

Name giving traditions among Adyghe-Abkhaz in Adapazarı-Düzce Region (Turkey)

Jade Cemre Erciyes

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This paper is divided in three sections. The first is the introduction and the name giving traditions in different cultural contexts. The second is about the name giving traditions of Abkhaz and Adyghe or as I will refer to them here, Circassians. The third is on the tradition of avoiding the names of elderlies or members of the family-in-law- the name taboo tradition of Circassians.

Circassians, or the Adyghe-Abkhaz people came to Anatolia after the invasion of their homeland- the Caucasus- by the Tsarist Russia in the second half of the 19th century. This forced deportation, is also named as the Big Exile. After the exile Circassians protected their culture and traditions, the *khabze*, but some of their traditions were also influenced by the geographical and social structures in their new environment.

This paper is about the name giving traditions (*akhdz akhtsara akhabz*) of the Circassians (Adyghe-Abkhaz) living in north-west Turkey in Adapazarı-Düzce region. Their child naming traditions is at the focus of the study but to have a better understanding of the importance of name choosing, related traditions (such as the *akhdz shara*) will also be considered. In this study, two in depth interviews with elderly women aged over 70 are taken as the main source of information. However, secondary sources were also examined and other Circassians living in the region were also interviewed.

Name Giving Traditions in Different Cultural Contexts

Most names are related to religious beliefs or ethnic roots. Some names are common to different geographical contexts or different languages. The Muslims, making up the main religious group in Anatolia, independent of their ethnic origin, give their children names according to the Islamic traditions.

According to these traditions, the name should not be one that can make the child question the Islamic beliefs, or that can make the child shamed of him/herself.¹ The Islamic traditions suggest that the child should be given a name on one of the following days after the birth: Monday, Thursday, Friday and the name is told to the ear of the child, with prayers, by the eldest of the family.

For this, the eldest takes the child, sings the Ezan and tells the middle name (the name given to the child while its umbilical cord is cut) to the child's right ear and tells the given name with prayers to the left ear.²

According to shamanic beliefs, the new born is given different names because of the fear that it can be hurt by evil spirits. Also, sometimes, in order to protect the child, people would act as if its

1 İbrahim Sarıçam, Hz. Muhammed ve Evrensel Mesajı [Prophet Muhammad and his Universal Message], D.İ.B. Publications, Ankara, 2003, pg.16.

2 Yalçın Toker. A'dan Z'ye Ansiklopedik Çocuk İsimleri [Encyclopedic Children Names from A to Z], Huzur Publications, İstanbul, 2002, pg 9.

the baby of another family and that family would take care of the child. After a while when it is believed that the evil spirits have left, the child would come back home and he would be given his real name.³

According to Jewish believes, name giving is an act that requires power and creativity. The name should be thought over and the parents should spend time on choosing the right name. Because parents, with the names they give to their children, connect them to the old generations and tie their hopes to their children. The new generations usually had double names, one traditional name for religious rituals and another according to where they live.⁴ Such as a Jewish in Anatolia using Joseph for rituals and Yusuf in daily life.

Besides names given according to religious believes people have also given names according to their ethnic origin. However, in Turkey, before it was changed in 2003, the Turkish citizens were not allowed to give names that contradicted with the “national culture” (Turkic-Islamic culture), or the moral order, customs and traditions. As part of the adaptation process with EU Laws the words “national culture, customs and traditions” were removed from the related law.⁵

Before these changes, most ethnic names, including Abkhaz-Adyghe names, were rejected by the initiative of the officers in the birth registration office. Due to this situation many social groups use different names for official registration and in daily life.

In Anatolia, the name is believed to have a direct effect on the owner.⁶ Among the Hitits, one of the old civilazitions of Anatolia, the name chosen was related to the events taking place during the birth or according to a characteristic the child has.⁷ Among old Turks, the boys were given names after reaching puberty according to his courage.⁸ Names reminiscent of war, victory, power and strength were given to boys and pleasatness, preciosness, beauty and good heartedness were given to girls.⁹

With the acceptance of Islam, the Turks started to give first Arabic than Persian names to their children.¹⁰ In the more near future families thoughts about the child such as wanting to have that child or not, or waiting for a boy but having a girl, wishing that it would be last child, a late comer to the family, having lost an elderly of a family or another child recently, and many other believes or livings effected the choices of names.¹¹ Among the Turks, the name giving, as in many cultures were celebrated with feasts and festivities. Even today, it is very frequent custom to give a feast during the name giving of the child.¹²

3 Erkal Zenger, Postmodern Şamanizm Alevilik ve Ozanlar [Postmodern Shamanism, Alevi Believes and The Ozans], Ayyıldız Publications, Ankara, 2000, pg. 95

4 Jewish Basics: Traditions, Baby Naming Background, http://www.tdhs-nw.org/jewish_basics/traditions.php3?tid=19

5 Nüfus Mevzuatı [Demographic Law], http://www.nvi.gov.tr/attached/NVI/nufus_mevzuati_pdf/genelge_pdf/23EvlendirmMeDenReh.pdf

6 Meltem Santur, Doğum Gelenekleri [Birth Traditions], Folklor Araştırmacıları Vakfı, http://www.folklor.org.tr/haber_detay.asp?id=34

7 Harry A. Hoffner, Birth and Name-Giving in Hittite Texts, Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Volume 27, Number 3, pg. 198-203.

8 Güllü Yoloğlu, Türklerin Aile Merasimleri [The family celebrations of Turks], Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 1999, sf.92.

9 Yalçın Toker. A'dan Z'ye Ansiklopedik Çocuk İsimleri [Encyclopedic Children Names from A to Z], Huzur Publications, İstanbul, 2002, pg. 5.

10 M. Kemal Çalık, Türk Ad ve Soyadı Sözlüğü [Turkish Names and Surnames Dictionary], Kastaş Yayınları, İstanbul, 1991, sf.7.

11 Meltem Santur, Doğum Gelenekleri [Birth Traditions], Folklor Araştırmacıları Vakfı, http://www.folklor.org.tr/haber_detay.asp?id=34

12 Kültür Bakanlığı [Ministry of Culture], Bebeğe Ad Koyma [Name giving to the baby], <http://discoverturkey.com/kultursanat/halk-gelenek-bebek.html>

Name Giving Traditions among Circassians

Traditionally, Circassians give great importance to their names. Inal-ipa refers to the importance of the names for Abkhaz people in his study of the Antroponomy of Abkhaz: The name, according to him is the twin of the person. It is the only thing that you own in your eternity. Besides, it is a symbol with which you are called by. It has an unbreakable connection to the person from birth. For Abkhaz people, it is not only a word to identify people but it does decorate the person.¹³

Adyghe people believed that names live with the owners all their lives. That's why, the faith of the newborn, how he will live his life and what kind of a character he will have is believed to be equalized with his name.¹⁴

The Circassians would never give names of neither the elderly of the family or the village, nor the famous people of their society, no matter they are alive or death. This is because of the belief that, this way, the child would be given the responsibilities of a life that does not belong to him.

An important aspect of the Circassian society is *respect*. Desrespectable of age or gender, the individuals show respect to each other and to the society they live in, and in return wait for respect. The name giving traditions are also connected to these social relations based on respect.

The Adyghe Nane, aged 78, living in a village in Adapazarı, started to tell me how they would give names to children when she was young with following words: *“We could not override our mother, father or if they were not alive the other elders of our family, we could never give the names that we want to our children”*.

The Circassians applied their social traditions more strictly in their extended families. The elderly always had the last word, the youngsters would only talk when they were given the permission to. The brides, on the other hand, would never talk with the elderly of the families (especially men). While naming their children the mother and the father of the child never had a right to comment. As in many situations the elderly of the family would decide.

“When I was pregnant to my first child, his aunt (yahshadu)¹⁵ told his grandfather -if it will be a boy, I have thought of a name, I will give his name. Since she was first to say, no other elderly suggested another name. When he was born, they called him Salih as she had wanted.”

The Adighe Nane tells how her other children were named: *“My second child was given a name by his grandfather, Orhan, as in Orhan Gazi- the second ruler of the Ottomans. When my third son Recep was born again his grandfather chose his name. When I had my fourth child, a girl, my mother give her the name Nurhan. My husband's family was thinking of what name to give and my mother send a message with elderly neighbours. As part of our tradition they would not come to see the newborn or the mother after the birth. We were in the same village but my mother was not coming to see me. She send a message saying if the elderlies of the family would accept she would suggest the name Nurhan. A close relative's daughter was recently named Reyhan. So when my mother-in-law heard the name she liked the harmony of the two girls names and they gave my daughter this name. I had two other children born in Muharem and Shaban months of the Islamic calendar- given the names of the months. But they did not live.”*

13 Shalva D. Inal-ipa, Antroponomy Abkhazov, pg. 12-13

14 Yusuf Tleusten, Name Giving [Adyghean], in the book by Jene Sul entitled Adige Zehetç'e Khabzeher [Adyghe Social Customs], Translation to Turkish from Adyghean: Çurmit Sebahattin, pg. 9-10.

15 Here the aunt refers to a relative of the extended family. Circassians would accept their cousins as their siblings and all relatives from the mothers and fathers' families would be called uncle and aunt.

The Adighe Nane exemplifies how the Circassians got affected from the Islamic culture when they came to Anatolia. Though it was against their traditions they have given names of important people or the elderly of the families to the newborns, the Arabic names have replaced the Circassian names.

The Abkhaz Nandu, aged 71, from Düzce also told how the elderly decided the name to be given to children: *“The mother and father of the new born child would not mention their thoughts of the name to be given to their child. If there was the grandfather, or an elderly uncle or a brother at the house they would give the name to the child. The mother and father of the child would never state their ideas. The men, grandmothers, grandfathers, the elderly of the family would come together, discuss and decide. Nobody would insist on giving a name. I have thought of a name, they would say, what do you think?, they would ask. Do you think it is suitable they would ask. They would all together decide the name... My two sons names were given by their uncle. My mother chosed the name for my daughter. The mother-in-law can also give a name. The name can be chosen both my the mother's family and the father's family.*

While talking with Adige Nane, her bride came and attended our conversation. She told us how her children were given names: *“My children's names were given by my brother-in-law, Salih. He was than one of the eldest of the family. He was doing his military service when I would have my first child. Than there was no phone to call. My sister-in-law wrote him a letter and said – we will have a nephew. I would like to give him the name Ömer. What do you say?- and than Salih responded the child should be given the name Ömer. When I would have my second child he said I have looked in many books for two days and this child should be given the name Enes (a name from Islamic history). My father-in-law said than the next child to be born should be given the name Ebubekir, and the next Osman. First my brother-in-law had a child but that bride did not accepted either of the names. Everybody do not listen to the elderly Besides, today it is much worse. We were not like that. When I will have a bride I will not tell her a word. And even if I say, no bride will accept that you name her child.*

According to old Circassian traditions, to announce that they had a child the families would fire a gun or hang a flag in the roof of the house.¹⁶ Abkhaz Nandu, said she remembers when a boy was born they would fire in double numbers (such as 4,6,8...) and if it was a girl in single numbers (such as 3,5...).

Also, traditionally the elders of the family would plant a tree in the garden of the house and even it is said that they would call the tree the name of the baby.¹⁷ When talking with an informant in Adapazarı, she remebered that her father had planted a tree in the garden of their village house when she was born.

The name giving ceremony among both Adyg and Abkhaz takes place according to Islamic laws. A feast is given to relatives and neighbours. Imam or an elderly of the family says the name of the child three times with prayers to his ear.

Another interesting tradition we learned from Abkhaz Nandu is that the “name changing”. When a child gets ill too frequently it was believed that the name given to that child did not fitted well. With a feast given to all villagers, the child would be given a new name: *“A child's eyes had a problem. He got very ill. The elderly said his name did not fit him well, they told the family to change it. The family gave a feast. They prepared the national cousine and with this celebrations they changed the child's name”.*

16 Yusuf Tleusten, Name Giving [Adyghean], in the book by Jene Sul entitled Adige Zehetiç'e Khabzeher [Adyghe Social Customs], Translation to Turkish from Adyghean: Çurmit Sebahattin, pg. 9-10.

17 Yusuf Tleusten, Name Giving [Adyghean], in the book by Jene Sul entitled Adige Zehetiç'e Khabzeher [Adyghe Social Customs], Translation to Turkish from Adyghean: Çurmit Sebahattin, pg. 9-10.

When I told about this tradition to our Abkhaz writer and researcher from Düzce, Kutarba Hayri Ersoy, he told me his name was also changed. When he was just a little baby he was getting ill very frequently. When he was three months old his family gave a feast to change his name. Then, the husband of his aunt was also visiting them and he suggested the name Hayri.

As we have mentioned before, due to laws and regulations in Turkey and as we will mention in the next section because of the *name taboo* many Circassians in Turkey have at least two different names. The first one is the official name in the birth registration and for many people this name is not known by even close relatives.

The second one, that can be called little name, usually replaces the real name and is used by everyone. This tradition is much more protected among the Abkhaz and Uzunyayla region Kabardeys. For example, the Abkhaz Nandu was officially named as Peknur which is an Islamic name but she was introduced to me as Tug. Similarly, many other Abkhaz women I interviewed in Düzce region had two names such as Bebek (official name Yıldız) or Kmaraca (official name Nezihah)...

Name Taboo

The social relations of Circassians are organized under strict rules called *Khabz*. Even stricter rules apply within family relations. Sula Benet tells us about the traditions of Abkhaz in 1972 with the following words: A husband and wife would never call each other's name or sit side by side near their elderly relatives, or they would never talk to each other near strangers. A woman could even never in her life call his husband's name.¹⁸ Jabagi Baj in his study of the Social Life and Customs in Cherkessia tells us that the husband too, can never call his wife with her name. He calls her by her family name.¹⁹

Traditionally the brides do not call any member of their family-in-law with their names. They do not talk with the elderly at all, and they would give "little names" to their youngsters. The children are also given little names most of the time. Murat Papshu, in his study of the Circassian names in the Diaspora explains that these names usually refer to sympathy or a compliment to the child made up of one or two syllable words.²⁰ The children also do not call their parents near others.

According to Shalva Inal-İpa, the names have many functions one of which is as in the animistic belief period, to protect people from evil spirits. In all religions, mystic powers have been leaned to names. Like the dictation of the Christian belief of the strict list of holy people names.²¹ Inal-İpa also informs us that the noble Abkhaz (*aamista*) for political reasons had double names- one according to the time a Christian, a Muslim or other name, other a local Abkhaz name. The villagers, on the other hand, used two names too- one official and one house name both of which were Abkhaz names left from the animist period.²²

The house names or little names are used among Circassians since it was a taboo at some instances. Some researchers argue that this is a custom left from the animist period as Shalva Inal-İpa suggests. Bğajnokko Barasbiy says in his study of Archaic elements of Circassian language that because of the belief that the earth is full of evil spirits, people are afraid that disasters, illnesses and death could happen to them, their children and relatives. So to get in harmony with or to deceive the

18 Sula Benet, *Abhazlar: Kafkasların Uzun Ömürlü İnsanları* [The Abkhaz: Long Living people of the Caucasus, Kafkas Derneği, 2002. sf. 88.

19 Jabağı Baj. "Çerkesya'da Sosyal Yaşayış ve Adetler" Social Life and Customs in Cherkessia in the book by Yaşar Bağ entitled *Türklerde ve Çerkeslerde İslam Öncesi Kültür Din Tanrı* [Culture, Religion, God among Turks and Circassians before Islam], Çivi Yazıları, 1997. pg. 214.

20 Murat Papşu. *Çerkes Adları Sözlüğü* [Dictionary of Circassian Names], Çivi Yazıları, 2002. pg. 47.

21 Shalva Inal-İpa, *Antroponomy Abkhazov*, pg. 12-13

22 Shalva Inal-İpa, *Antroponomy Abkhazov*, pg. 24-25

evil spirits they have the *name taboo*. 23

Abkhaz Nandu explains why the Circassians do not prefer to give the elderlies names to their children in relation to name taboo tradition: *“According to our customs when a woman becomes a bride and comes to the house of her husband, she will not talk or sit near her elderlies such as her father-in-law. She would behave in great respect to both father-in-law and mother-in-law. For example, I am a bride in this house. If my child is given the name of my brother-in-law, I can never tell this name. It would not be suitable to our customs. We would never give our children names of elders of our family or our village elderly. When I was young, the children were given Turkish names but were always called with Abkhazian names. For example my son's name is Sabahattin. His father would call him Kako. His friends still call him Kako.”*

Adighe Nane, tells how she felt uncomfortable when his first child was named after his grand-grandfather in contrast to traditions: *“It was the name of the father of my father-in-law. The brides never tell the name of their brother-in-laws or men of the family of their husbands. We have this custom. We could never call our child near the elderly. Now I had this problem, I could not call my son with his real name even when we were alone. Before, they would give Adyghe names to children. Such as Gupse, Nefne, Janset. It was a shame for the mother to call her children with their real names. For example, I would call you -if you were my daughter- with a name such as pishashe (girl), or a beautiful name such as Nefne (Light) or some little name like that in Adyghean.”*

The name taboo is not a custom that creates discomfort all the time. Usually, the creativity of the brides of name giving to *taboos* lefts good memories in people. The Abkhaz Nandu, for example, told me how all the brides in their village called the watch (which is saat in Turkish) cikcik just because an elderly man in their village was named Saat.

Murat Papşu in his study tells the story of a woman whose husband's name is Mahmut. The woman wants to go to the Mahmutpasha Market Place and when her daughter asks her where they will go she responds “to your fathers market place”.²⁴

To give some examples of names used instead of taboo names to father-in-laws efendi baba (meaning Mr. Father in Turkish), beybba (or beybaba meaning prince father), dedah (prince grandfather), to brother-in-laws, little bey, little prince, beautiful brother, to mother-in-laws nenah, nane, Nenefuw (elderly mother); to brides in Adyghean Nise (bride), Nisegah (tall bride), Nisefuw (elderly bride), ...In Abkhazian Tatsa (gelin), Tatsa khucu (küçük gelin), Tatsa du (büyük gelin)...

Results

The Adyghe of the Düzce-Adapazarı region, living closer to the city centers, are relatively more urbanized and more assimilated in terms of cultural values and traditions. However, recent developments in Turkey – changes in name giving law in relation to EU process- resulted among all Adyghe and Abkhaz in revival of national values such as giving Abkhaz and Adyghe names to their children.

23 Bğajnoko Barasbiy, Çerkesce'de Arkaik Öğeler ve Dilin Alt Sistemleri: Avcı dili [The Archaic elements and sub systems of Circassian language: The hunters' language], Alaşara Dergisi, Nart Publications, Istanbul, Volume December 1995-January 1996, pg. 28-29.

24 Murat Papşu. Çerkes Adları Sözlüğü [Dictionary of Circassian Names], Çivi Yazıları, 2002. pg. 50.