
Prehistories of Globalization: Circassian Identity in Motion

Seteney Shami

However undisciplined the term *globalization* might still be, there is increasing agreement as to the kinds of processes that it points to in the world. Whether interpreting alternative modernities, cultural hybridities, commodity circulations, transnational migrations, or identity politics, globalization theory largely looks to the future, attempting to prefigure the new millennium while eschewing notions of linearity, teleology, and predictability. Concomitantly, the notion of *modernity* has acquired remarkable fluidity, indicating that it has become plural, uneven, contested, and “at large” (Appadurai 1996). Building on ideas of the past as constructed, invented, and produced, globalization presents itself as a theory of the present moment. Powerfully expressing that “we now live in an almost/not yet world” (Thrift 1996, 257), it captures the in-betweenness of a world always on the brink of newness.

Modernization theory has also been concerned with process, innovation, and rupture, but it is differently invested in notions of the past. In its earlier, more concrete, more confident era, modernity invented an array of pasts. There is the past as Tradition, a timeless, static past whose value lies not in explanation but in revealing the alter ego either as the anachronistic self or the distant other. A different past is History. In one variant, this focuses on the rise of European hegemony, producing a causal narrative of how, why, and when modernity started.

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Quite different again is the past as Evolution, an indexical, ascending past that naturalizes the present. A fourth type of past, Antiquity, is indispensable to modernity's prime embodiment, the nation-state, which it territorializes. A fifth is the past as Civilization, a foundation myth featuring the migrations of the spirit of the West from Ancient Greece to present-day democracies. One could go on enumerating pasts, following the lines of Fabian's (1983) discussion of the different notions of Time that, among other things, served the anthropological production of self and other. Anthropology, history, archaeology, and other disciplines jostle one another to lay authoritative claims to the pasts of modernity: alternative pasts characterized by fixed temporalities, marked epochs, and bracketed periods, which work together to define, explain, enhance, and anchor the notion of modernity.

Will pasts be invented by globalization? What kinds of pasts will they be? How will globality trace its genealogies? These are the questions with which this paper grapples at its most general level. They are questions that speak to ongoing theoretical and ideological deliberations: Does globalization represent rupture or continuity? postmodernity or late modernity? Americanization or "glocalization"? I do not presume to give answers, and typologies or classifications would clearly not be the route to follow given the critical differences between the premises of globalization theory and modernization theory (Appadurai 1996). I will instead explore the issue through a closer look at an emergent notion that might be called the *prehistory of globalization*. Further, I will focus on how the pasts of one small diasporic group, the Circassians, act upon their present engagements with globality and the ways in which they experience a newly accessible homeland in the North Caucasus. In looking at the linkages between Circassian pasts and presents, mobility and migration emerge clearly as a constitutive element of Circassian identity.

To explore the relationship between motion and identity I will juxtapose two texts from different time-spaces. The first is an ethnographic text narrating a journey undertaken by a Circassian woman in 1993 from diaspora to homeland, from Turkey to the Caucasus. The second is an historical text dating from 1854 and documenting the journey of a Circassian woman from homeland to slavery, from the Caucasus to Egypt. The unexpected divergences, convergences, and counter-intuitive insights illuminated by the juxtaposition illustrate the changing trajectories of migration, memory, and imagination. They help assess the utility of *pre-history* as a conceptual link between past and present and reveal the profoundly gendered nature of globalization and its pasts.

Migration and imagination are historically linked processes that produce memorable moments in the pasts of peoples, nations, communities, and individuals. Each sustains the other, expanding circumscribed experiences and elaborating localized meanings. How do new forms of mobility and transgressions of boundaries invoke new imaginations? How are experiences, acts, utterances, and thoughts made meaningful given changing relations of mobility and incarceration? Situated at the nexus of such transformations, diaspora populations hold special promise for insights into cultural dimensions of globalization. They constitute “crucibles of a postnational political order” (Appadurai 1996, 22) generative of hopes for “nonabsolutist forms of citizenship” (Clifford 1997, 9). Diaspora identities are constructed in motion and along different lines than nation-states. They affirm multiple attachments, deterritorialization, and cultural hybridity.

The Adygei, better known by outsiders as Circassians (or Çerkez, Sharkass, Tcherkess), are an example of identity in motion. Circassians trace their origins to the Northwest Caucasus, which was historically part of the interconnected regions of the Black and Mediterranean Seas, as chronicled by the voyages and tribulations of Odysseus, Jason, and Prometheus. The Caucasus was also a source of warriors and slaves for various empires in the area (Toledano 1982). One example is the Circassian Mameluk slave dynasties in thirteenth- to sixteenth-century Egypt, whose descendants, augmented by later individual and group migrations, came to form a Turco-Circassian elite. The history of the Caucasus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is largely framed by the conflicts between the Russian and Ottoman Empires in which local peoples were pawns, partisans, and victims (Berkok 1958). Mass migrations of Circassians and other Muslim Caucasian peoples to the Ottoman Empire started in the 1850s, and the earliest immigrants were settled by the state in the Balkans. There they were immediately embroiled in the ongoing conflicts that resulted in the withdrawal of the Ottomans from the region. Within a few decades of settlement, therefore, they became part of the inflow of Muslim populations from the Balkans into the Anatolian and Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Together with the continuing flows from the Caucasus, the number of Circassian settlers by the beginning of the twentieth century reached an estimated total of 1.5 million (Karpas 1985).

Within a few decades, Circassians found themselves not Ottoman subjects but citizens of the newly formed states of Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine (soon to become Israel). In the Soviet Caucasus, Circassians were allocated the three small administrative units of Kabardino-Balkaria, Cherkessk-

Karachaevo, and Adygeia, parts of Russia's "ethnic fringe." Although Circassians were not among the "punished peoples," many were resettled and exiled during the Stalinist period, especially to Central Asia. During the first and second world wars, there were migrations out of the Caucasus to Europe and the United States. Middle Eastern wars produced further displacement, such as from Galilee in Palestine and from the Golan Heights in Syria. More recently, rural to urban relocation has drawn Circassian migrants from Anatolian villages to Ankara and Istanbul, and labor markets have drawn others to Germany, Holland, and the United States (especially New Jersey and California).

Throughout this long history of displacement, Circassian identity has been formed and transformed. The particularities and symbols of distinctiveness in each locality articulated with translocal ethnic connections and collective sensibilities. From the vantage point of Circassians living outside the Caucasus at the present moment, two particular migrations stand out: the first as a starting point of Circassian history in the diaspora and the second as a possible exit into a different future. At one end is the historical rupture with the homeland: the emigration into the Ottoman Empire that reached its peak in 1864. At the other end are the post-1989 "return" migrations.

The breakup of the Soviet Union and the sudden access to territories behind the Iron Curtain was momentous for Circassians, many of whom have now traveled to the Caucasus, some intending to settle permanently.¹ About two hundred families, mainly from Turkey and Syria but also from Jordan and the United States, have since settled in the cities of Nalchik (capital of Kabardino-Balkaria) and Maikop (capital of Adygeia). Increasing numbers of young people are going as university students and staying on. There are also short-term and seasonal migrations, with many Circassians spending the summer months in the Caucasus, some buying houses and flats and participating in business ventures.

For the scattered descendants of those who left the Caucasus, the prospects of return and of nationhood are appealing, even compelling (Shami 1998). However, unease, cultural dissonance, and mutual misunderstandings surround relations between Circassians of the Caucasus and those coming from abroad. Despite friendships and business partnerships with local Circassians, returnees tend to be critical of lifestyles, moral values, and social relations in the Caucasus (Shami 1995).

Now a central node in the formation of a Circassian diaspora, the Caucasus is

1. This is true of Abkhassians, Armenians, Azerbaijanians, Chechnians, Ingush, Georgians, Daghestanian groups, Ossettes, Kalmuks, Karachais, Balqars, and Lesghians to name but a few of the groups dispersed from the Caucasus.

the terrain where transnational encounters occur and economic and political organizations are formed. Still, notions of homeland remain fluid and unstable. Visions of nation and diaspora coexist and contest each other in Circassian discourses and political practices (Shami forthcoming). Motivations to return, and the journeys that ensue, are experienced and articulated differently by different people. Some explain their decision as reflecting the national necessity of building a homeland, others stress the opportunities of building social and economic bridges between countries of origin and settlement. Through these journeys, some are seeking kin and community; others are seeking faith in themselves. Some find home, others frustration; some find new livelihoods, others have lost their lives. In all these ways Circassians are situating themselves in a global context. That identity and the future are simultaneously viewed from both “elsewhere” and the “homeland” demonstrates a diasporic imagination employing temporal and spatial strategies: those of remembering and forgetting, inscription and erasure.

Migrations in the 1990s: Shengul

How does diasporic memory link past and present and construct futures? Such linkages were often present in the narratives I solicited about why and how individuals made the journey to the homeland, as in the one that follows. When I met her in the Caucasus in August 1993, Shengul was thirty-seven years old, a single woman who had migrated from Turkey eighteen months before. This is how she related her journey:

We came by boat from Istanbul to Novorossiysk. Due to bad weather the boat could not leave the port in Istanbul for four days and we had to stay on it. We could only go on the landing stage and get tea from the fire station. We were all in such bad shape and hungry. I had given up wearing a skirt and was in sweat pants. At that time, I had just had my hair permed and dyed blonde, and so people on the boat thought that I was Russian. Anyway, finally we set off, but it was still very rough, and it took several days. I spent most of the time in my cabin, but close to when we were about to arrive, I decided to go out on the deck and look out. I went to the balcony on the side of the boat. The *sefalet* (misery, degradation) of the past few days, the waves and the motion suddenly were too much for me. I became dizzy and fainted. I remember there was some water on the deck and I might have slipped. The water may have revived me a little because I remember being carried and then nothing. I woke up to find a very hand-

some white-haired man bending over me. My first thought was: “*Bütün bu senelerce taşıdığım şeyi böyle mi kaybedeceğem?*” (Is this how I will lose this thing that I have carried [cherished] all these years?)

Imagine that this is what I thought, I must have been in very bad shape. It turned out that the man was a doctor from Azerbaijan who was on the ship. The next thing I knew he was asking me: “*Nereni beğenmiyorsun?*” (What part [of your body] do you not like?) Of course in their language this means “where does it hurt?”² But when I heard this I fainted again. Finally, I revived and was resting when my [male] cousin came, angry and shouting: “We looked for you all over the boat, where have you been?” I cried back, “*Yahu, baygındım!*” (Hey, I was passed out!)

Soon after, we arrived at the port of Novorossiysk. We got off the boat, and the city seemed to be full of churches and crosses, those old ancient buildings were loaded down with crosses. I said, “What is this Christian place that I have come to?” I felt scared. However much I had said that I was an atheist, this was the feeling I had when I saw all these crosses.

First impressions are so strong, and yet later it all becomes routine and you stop noticing things. You should interview people when they first come, because people like me don't remember anymore.

The overwhelming tone of Shengul's narrative is that of loss: loss of self, loss of consciousness, loss of honor, and loss of religion. Paradoxically, on a journey “back” to the “homeland” that is meant to be about the recovery of identity and the redemption of history, she starts out by being mistaken for a Russian and ends the journey feeling that she is in an alien and foreign land, two instances of loss. The anxieties evoked by her crossing the Black Sea threaten fundamental aspects of her individual and collective identity. She vacillates in a space of in-betweenness, pulled in two directions at once, between a past that is interior and familiar (Turkey, family, her cabin on the ship) and a future that is exterior and strange (Caucasus, aloneness, the ship's deck). Interiority, or being inside, signifies both bondage and safety, while the outside is perceived alternately as freedom and as exile. The dilemma is embodied in the two male figures of her cousin, representing home, and the doctor, representing the Caucasus (Azerbaijan). Her cousin is familiar, but irritated that she has escaped surveillance. The doctor is a threatening stranger, but offering release from pain. The two figures are condensed symbols of Circassianness as she has experienced it in Turkey and Circassianness as she imagines it in the Caucasus. There is no recourse in family; her cousin's voice is an angry one. As for strangers, their kindness only

2. Azerbaijanian Turkish differs significantly from that spoken in Turkey.

reminds her of all that is at stake. Literally and metaphorically, she succumbs to motion sickness and defends herself against her predicament through fainting and oblivion.

Why was Shengul making this journey to the Caucasus? At first, her reasons echo those of others from Turkey who describe themselves as *dönüşücü* (literally, returnists). These are activists linked to Circassian associations who, since the late 1970s, have advocated that the only way to save Circassian culture from extinction is to return to the Caucasus and build a nation (see Emine's narrative in Shami 1998). While *dönüşücü* ideology attempts to reverse history, Shengul's account is more complex. It is saturated with, and reproduces, cultural memories of displacement. Her narrative recalls the original migrations away from the Caucasus: danger-filled sea crossings, unsafe boats, hunger and misery (*sefalet*). Even though Shengul's is a journey "home," it is marked by loss and arrival in the unknown. Her reference to atheism reflects the radical, secularist politics of the *dönüşücü*, but it also echoes narratives that stress Islam and escape from life under Russian and Christian rule as the main reason for seeking refuge in the Ottoman domain. Shengul experiences the return to the Caucasus as a threat to her Muslim identity, even though as a *dönüşücü* she had conceived herself as an atheist. The reversal of history is also a journey back in time. Threats that had earlier compelled migration are still present in the Caucasus.

Shengul's narrative resonates with that of an elderly woman I interviewed in 1979, who spoke of her memories of the turn-of-the-century journey that brought her at the age of nine from the Caucasus to what eventually became Jordan.

A big boat, it was full on top and below. Some went to Turkey, some Syria, some Baghdad, some Amman. They were not from the same places [in the Caucasus], some [groups] were twenty families, some thirty families. . . . There was no Russian pressure on the villages but the reason [for the emigration] was that they were going to make a school—Russia—and they were going to take their children [sons] to the army.³ But I am not sure—this is what we heard—I did not see it.

A Russian ship to Sebastapol, then usually they would change and take a Turkish boat in Iskulu, but ours went directly. They would not let us get off in Istanbul. People from the government took the passports—they said to us, those who want to go back, go back. And those who don't want to, give us the passport. They let us off in another faraway port. They pulled back the gangway quickly. A day and night by boat, then we got

3. The migration being described was among the last waves out of the Caucasus. By 1900 the Russians may not have been using direct means of deportation.

off. People from the government came and they gave each family seven *mejidiyes* [an Ottoman coin] and some food, but they would not let us off. After the boat, we came to a beautiful large land. People from the government, they distributed us [from] there.

In the Caucasus, they were farmers far from the cities. They were friends with the Russians, made bazaars with them. They don't want the school. They don't want to become Christians again.⁴ We were backward (*mutakhallifin*). They would have become people (*bani admeen*) and educated and more advanced (*arqa*) [she put her finger to her head and shook it to indicate how stupid they were].⁵ The main reason for the emigration was that they would take their sons to the army and they would fight the Muslims.

The boat journey is again the central image, the link between there and here. While the boat is the vehicle for escape from Russia, it becomes itself a sort of prison, from which the immigrants are not allowed to disembark until they have been divested of their former identity. While the moments that punctuate the narrative are similar to Shengul's—embarkation, ship deck, arrival—there are clear differences. Most noticeable, perhaps, is that there is no particular trauma associated with the travel, although the drama of the experience is apparent in the pulling back of gangways, the giving up of passports, and the dispersal to different destinations. Unexpectedly, however, the arrival is a hopeful one in a beautiful land, in sharp contrast with the threatening landscape portrayed by Shengul. This could be taken as a sign for the often-mentioned desire of Circassians to come to the land of Islam.⁶ Still, the original motives for the emigration are questioned. The whole narrative is remarkably free of nostalgia and contrasts the quest for religious freedom with that of modernity and progress. Also noticeable is the heavy presence of the state, forbidding and permitting movement. In Shengul's narrative, on the other hand, nature (the storm at sea) and individuals (the cousin, the doctor) play this role. Antinostalgia in this second narrative is accompanied by a clear and precise memory, a meticulous attention to what was expe-

4. Islam spread late in the northwest Caucasus (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries), only partially replacing Greek Orthodox Christianity and indigenous belief systems. In the Caucasus there are Christian Circassians living in and around the town of Mezdok in the republic of North Ossetia.

5. This elderly woman, who had no formal education, had absorbed both the spirit and the language of Jordanian modernity. *Mutekhallif* connotes reactionary/traditional as well as backward. To become a *bani adam* (plural *bani admeen*), literally a son of Adam, is to become fully human, to realize your full potential, and *arqa* means refined/evolved as well as advanced.

6. Narratives of the migration among Circassians in Jordan invariably mention that the first immigrants took off their shoes when arriving in Syria because they were on "holy land."

rienced, what was seen as opposed to what was heard. There is no recourse to oblivion, as with Shengul.

With these kinds of narratives still alive and circulating in diasporic memory, it is perhaps not surprising that Shengul and others would anticipate the return to the homeland as the reversal of both history and time. The actual experience of the Caucasus, however, though mediated by this expectation, is of a different order. As Shengul elaborates her story, past and present are brought together to reveal multiple layers of meaning.

Shengul came from a family living in one of the many small Circassian villages in central Turkey. Before the migration from the Caucasus, her great-grandfather had been “a Kulak for the Pshi of the village” as she described him, using newly found words, and freely juxtaposing cultural categories.⁷ When he came to Turkey, the family was well off, but their situation deteriorated when he became disabled. Shengul’s father worked hard to secure livelihood for the family and was exhausted in the process. When it became possible to travel to the Caucasus, the family decided that it would be good to have a foothold there—for nationalistic reasons, but also for economic ones, and as a safeguard for the future—for no one knows what will happen in Turkey or the region. But who was to go and establish the foothold? The sons were all working and married with children in school. Shengul, on the other hand, was unmarried and hence “free.” And so it was decided. She made the trip with a cousin, who returned to Turkey after lodging Shengul with newly found relatives.⁸ The idea was that she would begin the process of obtaining residence permits and buy a flat, since at the time prices were cheap. She established residency, but the family did not send the money in time, and flat prices went up.⁹ After renting a flat on her own for a while, Shengul was forced to move back with her relatives.

I did not discuss with Shengul my feeling that a rather large sacrifice had been demanded of her. However, I did once comment to another returnee, Emine, that I found it surprising that families who had been so protective of their daughters in Turkey would send them off to the Caucasus, to an unknown and turbulent society with whose lifestyle they felt such unease. Emine herself was in a similar

7. *Kulak* is the Russian term for a well-off landowning peasant, while *Pshi* is the Circassian term for prince or ruler.

8. People trace their kin in the Caucasus through the family name or the village of origin. The kin links that are forged sometimes hold and sometimes collapse under the burden of the expectations placed upon them (Shami 1995).

9. Those who came in 1990 could buy a three-room flat for about \$2,000 from ethnic Germans whose return to Germany was being facilitated at the time. By 1993 prices had gone up to \$5,000 or more.

position and had introduced me to Shengul by saying, “She came here alone, like me.” Emine’s dönüştürücü rhetoric was stronger than Shengul’s, and she made it clear that coming to the Caucasus had been her own decision, over her mother’s objections. But she also emphasized that her brothers had encouraged her and that they would “one day” join her. When I met another woman from Syria who related a similar story, it seemed clear that these women, in their thirties and hence with no more expectations of marriage, were the expendable members of the family who could be sent off to stake out the future homeland.¹⁰ Trying to find a way to ask Emine about this, I said, “It seems to me that, for families, this is a new . . .,” and as I searched for the appropriate word Emine completed the sentence for me. “Tactic?” she said.

Unfolding the narrative of Shengul’s journey reinforces the trope of loss, even of exile, but also discloses hidden hopes. In Turkey, Shengul had finished high school but had neither worked nor continued her education. Her brothers had not allowed her, she said. Now she had a job. Significantly, she was working at the city museum and had put together an exhibition about the returnees. She was thinking of enrolling in the university. People had been very kind and had spoken to the officials of the university, even the president, to make it possible for her to be admitted. Her journey, therefore, can be seen in a different light. Her permed and dyed hair, her immodest sweat pants, and her being mistaken for Russian may suggest anticipations of social and corporeal trespasses, rather than (or in addition to) loss of ethnic identity.¹¹ Perhaps Shengul’s sudden recall of her Muslim identity was a rejection of the restrictions of dönüştürücü ideology? Perhaps that “thing” that she had “carried” all these years was a burden she would have liked to be rid of?

Shengul’s journey is not only a migration but also a transmutation. This came through in her criticisms of the lifestyles of local women, which had more than a touch of ambivalence about them. She said that it was difficult for her to get used to the idea that women had extramarital sexual relations, dressed immodestly, and even had illegitimate children. But she immediately followed this by saying that she had become friendly with some of the same women and had accepted that she should not compare them with girls in Circassian villages of Turkey

10. Ferhunde Özbay informs me (in a personal communication) that it is a pattern in labor migration in Turkey that women are sent to, or left behind in, the place that is considered a “secondary” economic location. If the village of origin is the secondary source of livelihood, then women are left behind. If the city provides lesser economic resources, then women are sent there.

11. In Turkey and other countries receiving tourists and suitcase traders, people from the former Soviet Union all tend to be indiscriminately called “Russian.” Diaspora Circassians coming to the Caucasus also sometimes slip into calling the local Circassians “Russian.”

but with those in Istanbul or European cities. This acceptance was quite radical given the near uniform disapproval of such matters by Circassians coming from the diaspora.¹² In another turnaround, however, Shengul mentioned that some women with whom she had become friends now, under her influence, dressed more modestly.

Ambiguity pervaded all of Shengul's statements about life in the Caucasus. On one hand, there was the possibility of independence, work, and education. On the other hand, the society she was flung into was alien in all aspects of everyday life. For example, among Circassians in the diaspora, cleanliness is a prized value that is spoken of in identical idioms in households throughout various countries. At every appropriate and inappropriate moment, Shengul lamented the lack of cleanliness in houses, shops, and roadside stands, and compared them constantly with what she knew in Turkey. "Where," she asked, "is that cleanliness of the Circassian house? The way we wash dishes? Here they just pass hot water over the plate, and that is all."¹³ Still, she said that she had become used to it all, even to the way they used each other's utensils. "After all," she said, "if a person drinks from my cup and doesn't get sick even though I must have some microbes, then why would I get sick from drinking from her cup?" Immediately afterward, however, in a style that was becoming familiar, she went on to say that they might still be influenced and taught to be cleaner.

Perhaps more poignant, and more challenging to "incorporated practices" (Connerton 1991, 90), were manners of deportment. In Shengul's household in Turkey, they had strictly observed Circassian etiquette of decorum, formality, and authoritarianism between generations and age groups. Family members neither sat nor spoke in the presence of elders and never saw each other in a state of undress. Upon arriving in the Caucasus, Shengul stayed in a house that was crowded and not very clean. They queued up to use the bathroom every day, each carrying a towel. "Imagine this," Shengul said, "when in all my life, my brothers had never ever seen me even with wet hair. I was so ashamed." "But," she added, "I got used to it. What could I do?"

Shengul's memories and commentaries express a preoccupation with her bodily integrity but also acknowledge constant transformation of her external and

12. Such freedoms seem much rarer in the Caucasus than "in Istanbul and European cities." Also they are met with disapproval by most local Circassians and read as signs of "Russification." For the valorization of the domestic sphere as a site of resistance to Sovietization, see Shami (2000).

13. To my eye, the variations in the cleanliness of both private and public spaces in the Caucasus and Turkey make it difficult to unequivocally rank one above the other in this regard.

internal self. She inaugurates her journey by altering her own appearance. But when this threatens to transform her beyond recognition (from a Circassian to a Russian) she retreats into the safety of the cabin or unconsciousness. Loss of honor is threatened by a range of experiences from seasickness to indecency in the homes of strangers. Shengul experiences herself as exposed, penetrated, and polluted by what she perceives to be improper ideas, behaviors, and hygiene. Still, in all of my conversations with her, Shengul maintained that she had grown so used to things in the Caucasus that she no longer noticed anything about the place. Within five months she felt like she had lived there all her life. “They are so warm and so nice that it makes up for everything.” Making friends with women in the Caucasus opens up the possibility of interpenetration and exchange, even if, at the moment, Shengul will only extend this mutuality to the microbes in the shared utensils. The intensity with which she insists that “I have become just like them,” that she no longer notices anything, emphasizes both her hopes of a new life and her lack of fit. She is still in her in-between state, still suffering from cognitive motion sickness. It was not coincidental that she ended the detail-filled narrative of her journey to the Caucasus by insisting that she should not be interviewed, because she no longer remembers.

Memory and Prehistory

Implicated in the migrations of Circassians to and from the Caucasus are processes that configure the past in new ways. An emergent notion that helps conceptualize such processes is that the era of globalization has a prehistory. Buell, for example, argues that “Globalization thus traces prehistories to our current hyper-awareness of the interrelationship between local and global interactions, histories that, for some, date back to the expansion of the West, for others the Middle Ages, and for still others early civilizations and before” (1998, 259). Similarly, Clifford employs the phrase “prehistory of post-colonialism” (1997, 9, 277) in his proposition that diasporic relations preexisting the colonial state become the kinds of transnational networks, or at least provide the grounds, so to speak, on which postcoloniality and even perhaps postnationality can be built. In this sense, the concept appears to be deployed descriptively, simply to refer to a period before modernity that informs the present. However, Clifford assigns the concept more power when he suggests that it is “about recovering non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states, global technologies, and markets—

resources for a fraught coexistence” (1997, 277). How is the recovery of such models to be achieved?

The term *prehistory* is deployed by various authors as both a concept and a metaphor. As a concept it is an example of “typological time” (Fabian 1983), referring to a time before history, before writing, before the state, before humanity in the full sense of the term; a time of the subordination of culture to nature, which merges in popular memory with mythological time. But prehistory is also a historical device—more a way of thinking about the past than a fixed reality. In consequence, it is a mobile concept, referring to 10,000 B.C. in one place and 1000 A.D. in another. Prehistory as metaphor makes use of the attributes associated with the concept but applies them paradoxically to conjure new meanings. A powerful use of the term is Walter Benjamin’s. As Susan Buck-Morss (1999, 64) explains, Benjamin described bourgeois capitalist society as existing in a “prehistoric state” due to its being subject to the “natural laws” of capitalism. In spite of the promises of early modernity, for Benjamin, “so long as people were held under the power of these blind forces, the promise of a universal human history could not come into its own” (Buck-Morss 1999, 64). In this way, the notion of prehistory can mobilize the collective imagination “for a revolutionary break from the recent past by evoking a cultural memory reservoir of myths and utopian symbols from a more distant ur-past” (Buck-Morss 1999, 116).

There is promise in such a strategy. A prehistory of globalization seeks pasts characterized by mobility, cosmopolitanism, and vertical and horizontal linkages that displace a notion of the past as stagnant and bound by empire and tradition. It excavates beneath the nation-state and decenters it from the narrative of the present. In such a usage, prehistory denotes a past prefigurative of a nonnational future. The use of the term does not aim to fix the characteristics of a certain age, but to enable the mobilization of alternative pasts in order to challenge the teleological certainty of the present. Clifford affirms that “counterhistories can support strategies for nontotalizing ‘globalization from below’” (1997, 276). This is true only if they do not replicate modernist fascinations with the order of things, and do not become as totalitarian as the national imaginary, simply silencing different voices along their way. If the notion of prehistory is to be deployed to reveal, rather than to gloss, ways of seeing, then I would suggest that it has to be reconceptualized in three ways:

First, a new use of the term should reveal the predisposition of history to categorize, objectify, and impose fixedness through the construction of “periods.” It should question history as “the rise of the West” and its (inevitable?) protagonist,

the nation-state. Thus the first deployment of the term should be to see through categorizations of time that produce the past as a foreign country.

Second, the notion of prehistory should alert us to strategies of territorializing identity. It should question the way nationalism reaches beyond empire, beyond recorded history (which often does not represent *its* past but that of the *other*) for the scientific recovery of the nation's origins and boundaries from the archaeological record buried "in time." As Anderson asks rhetorically, "Supposing 'antiquity' were, at a certain historical juncture, the *necessary consequence* of 'novelty'" (1991, xiv, Anderson's emphasis). A new notion of prehistory has to deterritorialize identity and capture it while "in motion." Reinterpreting the archaeological connotation of prehistory as metaphor means recognizing that "*The archaeological object, in its widest sense, acquires another and new stratigraphic level each time it enters into the perceptual order of the present.*" (Seremetakis 1994b, 140–41, Seremetakis's emphasis).

Third, the teleological necessity of prehistory unfolding into "real" history should be interrogated. Deconstructing the national imaginary has shown that the past is used, reinterpreted, and subjugated to the politics of the present, highlighting the contingency of social formations and cultural meanings. Modernity constructs a continuum through the idea of progress, employing the tools of inattention, distraction, erasure, and silencing (Klein 1997). Yet it is not enough to read the past as the politics of the present. The genealogical and archaeological links to the world "before European hegemony" (Abu-Lughod 1991) are yet to be discovered through memory/imagination. Prehistory, therefore, has to "map erasures" (Klein 1997, 9).

In sum, a prehistory of globalization has to reinforce the break with modernization theory in the ways identified by Appadurai (1996, 9). It has to help discard teleology, focus on everyday cultural practice, leave open the question of prognosis, and highlight the transnational. Further, it has to reveal the practices of modernization as freezing the potential of transformation while presenting itself as newness. It has to emphasize mobility as a contemporary "structure of feeling [that] is able to capture the importance *and* 'thisness' *and* liminality of much new experience" (Thrift 1996, 284, Thrift's emphasis). In all of this, the "work of the imagination" which is so central to globalization processes (Appadurai 1996, 3) involves equally the ethnographer and the travelling subject.

An exemplary text in this vein is Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (1993), upon which Clifford relies in developing his argument. Ghosh's work is simultaneously a contemporary narrative of an Indian doing ethnography in Egypt and a history of linkages between Egypt, North Africa, India, and South Asia in the twelfth

century. Ghosh describes, with acuity and humor, how he and his interlocutors continuously fall into the hegemonic divide of East and West. In contrast, it is a slave in the twelfth century who represents a superceded world of interconnections. The archaeological object (“in its widest sense”) of Ghosh’s excavation is the slave who enters the “perceptual order of the present” not through national memory but through a manuscript (number H.6) from the forgotten Jewish Geniza archive. Ghosh’s story of how these documents are scattered from their historic depository in Cairo implicates missionaries, scholars, universities, travelers, and religious institutions. The gradual awakening to the “value” of the Geniza documents uncovers the story without which the past would be unknowable and unimaginable. Ghosh’s journey in search of paper fragments, sales deeds, letters, and jottings on waste paper gives the slave of MS H.6 a name (Bomma), a home and family, a lineage and life. In return Bomma provides a prehistory for Nabeel, a migrant worker from an Egyptian village and a figure of Ghosh’s contemporary narrative who is lost in Iraq during the Gulf War of 1990–91. Searching for him on the TV screen broadcasting the exodus of millions from Iraq, Ghosh and the Egyptian villagers realize that “there was nothing to be seen except crowds: Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of History” (1992, 353).

I have read Shengul’s narrative against the history of Circassian mass emigration out of the Caucasus. This represents her journey as one of going back, of return, of recovering pure identity. While her narrative includes moments of resistance, it is framed by the *dönüşcü* discourse, which conceives of the past as dispossession and the future as national. Yet the possibilities offered by the transnational encounters of the present can be explored in light of different pasts, such as pasts that foreground interconnections, histories of movement that complicate notions of home and exile, of self and other. The possibilities of transcending the discursive space of the national imaginary present themselves when Shengul’s narrative is set against a different migration—against the story of Shemsigul.

Migrations in the 1850s: Shemsigul

Although the diasporic imagination of the Circassians finds its “beginning” with the mass migrations of the late nineteenth century, complex economic and political relations between the Caucasus and the adjacent empires long precede 1864. Human traffic was continuous through wars, trade routes, and pilgrimages. One particular type of trade made for particularly complex interpenetrations: the slave trade.

Extracted from the anonymity of history we find the story of “Shemsigul: A Circassian Slave in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cairo” (Toledano 1993).

There, in the old pages of a police register at the Egyptian National Archives, in Ottoman Turkish, unravels a troubled chapter of a woman’s life that began in a Circassian village in the Caucasus, continued in Istanbul, and ended in Ottoman Cairo. . . . (60)

Born into a poor Circassian family, Shemsigul was brought to Istanbul by a relative or a slave dealer, who offered her for sale in the Ottoman capital, where the slave dealer Deli Mehmet¹⁴ purchased her . . . (61)

During the police interrogation on 30 June 1854, Shemsigul recounts her journey to Egypt two years previously and her sale to the household of Mehmet Ali Pasha, the governor general of Egypt, by Deli Mehmet. Five months after this transaction Deli Mehmet removes her from the governor’s house because it is discovered that she is pregnant.

Question: By whom did you become pregnant?

Shemsigul: I became pregnant by Deli Mehmet.

Questions: You state that you became pregnant by Deli Mehmet. Where, then, did he have sexual relations with you? And, since you became pregnant, how come he sold you [this being illegal]?

Shemsigul: In the boat, on the way here, he forced me to have sexual relations with him; he continued to sleep with me until he sold me. Before the sale, I told him: “Now you want to sell me, but I have missed my period, and I think that I am pregnant by you.” When I asked him later what would happen, he did not listen, but went away, brought back some medicines, and made me drink them [to induce an abortion]. Finally, he sold me to the palace. (62)

Shemsigul describes how Deli Mehmet returns with her to his house, and his wife hires a midwife to perform an abortion. The pregnancy, however, is too advanced, and when the midwife refuses, Deli Mehmet’s wife beats Shemsigul on the stomach and back with a clothespress and a mincing rod. A neighbor woman who witnesses the beating reports it to a dignitary, Selim bey, whose wife takes pity on Shemsigul and takes her into her house.

Shemsigul: When the child was expected to come into the world, Deli Mehmet’s wife came and stood at the bedside. As he was born, she took

14. Meaning “Mad Mehmet.” Mehmet is the Turkish pronunciation of Mohammed.

the child to another room and passed him through her shirt to mark that she was adopting him. To me she said that he died. Later she went to her house, brought in a wet nurse for the child, and gave [the baby] to her [care]. One day, Selim bey's wife brought the baby [home] secretly and showed him to me. (63)

Deli Mehmet then gives Shemsigul to one slave trader after the other, but none are able to sell her, in part because Deli Mehmet has stipulated that her buyer not live in Egypt. Finally she is sold to Timur, another slave dealer.

Questions: Did you at any stage from the beginning [of the story], inform the slave dealer Timur, or anyone else, that you had been pregnant and that you were badly beaten? If you did not, why?

Shemsigul: As a slave, I was afraid to say anything about my suffering so I did not tell Timur [or anyone else]. (64)

A woman's life is determined by another journey across the Black Sea—this time from the Caucasus to Turkey and onward to Egypt—and a rape while on board. Toledano estimates Shemsigul's age at the time of this interrogation as being around fourteen or sixteen years old.¹⁵ He explains that, "from a legal perspective, the slave dealer Deli Mehmet was the owner of Shemsigul and, as such, was allowed to have sexual relations with her. The law did not require the slave's consent, thereby allowing rape in case of the woman's resistance. The dealer was aware, of course, that when the slave lost her virginity, her market value automatically declined. Moreover, if the slave became pregnant, as indeed happened to Shemsigul, the law forbade her sale" (67). Furthermore, the children of such a union were legally free, and the woman is freed upon her owner's death. Clearly, for these reasons Deli Mehmet's wife was anxious to get rid of Shemsigul who would, in effect, be her co-wife. Deli Mehmet himself was anxious to sell Shemsigul outside Egypt so that his breach of the law could not be exposed. The child that Shemsigul bears from Deli Mehmet is ritually adopted by his wife and made to disappear.

All is revealed, however, when someone informs Timur that Shemsigul had borne Deli Mehmet a son. Timur complains to the head of the slave dealers' guild, who investigates the case and then turns over the matter to the police. After their investigation, and despite Deli Mehmet's prevarication, the police department accepts Shemsigul's version of the story and passes its recommendation to that effect to the court.

15. Toledano does not explain whether her age is mentioned in the document, or whether he is making an assumption. He states in the introduction that the majority of slave girls from the Caucasus were sold in their early teens.

At this point the document ends. “What happened to Shemsigul afterwards must be left to the imagination,” Toledano writes, speculating that, as a result of the court ruling, Shemsigul probably obtained manumission (72). But then where would she go? Toledano suggests that she perhaps sought patronage from Selim bey, whose kindly wife had helped Shemsigul. If so, she would have worked in his household, and he would have had the responsibility for marrying her off well. Toledano stresses that “While concubinage was hardly an ideal arrangement for women like Shemsigul, it was socially respectable and, if a child was born, also legally binding on the man. However, especially for women, but for men too, freedom had its own disadvantages, limited choices, deprivation, and oppression” (72).

By the nineteenth century, changes in the internal structure of the Ottoman Empire meant that slavery had become largely domestic rather than military, agricultural, or industrial (Erdem 1993). Furthermore, British antislavery pressures on the Ottoman Empire had drastically decreased the black slave trade through North Africa. The remaining trade was largely in women, among whom Circassians were in high demand.¹⁶ Why would Shemsigul’s family sell their daughter into slavery? Toledano gives various reasons: that a special class of agricultural slaves had existed among Circassians for centuries; that extreme poverty among Circassian slave families as well as the free lower classes forced them to sell their young children; that parents believed that they were improving the chances of their offspring for better living conditions through an entry into the Ottoman harems and consequently into elite society. He goes on to say, “As we consider how they ultimately fared, we should weigh the loss of family and legal freedom (for those who had not been born slaves) against the possibility that they might thereby have gained access to a better life” (61).

In giving these reasons for the Circassian slave trade, Toledano echoes a number of sources contemporary to these events. Erdem (1993) documents in detail the opinions of both Ottoman and European authorities and observers that “Circassians came to Istanbul willingly ‘to become the wives of the Sultan and of the Pachas, and the young men to become Beys and Pachas’” (1993, 236 n. 39). An Ottoman document explains that the slave trade did not need to be forbidden since, through slavery, Circassians were being taken from “primitivism to civilization, from poverty and need to prosperity and happiness” (quoted in Sen 1994, 175 and Erdem 1993, 209).

16. It should be noted that “Circassian” as an outsider term was often applied indiscriminately to the peoples of the North Caucasus. Given the complex mixture of peoples and languages, individuals referred to as Circassian in historical sources could belong to any one of a number of groups.

There is evidence enough that there were bondsmen among the Circassians in the Caucasus; however, the nature of this status or of the stratification system is hardly clear.¹⁷ Travelogues from the nineteenth century describe slaves as comprising an admixture of Circassian prisoners from intergroup raiding and non-Circassian war prisoners (mainly Russians, Cossacks, and Poles). There were also practices, such as exile and contracting disobedient sons into the service of another family as punishment, which added individuals to this rank. All these types of bondage seem to have been temporary and surrounded by complex sets of rights and reciprocity. However, the sale of offspring to overseas slavery must be seen as a distinct practice and as an outcome of historical relations with imperial systems rather than a result of an indigenous system of slavery.

Would poverty drive slave parents and poor free parents to sell their children? This assumes that slave parents are allowed to sell their children, who would presumably belong to the parent's owners. Furthermore, why was poverty so rife among Circassians? Shemsigul's story takes place in 1852–54; the mass emigration of Circassians and other Caucasian peoples had already begun and would peak some years later. At its highest volume, the sale of young women and male children by Circassians was prevalent enough to cause Ottoman authorities a great deal of anxiety.¹⁸ The Ottoman documents take pains to make it clear that the sales were necessitated by the need of immigrants to defray the costs of passage to Ottoman ports and the costs of settlement.¹⁹ The economic necessity thus emerges from a society in a state of massive dislocation.

The mid-nineteenth century recorded sharp increases in the supplies of women and children slaves and lower prices in the markets. New practices emerged, such as “mortgaging” children to slave traders to be repossessed by their parents if they found the money within a stipulated time period (Sen 1994). The state forbade the Circassian slave trade in 1862 and again in 1871, but trade continued and new markets appeared. At the same time, however, large numbers

17. Stratification among Circassians included the following: *Pshi* (princes), *Werk* (nobles), *Thfoqotl* (freemen), *Pshitl* (slaves, literally the Prince's man). There were also various degrees within each rank.

18. Erdem (1993) points out that Ottoman anxiety was partly due to the pressure being exerted by the British to abolish the slave trade if not slavery itself. However, it was also due to the fact that the authorities were increasingly faced with illegal sales, where the persons sold were not of slave origin, or had not been enslaved legally according to Muslim *Shari'a* law. The documents state that about 150,000 slaves came with the Circassian migration. Clearly this mass phenomenon was of a different order than the earlier slave trade with the Caucasus.

19. The Ottoman discourse is extremely interesting. On one hand, slavery is a religiously sanctioned status, though governed by strict laws regarding sales, manumission, and treatment. On the other hand, enlightenment terms such as *liberty*, *freedom*, and *humanity* saturate the documents.

of women sold into slavery were appealing to the courts for their freedom. The extent of the problem is evident in this communication dated 4 June 1873.

To the Exalted Ministry of Justice and the Most Excellent Directorate of Immigrants:

Being slaves of Circassian immigrants and being sold by their owners to buyers in Istanbul, most slave women, after being sold, are applying to the government with claims of freedom, and until their trials are ended and their freedom or slavery is established, they have been, with the knowledge of the Coordination Committee of the Ministry of Justice, placed as guests in the house of Duaci Salih Aga, and for each soul, six kuruş daily is being given to the mentioned Aga. Yet even so, in order to settle the disputes of these [women] and [for them] to be safeguarded and ordered [protected] in a more suitable manner as required and because they must be taken into a more acceptable order,²⁰ from now on such slaves as apply to the government with the claim of freedom will not be given by the Coordination Committee to the house of the said Salih Aga. [Rather] the old laissez-passez [internal travel document] office, which belongs to the property of the police department, and is an abandoned place, for its repair will be allocated seven-hundred-odd kuruş and assigned as a residence for them. And for the slaves to be [placed] under the supervision of Sadika Hanım, the employee of the police station's women's detention center, and another woman of good morals to be with the slaves on a constant basis, and this woman be given five kuruş every day and the mentioned Sadika Hanım be given eight and a half kuruş daily, and for such sundries as candles and soap a hundred kuruş a month to be allocated, and for each one of the slaves, five kuruş daily to be given to their own hands. Thereby having been placed in an proper manner, [given] the expenses that were incurred over the past three years, [through] the manner described here the expenses that will be incurred by the treasury will be up to nine thousand kuruş less, and in addition there will be improvement in every way. . . . ([dated] 7 Rebiülahır 1290)²¹

The fact that “most women” were protesting their slavery leads the Ottoman state to institute a special system and budget for processing their cases. Clearly

20. The implication appears to be that Duaci (“Prayerful”) Salih Aga was improperly availing himself of the opportunity of having young slave women in his house.

21. The directive continues with a paragraph on the details of the implementation. Başbakanlık Archives, Ayniyat Defteri, No. 1141. My translation.

not all Circassian girls saw slavery as a route to “prosperity and happiness.” Even through the dry language of official documents, the pathos of these women comes through. Used and abused by the likes of “Prayerful” Salih and “Mad” Mehmet, one wonders how many were able to resort to state protection and how many remained silent. Shemsigul says, “As a slave, I was afraid to say anything about my suffering.” The “willingness” of Circassian girls to be sold into slavery, therefore, should be weighed against not life in the Ottoman imperial harem but life in an Ottoman detention center.

Multiply Authored Histories and Silences

Shemsigul’s story can be read in three ways, each of which evokes different time-spaces. Firstly, it can be read, as Toledano does, as a story of premodern empires and slave-based societies. The pathos of her story is then mitigated by the perception of that time-space as one where bondage was preferable to freedom for the likes of Shemsigul. The assumption is that premodern sensibilities would not interpret experiences and notions of freedom and bondage in modern terms. A second reading, which I present above, sees Shemsigul’s particular experience of slavery as an outcome of the mass migration of Circassians. The negotiations within Ottoman society over the meanings of slavery and slave trading, the struggles between the Ottomans and the British over antislavery measures, and the judicial system for dealing with legal transgressions all point to a modernizing society and state. In general, the resettlement of the Circassians played into Ottoman policies of political and economic consolidation, centralization, and modernization, especially in the Syrian province (Rogan 1991, Shami 1992). These processes determined the nature of the nation-states that emerged from the breakup of the empire after World War I. Shemsigul then becomes one of the resources that are used up and spit out by modernization, an example of the many ways by which the nation is constituted through women’s bodies.

A third reading of Shemsigul’s story would see it as a prehistory of Shengul’s story. The coincidences between the two experiences are remarkable. In both narratives a sea voyage constitutes a turning point (a sea change?) in the protagonist’s life. It is a journey from home to exile, but at the same time it is touched with shades of a homecoming. For Shengul, it is a “return” to the homeland, her place of origin and natural domicile, in a sense. For Shemsigul, her journey from the periphery to the center of Empire is supposed to deliver her to an elite household, in which she would enjoy “welfare and happiness.” Instead, both women are left exposed and alone by the decisions of their families. Shemsigul’s vulner-

ability is forcibly brought home to her through rape, while for Shengul the realization awakens in a fear of rape. Both women's unstable status in the liminal space of the boat is not resolved at their destination. Both continue to inhabit an ambivalent space that constantly shifts between bondage and freedom. If Shemsigul is manumitted, she will have only the freedom of destitution and perhaps outright prostitution. For Shengul, she may escape the stifling family context, but to partake fully in the freedom of her new context would cast her out of her own values, out of her own society. For both, religion appears as a protection, although at different levels. In Shemsigul's case, *Shari'a*-based law offers her recourse and some justice. For Shengul, its apparent loss invokes her deeper, "true" beliefs. But ultimately both women may end up trying to integrate into a family not their own, to recreate a situation of bondage, rather than remain in the world on their own. Having set out, or been sent out, on this journey, they find that at its end there is no arrival.

Each of these texts exists in its particular time-space. The motivations for the journeys they narrate are different and the trajectories lead in opposite directions. The women in them, however, mirror one another and meld with one another. Each reveals hidden meanings in the other. Shemsigul's story comes to us in the form of a police document, an official interrogation with little room for emotion. Shengul provides Shemsigul's sensibility, her sensory memory of the disequilibrium wrought by the sea journey, in the transmutation involved in the migration. Shemsigul, in turn, illuminates Shengul's unspoken nightmare, revealing the equivocal nature of "freedom" in a patriarchal world. Even the divergences in the two stories reinforce the parallels. Shemsigul is sixteen while Shengul is thirty-seven, but in both cases it is their age that selects them for their journeys. In their very names, the contrapuntal relation between these two lives comes through. Shemsigul (Şemsigül) means sun-flower and Shengul (Şengül) means happy-flower, an irony compounded by Shengul being the real name of the protagonist²² while Shemsigul is likely not a real name, since names of slaves were routinely changed after they were sold.

The parallels between the stories extend further, from narrated experience into context. Both women's lives are subordinated not only for the sake of the family's economic survival but also for the sake of the reproduction of the ethnic group. Women like Shemsigul were sold to enable families to survive and to settle in their new country. Women like Shengul are sent ahead to pave a way for resettle-

22. I thank and admire Shengul more than I can say for her generosity in allowing me to share her story and for her discerning understanding of my task as an ethnographer.

ment in the homeland, to create an alternative to insecure livelihood. Group identity is safeguarded at the expense of notions of self-identity and accepted gender roles. Shengul is sent off at the last moment when she could have possibly found a marriage partner, to a place where marriage may be inevitably foreclosed. The perception of local Circassians as dissolute and irresponsible enables male returnees to marry local women (to redeem them in a sense), but makes it unacceptable for female returnees to marry local men. As for Shemsigul, it is not her marriage potential but her sexual function that determines her value as a commodity. Furthermore, if she marries it will not be into her ethnic group. If she bears a child as a concubine it does not belong to her, as was made manifestly clear to her by Deli Mehmet's wife, and her child does not perpetuate her own, her family's, or her group's identity.

In this aspect, thousands of Circassian girls share in Shemsigul's fate, for out-marriage of girls has been a clear strategy (a "tactic" in Emine's words) in Circassian communities of the diaspora, cementing alliances and securing patronage. As an elderly woman in Turkey once commented to me, "We have given away our girls to everybody." Thousands of girls also share Shengul's fate, not able to marry into the group, for a variety of reasons, and yet not allowed to marry out. On one hand, Shengul and Shemsigul give up central values of their ethnic identity, namely marriage and reproduction for the group. On the other hand, they ensure the reproduction of the group not through their own reproductive functions but paradoxically by giving up (or rather being denied) this function, or reproducing for "the other." It is perhaps due to the subordination of the individual to the collective that both narratives end with an insistence on silence. Shemsigul says that as a slave she does not have the right to complain of her suffering, to speak. Shengul, in a manner not so different, insists that she simply doesn't remember.

Globalization has produced new flows that open up the potential for new imaginations and memories. Without Shengul's journey, Shemsigul's story could not have been recovered and redeemed; it would have remained the story of pre-modern practice and sensibility, something to be transcended and looked back at with understanding and pity for the archaic other inhabiting a foreign country. Without Shemsigul, Shengul's story could not be layered in quite the same way. Shemsigul is not part of Shengul's cultural repertoire or of her memory, and yet they become part of the same diasporic imaginary in which "the word 'unfolding' has a double meaning. A bud unfolds into a blossom, but the boat which one teaches children to make by folding paper unfolds into a flat sheet of paper" (Benjamin 1992, 118). The boats on which Shengul and Shemsigul travel appear to

contain clear meanings once they have been unfolded into flat sheets of paper. They tell of empire and nation, exile and homeland, loss and redemption. On the other hand, the stories of Shengul and Shemsigul, Happy-flower and Sun-flower, unfold like buds, revealing their layers but receding into oblivion just when the heart of the blossom is glimpsed.

Reflecting the heart of the matter is the image of a woman on a boat. This image is truly a Benjaminian “dialectical image” which “‘interrupts the context into which it is inserted’ and thus ‘counteracts illusion’” (Buck-Morss 1999, 67).²³ Juxtaposing the two texts interrupts a linear history of Circassian migrations and identity. It shows that “it isn’t that the past casts its light on what is present or that what is present casts its light on what is past; rather an image is that in which the Then [and There] and the [Here and] Now come together into a constellation like a flash of lightning” (Benjamin, in Pred 1995).

It is the possibility of juxtaposing the two narratives, the bifocality that it entails, that brings into a different light the mediating story of migration and documentation through which these two lives, the past and present, are linked. The juxtaposition produces a past that reveals both the continuities and the new promises contained in processes and discourses of globalization. The strategies for recovering this past are the work of the imagination and make use of various resources: narratives, texts, objects. These are not fixed in particular “periods” but shift depending on the vantage point of the present.

Is it a coincidence that Ghosh’s excavations and mine both yield slaves and slavery? At the very least, this opens up a link with the world of “the black Atlantic” which has generated much of the inspiration for postcolonial possibilities. The Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, the Black Sea, offer new and appropriately agitated spaces in/on/under/through which “we can map the postcolonial by charting its submarine flows,” generate “a liquid vocabulary that identifies diaspora cultures and identities as flow dynamics,” and discover “a self which manifests itself not as an essence but as a meandering” (Baucom 1997, para. 17, 7).

In mapping these flows, however, gender differences should not be submerged. Wolff (1993) has shown how metaphors of travel may reproduce androcentrism by not acknowledging the differential access of men and women to travel and their different experiences of it. Both Shemsigul’s and Shengul’s journeys are enmeshed in the patriarchal and dominant structures of their day. Marginality and

23. See Benjamin’s discussion of Bertolt Brecht’s dramatic strategy where “the discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings” and the notion of the “quotable gesture” where “interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring” (Benjamin 1992, 147–48).

interstitial status, thus, are not attributes only of fixed places. Incarceration can be, and often is, mobile, as in slave ships and migrant households. Rather than “the middle-class idea of the chosen and leisured journey” (Wolff 1993, 225), these Circassian journeys are better compared with other more-or-less forced migrations of single women, as from Britain to Southern Africa in the past (Swaisland 1993) and with present refugee flows (Buijs 1993). Still, Wolff’s point that “destabilizing has to be *situated*, if the critic is not to self-destruct in the process” is an important one (1993, 235, Wolff’s emphasis). If the past is described through metaphors of liquidity and the present is characterized by “a nauseatingly decentered global interactiveness” (Buell 1998, 577), then Shengul’s motion sickness may be, after all, an appropriate reaction to how identity, self, and gender are situated in a globalizing world.

Postscript 1999

In Circassian oral history, there are narratives of sea crossings and dispersal, but silences about the means and costs of resettlement. Left unspoken is the story of Shemsigul. It is an imagination, that of the ethnographer, that brings together texts that are not linked and that do not “belong” together in any necessary way. However, it is that contrapuntal juxtaposition, the attempt at uncovering a multiply authored history, that produces Benjamin’s “flash.” The flash, and the image that is generated, illuminate Circassian memories but also reveal the silences and the erasures within them.

It was not my intention to give Shengul’s story a happy ending. In 1993, as I listened to her struggle with her ambivalent feelings it was clear that there was no resolution or closure. Since then things have changed. Shengul has obtained a university degree. She continues to work in the museum, prepare radio shows about the diaspora, and read the radio news in Turkish twice a week. She lives in her own apartment, having left the house of her relatives. “I don’t know why I am happy here,” she says. “Maybe it is because I came from that small village, all the restrictions that I lived with there, the way I was somewhere between being and not-being. I have found myself here.” It is not Shengul’s reconciliation with her personal past, however, but a phone conversation in 1999 that leads me to a different ending.

I called Shengul from Uppsala to explain exactly how I was framing her story and the narrative of her journey to the Caucasus. As I began to tell her about Shemsigul, she interrupted. “You mean the story of the girl who is sold to Egypt, raped by the slave trader, and beaten by his wife?” Over my astonished silence,

she explained. A synopsis of Toledano's article had appeared in a volume entitled *Circassians in Print* (Güven 1993), put out by one of the Circassian youth associations in Turkey just a few months after our first conversations. "I felt very sad for the girl when I read the story," Shengul said. "I thought of translating the article into Circassian and publishing it here. Then I thought that I should not give the Russians any more ammunition. They sold us in the past. I should not give them more power in the present."

Shemsigul has now become part of Shengul's repertoire. Hers is not a forgotten story any more. *Circassians in Print* contains a whole section on slaves and slavery. Still Shengul wishes to silence this memory or at least to limit its circulation. Fear in the present continues to censor the past. Since the silence has been broken, however, can it be replaced by nostalgia/nostalgia in its transformative sense?

Nostalgia is the desire or longing with burning pain to journey [to the homeland]. It also evokes the sensory dimension of memory in exile and estrangement; it mixes bodily and emotional pain and ties painful experiences of spiritual and somatic exile to the notion of maturation and ripening. . . . Nostalgia, in the American sense, freezes the past in such a manner as to preclude it from any capacity for social transformation in the present, preventing the present from establishing a dynamic perceptual relationship to its history. Whereas the Greek etymology evokes the transformative impact of the past as unreconciled historical experience. (Seremetakis 1994a, 4)

Seteney Shami is program director at the Social Science Research Council in New York. She is the editor of *Population Displacement and Resettlement* (1994) and the coauthor of *Women in Arab Society* (1990). She taught from 1982 to 1995 at Yarmouk University in Jordan.

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