Prof George Hewitt, Rengin Yurdakul, Elbruz Aksoy, Halil İbrahim Erbay, Hasan Genç, Khalid El-Awaisi, Müzeyyen Şirin, Ümit Şirin, İsmail Şirin, Meltem Şirin, Semih Şirin, Arzu Çınaz, Cihan Çelik and İleriş Çelik. I would also like to thank some of the many friends for their support during these long four years in the UK and Turkey: Ayşe Zeynep Nayır, Ayşe Kara, Aydın Erken, Kuban Kural, Yakoob Ahmed, Ozan Ahmet Çetin, Sebahattin Abdurrahman, Talha Çiçek, Elis Gjevori and Ömer Faruk Büyükkurt.

I am also grateful to the staff of the Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archives; the Prime Ministry's Republican Archives; the Turkish Military History and Strategic Studies archives (ATASE); the staff at the archives of the Institute for the History of the Turkish Revolution (TİTE); the SOAS Library where Dominique Akhoun-Schwarz and Kobir Ahmed were extremely generous with their time and help; the Western Thrace Minority Culture and Educational Company (BAKEŞ); the Centre for Islamic Studies (İSAM); the Atatürk Library; the Şamil Educational and Cultural Foundation; the Turkish Grand National Assembly; the Caucasus Research Culture and Solidarity Foundation (KAFDAV); the British Library; the National Archives and the Parliamentary Archives; Adımlar Café of Eskişehir; and the Ministry of Turkish National Education which provided financial support. This book is derived, in part,

from articles published in [MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES] on [12 September 2018], available online: [http://www.tandfonline.com/\[https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2018.1473249\]](http://www.tandfonline.com/[https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2018.1473249]) and [JOURNAL of BALKAN and NEAR EASTERN STUDIES] on [02 September 2018], available online: [http://www.tandfonline.com/\[https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2018.1506297\]](http://www.tandfonline.com/[https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2018.1506297]). Special thanks go to Sophie Rudland, Rory Gormley and Sorcha Thomson at I.B. Tauris, and Leeladevi Ulaganathan for their patient help on this project.

I would like to thank my grandmother, Şaziye Yelbaşı, and my aunt, Meryem Erdem, who ensured my comfort and hosted me while I was conducting field work in Ankara. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, my father Recep Yelbaşı and mother Gülümser Yelbaşı, and my brother Jankat Yelbaşı for their enduring and unwavering support.

# Note on place names, names, abbreviations

## Note on place names and names

Place names and names are rendered according to the modern Turkish usage, that is, not by strict transliteration. Therefore, names are given as Abdülhamid not Abdulhamid, and Paşa not Pasha.

## Abbreviations

ATASE	General Staff Military History and Strategic Studies Archive in Ankara, Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüd Başkanlığı Arşivi
ATASE/ATAZB	Atatürk Collection, Atatürk Koleksiyonu
ATASE/İSH	Turkish War of Independence Collection, İstiklal Harbi Koleksiyonu
BCA	Prime Ministry's Republican Archives, Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivleri
BOA	Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archives, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress, İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti
KAFFED	Federation of Caucasian Association, Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu
TGNA-TBMM	Turkish Grand National Assembly, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi

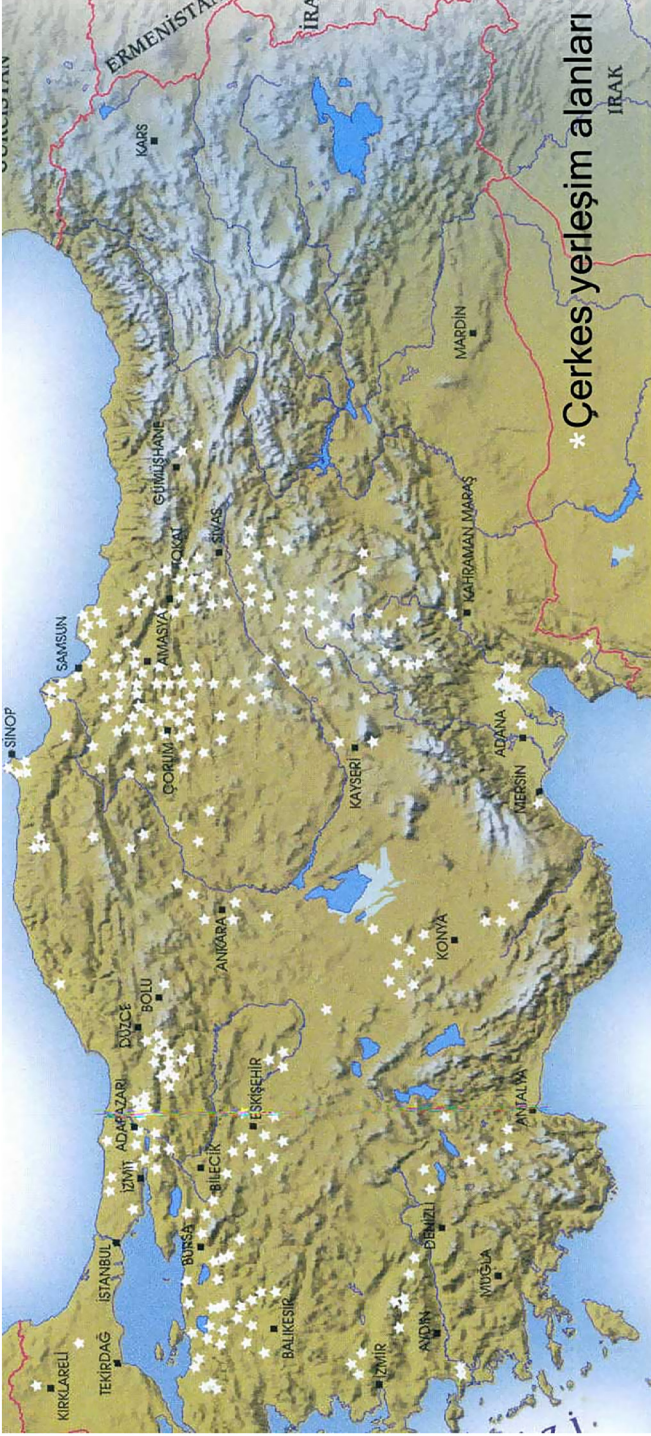
TİTE

Ankara University, History of Turkish Revolution  
Institute Archive, Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap  
Tarihi Enstitüsü Arşivi

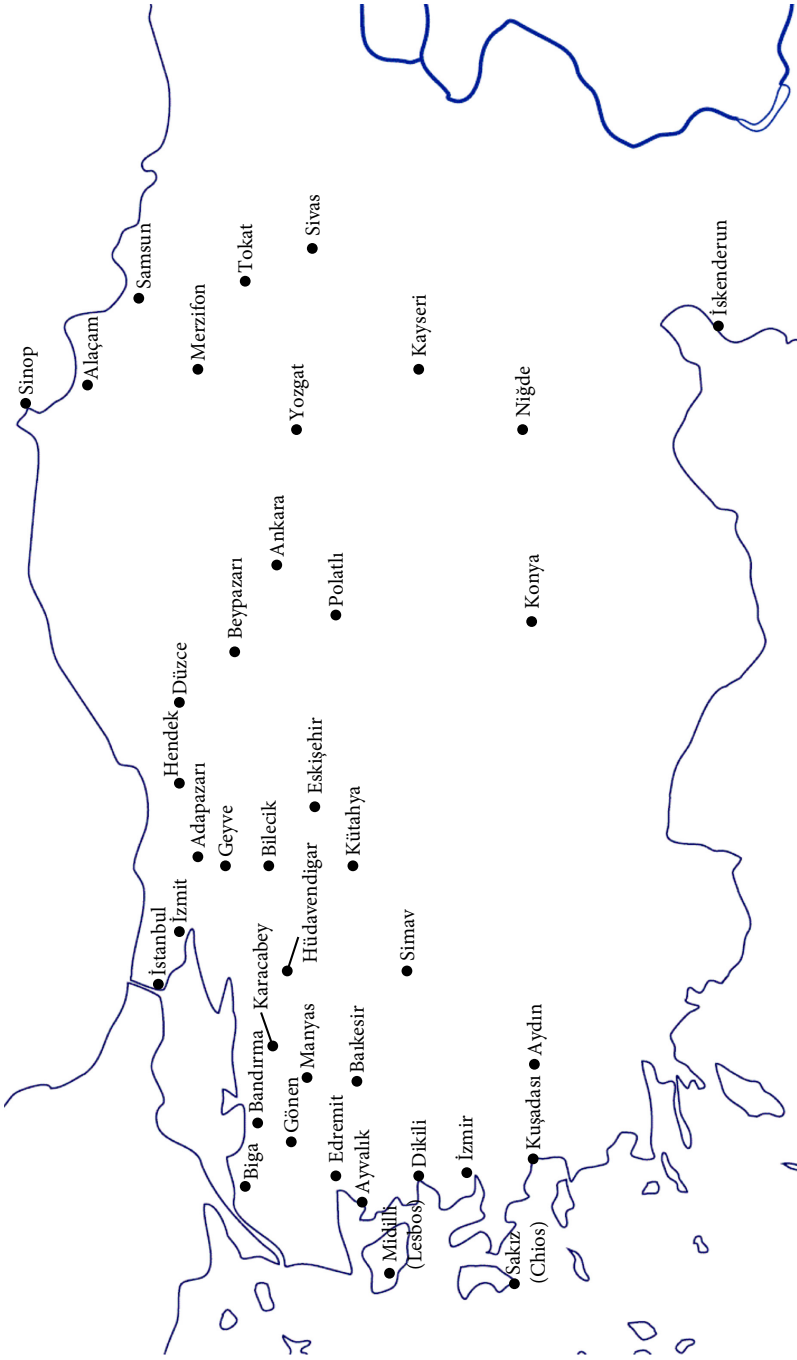
PRPRO/FO

Public Record Office/Foreign Office, National Archive,  
London, Kew Gardens

# Maps



**Map 1** Circassian settlements in Turkey, after 1864. (Source: Zeynel Abidin Besleney, 'A Political History of Circassian Diaspora in Turkey 1864-2011': PhD diss. (SOAS, University of London, 2012)



Map 2 Map showing the main places where the incidents took place. (Source: Author)

## Introduction

The Circassians are the second largest non-Turkish ethnic group residing in the modern republic of Turkey, after the Kurds. Their population numbers about three million.<sup>1</sup> The Circassians hold a unique place in Ottoman–Turkish history, with 90 per cent of them, approximately a million people, having been exiled to the Ottoman Empire during the Russian expansion into the North Caucasus in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Following their exile, which is symbolically traced back to 21 May 1864, the date on which the Russian tsar declared the Caucasian War to be over, the Circassian elites became integrated into the Ottoman military and bureaucracy, achieving significant positions. Ordinary Circassians became either infantryman in the Ottoman military or farmers in the regions under the control of the Ottoman state.<sup>3</sup>

The Circassians did not have a well-organized state structure in the North Caucasus before their exile. The lack of a unified state allowed neighbours to attack the region without having to face serious resistance.<sup>4</sup> Geographical limitations did not allow them to practice agriculture, but they were able to practice animal husbandry and trade in various goods, including slaves. The markets were widespread. Russian forces started to take control of the region, ultimately gaining total control from the 1760s onwards.<sup>5</sup> The Russians believed that it was not a simple task to deal with them. They did not simply aim to conquer the region but also wanted to assimilate the inhabitants of the region.<sup>6</sup> However, in time, the Circassians began to be seen as ‘savage’ and ‘eternal’ enemies who had to be decimated,<sup>7</sup> and it took the Russian forces about one hundred years to gain control of the region – which they did by ‘commit[ing] even more egregious acts of terror’<sup>8</sup> – and, finally, expel almost the whole Circassian population. The Circassians were being radicalized during this period by the poor conditions they faced on their transfer from their homeland to the Ottoman regions, where they were faced with

incompetent state facilities and a bureaucracy that worsened their situation.<sup>9</sup> Although the Ottoman state needed these newcomers in the military and to work in the agricultural sector, it was not able to both deal with them en masse and prevent the spread of epidemic diseases. Consequently, huge numbers of Circassians lost their lives.

There is still some discussion among the North Caucasian groups of Turkey about the term 'Circassian'. Historically, the British used 'Circassian' to refer solely to the Adige people, who comprised of more than ten tribes, among them Abzakh, Besleney, Bzhedug, Hatuqwai, Kabardian, Mamkhegg, Natukhai, Shapsug, Temirgoy, Ubikh and Znahey. On the other hand, documents show that the Ottomans generally used Circassian, or 'Çerkes' in Turkish, to describe all of the North-West Caucasian groups, namely the Adige, Ubikh, Abkhaz and Abaza and, in some documents, the Chechens and Dagestanis. Although, in some parts of Turkey, Abkhazians also call themselves Circassians, one cannot infer that all Abkhazians accept the Circassian identity as a supra-identity.<sup>10</sup>

With the reinstatement in 1908 of the Ottoman constitution of 1876, the Circassian elites benefitted from a new liberal atmosphere prevailing in the empire. They established a Circassian school and published a periodical focused on their history, culture and language and on the problems faced by them at that time within the empire. Subsequently, on 1 May 1910, they were granted permission by the Ottoman government to teach their language to pupils attending their schools.<sup>11</sup> However, this liberal climate did not endure. For nearly eleven years without cessation, the empire was at war on different fronts; from 1911 it fought against the occupation of Tripolitania by Italy, then in 1912–13 it was involved in the Balkan Wars, then it took part in the First World War of 1914–18, and then between 1919 and 1922 it was involved in the Turkish War of Independence.<sup>12</sup> There was also a coup d'état in 1913 by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP),<sup>13</sup> following which it gained control of the empire incrementally until the end of the First World War.<sup>14</sup>

## The aims and the central questions

Although there was general chaos throughout Anatolia after 1918, it should be underlined that this book limits its scope to Central and Western Anatolia. On

the eastern front, nationalist forces struggled against the Armenian army. In Southern Anatolia, the French army, with the help of local Armenian bands, also aimed at carrying out an occupation. Moreover, throughout Anatolia, local conflicts between bands, local forces, police and the gendarme were widespread. To study all these regions and conflicts is beyond the scope of this book, which focuses principally on key important Western and Central Anatolian conflicts involving Circassians. Specifically, Yozgat, Ankara, Düzce, Adapazarı, İzmit, Gönen and Manyas are included, as these places were where incidents broke out. The Anzavur, the Adapazarı-Düzce, the Yozgat and the Çerkes Ethem incidents, the attempt to prepare for Circassian autonomy under Greek occupation, the Gönen-Manyas deportations and the Circassian opposition to the Kemalist regime are the topics highlighted and studied in this book.

During the republican period, the state and its institutions failed to allow academics and researchers to study the bloody Turkish War of Independence or the early republican period in any detail with objectivity. Until the early 2000s, the controversial topics of this transformative period, from empire to nation state, were off limits to independent researchers inside Turkey. The authoritarian approach of the state to this topic created a barrier to researchers. Those who tried to circumvent it were punished by the state. For example, economist Fikret Başkaya, who wrote a well-known and critical book on Kemalism and the early republican period,<sup>15</sup> was sentenced in 1993 to twenty months in prison, under the prevailing counter-terrorism legislation. This was because the book criticized Kemalism from a leftist perspective, arguing that the Kemalist movement was no more than a Bonapartist and pragmatic movement. Similarly, a journalist, Hakan Albayrak, was also sentenced for claiming in his column that the Islamic funeral prayer was not conducted when Atatürk died, even though eight days later he corrected his earlier comment and said that the Islamic funeral prayer had indeed been held; Albayrak was sentenced in 2004 to fifteen months under the law 'Crimes against Atatürk'.<sup>16</sup> In the last decade, however, a great number of books have been published relating to this period, describing the experiences of the different religious and ethnic groups of Turkey. While there are a number of books that have been published on the most significant non-Turkish group inside the country, namely the Kurds, there is a dearth of academic studies on the Circassians of Turkey.

This book aims to introduce a new perspective on the existing historiography. Although over recent decades there have been some worthy, novel discussions relating to Kemalist historiography in both Turkish TV programmes and popular history magazines, there has been limited historiography originating from the academic domain. This study aims to break new ground in this area, focusing in detail on the political and historical context for the emergence of the activities of Çerkes Ethem and Anzavur Ahmed, the Gönen and Manyas exiles, and the Circassian opposition to the Kemalist regime and its repressive policies against the Circassians during the single-party periods. With few exceptions, none of these topics could hitherto be, or have been, studied, with objectivity by either the Turkish academy or internationally.<sup>17</sup> With some exceptions, existing works were heavily influenced by the Turkish 'one nation' ideology, based on Kemalism. Thus, they either ignore the presence of the aforementioned issues or accept them only to then bring them to view at a shallow level, with discussions centring on who was 'progressive' or 'backward' in the conflict.

The book will underline the presence of the Circassians in this specific period of Ottoman history, 1918–38, showing how the period after the First World War, the era that witnessed the transformation from empire to nation state, was a painful experience for the non-Turkish community. The study of the Circassians in this period helps to understand better the troubled years of the Ottoman collapse and the emergence of the Turkish nation state, in which the Circassians were actively involved – they were either fighting to save the empire or, later on, resisting the creation of the Turkish nation state.

In the broader context, the book will utilize concepts relating to theories of civil war and political loyalty and ask the following questions: First, where do the Ottoman/Turkish or loyalist/nationalist<sup>18</sup> struggles and civil war fit into a worldwide context? Secondly, what were the dynamics at play, in terms of the shifting loyalties among Circassian elites and ordinary people, for both the state and the ethnic identity of the Circassians during this period?

Civil war has been defined as armed conflict that leads to at least a thousand deaths.<sup>19</sup> It is typically a struggle between different groups or authority-wielders within the boundaries of a state.<sup>20</sup> It is possible to state that civil war can be divided into two categories: 'old' and 'new' civil wars. In old civil wars, there were mutual political aspirations for participants whose aims were delineated

clearly from the outset.<sup>21</sup> Violence was not venerated; it was merely accepted as a necessary stepping stone for attaining the political aims of the group.<sup>22</sup> In contemporary civil wars, on the other hand, a clearly delineated aim emerges among interested groups. The struggle for leadership and the lack of hierarchy within groups has also been a problem in contemporary civil wars.<sup>23</sup> These factors all contribute to uncertainty in the struggle between different groups and authorities.

It is further useful to understand the Turkish civil war in a broader historical context, by comparing it with another civil war, in this case one that was taking place in Russia. Similar to the Kemalists in Turkey, the Bolsheviks believed that their revolution in October 1917 signified a radical break with the past, necessitating the establishment of a new order in the country. There were some striking similarities between the Russian and Ottoman civil wars and, interestingly, both victors in the civil wars, namely the Bolsheviks and Kemalists, used similar terminologies to depict them. Those supporting the Bolsheviks and Kemalists were termed progressive and those against them were labelled backward, reactionary or loyal to previous regimes. This terminology framed the boundaries of the political language in domestic politics for many decades to come in Turkey.<sup>24</sup>

The second central question of the book concerns how Circassian political loyalty changed during this transformative period. Although the Circassians relied on the Ottoman sultan/caliph, considering that after the First World War political authority was represented by two governments – the Ottoman Porte in Istanbul as a *de jure* government and the Ankara government as a *de facto* one – the loyalty of the Circassian people was, contrary to traditional accounts, split between the two governments. The ordinary Circassian people, generally speaking, supported the loyalists, while the majority of the military elites and the CUP members backed the nationalists. It is also possible to assert that for some of the Circassian elites, the loyalty of their ethnic Circassian identity later became more vital and pronounced. As will be shown in this study, they tried to set up an autonomous Circassian structure under Greek occupation as a buffer zone between the Greeks and Turks in 1921. Until that time, Circassian identity and its loyalties to the Ottoman state were not in conflict. The concept of Ottoman identity, which was in fact a multinational identity, allowed the Circassians to identify themselves clearly. However, after the Greek occupation,

some of the Circassian notables thought that the Ottoman state's days were limited, and that the time had arrived for them to establish an autonomous structure under Greek occupation. This was partly because they feared that if they returned to Central Anatolia, the nationalists of Ankara would not give them sufficient space within the new state and would execute them for their opposition to Ankara.<sup>25</sup> They decided to take a step based on the Wilsonian principles<sup>26</sup> popular at the time and set up an autonomous Circassian state structure. However, this decision was not supported by the vast majority of the Circassians.

This book argues that the majority of the Circassians, like most of the people in Anatolia at the end of the empire, were dependent on the decisions taken by the Ottoman government, which was seen as the legitimate government by the people in Anatolia. Being aware of this and wanting the people's support, the *Kuva-yi Milliye*<sup>27</sup> and the nationalists of Ankara did not attack the Ottoman government in public at the beginning of their movements. Moreover, they used the rhetoric that *Kuva-yi Milliye* was fighting to save İstanbul and the sultan from the Alliance's occupation. Given this atmosphere, the Circassians expressed their support for the Ottoman government but distanced themselves from the *Kuva-yi Milliye* and the nationalists, who were seen as the successors of the CUP, which was blamed for the disastrous results the empire faced in the previous couple of years.

While ordinary Circassians may have distanced themselves from the nationalists, Circassians in the bureaucracy, army, Special Organization and paramilitary organizations were divided into three groups. The first group played an important role from the beginning to the end in the resistance against the Alliance and Greek occupation in Anatolia. Among the members of this group were people such as Rauf Orbay,<sup>28</sup> Bekir Sami (Kunduh),<sup>29</sup> Bekir Sami (Günsav),<sup>30</sup> Yusuf İzzet Paşa (Met, Janutuko),<sup>31</sup> İbrahim Süreyya (Yiğit)<sup>32</sup> and Cemil Cahit (Toydemir).<sup>33</sup> The second group, which involved people such as Çerkes Ethem, Çerkes Reşid and Kuşçubaşı Eşref, joined the national struggle at the beginning and prevented the chaos in Anatolia (like Çerkes Ethem), but later on it left or was excluded from the national struggle. It might be said that the second group was also close to Enver Paşa and it was at the centre of the Enver–Mustafa Kemal leadership struggle. The third group comprised of former Special Organization agents and soldiers who participated in the

First World War as members of the Ottoman army and Special Organization; however, they went against the nationalists of Ankara from the beginning of 1919 since they saw the nationalists, such as Ahmed Anzavur, Sefer Berzeg and Maan Şirin, as rebelling against the Ottoman government. They showed their opposition by organizing an anti-nationalist movement in the South Marmara and Adapazarı-Düzce regions.

One could see that ethnicity and Islam played roles in the Circassian mobilization, both when they were with the nationalists or against the nationalists, as Gingeras emphasizes in his book. In the case of Circassians, ethnicity facilitated the intra-community network. It made it easy for them to gather. However, it is difficult to say that their motivation was based on their ethnic identity. Whether intentionally or not, the Circassians became a part of the power struggle between İstanbul and Ankara, a power struggled that saw the transformation of the empire to a nation state. They were instrumentalized by the power centres, such as the governments in İstanbul and Ankara, and by their own local leaders at the time. The politics in the majority Circassian regions were related to the interior or exterior community struggles, local disagreements, intra-community networks and relationship with the state and religion. In this specific time period (1918–38), the transition of the state from one particular shape to another was instrumentalized and used in the power struggle between Ankara and İstanbul.

One of the arguments of this book is that the paramilitary activism of the Circassians from the end of the First World War to the Turkish War of Independence and the early Turkish Republican period completely changed their relationship with the 'state'. Here, the state refers to both the centres of power – the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. The Turkish Republic, particularly in its early days, aimed to shape society and the state with a top-down modernization and secularization project. As the loyal refugees (*muhacirs*) of the Ottoman state, Circassians were the human sources for the Ottoman army, Special Organization and agricultural production. Their elites were also relatives of royal household. Although their settlement process from the 1860s onwards created widespread problems, from epidemic to starvation, for the Ottoman state, their 'loyalty' to the state had not been questioned by it. However, after the chaotic and devastating period of the First World War and the Turkish War of Independence, they were not welcomed by the

new Turkish Republic. They became the subject of ambivalent policies of the republican rulers.

In the early republican period, the Kemalist elites, on the one hand, did not desire the exile or deportation of the Circassians from Turkey. Although they had only recently come (about sixty years ago, from 1860s onwards) to Anatolia, they were seen by the regime as Anatolian. The state system was not designed to create race-based ethnic citizenship. Rather, it proposed to dissolve the different identities and assimilate them into the Turkish one. The only way for a Circassian in the early republican period to participate in daily life without the interference of state officials in public places was to accept the Turkish identity and assimilate with the Turkish people. As Charles Tilly emphasizes in his article on state making, 'state making' is a process in which 'agents of the state' eliminate or neutralize 'their rivals inside those territories'.<sup>34</sup> In this case the Circassians were seen as rivals due to their relationship with the Ottoman state (or Ottoman past). The Kemalists wanted them either eliminated or neutralized – that is, turned into loyal citizens – by the new Turkish Republic.

It can be said that the nation-building process has one purpose: to destroy all the existing nations and create a single national identity in the given territory. In the Turkish nation-building process, the different identities of the post-Ottoman Empire *bakiyes* (or the non-Turkish people) had to be assimilated into the Turkish identity. However, as underlined by Anthony Smith, the national identity in many cases became the source 'of instability and conflict in many parts of the world'; it was the main cause of long-lasting conflicts,<sup>35</sup> as was seen in the creation of Turkish identity in the early republican period. Turkish identity was not welcomed by the non-Turkish groups in Anatolia and caused conflict and tension between the state and society.

The existing historiography of this period in Turkey's history is very problematic for a number of reasons. The Turkish War of Independence is still treated as a movement supported by most people, except those who were 'backward' or 'collaborators' with the 'Greek and British occupiers'. However, recent studies show that local dynamics varied massively from district to district and among different ethnic groups. In South Marmara, the relationship between the state and the residents of the region was already strained following the First World War, particularly due to the disastrous results of the war on the Anatolian people, which included epidemics and food shortages.<sup>36</sup> The existing

situation weakened the state's authority in this region and led to an increase in intra-regional struggles between the Turks, Circassians, Albanians and some Greeks, a significant number of whom were exiled or deported during the war. In particular, the Circassian–Albanian conflicts during the 1900s were among the most serious for the region. Moreover, until the Battle of Sakarya in 1921, the resistance movement was not expected to succeed against the Greek army, as it was supported by the Allies. The region was ruled by Greek authorities for more than two years, which shows that further scholarly research is still necessary to understand fully local anti-resistance movement activities and the local population's relationship with the Greek authorities.

One of the most significant books of the period relating to the activities of the Circassians and the post-Balkan War in Anatolia is Ryan Gingeras's *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923*.<sup>37</sup> The book was one of the first to adopt an alternative approach to study in detail the internal struggles in Anatolia during the Turkish–Greek War of 1919–22. Gingeras consulted a number of memoirs written by witnesses during this period and studied some of the key protagonists who played a prominent role in the period, as well as relied on archival sources. One of the missing parts of the story in the historiography of this period relates to the internal conflicts that transpired locally in parts of Western Anatolia, a place that Gingeras also focuses on in his book. What differentiates this book from Gingeras's book is that this book claims that a power struggle had an important place during these years. For instance, Çerkes Ethem and Mustafa Kemal's struggle seemed to be a conflict for power. Kuşçubaşı Eşref's opposition to the Kemalist rule was also a part of a power struggle. However, this does not mean that ethnicity did not play a role during this period. As will be seen in Chapter 4, the Ankara government's deportation of the Circassians from Gönen–Manyas region was based on ethnicity.

## Paramilitarism and Circassians

Bandits or paramilitary groups do not obey authority; they remain outside the control of the absolute power and, hence, have the potential to rebel against authority.<sup>38</sup> Not having control over all the land and over all citizens renders

those in power vulnerable. As will be seen in the following chapters, the ones in power, that is, the Kemalists, needed local patrons on their side to gain dominance in the name of law and authority over the central government in Ankara, since they were not all-powerful. Çerkes Ethem<sup>39</sup> was needed to exert power initially.

Just before the First World War, the South Marmara region was already a battleground for different brigand groups. There were the Albanians, who began to move to the region in the years after the Ottomans lost the Balkans in the Ottoman–Russian War of 1877–78; there were also the Circassians and Turks and the other local people who did not have a good working relationship ever since the mass migration, with inefficient state policies and the lack of security in the region causing problems between them. Each of these communities had armed groups to defend themselves against the other groups, since the state did not have enough power to protect people and provide security in the region. This situation helped the Circassians and the other groups to mobilize their armed people when they needed them, such as during the War of Independence.

One of the armed groups was under the control of Çakırcalı Ahmet Efe. Efe had great support from the local people since he was the symbol of resistance against the lawlessness and unequal treatment meted out by the state.<sup>40</sup> The local rivalry between the local Turks, Circassians and Albanians turned into a conflict and grew rapidly. To protect the local people from the cruelty of the Circassians and Albanians, Efe aimed to take vengeance on them. He killed approximately forty innocent Albanians and Circassians, thus exacerbating the problem and giving rise to a blood feud among the people.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, Anzavur Ahmed,<sup>42</sup> Kuşçubaşı Eşref<sup>43</sup> and Sami,<sup>44</sup> who would come to be well known, mobilized local Circassians in the region to kill Efe and his relatives in revenge. Efe was finally killed in a skirmish in November 1911.<sup>45</sup> This event demonstrates that the Ottoman state did not have the power to protect the life of its own subjects. It can also be seen that during these years the bandits were always one step ahead of the regular armed forces. They had the support of the people and were better armed and equipped than the regular army and gendarme. Although local Circassians did not have the capability to handle Efe themselves, they could rely on their armed people to save their lives when the state could not.

One of the aims of this study is to examine the process of Circassian mobilization during the Turkish–Greek War of 1919–22. During that period, both the de jure government of the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul and the de facto government in Ankara used paramilitary groups against one another in their attempts to gain control over the country. This struggle between the two governments and the use of paramilitary groups made the conflict akin to a civil war, particularly in the affected Adapazarı–Düzce and South Marmara regions,<sup>46</sup> which experienced widespread chaos. This state of civil war and the associated chaos have generally been disregarded by scholars, particularly those responsible for producing the official (Kemalist) historiography of Turkey. According to Kemalist historiography, which was created and developed by the regime in the late 1920s and 1930s based on Atatürk's famous *Nutuk* speech<sup>47</sup>, there was no attempt to differentiate approaches to engagement in rebellions initiated against the 'national struggle' and 'collaborators' working with foreign forces. This chaos and the internal struggles that occurred during the Turkish War of Independence undermines the very notion of a republic created by the Kemalist regime, which emphasized the 'nationalist' and 'total war' features of the war against the Greek troops during the republican period.

High-ranking CUP members, Ottoman bureaucrats and military men who used paramilitary groups to form lines of resistance against the Greek troops beginning to occupy Western Anatolia in May 1919 were already planning their moves before the end of the First World War.<sup>48</sup> They had been concealing arms for later use against the Alliance in case of the possible occupation of Anatolia after the Mudros Armistice (October 1918), the armistice that was signed between the Allies and the Ottomans. South Marmara was a key area for processing arms, and its depots were responsible for organizing the resistance movement and armed struggle against the possible occupation of the Anatolian portion of the empire by the Alliance. It was also a region in which people were already well armed, due to various intra-regional conflicts originating from the 1910s.

In the days following the end of the First World War in October 1918, high-ranking members of the CUP escaped the country to avoid facing charges for war crimes. After the war, the Allies allowed Greek troops to occupy İzmir in the west of Turkey in May 1919. The Ottoman army was weak at that time, as its soldiers had become increasingly ravaged after suffering war throughout

the entirety of the preceding last decade. The Ottoman military had suffered large-scale losses, casualties and deserters during the First World War. It was also enduring serious economic hardships and food shortages. At a time when morale and motivation were exceedingly low, the various paramilitary groups that emerged were initially perceived as saviours and protectors against the Greek occupation. They were considered useful as a means to deter further Greek offensives until the army would be ready to engage the Greek troops again. Thus, war-weariness was one of the greatest threats to the nationalists.<sup>49</sup> The Anatolian people suffered scarcity and economic difficulties because of the war; furthermore, as some army officers wrote in their memoirs, people in Anatolia hated soldiers and the practice of military conscription in the post-First-World-War era.<sup>50</sup>

The paramilitary unit, as a form of resistance against occupation, was a key feature of the early resistance movement in Anatolia. As has been mentioned previously, the Anatolian people were already sickened by war having suffered lasting periods of conflict over the previous ten years. Although a group of high-ranking military men, prominent CUP members and local paramilitary leaders aimed to protect Anatolia, the people of the region were not voluntarily willing to support the resistance movement against Greek occupation. The only concern of the majority of the people was survival, rather than coming together around the resistance movement to fight against occupying forces. People were tired, and suffering from war, lack of food, disease and infirmity. They were unwilling to fight anymore. The populations of Anatolia viewed the high-ranking military men and officers as responsible for the catastrophic situation they encountered.<sup>51</sup> Under such conditions, the role played by the paramilitary groups and brigades was crucial. The paramilitaries were more acceptable to people than the regular army. Moreover, soldiers preferred to fight as members of the irregular forces since they did not have to wear military uniform, the hierarchy was not so important as in the regular army and the salary was much higher.<sup>52</sup>

On the other side, the Greeks were also war-weary. Military service had been made compulsory in 1911, and they had engaged in several wars over the last ten years, including the Balkan Wars, the First World War and the Turkish–Greek War of 1919–22. Some soldiers recruited into the army in 1911 had still not been discharged, and an attitude of anti-militarism was pervasive

among the soldiers in the Greek army.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the Turkish–Greek War had triggered a domestic struggle between the Greek forces and the country’s politicians. The loyalists who wished to remain neutral disagreed on the subject of the occupation of Anatolia; the supporters of Venizelos, the Venizelists, backed the occupation.<sup>54</sup> Due to the difficulties associated with wartime conditions, the extended duration of a state of war and conditions at the front, the Anatolian campaign turned out to be a misadventure for the Greek army, as reluctance and anger spread among Greek army soldiers.<sup>55</sup>

There were many paramilitary groups in South Marmara that were made up of Circassians. One important question that has hitherto not been adequately dealt with is this: Why did a large number of Circassians join paramilitary groups? Without understanding the Circassian presence in the Ottoman Empire, it is impossible to understand the paramilitary activism of Circassians after the First World War. It should be emphasized here that the Circassians had become accustomed to war before being exiled to the Ottoman Empire, having been engaged in a long struggle against the Russians from the mid-eighteenth up until the late nineteenth century. Without a formal state structure, particularly those who used to live in North-West Caucasus, the Circassians tribes (*boy*), fought a long guerrilla war against the Russians in the North Caucasus.<sup>56</sup> In the post-exile period, their skills led them to be recruited into the army, to fill a gap in the Ottoman military’s needs. They were also used by the Ottomans to counter the rebellions in the Balkans and Anatolia, and during the reign of Abdülhamid II, formed part of gendarme forces. As Fortna emphasizes, the Russian attacks and their expulsion from the North Caucasus radicalized them, making it easier for the Ottoman government to recruit them for voluntary or irregular paramilitary groups.

The class structure was a characteristic feature of the Circassian community, and it affected Circassian participation in the Ottoman army. The Circassians can generally be divided into two different classes, *warq* (aristocracy) and *tfokotl* (peasantry).<sup>57</sup> The existence of slavery and the class structure continued even after the Circassians converted to Islam and were exiled to the Ottoman Empire. The system of slavery among the Circassian community was employed by the Ottomans when incorporating them as soldiers into the Ottoman military. Due to the increase in the slave trade in the nineteenth century from the North Caucasus to the empire, the Circassians were considered key

human resources, able to fill the empire's needs. This meant they were able to move to the higher echelons of the Ottoman military and bureaucracy, until recruitment practices altered to incorporate professional training during the late nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, a new law was issued by the Porte aiming to abolish slavery and recruit manumitted slaves into the military. According to this new legislation, the state would pay the price of the slave to the owner, and then the slave would be recruited into the army, assuming the owner accepted.<sup>59</sup> This policy increased the number of Circassian foot soldiers in the Ottoman military. There were also Circassians from upper-class families who joined the Ottoman army and royal military school, becoming a new elite class in the Ottoman Empire, and who used 'lower class' Circassians to solidify their own position at the centre of the empire. This situation provided an opening for them in their new country. The elites became part of the power centre and lower-class Circassians became either villagers or foot soldiers. Nonetheless, scholars have argued that slavery affected some enslaved families even during the War of Independence period (1919–1922), pointing out that during this period enslaved families, on the urging of their owners, fought the nationalists.<sup>60</sup> Undoubtedly, the elites benefitted from this situation until the end of the patron–client system at the beginning of the 1920s.

Notably, however, the Circassians already had a long history of interaction with the Ottoman Empire. Long before they moved to the empire en masse, their women served as slaves in the Ottoman harem. Girls were kidnapped and sold by slave traders or were simply given away by the girls' own families to the Ottoman aristocracy in the hope that it would help them become part of the Ottoman elite. This was especially true in the case of the Abkhazian and Ubikh tribes. This allowed some Circassians to become part of the Ottoman Empire via the harem.

The Porte used slavery both to meet its need for white women slaves for the harem and to move Circassian men into the military. The Abkhazians and Ubikhs, in particular, used the harem and the military to obtain positions inside the empire, as they had a more distinct hierarchical social structure than the other tribes. The existence of Circassian women in the harem provided an important means for the Circassians to enter the Ottoman bureaucracy and the military. Circassian slave girls became concubines and wives of