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## EDUCATIONAL RESULTS OF AN EXILE: THE AHISKA TURKS

*Research article*

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### Abstract

The restrictions imposed by a state on the way of life of a certain ethnic group, and the education policy implemented on that group, may prevent the use of the right to education, which is one of the fundamental human rights. This study focuses on the educational consequences of the exiling from their homeland of the Ahiska Turks (or Meskhetian Turks) who lived in the Ahiska (Samtskhe) region of Georgia at the time of the Soviet Union, in the year 1944. This descriptive study adopted the case study design based on qualitative research techniques. The data were gathered through a semi-structured interview form given to four participants selected via criterion sampling method from different generations who were either sent into exile, were born and grew up in the place of exile, or were born after the break-up of the USSR and were attempting to settle in another country. The data were analysed using the descriptive data analysis techniques, and the results revealed that the exiled Ahiska Turks suffered losses in terms of education due to their exile and its consequences. These losses were categorized in four groups, namely, losses stemming from leaving the community devoid of intellectuals, losses due to literacy becoming more difficult, losses originating from being forced into agricultural labour, and losses due to exposure to ethnic discrimination.

*Keywords:* Ahiska Turks, exile, educational loss, discrimination, educational inequality

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. A Short History of the Ahiska Turks

The known history of the Ahiska Turks begins with the record of the name “Bun-Turks” mentioned in old Georgian chronicles (GNAS, 2014: 20-21; Gippert, 2015: 31; Tellioglu, 2020: 27). It is claimed that the name “Bun-Turk” means “indigenous, autochthonous / aboriginal Turk” (Gippert, 2015; Koç, 2016). The Ahiska Turks, and the Northeast Anatolian Turks who share the same ethnographic characteristics as them, are given the name “Native Turk” by the other ethnic groups that they live with (Çınar, 2020: 7). The Bun-Turks, as a people of Turkic origin who inhabited the area along the Kura River, were one of the ancient inhabitants of the Caucasus (Kırzioğlu, 1992: 81; Koç, 2016). In addition to the Bun-Turks, at the time of the Georgian King David IV (1089-1125), a large population of the Christian Kipchaks who inhabited the Don-Kuban area came by invitation and settled in Georgia (Kurat, 2019: 83-84; Tellioglu, 2019: 56, 93). Later, the region, which passed into the possession of the Ilkhanate, was reshaped in the hands of the Ruler Abaqa Khan (1265-1282). Abaqa Khan ruled his country with a type of autonomous state model known as the Atabegate. In 1267, an atabegate (autonomous administrative area) was created under the name of the Samtskhe Atabegate (in Georgian სამცხე-საათაბაგო, or Samtskhe Saatabago),

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the expanded version of a text presented as a verbal statement at the meeting named *The 2nd International Turkish Communities Knowledge Fest: the Ahiska Turks*, organised jointly by Uludağ University and the Turkish Hearths Bursa Branch on 11th March 2019 in Bursa.

with its centre at the Castle of Cak in Posof<sup>2</sup> (Kırzioğlu, 1992: 150). Following the collapse of the Ilkhanids, the Samtskhe Atabegate maintained its existence under the protection of the Ak Koyunlu, Kara Koyunlu and Safavid Dynasties. In 1578, the region became part of the Ottoman Empire following the Battle of Childir that was fought between the Ottoman State and Safavid Dynasty. Population movements occurred during these periods, and Oghuz-Turkmen communities also settled in the region and took part in the ethnogenesis. The Ottoman State did not change the dynasty that ruled the Samtskhe Atabegate, but the dynasty changed its religion and became Muslim. Akhaltsikhe (Ahiska) became the centre of the province. This region was known as the Eyalet of Childir, and sometimes also as the Pashalik of Akhalzik, during the period of the Ottoman Empire.

Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29, the Eyalet of Childir was broken up. Ahiska (Akhaltsikhe), which was the centre of the Eyalet, and the surrounding area was ceded by the Treaty of Adrianople (1829) to Russia as a war reparation, while a large part of the province remained in the Ottoman Empire. In this way, Ahiska was separated from the Eyalet of Childir. During the Russo-Turkish Wars fought in the 19th century, Russia advanced as far as Erzurum and the whole of the Eyalet of Childir (the Samtskhe Atabegate) was annexed to Russia.

Due to Russia's Caucasus policies in the 19th and 20th centuries, this community was seriously affected and suffered from tragic breaches of human rights (Baddeley, 1908; Memmedova, 2015; Toksoy, 2015; Üren, 2016). As a result of this oppression, a number of Turks, especially from around Akhaltsikhe (Ahiska) and Akhalkalaki migrated to the Ottoman Empire. However, a large group continued to live in Akhaltsikhe and the surrounding villages.

When Tsarist Russia collapsed due to the Bolshevik October Revolution, Russia withdrew from the region. At that time, the Ottoman Empire also collapsed, and the Turkish Republic that was established in its place signed the Treaties of Moscow and Kars with the Soviet Union in 1921 (Buntürk, 2007; Çerniçenkina, 2014). According to these treaties, as in the Treaty of Adrianople, Ahiska remained separated as part of the Georgian SSR of the Soviet Union. The Ahiska Turks that are the subject of this research are the community that remained in the neighbouring country of Georgia, probably because of the inappropriate drawing of the boundary.

There are various views as to the reason for the exile. According to one view, the Stalinist regime regarded ethnic cleansing as a part of general security and exiled the Ahiska Turks from Georgia for this reason (Pohl, 1999, 137). Due to the importance of the geostrategic and geocultural conditions of Ahiska, the Stalinist regime pursued a policy of purging the border with Turkey of Turks by completely exiling the Ahiska Turks from the region (Aydingün, 2002; Buntürk, 2007).

It is obvious that the exile of the Ahiska Turks amounted to ethnic cleansing. Following the hastily conducted exile, the victims of the exile objected to the exile and wrote petitions to return to their homes from the areas where they were sent. The Interior Ministries of the USSR and Georgia exchanged correspondence with each other concerning these petitions. Some of these correspondences were published by Bugai (1994: 57-58). In the correspondence of the Georgian Ministry of the Interior numbered 4/0-2507 and dated 24th September 1945, which is one of the documents published by Bugai, the objections were

<sup>2</sup> Posof is a district of Ardahan in Turkey. According to the Google map measurement, its distance from the city centre of Akhaltsikhe (now in Georgia) is 25 km as the crow flies. The centre of the Atabegate founded by the Ilkhanids was the castle of Cak in Posof. The centre was later moved to the city of Akhaltsikhe (Ahiska).

evaluated, and while some petitioners who wished to return to their homes were rejected on the grounds that “it was not a mistake to exile them since they were Turks”, it was reported that the objections of some Laz people, who had been sent away as they were assumed to be Turks, were accepted and that they should be able to regain Georgian citizenship. The ethnic names of those who were to be exiled were already specified in the decree of exile. Finally, on 14th November 1944, the Ahiska Turks were collectively exiled by force to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In the exile, the smaller populations of Hamshenis and Kurds who lived in the region and kept company with the Turks were also sent into exile. This exile led to many breaches of human rights. This article focuses on the educational losses resulting from the educational problems faced by the Ahiska Turks as a people in exile.

## 1.2. Who are the Ahiska Turks?

The Ahiska Turks are a Turkish-speaking, Sunni Muslim people who lived in the Ahiska region, which was for centuries within the Ottoman Empire and is now in Southwest Georgia on the border with Turkey. In the literature, they are a community that is generally confused with the Muslim Adjarian Georgians. The Ahiska Turks are a small section of a divided community. Another, larger section, which displays the same ethnographic features as this community, lives in the provinces of Ardahan, Artvin, Kars and Erzurum, in an area known historically as the Atabegate (Atabek Yurdu), which is still located in the Northeast of Turkey (Kırzioğlu, 1992: 150; Çınar, 2020).

This community became divided as a result of drawing the boundary between Turkey and the Soviet Union (Georgia) inappropriately. The Ahiska Turks were subjected to many infringements of human rights in Georgia for ethnic reasons. Yemelianova (2015: 79) sums up these violations as follows: “*Prior to deportation, between 1928 and 1937, Meskhetian Turks were subjected to forcible ‘Georgianization’, involving the official change of their nationality and surnames. After their deportation they were subjected to a discriminatory settlement regime, which denied them basic citizenship rights until 1956*”.

Although there has been controversy as to the ethnic roots of the Ahiska Turks, this debate appears to be over. In the decree of exile, they are a group recorded as “Turks”, Turkish-speaking and declaring their own identity to be Turkish (Wimbush & Wixman, 1975: 338; Aydingün & Aydingün, 2015: 35; Poyraz & Güler, 2019). Then again, the history of the ethnogenesis of the region and community is a subject for other branches of science. In the scientific literature, they are referred to by the name of the geographical area as Ahiska Turks or Meskhetian Turks.

The Ahiska Turks were exiled to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on 14th November 1944 by a decree signed by Josef Stalin, the Premier of the Soviet Union (Pohl, 1999: 132; Pentikäinen & Trier, 2004: 9-11). The journey into exile was made under terrible conditions and was dispersed into countries suffering the ravages of the Second World War, and during this process, many people died of cold, hunger and disease. Nowadays, the Ahiska Turks live scattered in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, the USA, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Northern Cyprus and, albeit few in number, in Georgia.

Following their deportation, the Ahiska Turks always wished to return to their homelands, but the USSR administration refused to allow this. Nevertheless, while the USSR was still in existence, the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation issued the “Rehabilitation of Exiled Peoples” law on 26th April 1991, and in this law, exiled peoples were recognised as “peoples exposed to genocide and subjected to forced emigration as a result of political vilification” (clause 2) and it was stated that they would be able to return to their homelands

(Zakon, 2020). Due to the disintegration of the USSR within a short time, however, this legal arrangement could not be implemented.

### **1.3. Exile and the Ahiska Turks**

Exile is imposed on a cultural minority for political and ethnic reasons, and its consequences sometimes last for centuries. The exiling of a community is an event which leads to negative demographic, economic, sociological, cultural, political and educational outcomes. Principal among the consequences that it causes are problems such as death, ostracisation, poverty, lack of education and disorder. People in an exiled society are exposed to discrimination and exclusion in the places that they move to. As a result of this, they continually live as foreigners in the society where they are located.

In the Soviet Union in the 1940s and 1950s, many communities were forced to migrate en masse from their ancestral lands to other areas. The exiles were particularly intensified in the year 1944. Among the exiled were ethnic groups such as Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Karachays, Balkars, Kalmyks, Ahiska Turks, Lithuanians and Latvians (Özcan, 2007: 202-203).

Alam (2019: 274-280) examines the losses suffered by the Ahiska Turks in exile by separating them into the following items: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, food insecurity, increased morbidity, loss of access to common property and services, and community disarticulation. According to Alam, the Ahiska Turks experienced great losses in all these respects.

A few years after exile, the Ahiska Turks were in a deplorable condition. In the region in which they settled, hundreds of thousands of people died due to famine, drought, and diseases like malaria, dysentery and typhoid resulting from inadequate health conditions and difference in climate (Özcan, 2007: 202).

The Ahiska Turks were unexpectedly and traumatically sent to countries that had very different cultures, climates and geographical features from their own (Aydingün, 1999). The Ahiska Turks who were exiled had to deal with great problems ranging from social, economic and cultural problems, and incompatibility with the climate, right up to being treated as “enemies within” due to being Turks within the scope of “enemy law” under martial law (Keskin & Gürsoy, 2017; Karcı, 2018). Among the principal problems were also educational problems. There are many studies related to the Ahiska Turks in a number of fields, such as history, culture, folklore and religion. However, there are virtually no studies related to their education lives under their conditions in exile.

### **1.4. Education in Ahiska Before the Exile**

Education is an activity that develops humanity. Educational activity, which begins in the family and continues at school and in the social environment, is the task of developing the skills of the individual and transferring cultural heritage to him or her. People who do not benefit from education cannot develop qualities specific to humans or utilise the innate capacity that they possess. In this context, after the right to life, education is one of the most important human rights.

Ahiska (Akhalsikhe) was the centre of the Eyalet of Childir or Pashalik of Akhalzik at the time of the Ottoman Empire. Ahiska had a high madrasah and was a place that educated its own intellectuals and artists. It provided many elements for the high bureaucracy of the Ottoman State. In Ottoman times, the Ahiska madrasahs were renowned in that region. Many important people were educated in these madrasahs, rising to important positions both in the sciences and in state bureaucracy (Zeyrek, 2006: 34; Balcı & Temiz, 2015).

The Ahiska Turks lived in Ahiska, which was an important centre of education, science and culture in the Atabegate. Ahiska maintained its characteristic as a centre of science and culture despite the continuing oppression and policy of forced migration following the 1828 Russian invasion. It had a strong tradition of oral culture and its folk literature was also powerful (Memmedli, 2018).

In the year 1905, there were 106 masjid schools (*sıbyan mektebi*) in the Turkish villages in the Ahiska region (Gocayeva-Memmedli, 2009). These were schools that provided religious elementary education. The first school providing contemporary scientific education was a Jadidist school that opened in 1881 in Azgur. In later years, one of the teachers at the school was the intellectual democrat Ömer Faik Numanzade. Numanzade had received his education at the Darüşşafaka High School, which was one of the few schools in Istanbul that conducted scientific education. Even that school alone enlightened the Turks in the village of Azgur (Askuri), affiliated to Ahiska, to a significant extent, and brought them to the fore in society.

In the Ahiska region, schools offering scientific education were opened in Azgur and Ökem in 1881, in Hirtız in 1885, in Adıgün in 1895, and in Sinis, Varhan and Oşora in 1897 (Goca Memmedli, 2018: 219). In these schools, which were opened in Turkish villages with the permission of Tsarist Russia, Turkish lessons were also given (Goca Memmedli, 2018: 219). Following the Bolshevik Revolution, schools were opened in all the Turkish villages of Ahiska, and Turkish became the language of learning.

According to the records of the Georgian National Archive, 168 schools providing education in Turkish were opened in the Ahiska-Ahilkelek area in 1936, and a total of 14,256 students were registered at these schools. This means that almost all children of school age attended school (Goca Memmedli, 2018: 219).

Table 1. *Number of schools and students in Ahiska (1936)*

Districts	Number of Schools	Number of Students
Adıgün	61	5,821
Ahiska	55	4,032
Aspinza	42	3,398
Ahilkelek	9	801
Bogdanovka	1	204
Total	168	14,256

Source: *Georgian National Archive 300/8/515, pp. 55-72. (Cited in Goca Memmedli, 2018: 219)*

The success of the Soviet Union in enabling equality of opportunity in education and providing scientific education was applauded. Commendable activities by the Soviet Union such as freeing the people from ignorance, implementing compulsory education for all and making the 44 million people within its borders literate are included in the history of global civilisation (Alimbekov, 2019: 283). Books were also written to enable education in the mother tongue, but the Ahiska Turks were deprived of this right within a short time. The Ahiska Turks were unable to benefit from the success of the Soviet education system to the same extent as other communities. Indeed, Zemskov (2005: 177-179) wrote that 62% of the exiled Ahiska Turks did not know how to read or write in any language (cited by Pohl, 2014: 18). The Ahiska Turks were caught between the local Georgian administrators, who were determined to “Georgianize” them, and the Soviet Union’s “Nationalities Policy” (Yemeljanova, 2015: 79; Üren, 2016: 126; Şirin Öner, 2019).

The Ahiska produced their own intellectuals from the second half of the 19th century onwards under the influence of the Jadidist movement. An intellectual is a person who reads, knows and thinks, and produces knowledge, art and philosophy about himself, his nation and humanity. Intellectuals are people who elevate societies and humanity, who open new ways and who occupy the position of the brains of society. Undoubtedly, societies and humanity have need of such people. Societies without intellectuals are like abandoned children. The Ahiska Turks also endeavoured to educate intellectuals. However, following the 1917 October Revolution, the Ahiska intelligentsia were eradicated by the Soviet regime with the excuse that they were “land barons”, “anti-regime” or “Panturkist” (Pohl, 2006; Aydıngün & Aydıngün, 2015: 40; Keskin & Gürsoy, 2017: 20). Since the Ahiska people were scattered due to exile by Soviet Russia and kept under martial law in the places they moved to, the raising of new intellectuals was made difficult.

No studies about the educational status of the Ahiska Turks after their exile can be found. The main aim of this research is to reveal the educational problems that resulted from the exile of the Ahiska Turks, who were deported by the USSR and Georgia to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1944.

With this aim, in the study, the consequences for the educational and cultural life of the Ahiska Turks that resulted from the mass exile in 1944, at the hands of the Soviet Union, of around 100 thousand Ahiska Turks who lived near the borders of Georgia and Turkey, constitute the main aim of this study. In this context, the following sub-aims are examined:

1. What were the educational problems caused by the absence of intellectuals?
2. What were the educational problems related to the complication of literacy?
3. What were the educational problems caused by the coercion of the Ahiska Turks into agricultural labour?
4. What were the educational problems created by ethnic discrimination?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This study was designed according to qualitative research techniques. In qualitative research, an actual situation with equivalents in real life is discussed (Creswell, 2013, 2016). Since this study was made with four people from different generations who were exiled from Ahiska and experienced the exile and the subsequent period, together with findings obtained by a review of the literature in databases via the library and internet, the aim was to describe an actual situation in this respect. Therefore, a descriptive case study design was chosen for the research. Case studies are discussed holistically by dealing with an event that is the subject of the study in a certain environment. Therefore, the four people exiled from Ahiska represent the case as people who experienced the event.

Also in the research, an attempt was made to describe the actual situation by means of document scanning. In documentary analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods, the relevant documents may be documents in a written and electronic environment. The documents in this study are documents that can be used to be shown as sources without the need to obtain the permission of the authors. The documents are used as part of the method by considering them as a raw material (Bowen, 2009).

When considered in this framework, studies discussing the migrations of the Ahiska Turks have been included in the examination. Document analysis is made by means of examination via existing records and this is known as the document scanning method. In the scannings,

the experiences of people who lived through the situation of the forced migrations of the Ahiska Turks were examined. Documents regarded as best reflecting the situation experienced by the Ahiska Turks were considered in the screenings (Madge, 1965; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In this qualitative study, data obtained through interviews combined with data collected by examination and evaluation of the documents were examined under four main thematic headings. The documents are limited to publications included in the references and related to the forced migrations of the Ahiska Turks.

## 2.2. Study Group

In the research, criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was utilised. Criterion sampling is based on the researcher's formation of certain criteria and making choices according to these (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this study, the criteria were the selection of four people who had been forced to migrate at certain times and who belonged to different age groups so as to represent different generations.

Table 2. *Demographic characteristics of Ahiska Turks in the study group*

	Participant 1 Binali	Participant 2 Anahanım	Participant 3 Narhanım	Participant 4 Serinaz
Age	87	70	47	9
Places lived in	Uzbekistan and Russian Federation / Bursa-Turkey	Taraz-Kazakhstan / Bursa-Turkey	Merki-Kazakhstan / Bursa-Turkey	Azerbaijan and Georgia / Bursa-Turkey
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female (Child)
Education level	Bachelor's Degree	Associate Degree	University-Doctorate	Primary School
Occupation	Retired Teacher / Journalist	Retired Accountant	Academician	Student
Nationality	Russian Federation	Kazakhstan	Turkish Republic	Georgia

**Participants and their characteristics:** The source people from whom the data were gathered are four people from different generations who were either sent into exile, were born and grew up in the place of exile, or were born after the break-up of the USSR and were attempting to settle in Turkey. The majority of their lives were spent in Uzbekistan and Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Georgia, respectively. One of the participants is a man, two are women, and one is a girl. The original names of the participants have been changed.

**Binali** was born in 1932 in the village of F. in Ahiska, and is 87 years old. He received education in Turkish until 4th grade in Georgia. In 5th grade, he moved on to education in Georgian, but after having lessons for a few months, on 14th November 1944, he was deported to Uzbekistan together with his family. In Uzbekistan, they were settled in a village 20 km away from the city. Until 1956, he was unable to leave his village because of the martial law imposed on the Ahiska Turks. Therefore, he was unable to attend the high school in the district. After martial law for the Ahiska was lifted, he finished high school externally, and with the personal support of Rashidov, the Uzbekistan head of state, he registered at and graduated from a university providing education in Russian. He knows Turkish, Russian and



Georgian, and also speaks Uzbek and Balkar Turkish. He worked in teaching and journalism. He is retired and has lived in Turkey for five years.

**Anahanım** is 70 years old and retired. Her family was exiled from Ahiska to Kazakhstan while her father was a soldier in the Second World War. She herself was born after the exile in a village in Kazakhstan. She lost her mother when she was 12 years old. As she was a girl, she was taken out of school by her father to look after her younger siblings and do the housework. Later, she finished school externally. She has three children. She moved to Turkey a year ago, and has not yet obtained Turkish citizenship.

**Narhanım** is an Ahiska Turk working in Turkey as an academician. Her grandparents were exiled from Ahiska, and she is the child of a family whose parents were born in Kazakhstan. During the break-up of the Soviet Union, she graduated with honours from high school in Kazakhstan. She completed her bachelor's and postgraduate education in Turkey. After obtaining Turkish citizenship, she was appointed as an academician. She is 47 years old and has lived in Turkey for 27 years as a Turkish citizen.

**Serinaz** is 9 years old. Serinaz's great-grandfather was exiled from Ahiska to Uzbekistan. Her grandfather was born in Uzbekistan. When he grew up, the family moved to Azerbaijan since it is close to Ahiska, and moved to Georgia from there. Serinaz was born in Georgia. The family came to Turkey 4 years ago and are not yet Turkish citizens. Serinaz lives with her mother, grandmother and 7-year-old brother. Her mother works in Bursa as a clandestine worker. Since Serinaz does not have a passport, she was only able to start primary school two years later than her peers with the aid of a benefactor.

Ethical rules were taken into consideration in this research. While the participants were being included in the interviews, it was decided to identify them with assumed names. Therefore, the names Binali, Anahanım, Narhanım and Serinaz were used. Interview was taken with Serinaz under the supervision of her mother. The necessary information acquired from her mother. Interviews were recorded with sound.

### 2.3. Data Collection Tool and Collection of Data

In the research, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used. The questions included in the form are given below:

1. What were the educational problems caused by the absence of intellectuals?
  - a- What was the level of the Ahiska Turks' ability to read the state's official directives in Russian during the exile and afterwards? Can you explain?
2. What were the educational problems related to the complication of literacy?
  - a- How many times was the Ahiska Turks' alphabet changed during the period 1920-1945?
  - b- Did the Ahiska Turks receive the education in the mother tongue that was recognised for all communities in the Soviet constitution? How?
3. What do you think about the coercion of the Ahiska Turks into agricultural labour? What were the educational problems caused by this?
4. What were the educational problems created by ethnic discrimination?
  - a- Are there examples of any effect, alienation, or deprivation of rights granted to other communities due to being Turkish?
  - b- What was the level of women's interest in school education other than compulsory education?

During the question formation stage, the researcher created the questions by obtaining expert views of people who worked in this field. The semi-structured questionnaire form was given its final form in line with the views of a professor in the field of education sciences and an associate professor who was a historical researcher. The interviews were conducted by making appointments and going to the participants' homes. In order to create a sincere atmosphere, the researcher went to the interviews with his wife, in accordance with the customs of the Ahiska, and the data were thus gathered by creating a friendly atmosphere. The interviews were conducted in February 2019 and lasted between 60 and 110 minutes. The interviews were made in Turkish and sound recordings were made of most of the interviews.

#### **2.4. Data Analysis**

The descriptive analysis method was utilised for the analysis of the data. While the descriptive analysis was being made, the participants' views under the themes previously determined by the researcher at the first stage of the research, and views included in the literature were evaluated together. The results of the analyses are explained and interpreted under the four themes determined while preparing the interview questions, containing the headings: *i.* Educational problems caused by the absence of intellectuals, *ii.* Educational problems related to the complication of literacy, *iii.* Educational problems caused by the coercion of the Ahiska Turks into agricultural labour, and *iv.* Educational problems created by ethnic discrimination. By underlining interview scripts read more than once with a different colour in such a way as to include them under each of the four themes, the aim was to prevent loss of data under different themes. The data obtained from the interview scripts were combined and interpreted by assigning them to similar themes following examination of documents included in the literature.

#### **2.5. Validity and Reliability**

Lengthy interviews were conducted with the people interviewed in the research, and the focus was on obtaining detailed information. Attention was given to a sustained interaction during the data collection process. In the analysis and presentation of the data as findings, a connection with the literature was established and interpreted. During the research process, the views of experts were obtained for creating the data collection tool, and a test application was conducted for lucidity of the questions. The interviews were made by establishing conditions in which they could be carried out uninterruptedly and in a quiet environment. The interviews were taken up for analysis after requesting the consent of the interviewees and obtaining the necessary confirmations. During the research, in order to ensure reliability, the interviews were conducted by more than one (two) researchers to prevent researchers' bias from being reflected in the research. To increase transferability of the research, detailed descriptions were made, and direct quotations were frequently included. By describing the participants' characteristics in detail in the research, an attempt was made to increase the reliability of the study. Moreover, as another proof of reliability in the study, all interviews and documents were archived.

### **3. Findings**

The exile had a negative impact on the Ahiska Turks' educational and cultural lives. According to findings obtained from the views of the participants and the review of the literature, it was revealed that these problems were grouped under four themes. These themes were determined as *absence of intellectuals*, *complication of literacy*, *coercion into agricultural labour*, and *ethnic discrimination*.

### 3.1. Educational Problems Caused by Absence of Intellectuals

The greatest wealth of a society is its educated, qualified population. The best qualified of this qualified population are its intellectuals. Societies that possess intellectuals overcome their other deficiencies. For those which lack intellectuals, however, no matter how many riches gush forth from every place in the land or how great a cultural stock is accumulated from their ancestors, they cannot put these to good use. Societies that wish to maintain civilisation in the future will first raise intellectuals and see the way ahead by their light. Based on this, the eradication of another society's intelligentsia at the hands of a state or society can be evaluated as a great evil.

In the literature, the findings and interpretations in works examining the consequences of depriving the Ahiska Turks of their intellectuals following their forced migration are as follows:

The Ahiska Turks were subjected to cultural and economic pressures aimed at changing the demographic makeup after the area passed into the hands of Russia in 1828 (Yemelianova, 2015; Kurt, 2019). Instead of enduring these pressures, those with a high socio-economic level moved over to the Ottoman State. This was a kind of brain drain. Due to the collapse of tsarism and its replacement by socialism, and also to the social conflicts and chaotic situation experienced at that time, this brain drain deprived the Ahiska of the intellectuals who could lead them, defend their socio-cultural rights and guide the community. The period of the "Red Terror" implemented between 1918-1922 annihilated the opinion leaders and also those with a potential for this (Güngör, 2018). The newly educated ones were killed or sent to labour camps in Siberia without seeing the need even to judge them, with accusations of being anti-regime or Panturkist (Şirin Öner, 2019: 66). B. Hınzıoğlu, whose views were consulted in a study, mentions the period between 1930-1938, which was a new period of oppression and which was named "*repressia*" (repression), as follows:

*"Those who were literate were sent under a pretext from Ahiska to Siberia. Nothing was ever heard of them again."* (Aydemir, 2018: 216).

Among the reminiscences of Veyselöğlü, who was given the title of war hero several times during the Second World War, and who returned with medals, he wrote that "*the oppression continued from 1921 until 1937, and especially intellectuals and religious people were arrested and taken away.*" (Aliyeva Çınar, 2016). Even socialists and those joining socialist organisations could not avoid being killed (Pohl, 2006; Bayraktar, 2013). Indeed, the Ahiska intellectual, journalist and politician, Ö. F. Numanzade, was also one of those murdered in 1937 (Şirin Öner, 2019: 66).

In the 1930s, Stalin created a regime that could be characterised as brutal. On the grounds of making a cultural revolution by annihilating the bourgeoisie and feudalism, thereby establishing the socialist order that he idealised in his mind, he set up his own dictatorship by implementing the "Red Terror". During this dictatorship, all peoples and sections of society in Russia suffered terrible tragedies. Those of the Turkish communities were the most severe. Not only did they fall victim like the other communities, but also, their intellectuals were murdered due to being branded as "bourgeois, land barons, racist, or Panturkist" (Keskin & Gürsoy, 2017: 20). These were generally killed without trial or by being tried in kangaroo courts. Following the death of Stalin, those murdered during the *repressia* period were retried and generally found not guilty.

Among those subjected to cruelty and oppression were Russians and Russian Jews. The Russians and especially the Jews wrote about their experiences. In the academic literature,

there exists a vast amount of literature created by Russians, especially by Tsarist supporters and Jews who were able to escape. In fact, even Jews on the outside who learned about those inside branded Stalin as antisemitic (Smith, 2006). The Turks, however, were unable to leave or to contact their relatives on the outside, nor were they able to write about their experiences. On the other hand, some historians criticised the other group of historians, whom they called revisionist, for erasing what was done by the Stalinist regime. In their opinion, the revisionist historians had become “cleansers of ethnic cleansing” by reporting the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Stalinist regime as “those sent into exile were enemies of the state” (Martin, 1998; Chang, 2019). Due to these “cleansers”, the true facts remained in the dark for many long years.

The massacre of the intelligentsia reached its peak in 1938. In fact, in that year, all areas of the Soviet Union were like hell. During this period, known as the great terror or *repressia*, millions of people were annihilated due to heavy repression and execution without trial. Although all communities suffered from this annihilation, the greatest tragedy was experienced by the Ahiska Turks. Hardly any literate persons, let alone intellectuals, who could write letters remained.

Another aspect of the loss of intellectuals or literate people among the Ahiska Turks emerged with the recruitment of Ahiska men into the army for the first time. Males aged between 17-55 were conscripted to defend Russia in the Second World War. Considering that literate people were generally male and that about 50 thousand of these were drafted into the army<sup>3</sup>, the situation arose that neither men nor literate people remained in Ahiska. This was the situation at the time of exile. Gazigil (2016: 33), who was a lawyer and one of the Ahiska exiles, wrote in his memoirs that families whose men had been recruited into the army suffered greater hardships. Paşaoğlu (2012: 42), who was 5 years old at the time of exile, wrote the following in the book in which he told his life story:

*“When my father was conscripted, my mother had kidney disease. My poor mother was left alone and unprotected in exile with three children. (...) Her situation gradually worsened. She died in 1945 aged 28. As for my father, he never returned from the army.”*

Since the war was going on, the soldiers were unable to return to Ahiska, while those who survived and were able to return could not find their families in Ahiska because they had been exiled. In short, when the Ahiska went into exile, hardly any educated or literate persons remained. Indeed, Binali, who was one of those exiled as a child and student, stated the following during his interview:

*“No one was left who could guide the children, the youth, or even the women. The men had been conscripted and most of them did not return. Very few of the women could read. Moreover, we were taken to a foreign land. Everything was strange to us, and we only tried to survive.”*

After expressing her view that in the Soviet Union, the decision was taken to eliminate the representatives of feudal culture and the opinion leaders in society in order to facilitate the establishment of socialism, Narhanım also emphasised the impact of the removal of the intellectuals:

*“The new regime was both a Russian chauvinist and a rigid modernist one. The rapid achievement of their aims depended on their elimination of our literate*

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<sup>3</sup> This is the number quoted among the Ahiskas, but no reliable figure or source could be accessed on this subject.

*people or our opinion leaders. Many Ahiska intellectuals, notably the journalist and thinker Ö. Faik Numanzade, were killed. When Numanzade was murdered in 1937, he was not anti-revolutionary, he was a social democrat. These events spread terror in our community. When we saw what was happening to educated people, our interest in school and education decreased.”*

Narhanım’s view that the Stalinist regime was racist in character supports the revelation by Martin (1998: 860) and Pohl (1999) that characterises the period of 1937-49 in the Soviet system as the years of ethnic cleansing. The account given by Serinaz’s mother also supports Narhanım’s view. She stated that when she saw that those who had been educated at school were being killed, she stayed away from education at her family’s own request:

*“Those who were educated had already been sent to Siberia before 1937. None of them returned. Therefore, my grandfather did not allow his children to be educated. ‘They might be ignorant, but at least they’ll stay alive’, he said.”*

The massacre of intellectuals in the Soviet Union reached its peak in 1937 and 1938 (Yıldırım, 2018: 52). This view is supported by Anahanım’s information. She expressed it like this:

*“During the years between 1930-1938, the Soviet state condemned people to death without trial. These were generally educated people. While we were in Ahiska, we lost our affection for education. Moreover, when we also experienced exile, we no longer felt the need for education. During the Soviet period, no politicians, top executives or artists emerged from among the Ahiska.”*

When the events of the period between 1930-1938 which aimed to establish the Soviet regime and bring about a mindset revolution are examined, the period is known as *repressia* (repression). There are numerous documents and publications related to this period (Güngör, 2018; Şirinov & Erşahin, 2018; Yıldırım, 2018: 53). The Ahiska Turks received more than their share of this repression. Narhanım draws attention to another consequence of the falling education level among the Ahiska Turks:

*“Those who stayed away from school could not learn Russian sufficiently. The humiliation that resulted from the period of repression, when combined with lack of knowledge of Russian, reduced the Ahiska to the status of slaves who would do any kind of work that they were ordered to do. As a result of this, they could not raise their heads above working in the large agricultural collectives in Central Asia, and their children also generally showed a tendency to perpetuate that lifestyle.”*

According to Narhanım, the desire of Ahiska youth in exile to receive higher education began to increase in the 1980s. It can be understood that education for the Ahiska Turks had by then ceased to be dangerous. During that period, the increasing number of television broadcasts must have shown that there were different occupations and lifestyles for young Ahiska Turks apart from agriculture and have steered them towards higher education. However, this does not mean that there was a mass demand for higher education among the youth. A large number of them continued to work in collectives.

The Ahiska Turks’ opinion leaders and educated people, and those who knew Russian, which was the *lingua franca* in the country, had been killed prior to 1938 by the Stalinist regime. The remaining people who were literate and knew Russian (these were generally male) were recruited into the army up to the age of 55. Those who were exiled in 1944 were women, children and elderly people who were illiterate and did not speak a foreign language. Great losses were incurred in the war and at least half of those who joined the army did not

return. Consequently, no literate, multilingual people remained among the Ahiska Turks who were able to explain the directives of the regime or give guidance to the community, let alone intellectuals. It can be said that the elimination of educated people was one of the reasons why the Ahiska Turks became alienated from school and education.

### 3.2. Educational Problems Related to Complication of Literacy

This community experienced problems with reading and writing habits and skills when the alphabet was changed. Even those who were literate were suddenly forced to deal with reading and writing problems for a time since they were unable to use the new alphabet. Even during one generation, the Ahiska were exposed to several changes of alphabet and to the problems stemming from this.

In the literature, the findings and interpretations found in works that examine the consequences of the complication of literacy that followed the forced exile of the Ahiska Turks are as follows:

Until the year 1924, the Turkish alphabet with Arabic script was used in Ahiska. Between 1924-1939, they were taught in Azerbaijan Turkish with the Latin alphabet. They printed books and newspapers in Turkish. They published newspapers in Turkish with names like *Kızıl Rençber* (The Red Labourer) and *Adıgen Kolhozcusu* (The Adıgen Collectivist) in Adıgün, *Kommunist* (The Communist) and *Kızıl Bayrak* (The Red Flag) in Ahiska and *Bağban* (The Gardener) and *Sosyalizm Kendi* (Socialism Town) in Aspinza (Memmedli, 2012). Some Ahiska also learned the Cyrillic characters by attending Russian schools in order to receive a better education. Between 1939-1944, the alphabet in Azerbaijan was changed and Azerbaijan Turkish with Cyrillic characters was introduced. The Ahiska also attempted to learn this.

Binali had this to say about the change of alphabet:

*“We saw four alphabets: Arabic, Latin, Georgian, and Cyrillic. I was a child, I learned them easily but our older people could not learn them. Women who were past school age could not learn them at all.”*

While in Georgia, Binali, who was supposed to receive mother tongue education according to the Russian constitution, was educated in Azerbaijan Turkish for the first four grades, whereas in the fifth grade, education in the Turkish mother tongue was discontinued and he was taught in the Georgian language. Binali was educated in Uzbek Turkish in Uzbekistan. He says, *“I learned Uzbek straight away. My teacher said that I spoke better Uzbek than his Uzbek students, and showed me as an example to them.*

After stating that she lived in a village, Yıldız Bahriyeva, whose views were consulted for a study, said that in Ahiska, since all the men had been recruited into the army, the fields could not be sown and the people became very poor. She said, *“There was school, but the children did not have any clothes to wear for going to school; they were hungry, and they could not go to school.”* (Aydemir, 2018: 117). Speaking in the same study, Kandef Mededova said, *“I attended the first grade of primary school in Ahiska and studied in my own language. After the exile, I was not able to study in my own language.”* (Aydemir, 2018: 118).

Poverty increased further in the years following the exile. Saniya Halidova, one of those exiled to Uzbekistan, states that due to the bad living conditions in the first years after exile, school did not even enter their heads:

*“Since people could not find food; they ate the fodder that the animals grazed on. On some days, scores of people died of hunger or because of the unknown plants that they ate.”* (Aydemir, 2018: 199).

During the Second World War, teachers in Ahiska were also conscripted into the army. In primary schools in the villages, high school graduates or students acted as teachers. In 1944, the Ahiska were sent into exile. When they went to places like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, they were obliged to begin education and reading completely in Russian with the Cyrillic alphabet. Both the alphabet and the language of education were changed. While every community in the Soviet Union received education, albeit nominally, in the mother tongue, the Ahiska did not have this opportunity. In 1990, when the Soviet Union broke up, the alphabets were again changed. These changes of alphabet made reading and writing troublesome and people became disengaged from studying. Another problem caused by the change of alphabet was to strain the memory and put people off study.

The absolute authority of Russian also affected the Ahiska Turks more negatively than other communities. In the places that they moved to following the 1944 calamity of exile, the languages spoken (such as Kazakh) were very distant from Ahiska Turkish and not functional. Russian was the *lingua franca* all over the USSR. Even the Kazakhs and Uzbeks were forced to speak Russian. Therefore, the Ahiska Turks were able to speak their mother tongue only at home. They could not use the refined and developed language of Turkish for scientific or artistic activities. When people read with the language and letters they have been educated in, they understand better the things that they read. This, however, meant the dominance of Russian. While daily life flowed in Turkish, official and cultural life continued in Russian.

Binali had this to say about Russian:

*“In the Caucasus (he means Ahiska), the men would speak Russian. Women who went to school could also speak or understand it. But our people did not send girls to school if we could help it. Women above middle age did not generally know Russian. Men aged between 17 and 55 went to war, and most of them did not come back. So in the early days of the exile, our people had a language problem in Middle Asia. There was no one who knew the ropes and could guide us.”*

The problems stemming from not knowing the language of the country they were exiled to also confronted the Ahiska Turks in later periods. Some of the families who were exiled to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan moved to Azerbaijan in order to be closer to Ahiska. Since the children of these families did not know the language spoken in the country, they were made to start one or two years behind at the schools where they were accepted. Moreover, following the ethnic conflicts that broke out in 1989 in the Fergana region of Uzbekistan, a section of Ahiska Turks (around ten thousand people) settled in Ukraine and Russia. Malinovskaya (2006), who made a study of those living in Ukraine, recorded that this time, the Ahiska Turks and their children had to learn Ukrainian.

The Ahiska also wished to be educated in the mother tongue in the countries they were sent to, but they were unable to achieve this. Binali had this to say on the subject:

*“We also wanted to be educated in the Turkish mother tongue in Uzbekistan, but the state authorities gave us the cold shoulder. They said, ‘We too are Turks. We are Uzbek Turks. We are not different. Do not separate two Turks from each other’. We could not press the issue.”*

Regarding the fact that the Ahiska could not benefit from mother tongue education, which the Soviet Constitution granted as a right to all ethnic groups, Anahanım said, *“They oppressed us so much that we were not able to request anything. In the places we moved to, the rumour was spread that we were enemies of the people. Moreover, to make a request, you had to be literate in Russian.”* Narhanım, however, expressed her views on this as follows:

*“The Ahiska did not make a serious request in this regard. Our people always avoided causing problems. They could not live as a group in certain places in any case; they were dispersed in villages. Russian was the lingua franca in the Soviet Union. In any case, parents who wanted their children to have a good education and be successful in life sent them to schools providing education in Russian.”*

Since they are deprived of education in the mother tongue, the Ahiska who try to produce their works nowadays, write their works down with the alphabet that they know and features of the dialect that they speak in the geographical area that they inhabit. Inconsistencies in terms of both the alphabet and spelling appear as a serious problem in Ahiska Literature, which is being revived nowadays. Moreover, since the linguistic features seen in the Ahiska dialect cannot be completely put into writing, the fine points of the language, its richness and its aesthetics, sadly, cannot be fully reflected (Aliyeva, 2015: 441).

Among the Ahiska, the traditional education of the people was to a large extent based on oral culture, and the people who kept this going were the minstrels. Not even the *Âşıklık* (minstrelsy) tradition, which is an important tool of folk education, could withstand time and Russian. In Binalı’s opinion:

*“Both entertainments like feasts and weddings, and occasions with words and music which were free time entertainment-education occasions where good manners were taught, gradually lost their importance, because Turkish had regressed. The number of minstrels decreased, or even ended.”*

The Ahiska Turks were obliged to learn four different alphabets between the years 1924-1945. The frequent changing of alphabets was one of the reasons why their educational lives were adversely affected. It can be understood that the changes of alphabet were made for the purpose of ethnic oppression or assimilation rather than as a necessity of society. While the alphabets in countries such as Georgia and Armenia were not interfered with in any way in the Soviet Union, the alphabets of the Turkic speaking communities were changed. Moreover, a different alphabet was arranged for each of them, so that the Turkic speaking peoples, who had previously used a single alphabet, came to use 27 different alphabets and scripts (Yıldırım, 2018: 51). As a result of this, the Turkic speaking peoples had difficulty in communicating with one another. The frequently changing alphabets eliminated the ease of reading and made it more difficult. When texts were written in four different alphabets over the years, the burden of having to learn several alphabets at the same time was placed on people.

Besides the alphabet obstacle, the Ahiska Turks had other problems that made their education more difficult. Since they were dispersed in small groups in the areas where they were exiled, their numbers were not enough to request education in the mother tongue. Even when they reached a sufficient number, they were dissuaded from their requests due to bureaucratic negligence. It can be understood that as a people intimidated by oppression, they could not be insistent in their demands. As a result, they were unable to use the right to education in the mother tongue that was granted by the Soviet Union to its citizens. These problems complicated the Ahiska Turks’ education processes and led to their disengagement from education.



### 3.3. Educational Problems Caused by Coercion into Agricultural Labour

In the literature, the findings and interpretations found in works that examine the education problems caused by coercion into agricultural labour following the exile of the Ahiska Turks are as follows:

The Ahiska Turks were scattered in the village *kolkhoz* (agricultural collective) in the areas where they were exiled. Furthermore, they were settled with the prohibition of leaving the villages where they were dispersed “forever”. Although this prohibition was lifted in 1956, people were forced to a large extent to reside in the places where they were settled. This means that they were forced to live in villages and into agricultural labour. Pohl (2012: 207) states that the exile of ethnic groups in the Soviet system was a kind of racist employment policy:

“The similarities between Soviet treatment of the various deported peoples and South African apartheid are significant and stem from policies aimed at confining certain racialized groups to less desirable areas of the country, restricting their movement and using them as a source of menial labor.”

The Ahiska Turks were known for their expertise in agriculture and their strong work ethic. These characteristics of the Ahiska and the small population available to work in agriculture in Central Asia must have prompted this exile. Indeed, the Ahiska, who were packed into trains, were dispersed on the skirts of the Tian Shan Mountains in Turkestan, at the rate of one wagonload per village. The regime in the USSR had previously carried out a massacre in Turkestan (İbrahim & Türk, 2016; Güngör, 2018), a heavy population loss occurred in the Second World War, and as a result, the number of people available to work in agriculture had greatly decreased.

While giving an account of the conditions under which they lived in the places where they were settled after the exile, Binali explains it as if it was impossible to conduct education under those conditions. The first task for them was to carry out their agricultural work, and there was no second task to speak of. He discusses the education in the villages where they were settled after the exile as follows:

*“In the exile, they sent us to villages far from the cities and settled us there. There was a primary school in the village, but no high school. For high school, you had to go to the city, but this was impossible until 1956 because they imposed martial law on us<sup>4</sup>. Until 1960, those declared to have ethnic roots as “Turkish” on their passport were not able to register as students at universities or institutes. Even if we wanted to see our relatives in neighbouring villages, we were allowed to go by obtaining a “timed” permit, and even this was not easy to do. In those years, we were not allowed to go to high school. The village was like a prison for us. Martial law was lifted in 1956, but it was still not easy to visit the town. We were 20 km away and there was no transport. There were no accommodation facilities in the town, and the prospect of a 40 km return trip every day was not attractive, either. In the villages, there were no Russians expect for a few state*

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<sup>4</sup> The Ahiska Turks were subjected to martial law in the places where they were settled in the 1944 exile. In a decree of the Supreme Presidium passed on 26th November 1948, it was declared that exiles were to remain in the places where they were settled “forever” and that those escaping from the place of exile to any other place would be sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment. This martial law was lifted on 28th April 1956 by decree no. 135/142 issued by the Supreme Presidium of the USSR. On 31st October 1957, with the statement no. 161/29 signed by K. Vorşilov ve M. Georgadze, it was announced that the Ahiska Turks could settle wherever they wished “outside Georgia”, where their homeland of Ahiska was located.

*officials. The Russians lived in the cities and education in schools was provided in Russian. The best quality education was also made in Russian.”*

Paşaoğlu (2012: 50-53) wrote that in Uzbekistan, where he was exiled, he worked in agriculture while still a student, and that they were forced to raise silkworms and work in the cotton fields. *“Many people, from primary school to university students, even office clerks, worked night and day in the cotton fields. (...) We children had no free time, either. We just worked and worked.”*

Yasin Seferoğlu, who was born in 1935 in Ahiska, gave an account of his childhood in a documentary study, as follows: *“When the war started, they recruited my father into the army. My mother died. I had six siblings. In the mornings we went to school, and in the afternoons we went to pick cotton. I was working. When I was in 10th grade, we came to Kazakhstan. The living conditions were relatively good here.”* (Zeyrek, 2015: 90). Pohl’s (2007) study also supports this information.

Pohl (2007: 32 ve 2014: 18) states that the Soviet regime employed almost all (93%) of the Ahiska Turks as agricultural labourers, and that despite the high death rates due to hunger and disease, this type of work was not changed until the death of Stalin. Pohl’s account gives rise to the thought that the Stalinist regime regarded the Ahiska Turks as ethnic slaves. Anahanım, after explaining that working in the fields was hard work and that they had to work from the early hours of the morning until the late evening, continues like this:

*“We had no news of the world outside. How could we? You are in a village, you work night and day, you cannot read or write and you don’t know Russian! Women’s work was even harder. Besides the children, we had relatives who were made ill and disabled by the bad living conditions during the exile and afterwards. We had to look after them as well. For us, school was a distant dream.”*

Peasants live as an agricultural community; they are obliged to remain in an oral culture. They produce from the fields and the orchards. The peasant’s intellectual world is limited to his village and nature. The city-dweller, however, proceeds to written culture; he has to receive a school education in order to produce. In this way, he also gets to know the world. This, too, was taken away from the Ahiska. Even so, the system, which made conditions difficult for the Ahiska Turks to study, directed them towards areas as far removed as possible from the social sciences, such as working as an agricultural technician, a medical assistant, a veterinarian or an engineer. Narhanım gives the lack of a role model as the reason why Ahiska Turks stayed away from higher education or were merely steered towards areas like technicianship:

*“The people that they saw around them and that they could take as a role model were only agricultural engineers or veterinarians. The ideal of young people who wanted a better life was reached in these occupations. They began to do this in the 1980s.”*

In conclusion, it can be understood that due to production under the Stalinist regime and also its lifestyle, a policy was pursued which did not allow the Ahiska Turks to develop in an intellectual sense, or which was the reason for this. It was as if the Ahiska Turks were exiled in order to do agricultural work on the collective farms of Central Asia. The obligation to reside in their places of exile “forever” and also the ban on leaving their villages prevented them from wishing to live with different lifestyles or to receive education for this purpose. The obligation to reside where they were “forever” was lifted in 1956 together with the death of Stalin and the corresponding decline in his influence. However, since they had not been

able to leave their villages from 1944 until 1956, they were unable to attend university and their education was obstructed. The fact that even primary school students were forced to work in the cotton fields must have impeded their success in education. The ideal occupation that could be a role model for a student who did not have an adequate knowledge of Russian and who worked under very difficult working conditions, might have been *kolkhoz* chairmanship. To do this, he had to finish school, and since he could not leave the village, he could not go to school. In later years, males in particular began to receive technicianship training in high schools and universities. Until the 1980s, however, these were also rare.

### 3.4. Educational Problems Created by Ethnic Discrimination

The Ahiska Turks were exiled into cultures that were very foreign to their own culture and were thousands of kilometres away. Before the Ahiska Turks arrived in their areas of exile, rumours had been spread among the native population that they were “enemies of the people” (Kıprızlı, 2019: 90) and “cannibals” (Şirin Öner, 2019: 71). The local communities met the Ahiska Turks with this prejudice, but after a short time, when they realised that the newcomers were not like that and that they even had the same religion, the situation partially changed. The Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek peoples shared their own poor homes with the newcomers. Even so, the Ahiska Turks noticed this aloof stance. It is understood that the conditions allowed only for thinking about survival. The Ahiska state that they established good relations with the locals within a short time, and that they received their help and support (Şirin Öner, 2019: 72).

Although the Ahiska Turks established good relations, however, they were thrust as a minority into societies where they were foreigners. They were concerned that their children would be brought up with the value judgements of these foreign societies. Instead of sending their children alone to school in the city, they preferred them to remain uneducated with them in the village. They seem to have done this unwillingly. Indeed, in 1957, when they were granted freedom of residence on condition of not returning to Georgia, tens of thousands of Ahiska migrated to Azerbaijan, which was a country where they did not feel alienated linguistically or culturally. Those who went to Azerbaijan attached great importance to high school and university education. Serinaz’s family was one of those migrating to Azerbaijan at that time. In fact, Serinaz’s grandfather graduated from university in Azerbaijan. Serinaz’s mother had this to say:

*“When our people came to Azerbaijan, it was as if they had come to Ahiska. Even if they settled in villages, they sent their children, even alone, to schools in the city so that they could study at high school and university.”*

Anahanim says that those wishing to receive higher education avoided professions like law, public administration and journalism, and steered towards professions such as teaching, nursing, veterinary surgery or agricultural engineering. Although this situation may have stemmed from lack of role models and to not being able to speak Russian proficiently in those years, it may also have been due to ethnic discrimination.

Paşaoğlu, who was a doctor of medicine, stated in his memoirs that they had to work harder than others in order to survive.

“We were torn away from our homeland and brought here as “foreigners”. Our ‘crime’ was being Turkish. They regarded us as a potential danger. (...) If we Ahiska Turks had not worked very hard and had not done our jobs better than others, they would never have made us managers. In Uzbekistan, we were a minority and unprotected.” (Paşaoğlu, 2012: 143).

Gazigil, who was a child of one of the exiled families, applied for university education at the law faculty. He successfully passed the exam but he could not gain entry. To find out why

he could not gain entry, he went to the school and spoke to the dean. The dean told him, *“Who are you to come here and demand your rights? This is Uzbekistan and we give priority to Uzbek students. We will not accept you at the school.”* In the book in which he wrote down these recollections, Gazigil writes that he consulted a high executive of the Communist Party, and that only with his help was he able to register at university (Gazigil, 2016: 42). However, Gazigil writes that after completing law faculty in 1979, he was accepted for a job, but that because he was Turkish, he encountered obstacles. In the end, he entered an unimportant position (legal consultancy in the telephone administration) (Gazigil, 2016: 74-77). A 62-year-old woman who moved from Kazakhstan to Turkey, and whose views were sought for a different study, says, *“Our biggest problem was the fact that we were Turkish. There was marginalisation. They would not allow us to progress.”* (Sürmeli, 2016: 148). Another participant, who was forced to migrate from Uzbekistan to the Russian Federation, shares a similar view: *“It was impossible for Ahiska Turks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to attain important positions in their workplace. The state administrators would never have allowed this.”* (Sürmeli, 2016: 149). These people state that they had good neighbourly relationships and established friendships in the societies in which they lived, but that alienation was experienced to a large extent at school and in the workplace.

The fact that the Ahiska Turks’ problems continued with regard to education is revealed in a study conducted in 2012. A high school student in Kyrgyzstan related the following:

*“At school, they treat us as foreigners. ‘You are Turks, beware and go away’, they say. They treat us badly next to the other students. This is very painful for me. I want to learn but I don’t want to go to school. It would be better to stay in the village.”* (Sağır, 2012: 73).

Narhanım, after stating that “the Soviet education system created solutions for improving the education of minority groups”, says that “when it came to the Turks, this principle was ignored.” Narhanım had this to say on the subject of discrimination:

*“At the time of the Soviet Union, the way was always clear for a youth who finished school with a medal and continued with university education, but the Ahiska were given bad grades in most baccalaureate exams and finished school without a medal so that they could not benefit from such a right. Moreover, many examples of discrimination can be given. They always encountered this statement: ‘Could there ever be people among you Turks whose minds work?’ This statement was always made insultingly and sarcastically.”*

Jazira Sayin (2019: 728) wrote that “In the Soviet period, the Ahiska Turks’ rights to higher education was ignored. In those years, the number of Turks among those working in public institutions was low, and they were among those who registered their own ethnic names in Azerbaijani.” After explaining that being Turkish in the Soviet Union was a disadvantage, Sayin wrote that after Kazakhstan became independent, young Ahiska Turks were able to receive more higher education both in Kazakhstan and abroad.

The Ahiska community were a community that lived by their traditions, and they displayed many characteristics of traditionalism. In traditional societies, there is no equality between men and women like there is today. Male-female division of labour occurs in which male norms are dominant. In this division of labour, women stay at home and are considerably excluded from social life. When the lifestyle is like that, the education of girls at school becomes unnecessary. Families act in this way, and do not wish to send their girls to school when it is not compulsory.

In the literature, in works that examine the consequences of ethnic discrimination caused by the Ahiska Turks' living in foreign cultures, the findings and relevant interpretations are as follows:

Every society moving from the traditionalism of agricultural society to the modernisation of an industrial society assumed a conservative attitude in terms of preserving their traditions and were opposed to moving towards a status of equality for women in social and legal aspects. This situation also applied to the Ahiska Turks. Indeed, it is seen that the Ahiska showed more resistance towards their girls attending school than the Turks of Turkestan. The nationalities policy of the Stalinist regime forced the Ahiska to preserve their identity, which obliged the Ahiska to be conservative. They paid the price for this by taking their girls out of school. Binali, who is one of the first-generation exiles, gave the following account of the education of girls:

*“The Ahiska in Uzbekistan did not send their girls to high school or higher education. They married them off early. There are two reasons for this. The first was conservative attitudes, the idea that we should preserve our culture and not resemble others. This was an anti-assimilationist attitude, and when we look at it now, it appears to have been successful; the Ahiska were not dissolved and lost. The second reason was that the schools were very far away and in the cities, and there were no facilities like dormitories for girls, or if there were, the Ahiska were not aware of these facilities.*

*Until the 1980s, there were very few girls who studied at university, but later, Ahiska girls began to study en masse. During the years 1972-1978, only two Turkish (Ahiska) girls studied in Tashkent. Girls who studied were not regarded favourably, and it was believed that they would not be good wives when they got married. However, in the Soviet period, there was shame and honour. Now there are hardly any morals left. The communists valued women. The Russians educated all their girls, the Uzbeks educated them in the cities, while the Ahiska kept them away from school as much as possible.*

*As long as we failed to educate our girls, we lagged behind compared to other communities. We did not have any artists, composers, performers or scholars, either. We were not involved in civilisation, and we even became unable to hold weddings.”*

Anahanim, however, states that because her mother died when she was still at school, she was taken out of school to deal with housework and her siblings, and that she was very upset about this:

*“I loved school. I went to school in secret a few times without my father's knowledge, but my father was very angry about this. I was never able to go again. I examined the notebooks and books of my friends coming from school, and I studied the subjects that they learned at home. The following year, I was determined to go to school, but they did not send me that year, either. After getting married, I finished school externally while working on the collective. I worked as an accountant on the kolkhoz and retired from there.”*

Anahanim continues as follows:

*“Girls were under excessive pressure. They set a course for us by frequently saying ‘You are Turkish, you cannot behave freely like the other girls. Finish compulsory school and get married.’ There were many relatives around; in fact, the whole Ahiska community was like each other's relatives. We both protected*

*each other and children who were a little free grew up under the constraint of this strict social control.”*

Binali describes the negative effects of traditions on modern education like this:

*“One of the reasons why the Ahiska distanced themselves from education in the first years was our traditions. Girls were not educated apart from compulsory education. Among boys, too, the youngest son was not educated as much as possible. According to our traditions, boys get married and leave home. The youngest son, however, would always stay with the family and look after his parents when he got older. For this reason, they were not sent to school. That was also the case for me. I was married off early and lived with my family. When my father died young, I was able to realise my dream of studying at university.”*

Şirin Mamaserikova, who is one of the most important poets of Kazakhstan, is a person who was both a teacher and worked for many years as an education manager in the district of Merki. In an interview, while stating that people in that region did not look kindly on the education of girls but that they were persuaded over time, she explained that the Ahiska Turks were very conservative and that they needed more time to be persuaded (Çınar, 2016). Anahanım and Narhanım reported that the state was effective with regard to compulsory elementary education. For example, Narhanım stated:

*“Efforts were conducted towards providing elementary education for all individuals who lived in the Soviet geographical area. ‘Compulsory education’ was completely implemented with the declaration that persons who did not send their children to school would be punished by the law. In the 1980s, Ahiska girls who finished school began to form a desire to obtain higher education as well. Parents who did not want their children to do heavy work supported their children. All the same, most girls were married off without continuing their education.”*

However, this situation was different regarding university. Indeed, Narhanım, who wished to come to Turkey to be educated at university when the USSR broke up in 1991, explains the opposition of her family and of the Turkish community who lived in her town towards this move as follows:

*“I wanted to study at university in Turkey. But kindredship was very important for us, and our relatives were against my coming to Turkey. Turkey was a distant place, they did not know anything about it, and most important of all, I was a girl! They did not let girls go free. However, my father was determined to educate me, and he made the final decision.”*

Narhanım explains what it was like to be a girl in an Ahiska Turkish family from her own point of view, like this:

*“It was a disadvantage to be a girl in Ahiska families. Girls were obliged just to go to school, take part in compulsory activities, and return home. Developing their skills in different areas like art and sport was not wanted. Girls were brought up as housewives and for this purpose, they were not supposed to open up to the world. Parents and the Ahiska community monitored the girls more closely. At high school, I was successful in sports competitions and use of weapons, and this success was reported together with photographs in local newspapers. I kept it secret from my family, but my mother read it in the newspaper, and instead of being congratulated, I was scolded.”*

One of the hidden reasons for the exile of the Ahiska community was to employ them as agricultural labourers. Therefore, they were sent to the villages in the exile and allowed to maintain their existing lifestyle. Most of the villages where the Ahiska were settled were a long way from cities. Being far from the city meant that it would be very difficult for them to receive high school and university education, even if they wished.

In the USSR, the name of ethnic groups was written in their identity documents. The Ahiska Turks were marked as “Turks” as an ethnic group in their identity records. Furthermore, Soviet school history books gave a lot of space to the historical Russo-Turkish Wars and imprinted the Turks as “historic enemies” in the minds of their students (Maharramova Cengiz & Şimşek, 2017). In Russia, “the Turk” was perceived as “the enemy within”. As a result, even an ordinary Russian was put on the alert when it came to the Turks. Binali’s experiences can be given as an example of this:

Through his own personal effort, Binali met with Raşidov, the President of Uzbekistan, and with his support, registered at university, graduated with success, and was appointed as a teacher. *“But I could not establish good relations with the school’s Russian managers. They were disturbed by the fact that I was Turkish and they made me uncomfortable. A few years later, I was forced to abandon the teaching profession. I became a journalist and so on.”* Narhanım also attributes the fact that the gold medal she was awarded on finishing high school was somehow taken from her and given to a student who was Russian, and also that she was prevented from passing the university exam, to the fact that she was Turkish.

The Ahiska Turks were settled in the areas to which they were exiled as “enemies of the people” or “traitors”, and were forced to live under martial law. In later periods, too, it was rare for them to be promoted among state staff other than occupations like *kolkhoz* manager, simply because they were ethnic Turks. The Turks did not force this issue, either, since the Ahiska Turks did not join the Communist Party, and stayed away from it, as they were angry or resentful towards a political system that oppressed them. Yet those who were not members of the party could not be promoted to management or senior duties. In this way, the Ahiska Turks became distanced from politics and management. As a natural consequence of the situation, the Ahiska Turks were unable to rise to the higher levels of society. In her interview, Narhanım had the following to say:

*“Since I finished school with honours, after high school, the Communist Party invited me to become a member of the party. When I told my father about the invitation, he grew angry. ‘If you become a member of that I will break your leg’, he said. I also heard others say, ‘They (the Communists) deported us from the Caucasus, from our homeland, and broke up our home. Stay away from them. It was the Communist Party that exiled us, and Stalin was at their head.’ A wall was erected against the Communist Party in Ahiska society. A mentality of ‘Let them keep away from us, let’s not suffer any more harm; we don’t want their benefits, either’ predominated. Since the Ahiska were not generally in favour of becoming Communist Party members, they were unable to rise to higher positions other than in types of management such as *kolkhoz* management, because in the first years, they were a ‘penalised community’, and in later years, they did not become party members.”*

Narhanım, who narrated the above recollection and observation, still works in Turkey as an academician, and when she recalls her time as a student in the period of the USSR, she expresses the ethnic discrimination she was exposed to as follows:

*“Just when I was about to finish high school with a gold medal, things happened at the last minute that I could not understand, and I missed the medal; they gave it to a Russian student. I took the university exams twice in two years, but I could not get into university. I attribute my lack of success to two reasons: firstly, because I did not give a bribe, and secondly, because I was Turkish. The fact that my ethnic origin was recorded as Turkish in my identity document was a disadvantage.”* This statement indicates that there was prejudice during the period of the USSR.

Following the break-up of the USSR, too, the Ahiska Turks were subjected to similar treatment by the Kazakhs, who had learned the role of “dominant society” from the Russians. The Ahiska Turks reported that even the Orthodox Russians lived more comfortably than they did, that they were subjected to discrimination, and that even certain procedures that were simple for the Kazakhs and Russians in government offices were made more difficult for themselves (Ağır, 2017: 79). A similar situation can be stated for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Binali expresses the ethnic prejudice and the attitude that they themselves adopted against ethnic discrimination as follows:

*“We also educated the children at home on every subject. First and foremost was identity... We advised the children to remember that ‘We are not Uzbek or Russian; we are Turkish and Muslim. Take care with your demeanour and your actions, travel on the right road, and don’t give our community a bad name,’ and we would keep tabs on the children outside as well. (We did this) not only for our own children, as we counted all children of the Ahiska as our own children. Over there, we had to give an impression of unity in order to display our differences as Ahiska and to appear strong against possible alienation.”*

Binali’s observations and opinions are also supported by Aydıngün & Aydıngün (2015: 139). According to the writers, the Ahiska Turks were able to maintain their existence by developing their survival strategies with the most extensive family ties. In this family, children of siblings (cousins) were accepted as siblings, and spouses of siblings and even their families were included within the conception of the family. In this way, in a family type, “values such as the success of the family and prestige of the family name were placed ahead of individual freedoms. In return for the restriction of their freedoms, individuals were given a great deal of both material and spiritual support.” (Aydıngün & Aydıngün, 2015: 140)

Serinaz, who was the fourth source person, is the nine-year-old girl of a family who came to Georgia as “citizens” after the break-up of the Soviet Union but were not allowed to settle in Ahiska, and who settled in a village near Batum. The family have problems with adaptation in Georgia. Looking at her family history, it can be thought that Serinaz’s bad luck will continue.

Serinaz’s great grandfather was exiled from Ahiska to Uzbekistan. Her grandfather was born in Uzbekistan. When he grew up, they moved to Azerbaijan since it is close to Ahiska. Serinaz’s mother was born in Azerbaijan. When the Soviet Union broke up, they moved to Georgia. The family could not study due to poverty. Serinaz’s mother does not have a diploma of any kind. She can read and write, and speaks a little Georgian. They have a scattered family, with relatives in Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and some cities in Turkey.

Serinaz lives with her mother, grandmother and a brother aged 7. Her mother works in Bursa as a clandestine worker. Her father is an alcoholic and drug addict. As he was involved



in certain crimes, he was deported for a period of 5 years. Since her family problems were continuing and she did not have Turkish citizenship, Serinaz was not able to register at school for two years despite reaching school age. By chance, a benefactor noticed the situation and gave assistance to this family. Therefore, Serinaz and her brother Ahmet were able to register at school.

Serinaz is two years older than her classmates. She says that this is not a problem. She is top in her class. Her teacher is apparently very fond of her. When she grows up, she wants to be a teacher. One issue she complains about is that her brother is bullied by his classmates because he is foreign (!)

The Ahiska Turks began to experience ethnic problems following their exile. These occurred in two ways. The first was that they were put under pressure by the large ethnic groups around them. The second was problems due to withdrawing into themselves and conservatism in order to protect their own values. Both of these were reasons that complicated or even prevented the education of Ahiska Turkish children and youth. The Ahiska Turks believe that they encountered ethnic discrimination and that this prevented them from climbing the career ladder.

In the Soviet Union, every citizen's ethnic origin was written in their passports. It can be understood that the Ahiska Turks' declaring themselves to be "Turkish" caused them to encounter further discrimination. The reason for this may be due to history education or to the imprints left in the collective memory by the historical Russo-Turkish Wars. Russian history is like the history of the struggle with the Turks. The Ahiska "Turks" must have been understood as the enemy. It is seen that some Ahiska Turks declared themselves as "Azeri" in order to overcome this pressure and obstruction. Yet all things considered, they were a large group of people who insisted on their "Turkish" identity. Young people who grew up in this environment could not be ambitious in their educational careers.

The Ahiska Turks' avoidance of politics also prevented them from integrating with the system and moving up the career ladder. Following the calamity of exile, they became angry and resentful towards the Communist Party. It can be said that they distanced themselves from the Party by adopting a passive attitude. This, however, was the biggest obstacle to promotion.

The Ahiska Turks became more conservative in order to protect their own cultural values against others in the place of exile. This, however, resulted in girls especially becoming distanced from education. To sum up, various consequences of ethnic discrimination inflicted a heavy blow on the education lives of the Ahiska Turks.

#### **4. Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions**

The city of Ahiska (Akhaltzikhe) was the centre of the Pashalik of Akhalzik or Eyalet of Childir at the time of the Ottoman Empire. During the Russo-Turkish Wars, it frequently changed hands, and finally, Ahiska and the surrounding area were ceded to Russia (later Georgia). However, the provinces of Ardahan, Kars, Artvin and Erzurum, which belonged to this region, remained in the Ottoman Empire (later Turkey). The community that lived in this area was split up. The Ahiska Turks were the Turkish community which remained in Georgia and which is the subject of this research. In 1944, the Turks who lived in Ahiska, and the smaller ethnic groups of Kurds and Hamshenis who accompanied them, were suddenly exiled to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As Pohl (1999) revealed, the exiling of the Ahiska Turks was one of the ethnic cleansings carried out by the Stalinist regime.

Exiled communities suffer great losses within a short time in many areas, such as language, history, art, culture, empirical knowledge, health and population. These lead to

psychological traumas. The Ahiska Turks also suffered many losses, principally in population, during and after the 1944 exile, due to the bad living conditions that they encountered. This situation shows parallelism with losses experienced by other exiled communities (Ediev, 2003: 265; Alam, 2019). One of these losses was in education. In this research, the educational losses that occurred due to reasons stemming from the exile of the Ahiska Turks were investigated. Education enables a society to maintain its existence by developing its human resources. It was revealed that for reasons originating from their exile, the Ahiska Turks were unable to benefit sufficiently from education for several generations. Moreover, the people whose views were consulted in the research, and written sources that support their views, revealed tragic results of the exile.

Due to the exile and its consequences, the Ahiska Turks had difficulty not only in developing their qualities by receiving a good education, but also even in transferring their cultural heritage. As a result of this, they were unable to produce important scientific, cultural and artistic works during the period of exile. Not only were they unable to learn their own history and culture, they were also unable to explain their own civilisation to others. For this reason, they were subjected to alienation in the society in which they lived, and even to massacres (such as the 1989 Fergana pogrom).

Because of the educational obstacles, Ahiska Turks suffered losses in basic areas such as language, literature, art, science and culture. This situation was due to their being an ethnic minority group punished with the sentence of exile.

A significant percentage of the intellectuals and opinion leaders raised by the Ahiska Turks were eliminated with false accusations such as that they were anti-regime, land barons, bourgeois nationalists or Panturkists. Not only were these revealed to be slander in revised judgements made after the death of Stalin, the exile was also accepted as a political slander (Zakon, 2020). Thousands of literate people were annihilated during the years 1930-1938 even though, far from being anti-regime, they supported the socialist regime. In this way, the number of educated people who could guide society decreased significantly. Men up to the age of 55 who were literate, who were better able to use Russian, the official language, and who knew the functioning of the system in the country, were recruited into the army and sent to fight in the Second World War. While the men were serving in the Russian army, their families were exiled to areas thousands of kilometres away with the label of “enemy of the people”. The people who were exiled on 14th November 1944 were generally poorly educated, illiterate and monolingual women, children and old people. These people were unable to guide their children educationally during and after the exile.

The Ahiska Turks’ alphabet was changed at least four times during Stalin’s time. These changes were not due to the needs of society, but stemmed from the assimilationist policies of the regime. In their study, Bugai (1992) and Yemelianova (2015) also revealed the consequences of these policies. The consequences of this were that reading and writing became more difficult, people were unable to read printed documents and books from the past, the culture of reading was weakened, and reading became a burdensome task. Even this situation alone can seriously disrupt a society’s education life and consequently, its quality of life as a whole.

In their places of exile, the Ahiska Turks were settled in small groups in villages. Since there were numerically very few of them in each village, they were unable to receive education in the mother tongue, a right normally granted by the Soviet regime to all its citizens. Due to being intimidated by oppression and to being branded as “guilty people”, they could not insist on requesting a number of rights. Despite having a developed mother

tongue, they were prevented from using this when educating their children. This situation also prevented the Ahiska Turks from gaining the expected returns from education.

The Ahiska Turks were forced to become agricultural labourers and to remain so. From 1944 onwards, they were prohibited from leaving the villages where they were settled without permission and were forced to live there “forever”. This decree was lifted in 1956. During this period, they lived a camp life under very difficult conditions. Even elementary students were made to work in the cotton fields. Even if there was a primary school in the village, young people could not receive education at high school or university, and thus, they were prevented from being educated. Just as they were unable to benefit adequately from education, first-generation exiles, who did not know Russian sufficiently, also lived in a restricted world without a role model in the village, and living in this limited world on the *kolkhoz*, they grew up deprived of knowledge of what other occupations and lifestyles were like.

In the Soviet Union, people’s ethnic origins were written in their passports. For historical reasons, “being Turkish” in Russia caused them to be placed in the category of a captive people or an enemy community. Because of oppression, some Ahiska Turks were forced to declare their own ethnicity as “Azeri” (Sayin, 2019). Prejudices such as these also prevented the Ahiska Turks from moving up the career ladder. Due to pressures and assimilationist policies like these, the Ahiska Turks were obliged to become more conservative. They became a community that especially maintained the feudal community values of the middle ages, kept within the bounds of old traditions that should have been surpassed with time and clung more tightly to them, and did not give importance to school education, especially for girls.

The Ahiska Turks were prevented from raising their intellectuals, and were unable to put their intangible cultural values into writing and record them. This led to a significant loss of culture. Since the Ahiska Turks could not establish warm relations with the Communist Party who had sent them into exile, they could not participate in management, move up the career ladder, or defend their rights in legal environments. All of these originated from the exile.

In conclusion, the Ahiska Turks, who lived in the Ahiska region of Georgia at the time of the Soviet Union, have still not escaped from the heavy consequences of the exile that they experienced under the Stalinist regime in 1944, or from the state of exile. The situations revealed in the details given by certain researchers from Russia support the findings of this study (Bugai, 1994; Yemelianova, 2015; Akkieva, 2018). In this study, in which the educational consequences of exile have been investigated, the education of the Ahiska Turks was hindered by the loss of their intellectuals, the complication of literacy for them, their conversion into forced agricultural labourers, and their subjection to ethnic oppression, and in this way, they became a community whose individual and communal development was severely disrupted.

A section of Ahiska came to Turkey, and they have now made themselves at home. They can speak about and relate their experiences freely. The type of educational and intellectual barriers that the Ahiska have faced should be revealed with comprehensive studies in which the recollections of Ahiska are compiled. The fact that the Ahiska were forced to become more conservative due to the conditions of exile has kept their collective memories active. The recording and documentation of the memories, traditions, values and folkloric products that the Ahiska have stored in their collective memories awaits interested researchers.

## 5. Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

## **6. Ethics Committee Approval**

Ethics committee approval was received from Kafkas University (No. 28644117-905.02/35)

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