



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Posting Practices and Identity Production
Social Media Use Among the Circassian Diaspora in Amman

verfasst von | submitted by
Alina Bzhadug

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 656

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium CREOLE-Cultural Differences and
Transnational Processes

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Assoz. Prof. Dr. Sanderien Verstappen

Abstract

English

Circassians are one of the peoples from the North-West Caucasus that were violently displaced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a result of Russian imperialistic expansion in the region. Circassian people who survived the journey settled in the Ottoman Empire, including the territories of the present-day Jordan. Currently in Jordan, many Circassians actively participate in sustaining diasporic groupness, have their own institutions, and dream of visiting or returning to the homeland one day.

This thesis examines how Circassian diasporic groupness in Amman is practiced on social media platforms. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Amman, including discourse analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with Circassian people, I argue that social media functions as a complex infrastructure, one in which people choose online spaces, posting formats, and privacy settings strategically, based on what they want to achieve and what they want to avoid.

The findings of this thesis are organized in two empirical chapters. The first argues that for the Circassian diaspora, social media functions as an important site of identity production - simultaneously an organizational tool, a cultural and historical archive, a space for transnational communication and maintenance of networks of mutual support, a stage for artistic expression, and a platform where the Circassian collective identity that is worthy of recognition and respect is performed. The second chapter argues that even though the above-mentioned activity is frequent and visible, many Circassians refrain from participating in it, especially in conversations of political, historical, and ideological nature, to avoid both the structural repercussions that come from outside the community and the social consequences enforced from within it. Together, these arguments suggest that Circassian social media use in Jordan is defined by both continuous performance and deliberate silence.

This thesis adds to the literature on social media as a tool for cultural preservation by showing that preservation does not occur naturally, but in conditions of constant tension between what is beneficial to show and what is better kept invisible. It additionally extends the accounts of

self-censorship mechanisms by presenting a case in which internal community dynamics are just as successful in silencing individuals as state surveillance and pressures imposed from outside societies. Finally, this study presents the first ethnographic account of the Circassian diaspora in Jordan through the lens of media and diaspora anthropology.

German

Die Tscherkessen sind eines der Völker des Nordwestkavkasus, die im achtzehnten und neunzehnten Jahrhundert infolge der russischen imperialistischen Expansion in dieser Region gewaltsam vertrieben wurden. Die Tscherkessen, die diese Reise überlebten, siedelten sich im Osmanischen Reich, einschließlich des heutigen Jordaniens, an. Heutzutage nehmen viele Tscherkessen in Jordanien aktiv daran teil, die diasporische Gruppenidentität aufrechtzuerhalten, haben ihre eigenen Institutionen und träumen davon, eines Tages ihre Heimat zu besuchen oder dorthin zurückzukehren.

Diese Arbeit untersucht, wie die tscherkessische diasporische Gruppenidentität in Amman auf sozialen Medienplattformen praktiziert wird. Auf der Grundlage ethnografischer Feldforschung in Amman - einschließlich Diskursanalyse, teilnehmender Beobachtung und semistrukturierter Interviews mit Tscherkessen - argumentiere ich, dass soziale Medien als komplexe Infrastruktur fungieren, in der Menschen Online-Räume, Posting-Formate und Datenschutzeinstellungen strategisch wählen, basierend auf dem, was sie erreichen und was sie vermeiden wollen.

Die Ergebnisse dieser Arbeit sind in zwei empirischen Kapiteln gegliedert. Das erste argumentiert, dass soziale Medien für die tscherkessische Diaspora ein wichtiger Ort der Identitätsproduktion sind - sowie ein organisatorisches Werkzeug, ein kulturelles und historisches Archiv, ein Raum für transnationale Kommunikation und die Pflege gegenseitiger Unterstützungsnetzwerke, eine Bühne für künstlerischen Ausdruck und eine Plattform, auf der die kollektive tscherkessische Identität, die Anerkennung und Respekt verdient, dargestellt wird. Das zweite Kapitel argumentiert, dass viele Tscherkessen, obwohl die oben genannten Aktivitäten häufig und sichtbar sind, vermeiden, daran teilzunehmen - insbesondere an Gesprächen politischer, historischer und ideologischer Natur - um sowohl die strukturellen Repressionen zu vermeiden, die von außerhalb der Gemeinschaft kommen, als auch die sozialen Konsequenzen, die von innen heraus durchgesetzt werden. Zusammengefasst legen diese Argumente nahe, dass die Nutzung sozialer Medien durch Tscherkessen in Jordanien sowohl durch kontinuierliche Performanz als auch durch bewusstes Schweigen geprägt ist.

Diese Arbeit ergänzt die Literatur über soziale Medien als Werkzeug zur kulturellen Bewahrung, indem sie zeigt, dass Bewahrung nicht natürlich stattfindet, sondern unter ständiger Spannung zwischen dem, was vorteilhaft zu zeigen ist, und dem, was besser unsichtbar bleibt. Sie erweitert zudem die Auseinandersetzung mit Selbstzensur-Mechanismen, indem sie beschreibt, dass in diesem Fall interne Gemeinschaftsdynamiken genauso erfolgreich darin sind, Einzelpersonen zum Schweigen zu bringen, wie staatliche Überwachung und von außen aufgezwungener gesellschaftlicher Druck. Schließlich präsentiert diese Studie den ersten ethnografischen Bericht über die tscherkessische Diaspora in Jordanien aus der Perspektive der Medien- und Diaspora-Anthropologie.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dearest family and friends for all their support and patience during the months of this research. Having every person important to me be genuinely excited and interested in my work has given me the strength, motivation, and inspiration I so needed to write these pages.

Dear Oxana, Marwan, Adel and Galya, this thesis quite literally could not have been written without each of you by my side. Thank you for supporting me no matter what and for making sure I don't forget to eat and rest.

Dear Nadia, Liza, Yana, Keshav, Mahari, Anjelica, Oliwka, Belal, Krisztina, Daria, Eszter, and Lukas, thank you for making every challenge feel easier, listening to me complain whenever I need to, making sure I keep smiling, and just existing at the same time as me.

Dear Talal, Anas, Yanal, Ehsan, Adnan, Rula, Suha, Maria, Aya, Adam, Tia, Jan, Leila, Jad, and Milana, thank you all for making my trip to Jordan so comfortable, warm, and joyful. I cannot wait to come back.

Dear research participants, thank you all for your priceless contribution to this work. This thesis would not be the same without each and every one of you.

Finally, I would like to thank my supervisor, Sanderien Verstappen, for her support, patient guidance, and helpful feedback during this research.

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List of acronyms

CCA – The Circassian Charity Association

CRO – The Circassian Repatriation Organization

ICCA – The International Circassian Cultural Academy

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

Introduction

People always ask how my surname is pronounced, then they ask where it comes from, and then they say they have never heard of that place or those people. My surname is Circassian. Once, someone asked me if I had ever lived at a certain address — and I had. When I asked why, they said: *“My eye is always looking for something Circassian. I saw your surname on a postbox, and I knew immediately you were, so I tried knocking.”*

Circassians usually require a very long, formal introduction. They are one of the peoples of the North-West Caucasus and call themselves “Adyghe”, while the word “Circassian” - or “Sharks” in Arabic - was introduced by outsiders such as Arabs, Turks, Russians, and Europeans (Shami, 2009). Currently, both variants are used interchangeably in Jordan (Shami, 2009). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the North Caucasus became a site of Russian imperialistic expansion (Shami, 2009). As a result of violent incorporation into the Russian Empire, many Adyghe people were displaced, leading to the establishment of Adyghe communities in the Ottoman Empire, including present-day Jordan (Shami, 2009). Subsequently, the diaspora played a significant role in the development of the Jordanian state and has been integrated into various sectors, particularly the security forces, where Circassians have been seen as the “defenders” of the nation (Pizzigrilli, 2021, p. 11). That is commonly considered a reason for the stable relationship between the Circassian people and the Jordanian state. Circassians in Jordan are not being institutionally discriminated against, nor were they ever forced to abandon their practices. They have their own distinct institutions that government officials frequently visit –the Circassian Tribal Council, the Circassian Charity Association and its branches, Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club, the Circassian Cultural Academy and the Circassian Repatriation Organisation. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, while at first glance Circassians' position in Jordan appears stable, they still occupy a fragile position within broader Jordanian society.

Circassians are not widely known outside the Gulf countries and the Caucasus, and they have received little scholarly attention in general. Furthermore, there is no existing research on Circassian social media use - a gap that this thesis aims to fill. I aim to explore how Circassian people in Jordan engage with social media platforms - specifically Facebook and Instagram. My hypothesis is that people use them to stay informed about the life events of other Circassians around the world, to promote community events, to preserve their language and

traditions, and to navigate conversations about returning to the homeland. The research question of this thesis is: What do people who self-define as members of the Circassian diaspora in Amman use social media platforms for?

This research sits at the intersection of media and diaspora anthropologies and takes an ethnographic approach. I examined social media practices as embedded in the social, political, and cultural contexts of community life and not as separate digital behaviors. In the media anthropology section, I draw on the theoretical frameworks developed by Mark Allen Peterson, Faye Ginsburg et. al., Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller, Veronica Barassi, and others (Peterson, 2021; Ginsburg et.al., 2002; Miller & Madianou, 2021; Barassi, 2022; Zuboff, 2019). I further draw on Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity and diaspora theory as developed by Robin Cohen, William Safran, and Rogers Brubaker, as well as long-term ethnographic research of Elisabetta Costa in Mardin, Eastern Turkey (Hall, 1990; Cohen, 2022; Safran, 1991; Brubaker, 2005; Costa, 2016).

As for the methods used, I first conducted (digital) participant observation and visual and textual discourse analyses in the social media groups and pages of Circassians. I then conducted semi-structured interviews and participatory scrolling, along with in-person fieldwork in Amman.

This research finds that, for the Circassian diaspora in Amman, social media serves as a complex infrastructure rather than a tool for a particular function. Online, Circassian people develop and monitor the community's networks of mutual support, construct counter-narratives to traditional historical discourses about them, document current history, and, most importantly, actively produce their cultural identity. At the same time, while exploring what Circassians *do* on social media platforms, I frequently observed what they choose *not to do* there. I found that many Circassian people prefer to avoid political, ideological, and historical discourses on social media, often hoping to escape the structural and social consequences that might follow.

The thesis is structured as follows. It begins with the literature review, first reflecting on the media as a global connector, then covering media anthropology and diaspora anthropology scholarship as separate sections before moving to the intersection of social media and minority/diaspora scholarship. This is followed by a methodology section that describes the

ethnographic methods used to conduct this research and reflects on the fieldwork process. The two empirical chapters then address the research question from complementary angles: the first examines what Circassians in Amman use social media for, and the second examines what prevents some of them from engaging with social media. The thesis closes with a discussion, situating the findings in relation to the broader literature, and a conclusion. In the appendix, the reader can find the images collected during the discourse analysis.

1 Literature review

This chapter outlines the theoretical background for this thesis. I see it as necessary to situate the findings of this research within anthropological discourses on diaspora, media, and their relation. This chapter moves from the broader theoretical landscape — media's role as a global connector, media anthropology, and diaspora anthropology — toward the more specific: social media use among minority and diaspora communities, before grounding the discussion in the Circassian case in Jordan.

1.1 Media as a global connector

I see reflecting on how different communities came to exist in the first place as a suitable starting point before moving on to the discourses that I directly engage with within the scope of this research, such as media and diaspora anthropology. Therefore, I begin this subsection by drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson and his concept of “Imagined Communities”. Anderson argues that nation-states were never natural but were imagined and then made real (Anderson, 1983). People of the same nation will never meet even a small percentage of the people they imagine share a community with, which was made possible by print capitalism – the widespread production and sale of print, especially newspapers (Anderson, 1983). What is crucial to understand here is the strength of the printed media's influence. People of the same imagined community, to this day, are willing to sacrifice everything they often have for something they rarely, if ever, have seen or experienced, in pursuit of feelings of belonging, connection, and distinctiveness from others (Anderson, 1983, p. 6).

With globalization, information exchange became more easily accessible, but its processes grew more complicated. To make sense of that, it is helpful to refer to Arjun Appadurai's concepts of “-scapes” – ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, and ideoscapescapes (Appadurai, 1996). For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on the definitions of ethnoscapescapes and mediascapescapes. Appadurai defines ethnoscapescapes as landscapes of persons (tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and others) that “constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of and between nations” (Appadurai, 1996, p.33). Mediascapescapes, in turn, include both “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios)”, now available to the greatest number of interests in history, and to the

“images of the world created by these media” outlets (Appadurai, 1996, p.35). Appadurai writes that mediascapes give people from different places in the world access to a wide mix of images, stories, and cultural references, simultaneously combining entertainment with news and politics, blending them in a way that is often hard to separate (Appadurai, 1996, p. 35). Therefore, the lines between the realistic and the fictional in the mediascapes are blurred as well, so that the audience is encouraged to construct imagined worlds that are “aesthetic, even fantastic, particularly if looked on by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 35).

Appadurai also works with the concept of imagination. He proposes thinking of imagination as a social practice and offers a very helpful for this thesis explanation. “The imagination - expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths, and stories - has always been part of the repertoire of every society, in some culturally organized way” (Appadurai, 1996, p.56). However, over time, the sources of imagination shifted to mass media, which had become more widely available. As a result, people consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before, with the imagination of those lives grounded in books and newspapers they read, television programs and films they watch, and other mass media sources they engage with, not often questioning how accurate what they see is (Appadurai, 1996).0

Concluding this subsection, Anderson writes about newspapers that have finally become available for more people to read and how they contributed to imagining communities, which then led to very real, significant events (Anderson, 1983). Appadurai later writes about television, music, radio, and other information sources that construct people’s imagination and understanding of the world, and that not only have become accessible to the broader public but are also much easier to disseminate (Appadurai, 1996). Both scholars highlight the strong influence of these processes, pointing to traditional media sources in their arguments.

Social media differs from traditional outlets in a number of ways, while also having much in common with them. Many people around the world now have access to limitless images and information, quite literally in their pockets. We now imagine our possible lives following what feels like closely the lives of influencers, professional athletes, and our high school classmates, while in reality we often know nothing about them. In the modern world, we can share a strong sense of community not only with people from the same geographical location but also with those who love the same band or share the same political views.

1.2 Media anthropology

Media anthropology, which emerged in the 1990s, is one of the fields of social and cultural anthropology that recognized the importance of studying social media with its rise (Peterson, 2021). While essentially focusing on print, film, and broadcast media, media anthropology shifted to examine how media are intertwined with everyday life (Peterson, 2021). The sub-discipline looks into how people express themselves, imagine communities, and negotiate belonging through digital means (Peterson, 2021). Unlike traditional broadcast media, social media is increasingly participatory and reshapes the dynamic between producers and audiences: users do not simply consume content but actively create, share, and respond to it (Peterson, 2021). However, it is important to note that social media technologies are used differently across contexts and have distinct social consequences (Costa, 2016, p. 3). In other words, social media posts may have very different meanings in Austria than they do in China.

Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller coined the concept of polymedia, which is essential to discussions of how people navigate a media landscape (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Madianou and Miller introduce polymedia as an “environment of communicative opportunities that functions as an ‘integrated structure’ within which each individual medium is defined in relational terms in the context of all other media” (Madianou & Miller, 2012, p.170). In other words, polymedia suggests that people experience the entire spectrum of available communication media as a single, integrated environment, moving between platforms and choosing them based on the social and emotional affordances they offer, rather than treating each platform as an isolated tool (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Additionally, they argue that navigating the polymedia environment and choosing which tool to use are directly related to how interpersonal relationships are experienced and practiced (Madianou & Miller, 2012). For instance, “a child who is embarrassed to ask for money from their parent may resort to texting instead” (Madianou & Miller, 2012, p.178). Another example is people avoiding sending voice messages during an argument (Madianou & Miller, 2012, p. 178). This idea is further supported by the Why We Post project, which finds that people approach Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as distinct tools with different purposes and meanings, despite their common ownership, “a matter of which most people seem generally unaware and uninterested” (Miller et al., 2016, p.190). For example, in South India, WhatsApp was used to disseminate employment information, with current employees informing friends and relatives about open vacancies before they were publicly advertised (Venkatraman, 2017, as cited in Miller et al.,

2016, p. 89). Simultaneously, LinkedIn often serves as a more formal professional platform where recruiters evaluated candidates' activity during the hiring process (Miller et al., 2016, p. 88).

The social media engagement practices, however, are not at all neutral or the same for everyone. The majority of people in the world cannot afford a phone, a television, a radio, or, nowadays, a Wi-Fi connection. When it comes to social media specifically, some people, for instance elders, tend not to possess the media literacy needed to produce content themselves (Miller & Madianou, 2012, p. 176). Additionally, algorithms in place filter what reaches viewers and what stays invisible (Bucher, 2018). Those algorithms prioritize content that is simple, quick, and easy to engage with, given social media's commercial nature (Panchal & Mago, 2024). This has become even more evident in recent years, as we have seen the rise of the fifteen- to thirty-second "reels", where a message must be communicated as quickly as possible, be "catchy", and provoke an immediate reaction in the form of likes, comments, and reshares. In order to keep the user engaged for longer periods of time, social media systems recommend content that is aligned with pre-existing interests and viewpoints of the user, while neglecting opposing narratives, which limits exposure to alternative perspectives and amplifies people's biases (Bucher, 2018). Finally, access to social media platforms is heavily influenced by the world's and local politics. For instance, in Russia, foreign social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X, TikTok, and others are banned and considered "extremist" at the government level (Kruope, 2025). At the same time, the national messenger Max is almost mandatory to install, as at the very least it is required to access the online platform called "Gosuslugi" (Governmental Services), which is necessary to receive any service from the state, for instance, a medical appointment (Mirumyan, 2025). These examples illustrate that, even though social media is often seen as more accessible for public participation, inequalities and power struggles persist (Peterson, 2021, p. 26).

Naturally, it is also important to address the issue of media control and how it has changed with the advent of the internet. As I mentioned briefly, broadcast television played a significant role in shaping national identities during the twentieth century (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin, 2002, p. 2). It was expensive and required significant infrastructure, yet governments could still regulate it relatively easily (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin, 2002, p. 2). With the internet in play, media became harder to control, leading to more privatized media, new audiences, and

groups with a previously unavailable form of communication (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin, 2002, p. 3).

The issue of online surveillance has been quite worrying for the past two decades. Our data is tracked across our social media accounts, security systems, health-related apps, voice-operated virtual assistants, and many other platforms (Barassi, 2022). While for some of us the main concern is targeted advertisements, others are struggling with being monitored by insurance companies, immigration offices, banks, doctors, and the police (Barassi, 2022). These worries directly affect people's behaviors on social media. For instance, Elisabetta Costa, in the book titled "Social Media in Southeast Turkey" within the series "Why We Post," gives many examples of how people self-censor on social media, post under a fake name, or do not post at all to avoid structural issues (Costa, 2016).

The scholarship discussed in this section makes it evident that media, in all its forms, is a social and political environment that both shapes and is shaped by the people who interact with it. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the technical aspects of platforms and consider the specific social, political, and cultural circumstances in which those interactions occur to understand how the Circassian diaspora in Jordan uses social media. Considering all of this, I am turning to the anthropological literature on diaspora, followed by a growing body of scholarship that investigates the intersection of diaspora or other minority communities and digital media.

1.3 Diaspora anthropology

Historically, the nation-state was reproduced as "normal", central, and natural by the social sciences (Daswani, 2013, p. 35). Therefore, the research was organized in the same way, and its findings were understood accordingly. As a consequence, academia has perpetuated cultural hierarchies in which immigrant and minority groups have remained the "other" within pre-existing national societies (Daswani, 2013, p. 35). James Clifford wrote that diasporas operate in a space that cannot be reduced to national boundaries and stressed that they also cannot be researched from a standpoint similar to that of immigrants (Clifford, 1994). In comparison to diasporas, "...immigrants may experience loss and nostalgia, but only en route to a whole new home in a new place" (Clifford, 1994, p.307). However, people whose whole sense of self is

shaped by traumatic displacement cannot be “cured” by integrating into a new national society (Clifford, 1994, p. 307).

Nevertheless, for a long time, in scholarly discussions of ethnic communities and immigrants, as well as in most discourses on relationships between minorities and majorities, little, if any, attention has been devoted to diasporas (Safran, 1991). Another reason for it being a very specific meaning of the word is “the exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands” (Safran, 1991, p. 83). Though later, “diaspora” and “diaspora community” were used to describe several categories of people - from political refugees and immigrants to ethnic and racial minorities (Safran, 1991). Rogers Brubaker highlights the issue of applying the term to any “nameable population that is to some extent dispersed in space” (Brubaker, 2005, p.3). He writes that, in this process, the term loses its power, its ability to make distinctions (Brubaker, 2005, p. 3).

Brubaker also criticizes treating diaspora as a fixed, bounded entity with countable members and suggests treating it rather as “an idiom, a stance, a claim” (Brubaker, 2005, p. 12). When approached from that angle, diaspora becomes a way of constructing people's identities and loyalties, while allowing them to adopt that stance to varying degrees, and possibly not adopt at all (Brubaker, 2005, p. 12). This helps overcome the common problem of “groupism”, the tendency to take clearly established, internally homogeneous, and externally restricted groups as key elements of social life and fundamental units of social analysis (Brubaker, 2002, p. 164). Brubaker writes that ethnicity, race, nation, and diasporas are better conceptualized in relational and dynamic terms of “practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects, and contingent events”, rather than fixed organisms (Brubaker, 2002, p. 167). That means understanding these concepts as processes and taking a contextually fluctuating “groupness”, an event that occurs in the process of group-making, as an analytical category (Brubaker, 2002).

Therefore, before engaging with the concept of diaspora, it is necessary to determine whether the group in question can be classified as a diaspora rather than, for example, a transnational community. In this research, I am working with the conceptualizations of diaspora by William Safran and Robin Cohen, while keeping Brubaker's caution about groupism in mind. I shall try my best not to treat the Circassian diaspora as a single, homogeneous group, but as a process of groupness in which people adopt varying levels of diasporic identification and commitment.

William Safran in one of his articles “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return” suggests that the word “diaspora” should be used to characterize minorities that share perhaps not all, but several of the following characteristics:

1. “They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions” (Safran, 1991, p.83);
2. They retain a collective memory about their original homeland—its physical location and history (Safran, 1991);
3. They believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated from it (Safran, 1991);
4. They think of their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and believe it to be the place to which they or their descendants should return (Safran, 1991);
5. “They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity” (Safran, 1991, p.84);
6. “They continue to relate to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship” (Safran, 1991, p.84).

Robin Cohen similarly identifies nine features of diasporic rope: dispersal, expansion, retention, idealization, return, distinctiveness, apprehension, creativity, and solidarity (Cohen, 2022). For the purposes of this paper, I will discuss features most relevant to the Circassian diaspora and briefly illustrate how they apply to the case.

In order to explain “dispersal,” Cohen uses a metaphor of shattered glass flying off in many directions after a crash to illustrate a society shattered by military conflict, civil war, ethnic cleansing, earthquake, or similar events (Cohen, 2022, p.4). Connecting this feature to the case study, Circassians were forced to migrate from their homeland, the Caucasus, during the expansion of Tsarist Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries, and ended up in different places - current Jordan, Syria, Israel, and Turkey (Besleney, 2010).

“Retention” describes the ways diasporic communities preserve collective memories of historical trauma and injustice, which helps sustain a shared feeling of community (Cohen, 2022). A good illustration of this is that the historical experience of displacement and

resettlement continues to serve as a central symbol of Circassian self-identification (Shami, 2009). Speeches during events that bring together the Circassian people, including social events at associations and clubs, most often reference memories of displacement from the Caucasus (Shami, 2009).

The presence of the “return” movement is very important in diaspora studies; however, many diasporas have now replaced a once-in-a-lifetime return movement due to increased travel opportunities (Cohen, 2022). Instead, they maintain a connection to the homeland through virtual recreations of home and frequent visits (Cohen, 2022). The return movement is indeed present for the Circassian Diaspora. For instance, the international NGO Circassian Repatriation Organization aims to provide aid to Circassians who wish to return to their historic homeland in the North Caucasus, among other things (CRO, Mission Statement). However, it is also important to note that the issue of return is complex for Circassian people, especially for those who are relatively free to preserve their traditions and customs in the country where they live (Pizzigrilli, 2021). This is the case for many Circassian Jordanians who occupy prominent positions in the Kingdom because of the historical contributions of their ancestors to “its state and elite building processes” (Pizzigrilli, 2021, p. 5).

Another important feature of a diasporic rope is a troubled relationship with the host society, which Cohen labels as “apprehension” (Cohen, 2022). Even though most literature on the Circassian diaspora in Jordan stresses their unique relationship with the host society and gives examples of the officially recognized “Circassian Language Day” or “Circassian Mourning Day” or the existence of the NartTV Channel, a discussion with one of the participants indicated that there are in fact no such recognized days, as well as that it is almost never specified that Nart TV channel is now only a YouTube channel, not a satellite television one, due to the lack of funding (Pizzigrilli, 2021). Furthermore, many nowadays accuse the Jordanian government of trying to erase the representation of other ethnic populations (Pizzigrilli, 2021).

The notion of distinctiveness in diaspora scholarship goes beyond a shared origin and birthplace (Cohen, 2022). Robin Cohen explains that by distinctiveness he means a myth of a distinct origin that is supposed to ‘root’ a diasporic consciousness and give it legitimacy and distance the community in question from other groups, such as, the belief that Armenians have that they “sprang from Haik and that Noah’s ark ended up on top of Mount Ararat, where the

earth was reborn” (Cohen, 2022, p.7). Such myths are very helpful in creating a sense of uniqueness and superiority, even when experiencing discrimination or expulsion (Cohen, 2022, p.7). Even though the Circassian diaspora lacks a commonly accepted myth of origin, they do share an understanding of a shared homeland. Moreover, many of them claim to have distinct qualities that allow them to recognize one another immediately; therefore, I see this feature as a fitting one for this section.

Cohen also classifies six different types of diasporas – victim, labor, imperial, trade, deterritorialized, and incipient (Cohen, 2022). That is, of course, not to say that these have nothing in common. It simply helps highlight the most important characteristics of these diasporas (Cohen, 2022). In my opinion, the Circassian diaspora is best characterized as a victim diaspora. A terrible event normally forms victim diasporas, disrupts normal life deeply, and stays alive in a group’s shared memory (Cohen, 2022).

Cohen and Safran both offer frameworks that categorize and investigate diaspora communities structurally, as well as consider how they construct their own identity through mythology, collective memory, and practices (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 2022). Brubaker warns against reification, treating diaspora communities as something that exists rather than as something brought into being through group-making processes and institutions (Brubaker, 2002; 2005). Stuart Hall, in turn, works with the concept of ‘cultural identity’, pushing against its essentialization, arguing that it is rather actively constructed, and questions how, similarly to Brubaker's questioning of the concept of the group (Hall, 1990). Hall argues that diasporas, rather than simply retrieving something that has been lost as a result of displacement, actively and continuously produce cultural identities anew already in the context of those tragic events (Hall, 1990). Even though diaspora communities have strong emotional connections to their homelands, Hall writes that the “original” homeland is “no longer there” and has transformed (Hall, 1990, p. 339). Connecting this idea to the case study, it is impossible for Circassians to go back to the Caucasus that existed before the eighteenth century, not physically, not culturally. Circassian cultural identity has been inevitably affected and transformed by displacement, just as it now is being affected and constantly reproduced by their experience of living in the diaspora.

It is important to note that in the process of this production, people tend to refer to representation materials produced by the colonisers or other outsiders that had more power to

speak and write about the community (Hall, 1990). The Circassian diaspora has been going through these processes as well. As Lidia Zhigunova writes in her dissertation, Circassians “turn to the older images and representations found in Western/European sources”, and “adopt them without a proper re-examination of these images, leading to a dangerous process of internalization of these superficially constructed and highly stereotyped images” (Zhigunova, 2016).

If, as Hall and Brubaker argue in different ways, identity is always a production and groupness is always a project, then one question for modern diaspora societies is: what are the current realities of that production? The answer is increasingly found in social media and digital platforms, which have transformed the nature and techniques of identity work. Further in this chapter, I discuss the intersection of minority and diaspora studies with social media scholarship.

1.4 Social media use in minority and diaspora communities

Over the past 20 years, research on how diaspora populations interact with social media platforms has expanded significantly, though its geographic and ethnic coverage continues to be uneven. Before turning to the existing literature on this intersection specifically, I would like to address the ethnographic work of Elisabetta Costa in Mardin, Turkey, within the series *Why We Post*, which I consider highly relevant here. Mardin is a multilingual, multiethnic enclave where Kurds, Arabs, Turks, and other communities coexist (Costa, 2016). According to Costa, her findings may be applicable to other ‘Middle Eastern’ civilizations and are relevant beyond the Turkish context: “Located on the top and at the bottom of a hill in front of the Mesopotamian plain, Mardin is an enclave of an Arabic-speaking minority within a largely Kurdish region. This means that, far from being just a ‘Turkish’ field site, many of my ethnographic observations are likely also to be relevant to other ‘Middle Eastern’ societies” (Costa, 2016, p.8). Indeed, while reading, I noticed many similarities to the Circassian people's situation in Jordan, in addition to the two sites' geographical proximity. Hence, I consider Costa's observations on how politically marginalized individuals use social media to be a useful point of reference for this research.

In Mardin, Instagram is used by a “small elite of more educated youth” rather than by the majority of the population (Costa, 2016, p. 40). Young people mostly share visuals of

experiences they consider more exciting, such as travel or newly bought clothes (Costa, 2016). Facebook becomes a performative space where users behave in ways that are aligned with family expectations and social norms based on “male honor, female modesty and gender segregation” (Costa, 2016, p. 46). This illustrates how social media users decide what to share, guided by concerns about their private relationships and societal expectations. Additionally, Elisabetta Costa writes that in southeast Turkey, employment, resources, and favors are largely dependent on family ties and on patronage- and friendship-based relationships, and that “Facebook was used to maintain these local networks of support” (Costa, 2016, p. 133). In this sense, the platform serves as a space for self-expression and a practical infrastructure for community life.

At the same time, when it comes to engagement with political activity, public Facebook strongly replicates the climate of silence that dominates physical public spaces (Costa, 2016). Many people often avoid posting or even interacting with content that might result in repercussions (Costa, 2016). The fear of state surveillance extends from offline life into online behavior with even greater force, as control is more widespread and one’s visibility is often harder to manage (Costa, 2016). On public social media, any political expression can be visible to everyone; therefore, it can be used as evidence against the person posting, whereas in the offline world, people can adjust their behavior to their surroundings (Costa, 2016, p. 137). For instance, even writing in Kurdish is itself perceived as a political act, one that carries a risk precisely because of its visibility (Costa, 2016, p. 135). Notably, though, Costa also notes a significant contrast: minorities, opposition-affiliated individuals, or people with less social and political power in general tend to keep quiet on social media for the reasons described above, while members of the governing party or and people of the higher status on the other hand feel empowered and protected to express their political ideas with confidence, that often even exceeded their offline behavior (Costa, 2016, p.138). Hence, Costa concludes that social media reproduces and amplifies existing hierarchies rather than dismantling them (Costa, 2016, p. 138).

Moving on to studies focusing specifically on social media and diasporic populations, Pusti Panchal and Beenu Mago write that social media is an essential tool for diasporic communities to preserve their cultural heritage (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 15). A good example of this dynamic is the Filipino diaspora, known for strong cultural pride (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 17). For instance, in Facebook groups such as “Filipino Food Lovers,” culinary classes are

frequently organized, fostering learning and the preservation of traditional recipes (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 17). Similarly, the Indian diaspora is actively using YouTube (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 17). On channels called “Indian Cultural Odyssey” and “Indian Tradition Today”, one can find tutorials of traditional Indian recipes or watch live streams of important festivals (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 17).

As positive of an instrument as social media can be for diasporic communities, it does not come without risks. One of the strongest concerns is the risk of cultural dilution (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p.16). Social media algorithms prioritize short, easy-to-consume content, leading to the traditional practices shared online being adapted to appeal to wider audiences (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 16). This can result in frequent false representations of traditional practices and the spread of misinformation. Additionally, online interactions tend to be fleeting and shallow: likes and comments may introduce users to cultural discourse, but they do not necessarily support genuine participation (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 18). The consequences of these processes are alarming: future generations may interact with their cultural history mostly through digital platforms and encounter only selected or incomplete fragments of it (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 18). Finally, as Pusti Panchal and Beenu Mago write, many people practicing diasporic groupness may not have access to or aptitude for social media tools, which also means uneven participation and representation (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 16). This gap makes it difficult to sustain cultural continuity, as some people are excluded from the digital dialogue (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 16). As Sandra Ponzanesi notes in the case of the Somali diaspora, those who become gatekeepers and leaders in digital diasporic spaces tend to be well-educated participants of the community's elite (Ponzanesi, 2021, p. 7). This structural imbalance determines whose perspectives are visible and whose are overlooked.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, substantial gaps remain in the study of particular diasporic communities and their relations with social media platforms. This observation aligns with the concerns of the current research: despite being a case that directly addresses many of the themes covered above, including cultural preservation, historical memory, political caution, and navigation of belonging across multiple contexts, the Circassian diaspora in Jordan has received almost no attention in the literature on social media and diaspora. The current study intends to fill this gap.

1.5 Situating the case: the Circassian diaspora in Jordan

1.5.1 Historical background

Populated since the Paleolithic era, the Caucasus has long been the homeland of Circassians, and a region that experienced several invasions and migrations (Shami, 2009, p. 142). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the North Caucasus lay in the path of a two-pronged Tsarist Russian expansion - the first through the establishment of several coastal forts, and the second through settler colonialism in the middle plains (Shami, 2009, p. 143). The Russian Empire viewed Circassian populations as “backward” and sought to “civilize” them by converting them to Orthodox Christianity (Karpát, 1974, p. 791). As the populations of the Caucasus rejected these demands, the area was gradually but violently incorporated into the Russian Empire, and the population experienced numerous migrations, armed clashes, and displacements (Karpát, 1974, p. 791; Shami, 2009, p. 143). Scholars refer to these events as the Circassian genocide (Richmond, 2013).

However, the Circassian displacement was also part of Ottoman policy at the time, which encouraged immigration into Ottoman areas (Shami, 2009, p. 144). This strategy was intended to address the workforce deficit (Karpát, 1974, p. 791). In 1860, the Russian Empire negotiated a treaty with the Ottoman Empire, under which the latter agreed to accept 40,000 to 50,000 Circassian immigrants (Karpát, 1974, p. 791). Between 1.2 and 1.6 million people are estimated to have fled the Caucasus for Turkey overall (Karpát, 1974, p. 791). Still, only 700,000 to 1 million of them managed to reach the Ottoman territory, with many of them dying during their journey (Karpát, 1974, p. 791).

In Jordan, Circassians have been a middle-class urban group since the founding of the state, with significant representation in the executive and parliamentary branches of government and employment mostly in the military and government bureaucracy (Shami, 2009). Some people with Circassian roots now identify themselves as Jordanians, see Jordan as their home, and do not reflect very deeply on the subtleties. Meanwhile, others strongly identify as Circassians, initiate community gatherings, and actively promote the idea of returning to the homeland. What many of them share is feelings of appreciation, grace, and love for Jordan, their host country.

1.5.2 Circassian institutions in Jordan

Circassians have established their own legal institution in Jordan, called “Xasa” (Khasa) in Circassian, best translated into English as “assembly”. I was told that, essentially, the word meant any gathering for the purpose of decision-making. Over time, it evolved into a specific institution, now known as the Circassian Charity Association (CCA). The CCA was first established in 1932, 14 years before Jordan became an independent state (Circassian Charity Association, 2021). Legally speaking, CCA is a charitable institution, as reflected in its title. The funding comes from individual donations from wealthier Circassians and is used to organize and support community events and educational initiatives, such as Circassian language or dance classes, and to raise funds for people in need.

In reality, the Xasa also has a political dimension to it. Throughout history, many leaders of the Xasa also held various government positions. When government representatives need to know who the leader of the Circassian community in Jordan is, they look to the Xasa leader. Even when foreign officials visit Jordan and need to meet representatives of the Circassian community, they will most likely contact the leaders of the Xasa rather than the Circassian Tribal Chief, a Circassian representative within government structures. If a Circassian wants to repatriate, they must obtain the needed documentation from the Xasa. As one participant put it: “Xasa is the only legal institution that can prove that I am Circassian.” In this sense, the CCA Xasa is much more than a charity institution - it functions as the primary institution of Circassian self-governance in Jordan, managing community welfare and political representation.

Any Circassian can become a member of the Xasa, but the membership costs money: 6 Jordanian Dinars per year, which is about 7,5 Euros in 2026. After a year of membership, one may join the General Assembly of the Xasa – meetings held a few times a year to discuss relevant Circassian issues. During those meetings, every member is allowed to express their opinions and propose or veto ideas. The Leader of the Xasa is elected by voting, and all members can vote. There is also a board of fourteen people, who are also elected and make the major decisions together with the Leader of the Xasa. The Xasa has branches in a few Jordanian cities, each with its own Xasa Leader and board. The main branch is located in Amman, Jordan's capital, and its leader is considered the Leader of the Jordanian branch of the Xasa.

Every member can vote for the leader in their respective branch, as well as for the main leader in the main branch.

Additionally, Circassian women have created their own branch within the Xasa system. Only women can be members of that branch, but it is not obligatory. Similarly, they can vote in both their own branch and the main one.

In addition to the Circassian Charity Association, there are a few other Circassian institutions in Jordan - the International Circassian Cultural Academy, the Circassian Repatriation Organization, and Al Jeel al Jadeed Club, which translates as “The New Generation Club” (Pilizginni, 2021 p.12).

The International Circassian Cultural Academy is a non-profit cultural hub headquartered in Amman (International Circassian Cultural Academy). They see their mission in “preserving, teaching and celebrating Circassian culture locally and internationally through language programs, performing arts, and vocational workshops” (ICCA).

The Circassian Repatriation Organization supports the Circassians in their return to their ancestral homeland in the North Caucasus (CRO, Mission statement). The organization also works to improve the living standards of Circassians in the North Caucasus by supporting commercial, industrial, and agricultural enterprises, as well as providing counseling and scholarships to persons of Circassian descent in need (CRO, Mission statement).

Al Jeel al Jadeed Club defines itself as a cultural, social, sports, and artistic club (Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club, Instagram page).

1.5.3 Adiga Habze

When introducing Circassians, one must mention and discuss Adiga Habze. Adiga Habze is an unwritten ethical code of the Circassians, reported to have existed before the forced deportation from the Caucasus (Besleney, 2014, p. 35). Xabze is a series of regulations that for centuries dictated the norms of daily life, “the rules of military affairs, the communal courts, crime and punishment, blood feuds, the interaction between social classes, marriage, sexuality, and gender relations” (Besleney, 2014, p. 35). Even though Xabze has changed significantly as a

result of adapting to local conditions in the diaspora, Circassian communities worldwide recognize certain features of it (Besleney, 2014, p. 35).

While I had not heard of Habze growing up, as I learned about it, I realized that even though I didn't have a name for it or imagine it as a distinct set of rules, I was still brought up by them and expected to behave accordingly. Currently in Jordan, Habze is understood as a set of unclearly defined rules that one must follow to remain a good and respectable Circassian, both for the other Circassians and for outside actors. Adiga Habze varies across families, but there are also some similarities and general principles. Those are honor, humanity, respect for elders, courage, and good manners. In modern-day Jordan, I have observed that practicing Habze often manifests in the following: strong internal hierarchy, profound respect and admiration of elders, women, and guests, volunteering as the only possible option for the community's operation and one of the central elements of the Circassian self-representation, often overwhelming and excessive "niceness" and courtesies, conflict suppression, and self-censorship. Some of these things were more visible in social media practices; others I learned about during conversations with interview participants.

The Circassians in Jordan are situated in this section as a continuously brought together community shaped by catastrophic loss and incredible resilience. They were uprooted, relocated and resettled in a foreign land, and yet, 166 years later, are still so strongly dedicated to their distinctiveness that they have built lasting institutions, preserved a dynamic society, and upheld a cultural identity across generations and borders. In this thesis, I aim to explore how these processes are structured in the context of the internet and social media.

2 Methodology

To answer my question, I first conducted (digital) participant observation and visual and textual discourse analyses. I then carried out semi-structured interviews and participatory scrolling, followed by in-person fieldwork in Jordan. In the following sub-sections, I will cover the challenges related to gaining access to groups, participants, and spaces, as well as how these methods were performed. The chapter closes with a section on ethics and positionality.

2.1 Digital participant-observation and discourse analyses

While preparing for this project, with the help of my Circassian family and friends living in Jordan, I have identified a few social media groups that people who engage in diasporic groupness frequently use. Over a few weeks, I conducted digital participant observation in these online spaces, examining the new content posted. I have also performed visual and textual discourse analyses, within which I collected 48 images and 48 accompanying texts from these groups. I referred to Gillian Rose's approach to Discourse Analysis 1 for this step (Rose, 2023). With time, I realized that I was only looking at the surface of Circassians' social media activity, as there were many more groups and accounts mentioned during conversations with the participants that would add more to this method's results. However, I decided not to include them in the discourse analysis for privacy reasons. A lot of those groups I couldn't even access myself, as it was impossible for the participants to share the links with me due to the privacy settings of those spaces. I was only able to look and learn about them during the participatory-scrolling method. As a result, I have decided on 6 pages for this research, 5 of which are official pages of different Circassian organizations, and 1 is a group for public conversations. I understand that this will limit the findings of this method, as it will reflect mostly the perspectives and interests of institutions with a very curated agenda, rather than being diverse and include other sides of the conversation. However, I hope to restore the balance through the interviews' and participatory scrolling findings, during which participants helped me to see different social media activities among Circassians in Jordan.

Even though it is allowed to collect content posted in open public groups, I still started by reaching out to the administrators of the groups I selected to let them know about my plans. I first reached out to the 'Nart TV' group administrator, as the group is private, and I had to ask for their explicit permission to use the content posted there. The administrator responded very

soon and was very enthusiastic about my research idea. He allowed me to collect any content posted under his name, but asked to reach out to individual posters as well, in case I needed to collect posts made under their names. I did so a couple of times as well. Next, I have reached out to the administrator of the public group ‘Circassian Community News’. The administrator requested more information about the project and listed a few specific questions he wanted answered before he could give me his permission. I sent him an email, answering all of them, but he never got back to me. It turned out that he was also an administrator of the group ‘Circassian Deaths In Jordan’. He requested the same information, but didn’t get back to me regarding that page either. I followed up twice more, but still did not get an answer. I decided not to proceed with these two groups, as the administrator used the specific words “before making a decision”, so it felt inappropriate to collect anything without it. Then I reached out to the administrator of the group called “Circassian Market Jordan”. I did not get a response, so I did not proceed with this group. However, it's worth noting that the last post in the group is dated May 5th, 2025, so I concluded that it was not active for the time being. Communication with the administrators of other groups was more successful – “Circassian Charity Volunteer Club” page (Facebook and Instagram), “Circassian Repatriation Organization – CRO” (Facebook and Instagram), “Circassian Charity Association” (Facebook and Instagram), and “International Circassian Cultural Academy” or ICCA (Facebook and Instagram) have all given me their permission to collect the materials from their pages. Even though I did not hear back from Al Jeel Al Jadeed, I have met and worked with people involved in that club, and they assured me I could collect the materials from its pages during our conversations.

Summing up, I have collected data from the following pages:

1. **“Circassian Repatriation Organization – CRO”**, Facebook and Instagram pages. Circassian Repatriation Organization is an ‘international, not-for-profit, humanitarian, charitable, and peaceful, with no religious agenda or orientation’ organization (CRO, Mission Statement). Even though the organization's headquarters are in Canada, it features activities and news about Circassian people around the world and has a branch in Jordan, so I decided to include it.
2. **“Circassian Charity Association”**, Facebook and Instagram pages. Pages of one of the main institutions of Circassians in Jordan. The Association is being funded by donations and focuses on keeping Circassians in Jordan a closely connected community by organizing various concerts, giving lectures, etc.

3. **“Circassian Charity Association Volunteer Club”**, Facebook and Instagram pages. A page of the branch of the Circassian Charity Association, which focuses on volunteer work or the organization of smaller events.

4. **“International Circassian Cultural Academy – ICCA”**, Facebook and Instagram pages. ICCA is a ‘non-profit cultural hub headquartered in Amman, whose mission is to preserve, teach, and celebrate Circassian culture locally and internationally through language programs, performing arts, publications, and vocational workshops’ (ICCA, Who We Are).

5. **“Al Jeel Club”**, Instagram page. An official page of the Al Jeel al Jadeed Club, established with the primary goal of preserving and teaching the Circassian language. Nowadays, the club still has a Circassian language course, as well as organizes a number of other group-making activities – a book club, dance lessons, etc.

6. **“Nart TV”**, Facebook page. The Nart TV group is a Facebook group created by the National Adiga Radio and Television Channel in Jordan, a channel for Circassian people founded in 2007, but it quickly became simply a YouTube channel due to a lack of funding. The Facebook group remained active after that format change, and now it is an online space where all Circassians can post, share their thoughts, and share news.

I collected images and texts posted in the groups during the months of September and October. As I was working with 6 groups, I decided to split the number of posts to analyze per group evenly, 8 from each group. When it came to pages with both a Facebook and an Instagram account, I decided to split the posts evenly – collect 4 images from Facebook and 4 from Instagram. I am choosing not to treat them as completely separate channels, since they are run by the same organizations, if not the same people, and there is little difference in the content posted. I still decided to include both Instagram and Facebook variations of the groups to perhaps see if there was any difference in engagement. However, in the case of Circassian Repatriation Organization pages, where only 4 posts were made during October and November and were identical on both social media platforms, I decided to include 4 Instagram posts that were either posted in November or August, in order to keep the numbers equally distributed. In the case of Al Jeel club, even though it has both Facebook and Instagram pages, I only decided to include the content posted on the Instagram, as it's more active, and there were no posts made at all between the months of September and October on their Facebook page.

I decided to split the number of posts per group evenly at a later stage of my fieldwork. During in-person interviews, when I was showing the collection to the participants, I realized that I had collected disproportionately more of the content posted on Circassian Charity Association pages than, for instance, International Circassian Cultural Academy pages, and felt like the results of the method in that case would not be very efficient, as they would incline towards one very curated narrative. When choosing what posts to collect from each group, in case there were more posts than 8 of them made within the chosen timeframe, I was trying to keep the balance between collecting images and texts that stand out to me as a researcher and taking into account the topics and ideas brought up by the interview participants.

I created an Excel table on my private laptop, where for each image and text I saved the following information: the name of the group, the social media platform the post is on, the date of the post, a screenshot of the image, the text in original language of the post, the translation, where required (some posts were made in English), the link to the post, number of likes, comments, reposts and a short summary of the main idea of the post. I also saved the images in cropped screenshots separately in the folder on my private laptop. The posts were translated with the Deepl translator, which is GDPR compliant (Deepl - Data Security).

2.2 Semi-structured interviews

I have performed 14 semi-structured interviews between the months of September, October, and November, 5 of which were conducted online via Zoom (without screen or audio recording through the software) and 9 in person in Jordan in Circassian Associations (Zoom - GDPR). The interviews took between 40 minutes and 2 and a half hours, depending only on how much time the participants had and how much they wanted to share. I audio-recorded and later transcribed 13 of the interviews and documented 1 with written notes, due to it being very loud in the space where the interview was conducted.

I did not have significant challenges with getting access to the participants, as a big part of my family lives in Jordan and is engaged in the Circassian community. They connected me directly with 5 participants, while the others were these participants' friends or acquaintances. When it comes to me being in the physical spaces as a researcher, it was also not an issue. Of course, having my uncle, who speaks Arabic and who a lot of people know since he was young, bringing me to the Associations helped, but it was also brought up a few times during my

interviews and informal conversations, that because I am Circassian myself - other Circassian people would be happy to help me in any way they could and I could enter those buildings without many complications, even though there is security present.

All 14 participants were born and lived most of their lives in Jordan. I interviewed 8 women and 6 men, and their ages ranged from 19 to 43 years old. 10 of these people are very active in the Circassian groupness; they participate in the organization of events, give lectures, work on social media pages, volunteer, perform in troupes, etc. 4 remaining people are also active, but they, on the other hand, attend and participate in the organized events. 4 people work in areas where social media is central – marketing specialists, a graphic designer, and a photographer. 3 people are currently unemployed but mentioned spending their time volunteering. There are also 2 university students and 2 others with different jobs. 13 of these 14 people spoke English very comfortably, so I had no issues interviewing them.

For one interview, I used an interpreter, my father, and that went smoothly. I asked the question in Russian, then my father translated it into Arabic, then the participant responded in Arabic, and my father translated the response into Russian for me. During this interview, I felt the need to be a bit more selective with the questions I was asking, because the translation process required more time. Thankfully, this interview was done towards the end of my fieldwork, after I had already conducted several interviews, so I had a better understanding of which questions tend to provoke more thoughts, and which are acceptable to skip, so I still believe the information acquired during this interview was relevant and helpful. Nevertheless, I understand that if I spoke the language, I would likely uncover a lot more during that conversation.

My interview questions were split into the following sections: introduction questions, reflection on personal experiences within Circassian social media pages, reflection on the meanings of posts, reflection on personal participation, and safety concerns. Frequently, other topics were brought up and explored by the participants. In some cases, the participants already brought up answers to a few questions on my list by the time we got to them, so I would either skip those questions, when I felt like we discussed the topic thoroughly enough, or bring them up again, in case I felt that there were more thoughts on the topic that would appear.

I also asked 6 participants to look at my image collection for discourse analysis. I created a whiteboard in Canva and made a simple collage, adding screenshots of some posts collected (Security at Canva). We looked at them, spoke about whether the participants had seen the

posts or knew the people in the images, whether the collection accurately reflected the diaspora's social media use, and about events and initiatives featured in those posts. Those parts of the interviews were helpful, as they made me realize in what ways the collection still had to be adjusted, as well as helped to make sure that the people I was interviewing were participating in the Circassian groupness in Jordan. However, I did not ask all the participants' perspectives on the collection due to it not being ready for the first few interviews, as I have been interviewing people online and collecting material at the same time, or due to a limited amount of time, or due to other complications during the interview process.

In this thesis, to ensure the participants' safety, I will not be mentioning most of their names. When quoting an individual, I will refer to them by their assigned number while providing necessary context, such as their interests, age, or gender. Additionally, as I am quoting some of the participants multiple times throughout this thesis, to ensure the reader can always situate the person being quoted, as well as to provide a clearer picture of the focus group's composition, I am including a table at the end of this sub-section that highlights some details about each interlocutor - age, gender, and occupation.

Nevertheless, I have been explicitly asked a few times by two of the participants to refer to them by their real names. Before finishing this work, we had multiple conversations about the risks that may arise from me using their real name in this thesis, and they assured me that they are aware of them and prepared to handle the potential consequences. They explicitly stated that they "would like to own their opinions", so I can only honor their choices. These two participants are brothers, Belal and Bashar Waleed Lebzo, both born and raised in Amman. Belal is 27 years old and works as a Marketing Operations Specialist at a digital agency. He has always been very active within the Circassian community in Jordan. Belal is frequently volunteering, participating in the organization of Circassian initiatives, dancing in the Highlanders troupe by the International Circassian Cultural Academy, and has been elected as a Managerial Board Member at the Circassian Charity Association, Wadi al Seer Branch. Bashar is 30 years old and is working as a Customer Experience Officer at the same digital agency. He is similarly very active within the Circassian community. Bashar calls himself an amateur folklorist, as he writes new folkloric songs based on the old ones. He translates Circassian traditional Nart mythologies from Circassian to English and Arabic, and used to give private lessons in Circassian. Both brothers speak Circassian, Arabic, and English. Belal and Bashar have contributed greatly to this research, sharing with me their invaluable

perspectives, and as I mentioned previously, when quoting them, I will be using their real names in the text.

Research participants

Number	Age	Gender	Occupation
Participant 1	27	Man	Currently unemployed
Participant 2, Bashar	30	Man	Customer Experience Officer
Participant 3	30	Woman	Doctor
Participant 4	27	Woman	Graphic Designer
Participant 5	36	Woman	Workspace Manager, Singer
Participant 6	31	Woman	Currently unemployed, Volunteer
Participant 7	33	Woman	Currently unemployed, Volunteer
Participant 8	21	Woman	Student
Participant 9	19	Woman	Student
Participant 10	25	Woman	Content Writer
Participant 11	35	Man	Photographer
Participant 12	43	Man	Administration Officer
Participant 13	32	Man	Accountant; Board Member of The CCA
Participant 14, Belal	27	Man	Marketing Operations Specialist; Managerial Board Member at The CCA – Wadi al Seer Branch

2.3 Participatory scrolling

The main idea of the method was to uncover the social media activities that I did not have on my radar while preparing for my research. Additionally, this method, similarly to the process of discussing the collection of posts with my interlocutors, helped ensure that people I was interviewing take an active diasporic stance.

The process went as follows. I asked the interview participants to open social media groups or channels that they personally follow, scroll through them with me, and tell me what they see, how they feel about the posts, if they know anything about the topics discussed, etc. I did not video-record the process of scrolling, but I did audio-record the conversations we had during it, which was enough to process the material.

I have performed the participatory scrolling method with 6 participants, due to some people not feeling comfortable with me looking at their screens and social media pages, or it being too complex of a process during online interviews, with screen sharing and time limits. Additionally, in some cases, we had only a limited time for the interviews, so I decided to skip the method and focus on the interview questions.

As I have stated previously, the method was very helpful, as it showed me the other side of social media use among Circassians: individuals engaged in conversations with each other rather than with established organizations and formed their own smaller communities. Sometimes people showed me the groups and posts I included in my collection for discourse analysis; sometimes they showed me the ones I could not access. Three of them were mentioned more than once: “Hand in Hand. For the benefit of Circassian people”, “Adige-Circassians Nationalists”, and a group for Circassian students at the University of Jordan.

2.4 Participant-observation

My family is Circassian and lives in the Naour municipality, a neighborhood considered Circassian as well. Therefore, when we run errands or spent time with friends and family, I kept treating it as fieldwork as well. I stayed in a house where my grandpa and two of my uncles live; each of them lives on a separate floor, which always made it feel like there were a lot of people around, but at the same time, everyone could get their privacy when they needed to. One of my uncles living in the house is married and has three kids, and another was about to get married in the next few months. I have two more uncles, one of whom lives in the United States with his family, but came as a surprise on the same dates, and the other one lives in Jordan, about 30 minutes away from where we stayed with his wife and two kids, approximately my age. My dad and my brother were also in Jordan on the same dates. This dynamic was not at all overwhelming, as one might imagine, but fostered a very supportive

and helpful atmosphere for me to do my research. There was a lot of care, warmth, and genuine help. My family took care of food and transportation, helped find the participants, and looked after me when I was not feeling well.

When I was planning my trip, I hoped to attend two major events organized by the Circassian diaspora, which I was told about by one of my participants. However, unfortunately, closer to the trip, it turned out that both events were rescheduled to different dates, which I was not in Jordan for. Nevertheless, I was fortunate enough to visit three institutions for Circassian people with the help of my interview participants. When looking for a space to conduct in-person interviews, people suggested meeting at these Circassian spaces - Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club and Circassian Charity Association. These two clubs are located right next to each other in Amman. They did not feel completely foreign to me, as I included their social media pages in my discourse analysis, but some participants were still kind enough to give me small tours and explain the histories of the establishments. I also asked my family to drive me there a few times without having an interview scheduled, so I could look around more calmly and observe. There was a smaller branch of the Circassian Charity Association closer to my family's home that I also visited and conducted a spontaneous interview there. One of the participants also suggested we spend a day in the old town of Amman, during which we had very complex, informal discussions on topics related to the Circassian diaspora, but not so much to social media. I still found those very insightful in many ways.

2.5 Materials collected

During the fieldwork, I have collected the following materials:

- a fieldwork diary of 25 pages with notes about informal conversations I was present in, my personal feelings, reflections on my positionality, reflections on Circassian traditions, rules, and dynamics;
- 13 audio-recorded and transcribed interviews and 1 interview documented with written notes about people's thoughts on social media spaces and activities of Circassians, as well as their participation;
- 7 described observations of evenings in Circassian associations (5), running errands in Naour (1), Old Town Amman (1), each between 1 and 4 pages;
- 48 images and 48 accompanying texts from 6 Circassian social media channels with translations, number of likes, comments, and reposts;

- 9 images taken in Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club and 8 in Old Town Amman.

The 48 images and 48 texts I have collected consist of:

- 12 event recaps - photographs or videos of a past event. Those are divided in smaller subgroups: a) charity events, during which people come together to help others in need, by cooking food or preparing gifts for orphans; b) activities organized for any Circassian who is willing to join – bike rides, trips to historical landmarks in Jordan, etc; c) bigger events with more actors involved – concerts, Circassian Association's anniversary celebrations, job fairs.
- 8 invitations to events – posts introducing the event (such as a trip, a book club, a lecture on religion).
- 7 educational posts – information posts about Circassian costumes (5) and dances (2). A few of the chosen groups frequently posted educational information about traditional Circassian costumes in the chosen research timeframe, as the 28th of September is a day of Circassian National Costume (Kabardino-Balkarian State University named after H.M. Berbekov, 2022).
- 3 posts congratulating the Circassian people on their achievements (winning an award, medals in sports competitions).
- 3 personal essays by independent users on the topics of homeland, minority rights, and a historical event.
- 2 gratitude posts, 1 to the Circassian community and 1 to the specific individual.
- 2 posts about recent news in Jordan.
- 2 posts asking for donations to help cover Circassian students' university tuition fees (1 post in English, 1 post in Arabic).
- 9 others (1 call for a costume design competition, 1 post celebrating the Association's 93rd anniversary, 1 prayer for the new administration of the Association, 1 post informing about a death of a person, 1 call for contribution to a cultural preservation project (looking for people to submit images of old Circassian weapons, tools and artifacts), 1 post of Nalchik admiration (a city in the homeland Caucasus), 1 animation of an old image, 1 post focusing on an event of Circassian people Vienna, 1 post searching for workers to finish the new building of Circassian Charity Association).

The language of the majority of texts was Arabic; 5 texts were written in English; 1 text was written in three different languages, one after another - English, Russian, and Turkish; 1 in English and Turkish; 2 in Russian; and 1 in Russian and Arabic.

As I mentioned earlier, I collected most of my material from the official pages of Circassian organizations in Jordan rather than from posts by independent users, which, of course, influences the results of this method. For instance, of the 8 posts I collected from the Nart TV Group, which is the only group that allows individual users to post on the page after administrator approval, 3 were long personal essays. Another example is that there was no mention of the homeland, the Caucasus, in posts on organizations' pages, whereas on the Nart TV page, the homeland was mentioned 2 times out of 8 posts I collected. However, it is important to keep in mind that Nart TV sometimes shares more than 10 posts a day, which makes drawing any conclusions about the content posted there increasingly hard.

2.6 Positionality and ethics

Growing up as a Russian-Circassian in Moscow has been a unique and formative experience. For much of my life, I primarily identified as Russian - largely because I lived only in Moscow until I was eighteen, did not speak Arabic, and had limited daily contact with my Circassian family beyond my father. This separation has long fueled a personal interest in connecting with and better understanding my Circassian roots. That is part of the reason why, when the opportunity to write a thesis that involved working closely with people presented itself, I had little hesitation in choosing what community to focus on. At the same time, I am aware that this personal investment is both a strength and a source of potential bias. Being a semi-insider raised by Circassian rules and norms, but mostly outside the community, I occupy an specific position that has influenced what research participants were willing to share with me, how I perceived what I observed, what topics I avoided, and where my blind spots lied. Although I have made a continuous effort during this research to address the matter of positionality with honesty and care, I urge the reader to bear this in mind.

The research adhered to the ethical guidelines of the University of Vienna's Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology and to those established for digital ethnography. The comfort and safety of the participants were my top priority during this process. Often, sensitive topics were discussed, and I did my best to treat them with care and seek consent for all the interviews

or the use of personal content. I made sure to explain the project's topic to all participants in detail and to confirm their willingness to be involved multiple times. For safety reasons, I am not using the participants' names throughout this thesis, except for the two people who have explicitly asked me to do so.

Regarding material collection from Circassian community social media pages, I have always reached out to the administrators of the channels before proceeding to collect, even though all the groups I used for the method were public. I have only added posts made under the names of individual posters a couple of times, but still reached out to them and waited for their approval. In the section on the Discourse Analysis method earlier, I describe the collection process in more detail.

It seems appropriate to address the question of algorithms in this section. Things we see on the internet and the way we see them are strongly determined by algorithms that social media have in place. They function based on our previous activities on the internet, the content we previously posted and engaged with. Therefore, it is impossible to do independent and neutral research when on and with social media because all that we see online is already determined by what our values and interests are. I tried my best to work around the algorithms in place by implementing the following steps: I created new Facebook and Instagram accounts that were not used for anything else other than this research. The email connected to these accounts was only used for this research purpose as well. Additionally, I chose the social media groups recommended to me by Circassian people living in Jordan for this analysis, which I hope already makes my research based more on what is important for them, rather than what my algorithm would allow me to see.

The fact that I don't speak Arabic has been one of the strongest obstacles of this research, which I explicitly address in the limitations section of this thesis. Nevertheless, to complete this work I used a GDPR-approved Deepl translator to make sense of the online posts, asked friends and family to help me translate signs, phrases, and documents I encountered, and asked my dad to be an interpreter during one of my interviews (Deepl - Data Security).

3 The Logic of Posting

Just like the rest of the world, the Circassian diaspora in Jordan is actively using social media platforms. Within the scope of this research, I found out about the various and distinctive ways Circassians engage (or don't engage) with social media, as well as how they think about them. This chapter consists of two subchapters titled "Social media spaces" and "Participation".

In "Social media spaces", I first describe the platforms most used by the Circassian people: Facebook and Instagram. After that, I introduce the groups identified as most important to Circassians in Jordan. I describe the institutions these groups are connected to, give examples of posts shared there, and, in some cases, clarify how some interview participants feel about those spaces. I divide Circassian social media pages into "Official pages of the Circassian institutions" and "Non-institutional community pages" based on content and on who is allowed to post in those spaces.

In "Participation", I am switching the focus from the online spaces to the online activities of Circassians in those spaces and on their individual social media pages. I also discuss social media features that participants brought up when discussing their social media engagement decisions, as well as the online activities they participate in. Based on the findings of the discourse analysis, as well as interview inputs regarding participation choices, I argue that for the Circassian diaspora in Amman, social media functions as an important site of identity production, but one that is characterized by both a strong desire for recognition and visibility, as well as a need to control exactly who can look at it and how.

3.1 Social media spaces

3.1.1 Social media platforms

Facebook and Instagram are the most used social media platforms among people in the Circassian community. They have a lot in common, but there are a few differences as well. The user can create a personal page on both platforms, set its visibility (private or public), post photos, videos, and text, "like" and comment on other users' posts, and receive "likes" and comments on their own posts. On both platforms, users can privately message each other – on Facebook, one has to download a separate "Messenger" app for that purpose. In contrast, for

Instagram, users can do so directly on the main app, via “DMs” or “direct messages”. Currently, both platforms are owned by Meta Platforms, Inc., whose CEO is Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook. I will shortly summarise the emergence and the differences between the two platforms in more detail.

Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg, launched as TheFacebook in February 2004, and renamed to Facebook in 2005 (Hall, n.d.). Initially, it was a platform for Harvard University students, but it started expanding rapidly, and by the end of 2005, it had six million monthly active users (Hall, n.d.). In 2006, Facebook allowed anyone over the age of 13 to create an account free of charge (Hall, n.d.). On Facebook, one can create a personal page where they are the sole creator of their online persona, posting images, thoughts, videos, and navigating comments.

Users can also join *groups* centered around specific topics or communities. Those groups have one or more administrators who have the most power in these online spaces. Even if everyone can technically post publicly in those groups, the administrators are ultimately the ones who decide what content stays on the group page for everyone to see and what has to go. Facebook groups have different, very specific posting processes for independent users. In some cases, the post becomes visible to the public immediately right after posting, and the administrator can determine whether it stays or goes post-factum. In other cases, the posts do not go public at all before administrators approve them.

Additionally, Facebook offers both public and private groups with a wide range of privacy settings. Certain groups are closed, meaning outsiders cannot view their content. However, users can request to join, and their requests are either approved or declined by the administrators. Others can only be joined via an invitation link sent by a member or an administrator, depending on the group's settings, and are totally invisible from the outside. Facebook also allows for *pages* that are different from *groups* in a way that they don't allow followers to post at all, only comment, but even that can be restricted. Those are most commonly used by organizations or businesses, rather than by individual users. A few of my participants mentioned that the pages of Circassian institutions are now restricted, with posts appearing only under the official association names, whereas previously these pages were open to public contributions. Allegedly, recurring conflicts led administrators to turn off public posting options.

Instagram was launched in 2010 by co-founders Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, and it is now owned by Meta Platforms, Inc., the parent company of Facebook (Eldridge, 2026). The app reached 25,000 users on its first day and remains one of the most widely used social media platforms worldwide, surpassing 2 billion monthly active users in 2022 (Eldridge, 2026). The main difference between Facebook and Instagram when they first emerged was that Instagram only allowed posting images, which had to be square. With time, many updates were introduced – users could also post videos and pictures in different formats; eventually, a format called “stories” appeared, which allows the user to post a picture or a short video for 24 hours only; eventually, users could save those stories in “highlights” after the 24 hours expired. In 2020, Instagram introduced “Reels,” a format that invited people to create 15-second videos on the app, similar to those that achieved virality on TikTok (Instagram, 2020). TikTok is another major social media app, but it is unavailable in Jordan, so it is not discussed in this thesis. Reels on Instagram have gained popularity very quickly, and users could soon create longer videos, which are currently limited to 3 minutes. Soon after the emergence of Reels, other social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, started introducing similar video content formats – vertical, short, easy to consume. The format is currently being blamed for society's attention-deficit crisis because it offers users large amounts of information in a short time period, stimulating quick feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment and making it increasingly hard to stop “scrolling”. As a result, more and more people seem to be able to mainly process information in such a fast, constantly entertaining format. Finally, Instagram didn't allow community groups until very recently, and I would still argue that the feature is not used as widely. The platform is better suited for individual “one-to-many” posting than for group interaction.

Most of the participants remember Facebook as the first social media platform they discovered. Many of them told me that they were first added to groups by one of their friends, who, in most cases, did not ask if they wanted to enter those spaces. Many Circassian groups emerged back then, and some of those are still functioning to this day. However, over time, Facebook became less popular, possibly due to the rise of Instagram. Currently, more Circassians report using Instagram more often than Facebook. There is a somewhat unspoken agreement that Facebook is a social media platform for ‘old people’, while younger generations prefer Instagram, and the Circassian diaspora in Jordan is no exception. At the same time, Facebook is considered to encourage an exchange of ideas and longer conversations, as it, at the very least, does not

require you to add an image to communicate a thought or to get your message across in a 15-second video.

Additionally, Facebook allows group pages, so that many different opinions can be expressed in the same space, and posts can sometimes be made by all group participants rather than by a single administrator. On the contrary, on Instagram, a page belongs to only one person or one organization. Even though people still often argue in the comments, the idea is different: one posts, and others can react. Therefore, when it comes to discussions about the Circassian Xasas' history, traditions, and ways forward, some people consider Facebook groups more suitable, as many can express their thoughts more equally.

Instagram is perceived and used as a more personal platform, where people tend to post about their private lives – personal images, art they make. However, Xasas and other Circassian institutions have Instagram accounts as well, which I suggest are meant to appeal to younger audiences. Instagram also seems to be an online space where people choose to follow what others are doing, even more than they choose to share about themselves. People follow artists whose work they admire, get inspired by what they see, and keep up with the lives of their friends. It seems to be the easiest way to do the latter these days, especially when knowing people from different parts of the globe - it takes a lot more effort to send a picture of yourself traveling to everyone you would like to share it with than to put it on your Instagram story and have those same people each react to it from their side. When critiquing social media, participants either referred to 'social media' in general when they wanted to emphasize fights online or online personalities people are curating so carefully, or 'Instagram' when they wanted to emphasize algorithms or constant consumption of content and its effect on human attention. Facebook was never openly criticized but rather dismissed as unimportant or unhelpful, mostly by people irritated by online fights and not participating in group discussions. They saw political conversations on the platform as pointless, since they never bring any real solutions or change.

In the next section, I describe all the Xasas' and other Circassian institutions' social media pages, specifically the content posted on them, engagement tendencies, as well as the Xasas themselves, for context. Most Circassian institutions have accounts on both Facebook and Instagram, so I am also providing a comparison of their respective pages. Finally, in cases

where participants have spoken to me specifically about those groups, I am adding their perspectives in the appropriate sections.

3.1.2 Official pages of the Circassian institutions

To understand the stakes of engaging in online conversations on the official pages of Circassian institutions in Jordan, one needs to grasp the role these institutions play in the community. Xasas and Associations are the main institutions for Circassians in Jordan. Their activities range from organizing and hosting events to providing such services as maintaining a blood bank for Circassians in need of transfusions. Xasas' and Associations' nature is completely voluntary - people are not paid for their work, and the only funding these organizations have comes from individual donations from Circassian people. At the same time, these institutions' buildings are where most events are held, and the people elected to the boards of Xasas are the ones cooperating with other political actors. An unpopular opinion exists regarding the efficiency of those associations and their voluntary nature. Some people believe that in the current capitalist economic system, there is not enough motivation for collaborative work when there is no clear profit seen in doing so. Most people are full-time employed and do not have much time or capacity to volunteer for the good of the Circassian community, even though they might like to. However, those people emphasize that they “do not think volunteering should end”; they are of the opinion that finding other ways for the Xasas and Associations to operate would greatly benefit Circassians in Jordan. The opposing opinion holds that involving money would be “against the Circassian nature” and would harm the strong bond among the Circassian people.

For this research, I have investigated the websites of the following organizations: the Circassian Charity Association, the International Circassian Cultural Academy, the Circassian Repatriation Organization, and Al Jeel al Jadeed Club. Additionally, the Circassian Charity Association has a club within its structure titled “Circassian Charity Volunteer Club”, a separate page of which I am also including in this section.

All these groups have large followings, ranging from two to twenty-six thousand people, so everyone I spoke to and showed the collection I used for discourse analysis knew the pages I collected from; sometimes people in the posts, sometimes they even participated in the events

promoted in those posts. Notably, many people shared that they have more trust in the information posted on the official Xasa and Associations pages, rather than on a “random personal account”.

The Circassian Charity Association and the Circassian Charity Volunteer Club pages

Earlier in this work, I have described the Circassian Charity Association as a formal institution within the wider Jordanian civic and political structures, while in this section, before considering its digital presence, I briefly cover the ways it functions as a social space in the everyday lives of Circassians.

The main aim of the Xasa, according to its website, is to develop relations among the Circassian people, encourage them to learn the language, remind them of customs and traditions, and support a spirit of collective charity work (Circassian Charity Association, 2021). Many events are held within the walls of the seven Xasa branches across different cities in Jordan. A good example of such an event would be the recent job fair, where Circassian people had a chance to meet with representatives of and be interviewed by some of the biggest companies in Jordan.

Besides being an event venue and a meeting point for board members, Xasa’s buildings are understood as spaces where all Circassian people can come together and socialize. For instance, in the main Xasa building in Amman, where I spent a lot of time during my visit to Jordan, there is a café where people can enjoy non-alcoholic drinks, a common area with comfortable couches, a TV, and a garden. Xasa buildings are spaces where every Circassian is welcome, which is why most of my interviews took place there – it felt like the most natural option.

The Circassian Charity Association is present on both Facebook and Instagram, but the content on both platforms is the same. If one sees a certain post by the Xasa on Instagram, they will always find the same post on Facebook, posted on the same day or within a couple of days at most. Short videos (reels) and images are posted on Facebook and Instagram and are almost always accompanied by a long text describing the post's theme. Most of the posts have a similar design - a light blue background, white text on top, and photographs where applicable. I got to interview someone who handles the social media and photography for the Xasa. He told me that the consistent design is very important and serves as somewhat of a brand strategy

for the Xasa pages, so when someone sees the light blue background, they immediately know it's the post by the CCA. Additionally, all the posts include an emblem of the Xasa, which portrays the blue sky with white stars, a green field, white mountains, a white moon, a sword, and a Circassian hat, called 'papakha', in the background (See Image 1).

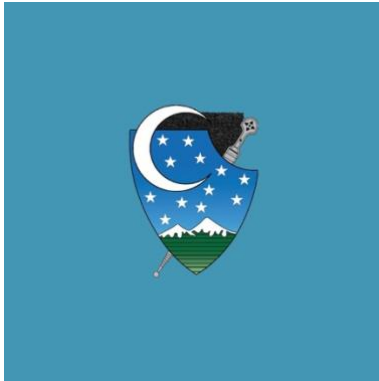


Image 1: The emblem of Circassian Charity Association

Regarding the content posted on Xasa's Facebook and Instagram pages, I have identified a few recurring themes. As the Xasa itself often organizes public events, the posts on the pages first promote and then cover those same events. For example, a job fair I mentioned earlier was organized a month before my in-person fieldwork, so posts advertising it, as well as those covering how it went, appeared in my collection. Another example of a post one can see on this Xasa page is a congratulatory post. It usually looks simple – a Circassian person is photographed with their new medal, trophy, or diploma, accompanied by a congratulatory text. These achievements vary, but the posts that I saw and heard about myself were celebrating graduation, a new position in a governmental institution, a win of the "Strong Jordanian Woman Award", and prize-winning places in sports competitions. Based on my collection, I cannot make statements about which types of posts receive the most likes, as the sample is too small. However, I still feel confident suggesting that congratulations posts are among the types receiving the most traction – likes, comments, and reposts. Last but not least, you could often see announcements and general news on these pages as well – for instance, a post looking for a crew to finish work on the new Xasa building, or a post highlighting the completion of the renovation of the Prince Hamza Al Hussein Kindergarten, a kindergarten within the Circassian school, that was founded by the CCA as well.

The Circassian Charity Volunteer Club is a club established by the Circassian Charity Association that focuses on volunteer activities for the community. The Club regularly holds

events – both volunteer events for a cause (preparing gifts for orphans, making meals for people in need) and entertaining fun activities (bike rides, trips to famous sights in Jordan). Most of the posts on both the Club's Instagram and Facebook pages are directly related to those topics. Similar to the Circassian Charity Association, you can always find an event invitation post and a recap of the event. Event invitation posts frequently include the participation fee (if any), what participants need to bring, what the organizers provide, and whom to contact. The recap of the event is sometimes done as a short video, sometimes as a collection of photographs, sometimes both, as separate posts. During the interview process, I learned that it is important to show people that the activities of the Xasa and the Volunteer Club are consistent, that they can rely on them, and that this is part of why everything is so systematically documented.

The Circassian Charity Association and the Volunteer Club are very visibly connected on social media; their posts often have a similar design – a blue background and white font. Some posts also include two emblems – of the Association, which I have described previously, and of the Volunteer Club, which portrays a handshake with the Circassian flag in the background (green with yellow arrows and stars), white mountains, and a blue sky (See Image 2).



Image 2: The Emblem of the Circassian Charity Volunteer Club

The International Circassian Cultural Academy

The International Circassian Cultural Academy is a non-profit cultural hub headquartered in Amman (International Circassian Cultural Academy). They see their mission in “preserving, teaching and celebrating Circassian culture locally and internationally through language programs, performing arts, and vocational workshops” (International Circassian Cultural Academy). The Academy has had its own dance troupe, “The Highlanders,” since 2010, and a

singing group since 2019, which was the first Circassian singing group in Jordan (International Circassian Cultural Academy). The ICCA is active on both Facebook and Instagram, and the posts are identical on both platforms. Both pages are very popular, and you can frequently see high numbers of likes on the posts; the range is from twenty to more than a thousand. Comments are written less frequently, ranging from about ten to thirty per post. When it comes to the contents of the posts, many of them are related to the Circassian traditional dance. Among the images and texts I have collected for my discourse analysis from this page were two long (about 8 minutes) horizontal videos of the troupe performing the different Circassian dances (Afaq and Abaza) on stage; an announcement of a new dance course supported by a video edit of moments of the previously held courses; a launch of the second phase of heritage preservation and documentation project with the call for participants; an educational ‘carousel’ with a text in English about the Circassian costume titled “What does the Circassian costume tell?”. The languages used in the posts vary; sometimes they are written only in Arabic, more often they include translations into English and Russian.

The Circassian Repatriation Organization

The pages of the Circassian Repatriation Organization (later referred to as CRO) were among the first I found when preparing for this research. The main mission of CRO is to support the Circassian people in their return to their ancestral homeland in the North Caucasus (CRO, Mission statement). In addition to offering displaced Circassians practical support, including relocation, repatriation, and emergency relief, CRO seeks to increase public awareness of their struggle through research, information campaigns, and seminars (CRO, Mission statement). CRO also works to improve the living standards of Circassians in the North Caucasus by supporting commercial, industrial, and agricultural enterprises and providing counseling and scholarships to persons of Circassian descent in need (CRO, Mission statement). The organization’s initiatives, for instance, include the “Small Business Support program” that grants loans to returners in the Caucasus who wish to start a small business; or a “Backpack Drive Program” that is aimed at supporting Circassian students and their families in the Caucasus to cover school expenses (CRO, Programs). The programs are not held annually; for example, the “Backpack Drive” first took place in 2019, then in 2020, 2021, and 2024 (CRO, Programs). CRO also organized three International Circassian Conferences, the latest of which took place in 2022 (CRO, Conferences). The activities of the organization are funded by “Membership registration and Annual Membership fees; unconditional donations, grants, and

aids from individuals, institutions, and other formal and informal organizations or agencies across the globe; all other forms of income generated from organizing exhibitions, activities, and financial investments” (CRO, About Us). People who are willing to donate to CRO’s initiatives can find the necessary account details on the organization's website. CRO is headquartered in Waterloo, Canada, and has two other branches – in New Jersey, United States, and the Netherlands (CRO, About Us). Still, their work is known and aimed at all persons of “Circassian descent,” regardless of where they are located (CRO, About Us).

CRO is present on both Facebook and Instagram, like other Circassian organizations; however, their following is significantly larger on Facebook (7,8 thousand followers) than on Instagram (946 followers). Posts are the same on both platforms, but the engagement is significantly lower than on other Circassian social media pages – the maximum number of likes from the posts I have collected is 99, comments – 111, at the same post of grief for one of the former presidents of the Circassian Charity Organization in Jordan. Other posts include, for instance educational videos about traditional Circassian costume, calls for contribution to cover Circassian students’ tuition fees, a celebration of new administration of Circassian Charity Association in Jordan, a recap post with 26 photographs from the event honoring Circassian students achieving the highest grades in Syria, and a “thank you” post to the Circassian Charity Organisation in Syria for organizing the said ceremony. The design of the posts is not that strict on CRO pages, but it frequently includes green tones, as on its website. The languages used are most often Arabic, sometimes Russian or English.

Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club

The Al Jeel Club building is located right next to the Circassian Charity Association building in Amman. I have conducted the first of my in-person interviews in Amman at Al Jeel Club. Al Jeel Club does not have a website, or at least I could not find one, so some of the general information I have about the club comes from the interview participant I spoke with there, who is part of the club’s Cultural Committee. Here is an excerpt from my fieldwork diary from that day:

We went in and went upstairs. We went in and went upstairs. As we walked up, she told me things: the club was established in 1950, only 4 years after the Kingdom of Jordan was founded. She said preserving language was the main reason for its

establishment. She said that the head and the board of the clubs are elected regularly, so everything is very democratic.

Nowadays, Al Jeel Club positions itself as a cultural, social, sports, and artistic club (Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club, Instagram page). Inside the building, there is a large dance hall where dance classes and major events take place. I also got to see a boardroom, a classroom for language classes, and a book club, one of the Club's initiatives, that happens regularly:

In the boardroom, there was also a map of the Caucasus from when the deportation happened, with many village names written in Circassian, along with pins and threads. She pointed at one of the names and said, "This is where my family is coming from". Then she told me about a man they work with who could trace my family "all the way back," give me the name of the village where my ancestors lived, and maybe also tell me if any of my relatives still live there.

Al Jeel Club doesn't have a website but does have social media pages on Facebook and Instagram, so I included both in my analysis. The posts are repeated across these two platforms and include event invitations, event recaps, educational reels, congratulatory posts, and gratitude posts, similar to those on other pages. Among the posts I have collected there were two recap posts from the grand celebration of the Club's 75th birthday, one of them highlighting the attendance of Prince Ali bin Al Hussein; one post offering to purchase tickets for the said performance; one post inviting people to submit the design of Circassian traditional costume; one congratulation post on earning Taekwondo black belts for two young women; one gratitude post to a woman that has resigned from her secretary post in Women's Committee. The language of all the collected posts is Arabic. Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club also does not have a strict design guideline for its social media posts, but when an artificial background is needed, they will most likely use a shade of green, the color of the Circassian flag. Sometimes, an emblem of the club is also attached to the post. It depicts a white falcon, a treble clef, 3 white arrows, and 6 stars, with a red ribbon on top. All of those pieces, except the ribbon, are portrayed on a green background, with the words "the club of the new generation" written in Arabic at the very bottom (See Image 3).



Image 3: The Emblem of Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club

Summary

Based on the discourse analysis findings, I conclude that the frequent themes posted on the Official pages of the Circassian institutions are: event advertisements and recaps; celebration of wins, individual and communal; posts of grief; volunteering and donation calls; heritage documentation project calls; informational content about traditional Circassian dance/language/costume; general announcements and practical news. As such, I see content posted on the official social media pages of Circassian institutions in Amman best divided into four general categories:

1. Organizational communication – social media platforms become an effective tool for organizations to expand their administrative reach into digital spaces by posting announcements, volunteer/charity calls, and updates on the institutional infrastructure.
2. Current history documentation - by posting content that is celebrating wins and recapping major events, Circassian institutions document the modern history of the community.
3. Cultural preservation – by frequently posting informational content about customs, traditional dance, language, and costume, as well as documentation and heritage calls, Circassian institutions participate in the process of cultural preservation.
4. Production of community identity - public expressions of grief and celebrations of individual and group accomplishments, as well as honouring of cultural elements, reaffirm belonging and add to the production of a common cultural Circassian identity.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Circassian institutions in Amman use social media to continue sustaining community life, rather than simply as a means of communication.

3.1.3 Informal social media spaces

As I have described in the section on methodology, it was not always easy to obtain access to and consent to collect the posts, even from group administrators, let alone from independent users. However, with the help of the participatory scrolling method, I was able to look into more restricted social media spaces of Circassians in Jordan. In this subsection, I will cover four such groups – “Nart TV”, “Hand in Hand, to benefit Circassian people”, Jordanian University students’ group, and “Adiga-Circassian Nationalists”. I intentionally include excerpts from the participatory scrolling parts of the interviews when describing some of the groups, so that reading these sections somewhat resembles the experience of scrolling through a social media feed.

The Nart TV

The Nart TV page is the only page among these groups that I could access myself and collect from for discourse analysis. The Nart TV group is a Facebook group created by the National Adiga Radio and Television Channel in Jordan, a channel for Circassian people founded in 2007. However, it quickly became simply a YouTube channel due to the lack of funding. The Facebook group stayed active after that format change and is now an online space where Circassian people can post, share their thoughts, and share news. The name Nart comes from the Circassian mythologies, where Narts are “courageous, energetic, bold, and good-hearted” warriors (Colarusso, 2016).

Nart TV Facebook is a private group with 8.7 thousand followers. Every member can suggest a post, which will first be reviewed by the administrators and, upon their approval, become visible to all group followers. The posts are very frequent on Nart TV – often 10 new posts in a day, which made choosing which ones to collect challenging, so I decided to do it intuitively. Most of the posts, however, are made by one of the administrators himself and a couple of other people; it's very noticeable, as these people's names are very repetitive in the group. The general topics of the posts are the appreciation of the places in the Caucasus, the homeland; personal essays about various topics, but always somehow related to the Circassian discourse,

for instance a historical event or minority rights or a recent event that happened in the diaspora or homeland; wins of the community, whether of one separate individual or bigger groups; Circassian news from all over the world, not only from Jordan or homeland. To illustrate these categories better, among the posts I have collected, there were two essays about recent events in the Xasa, one essay about a historical event, one post introducing a fashion designer from Nalchik, one short reel admiring views in Nalchik, and one invitation to a Circassian event in Vienna. 7 of the 8 collected texts were written in Arabic, and the remaining one was written in Russian.

When I spoke with interview participants about this group, most had little trust in it. They were of the opinion that if everyone could express their thoughts without needing any credentials, it would be damaging for the Circassian community because misinformation spreads easily on the internet. Some people, on the other hand, spoke about it with smiles on their faces, saying that it has been around since they were kids and that they frequently check it because it's exactly the space where any relevant news would appear.

Hand in Hand

The Hand in Hand group, which many consider vital, is the most important market for goods and services among Circassians. 4 out of 6 people we conducted participatory scrolling with mentioned this group to me. Hand in Hand looks like a normal Facebook group in which every Circassian can post to offer their services or products, or look for someone who can provide them. The services offered and sought range from catering to blood donations, from selling clothes to providing legal services. The group is strictly private, so much so that the participants couldn't even share the link with me because of the privacy settings. Participant 10, a 25-year-old woman, translated a few posts from this group for me during her interview:

... this is like a catering service. So she's posting about the meals she prepares and donating. Actually, in this post, she's donating meals for people in need. So she's posting as a way to like promote her business, but also encourage more people to donate. This is [name], and she's selling clothes; she's selling hoodies. So she's posting about the prices, available colors, and available sizes. [name] is posting about a job opportunity for an accessories store at a mall, and he's posting about the work hours, etc. Okay, this is dietitian [name], this is a cooking session for kids. It also involves a yoga class. So

it's held by dietitians or people who are specialised in this area, let's say. And she's posting the details. So they're basically talking about how important healthy food is, and they're going to teach people some healthy recipes.

In addition to the examples the Participant gave during the interview, I have also observed people seeking out Circassian professionals in hospitals, believing they would receive better care, looking for someone who can donate a certain blood type, and looking for a person who can provide legal services, all on the Hand in Hand group. As I mentioned earlier, volunteering and helping others in need are considered crucial parts of what it means to be Circassian, so having an online space like Hand in Hand becomes essential, as it allows one to reach so many people at once. This group also reflects that many Circassians prefer to collaborate with and purchase from people within the community.

Participants themselves described this dynamic as a survival mechanism. To me, the closest concept is social capital. James S. Coleman wrote:

Social capital is defined by function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievements of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (Coleman, 1988).

The exchange of goods and services within the Hand in Hand group fits well under this definition. There is another form of social capital – bonding social capital. According to Tristan Claridge, bonding social capital refers to ties within a community characterized by a high degree of similarity in demographics, values, resources, and information accessible to its members (Claridge, 2024). “Bonding social capital exists between ‘people like us’ who are ‘in it together’ and who typically have strong close relationships” (Claridge, 2024). In this case, the people in the Hand in Hand group provide social support to each other in the form of favors, information, services, and goods, exclusively within their own community.

Jordanian University students' group

If one looks at a Jordanian University students' page from the outside, they will see some group pictures of the Circassian students together, a picture of the space of the university that is informally reserved for Circassian people only, maybe a post with contact information of older students, which could explain to youngsters how the university system works. However, there is a side to it that I wouldn't be able to see without the interview participants' input. They explained to me that it is important to remain a close-knit community within the university, too, for safety reasons. For instance, the informally reserved space for Circassians is very protected. If a non-Circassian enters it for whatever reason, they will first be politely asked to leave. If they refuse to, the situation can be seriously escalated and even become physical. Other communities have their own spaces as well, where the rules are the same. Belal, 27, who graduated from the university in recent years, explained that this Facebook group was one of the channels Circassian students used to communicate with each other and navigate that complex "tribal" relationship in the college buildings:

We, the guys, communicated with each other. Where are the places that have trouble? And then we go, we know where the girls are having their lectures. We try to go with them, go back with them. Sometimes the parents of people used to talk to us, like, "Please keep our children safe, please."

He also told me a story of a conflict that happened a few years ago in the university and had escalated to the point that the government officials had to intervene in solving the matter between Circassians and the other group:

... people remember that in 1995, there was a big war that happened in the Jordanian university between the Circassians and another tribe because they harassed a Circassian girl. And things grew wider and wider to the point that the late King Hussein had to deal with the issue... So things get deeper than they seem. It's not just a university where people go to study.

Therefore, this Facebook group serves as both a starting point for students to meet, socialize, and help each other with class assignments, and as a space for safe communication, where members exchange information about potential conflicts with other groups and look out for

each other. I see this dynamic in the university group as another perfect example of the community's social capital, this time utilized for safety reasons – by updating each other online about the situation on campus, Circassian students ensure each other's well-being.

The Nationalists

The last page shown to me during the participatory scrolling method was the group called “The Nationalists”. This group, unlike Circassian Association pages, is a space for political and ideological conversations about the “Circassian nation,” rather than domestic issues such as how to run the Xasas or improve society. This page is available for everyone to post on, but administrators must always approve the suggested post first. This policy means that administrators have the most power in these conversations, as they form the narratives. If they disagree with an opinion expressed in the suggested post or comment, they can easily prevent the idea from reaching others.

This page is full of long essays on ideological beliefs, so the interview participants were unable to give me a clear summary of each during the participatory scrolling method. It would require them to read carefully and for a relatively long time, which we could not afford. However, we still scrolled through the pages with them, and they tried to give me some examples of topics being discussed on the pages. The following is an excerpt from the interview with Belal, 27:

...what politics is useful for us?... Should we lean more towards Russia? Should we lean more towards America? For example, what makes a Circassian a Circassian? Sometimes, some people pretend that everything in the world is of Circassian origin. So you can find such propaganda like this - here he's saying that the Arabian horse is originally from the Caucasus...”

Even though the participation options in this Facebook group are limited for non-administrators, it remains an online space where many ideological conflicts occur. Belal expressed the opinion that most people in this group lean more towards right political ideologies and added that there is no equivalent for individuals who lean towards left.

For the left, we don't have that, because, let's say, the environment we're living in helps the right ideology spread more... So it's hard to find an environment that leans more to

the left. The left opposes tradition in the minds of society. The left equals you want us to assimilate in their opinion. But because we don't have this many people who lean left, they unconsciously leave Circassian society. Leave it completely.

Overall, the page encourages complex conversations, such as, for instance, about Circassian identity or political orientation. Certain opinions seem to dominate these discussions, with some viewpoints, particularly those seen as untraditional, remaining unpopular. Even though the group allows public participation, administrators still fully control what is visible. As a result, the page illustrates the Circassian community's internal discussions and ideas that can be freely communicated during them.

Summary

As opposed to the official pages of Circassian institutions in Jordan, I observed more communal activities, more political, and ideological discussions on the informal pages. I see content posted on informal Circassian social media pages best divided into 4 categories:

1. Homeland orientation – frequent posts admiring the Caucasus as well as actively discussing current affairs in the homeland demonstrate a strong emotional and symbolic attachment to a location.
2. Bonding social capital – through some informal groups, Circassians share job opportunities, offer services, exchange goods, assure each other's safety, and ultimately, establish networks of reciprocal support within the community.
3. Counter-narrative construction – some informal spaces serve as sites for political and ideological discourse, where participants discuss issues of recognition, policy, and collective memory.
4. Production of collective Circassian identity – public celebrations, essays about ‘what makes a Circassian’ foster a sense of belonging and pride, producing a sense of successful and respectful collective identity.

Overall, the described themes and categories show that informal social media are the spaces where more Circassian people are free to participate in various discussions, connect and support one another.

3.1.4 Summary of the subsection

In this subsection, I have described the most commonly used online spaces among Circassians, which can be divided into two groups: official institutional pages and informal pages. This division illustrates the negotiation over who gets to post and speak for the whole Circassian community and who gets to only communicate ideas.

Official social media pages of the institutions used to allow the public to post, but now they are restricted and only post under the institutions' names. The topics vary between event invitations and recaps, celebrations of collective and personal wins, sharing charity causes and volunteering calls, sharing information about Circassian discourse and practices – dance, costume, folklore, etc.

Informal participation-oriented social media groups and pages reflect the engagement of the broader population. These are the spaces where ideological and political discussions take place and where people look for goods and services. These are also the spaces where people communicate with each other for mutual support and protection within narrower social circles – such as the University of Jordan. The theme of using social media to keep track of and develop social capital emerges frequently – people seek help in these spaces, such as blood transfers, legal counseling, and catering. However, these groups are also restricted in participation – the administrators of the groups either evaluate the post you suggest before it is accessible to the broader public, or they have the power to delete it after you posted it yourself, so ultimately, they are the ones controlling the narrative.

The main themes of content posted on Circassian social media pages are: organizational communication, current historical documentation, cultural preservation, and reinforcement of collective identity for the official pages of the institutions; and homeland orientation, bonding social capital, counter-narrative construction, and reinforcement of collective identity for the informal community pages.

These findings show that, for the Circassian diaspora in Jordan, social media functions as an organizational tool, a historical archive, a space for debate, and a network of mutual support. At the same time, there is an overlap between the two types of pages in the production of Circassian collective identity. For Circassians, social media serves as a platform where Circassian identity is not only broadcast but also actively and continuously constructed, whether through carefully curated posts on official pages or devoted ideological debates on informal pages.

A pattern that spans both types of digital spaces is control. Public engagement has been limited by official institutional pages, which currently post exclusively under the institution's name. Although informal pages are indeed more accessible for public engagement, there are still gatekeepers in the form of administrators. This structural characteristic invites the question of whose voice in the Circassian digital world is filtered out and whose counts as representative.

3.2 Participation

This subchapter focuses on the Circassian people's choices regarding participation in social media activities. I will start with the section titled "Social Media Features" that focuses on people's preferences when it comes to privacy restrictions. Further, I will cover the different kinds of content people choose to engage with or post on social media themselves, such as sharing life events, connecting with other Circassians around the world, sharing knowledge about Circassian history, and more.

3.2.1 Social media features

Social media platforms are constantly evolving and introducing new ways to engage with content. So many changes have taken place in the last ten years that people online even share nostalgic feelings about how Facebook and Instagram used to be. There are several decisions each person must make before even creating an account. Do I want my profile to be public or private? Do I want to sync my contacts so that people who have my phone number can easily find my profile? Should I make my Instagram account "professional" and choose a title that represents who I am? Am I a content creator? A musician? A writer? Or do I make my account

“personal” and private? During the interviews, I have found out what motivates Circassian people when they make those and similar decisions.

Public account vs private account

Most of the people I interviewed said they rarely engage in conversations in informal Facebook groups because they prefer to avoid the frequent arguments. Some of them added that they don't believe in 'behind-the-scenes' conversations and, in case of a disagreement, would prefer to meet the person in real life and discuss the issue face-to-face. Some even decided to leave Facebook completely and are now active only on Instagram, on their personal accounts, where they are the sole curators of their social media image. Even though others can still write comments on personal posts, the account's owner has authority in that space – it's theirs, it has their (nick)name on it. They can delete unwanted comments, earlier posts they do not like anymore, choose who sees them, and who does not purely based on their own free will. To illustrate the difference, if they were to post a comment that triggered a negative reaction in a public group, they would not be able to delete it independently, so it's possible their name would be permanently associated with the disagreement. I suggest that having more power over one's own image leads more people to migrate from public group conversations to personal social media pages.

Most Circassians prefer to keep their personal accounts private, which means that the people who do not follow them cannot see the content posted on their pages. This setting makes it emotionally easier for some to share personal images and thoughts because they can control who can see them. For instance, on Instagram, it is difficult to overlook a new follower, as each follow request must be approved or declined before the new user can access the page's content. One of the participants shared that if her profile were public, she would not feel comfortable posting an image of her son or her house. At the same time, people who are active within the community tend to keep their accounts public because they believe it is important for Circassian discourse and traditions to be visible to people both inside and outside the community. Participant 5, a 36-year-old woman, is a well-known singer in Jordan and frequently posts videos of her singing in both Arabic and Circassian languages, in addition to sometimes sharing information about Circassian costume, dance, and traditions, spoke about her experience posting publicly:

... maybe 5 or 6 people from Libya, they contacted me saying that they are Circassians, and they do not have the knowledge, they do not have the information, the language is not there anymore, so for them, it was really important to follow me and so they can know a lot about our costume, how we wear things, how we live in other countries and diaspora. So, this is a whole different aspect of it as well. Like to spread the word in the whole entire world, you know?

This example illustrates how a decision to keep one's social media account public is often understood as a contribution to the community's visibility and spreading knowledge about its practices.

Close friends

“Close friends” is a feature that Instagram introduced in 2018 (Oladipo, 2025). It allows one to share a story with only a select group of users, rather than all followers. I have always understood and used this feature to share fun images or thoughts, and perhaps more private ones, which is why the way Circassians in Jordan use it surprised me. Some Circassians, reportedly mostly men, choose to add only Circassians to their “close friends” list. Sometimes they don't even know the people they add personally; they know that those people are Circassian, and that is enough to include them in the more private digital space. Participant 4, a 27-year-old woman, first brought up this tendency during the interview:

Sometimes, when I'm scrolling through people's stories, I find myself in the close friends list of some Circassian guy I don't even know. And then I realized, apparently, guys do this. [...] Then I asked my friend, and he told me, “Oh, this is a guy thing, we're doing this because we don't want to show like, the non-Circassian people, like our beautiful women or like our beautiful culture,” or whatever.

This example illustrates that for some Circassians, the feature is used as a tool for boundary-making. By limiting access to what they post on “close friends” to Circassians only, some men try to control how outsiders see Circassian women, discourse, and practices, once again reflecting concerns about the community's collective identity.

Additionally, Participant 12, a 41-year-old man who often gives public lectures on Circassian politics and history, shared another opinion on the matter. He shared that he only added Circassian people to his “close friends” as well, but still chooses how to post depending on the content:

...if it's about the Circassians and sensitive things, it's between close friends. If it's about the glory of the Circassian, then, of course, for all people to see our history.

Participant 12's approach also shows a consideration of multiple audiences. In this case, the choice of audience depends on the message communicated. Parts of the Circassian discourse that evoke feelings of pride are acceptable to share publicly, while tensions and conflicts within the community should ideally remain behind closed doors.

Taken together, these two accounts show that the use of the “close friends” feature is tied to questions of respectability and identity-making among Circassians in Jordan. By carefully controlling which aspects of the Circassian discourse are visible from the outside, people try to maintain their desirable collective image.

3.2.2 Popular content to engage with

Before considering online activities of Circassians, it is important to note that most Circassians in Jordan are very active within their community offline as well. Circassians stay close to one another for many reasons, one of which is mutual support, as illustrated earlier in the chapter on Circassian digital spaces. Additionally, Circassians are afraid of assimilation and are trying to protect their customs and people as best they can. For instance, charity work and volunteering are seen as central to Circassian self-representation. When a Circassian person is in need, the community can collect a few thousand dollars in the blink of an eye. Traditions and culture are also carefully protected and revived: old Nart mythologies are being translated, new songs in the old folkloric style are being written, and attending traditional dance classes is almost seen as the only right thing to do. For those reasons, among others, the Circassian community keeps close all year long - concerts, charity events, book clubs, bazaars, lectures, and collective trips are happening regularly. Naturally, activities of the diaspora that are so interconnected offline would also be present online. Further in this section, I describe some

types of content that Circassian people in Jordan engage with on social media and how they think about those behaviors, while including some personal reflections on the matter.

Sharing life events

One of the first things I noticed while observing the activities of Circassian people on social media was the way they share their wins and losses. On the official Association pages, you often see an image of a young girl who graduated from university, accompanied by tens, sometimes hundreds, of congratulatory comments. The same thing is done for people who get promoted in the army or in a government institution, or who win a major sports competition. This behavior caught my eye immediately, and during the interviews, many interesting explanations emerged.

To start with, some people found this tendency completely unnecessary. They said they see no reason to post those events on social media, adding that this kind of activity mainly happens on Facebook and is ‘for old people’ now. They believe that when someone they know or care about achieves something important, they can learn about it without social media. A few participants saw these exchanges of good news and congratulatory words as social currency, which has the power to improve one’s position in society, so if you write someone a congratulatory comment, you also expect to receive a few yourself when achieving something. A different explanation was given by Participant 4, a 27-year-old woman, who shared that she thinks this behavior was adopted from Jordanian Arabs, who also tend to advertise achievements very publicly:

This is such a Jordanian thing, like the Arabic culture here. Sometimes, when you're driving through the streets, you will see a huge sign, literally, like a billboard or something in the street. They're congratulating some guy who got an engineering certificate or some guy who became a lawyer, and they have his picture right there in the street. So I think maybe we picked up on it in a way.

A few others, including Bashar, 30, expressed that people are sharing their achievements on social media from a place of human need for attention, approval, and recognition:

I think that this need is built in us for millions of years. Like we are dealing with neurological systems here that are built to make us need not only the attention of people, but the approval of people. The smart thing to do is to think about whose approval you are asking for, not rejecting this human need for approval. So I would say it's an extension of our efforts to be seen.

By looking at these interpretations, the reader sees that some people understand this behavior as a natural human need. In contrast, others see it as something learned within a particular social context. While I do believe that humans inherently seek approval and inclusion, and that the ability to broadcast one's achievements to a wide audience serves to meet those needs, I also think that the age of social media has intensified them. Social media exposes us to images of carefully curated, seemingly great lives every day. We constantly compare ourselves to influencers we see on Instagram and to our friends who have achieved things we want for ourselves, which triggers constant feelings of self-evaluation and self-doubt. So when we actually achieve something that, in our social circles, is seen as a success, it feels not only right but even necessary, in some cases, to share that win publicly. Moreover, I suggest that right now, sharing your wins specifically on social media may bring you almost as many positive emotions as winning in the first place. I am certain that for some of us, the anticipation of sharing becomes part of the experience - we imagine the post even before the moment fully arrives.

At the same time, in light of Bashar's words, it is important to reflect on whose approval one is seeking, because the answer is never neutral. As we have already seen in the previous sections, ideas of respectability and collective image are especially important within the Circassian diaspora; publicly sharing achievements can also help demonstrate that one is a “good” and worthy “member” of the community to other Circassians. At the same time, and perhaps in some cases unconsciously, these posts are not only made for personal gain, but also for communal - they help to maintain an accomplished, disciplined, progressive image of the community in the eyes of both internal and external audiences.

Nevertheless, I was also met with other interpretations of this behavior that were unrelated to the themes of approval, recognition, and image-making. Some people saw these activities as vital to the community's functioning in the following ways. First, for a minority whose only political institutions are entirely voluntary, it is incredibly important to be aware of the

professional positions held by its members. Participant 12, a 32-year-old man, shared that those practices make it quicker and easier for the community to find people who have the necessary connections or expertise when a need arises:

To give you an example, we held a job fair, contacted around 40 companies, and they all came to the Xasa to hire as many individuals as they could. Most of them were really big companies. But how did we manage to get all of those companies in one place for the first time in the history of the Xasa? Through connections. Around 90% of these companies have a Circassian guy or a Circassian woman. And he is a CEO, or he's like high up in these places, so we called them and asked them for it. So through them the companies came. And without knowing that this person we know works over there, it would be hard to randomly just knock on the door..."

This is another example of how social media activities contribute to the community's bonding social capital. Being aware of each other's strengths helps make the Associations' work more targeted and therefore more productive, hence supporting many Circassian people professionally in this instance. Participant 1, a 27-year-old man, expressed that it's important to be close to one another, updated on each other's professional, social, and personal situations, as without those connections, it would be hard to navigate other aspects of life:

You have to understand where we are living [...] if you are not connected and not informed about what's happening with your society or community, I believe there will be a lot of things that are happening that might affect you as a person, but you won't know about it or understand it.

Finally, Participant 6, a 31-year-old woman, and Belal, a 27-year-old man, both very actively engaged within various Circassian institutions in Jordan, suggested the last explanation for the frequent sharing of personal wins. They see it as the simplest way to document modern Circassian history and progress:

I believe those things are really important to document because, after a while, you forget what you did, and the benefits are very momentary. All the work will be forgotten. No one will actually benefit from it. – Participant 6, 31

... and even if I don't like doing it [posting] right now, I know that someone would want this to happen. Just like I am looking for things now and wish they were properly archived and later put on social media. I know that people in the future would also expect the same from me. – Belal, 27

The shortage of documented information about Circassian history and practices was a recurring theme in my conversations with participants, and sharing on social media is also often understood as a generational responsibility. Belal reflected extensively on his experiences searching for information that was never properly recorded, which has shaped his desire to document the present for future generations. Participant 6 is similarly concerned with the long-term benefits that this practice can bring to Circassians. These two explanations again illustrate that some people who are engaged in the Circassian diasporic groupness in Jordan also use social media as an archive.

As I mentioned earlier, Circassians share not only their triumphs but also their losses with one another. While preparing for this research, I found a Facebook group dedicated to announcing deaths within the community. At first, I felt a slight shock and did not know what to think, but I knew immediately that I had to speak to my interview participants about it. When I asked them, nobody seemed to think it was in any way unusual. People explained to me, very calmly, why there was a need to do this, often without pausing to think. They explained that when someone passes away, it is natural to let the whole community know, so that people who were once close but might at the moment live far away can reach out and offer their condolences or help. They also mentioned that posting about death on social media took the place of writing about it in the newspapers or announcing it from the mosques. Even though in some cities in Jordan it is still practiced, many people have relocated in the last few years, and families that are related or have been neighbors for generations might no longer live in close proximity to each other, which has created a need for a new way to spread that information. The posts also usually specify when and where the funeral will be held, so that people can come and support

the family of the deceased in person, emotionally, and sometimes financially. It is considered polite to offer to pay for some of the funeral costs and food, and maybe cover a family debt, if one is financially able.

Connecting to other Circassians, in Jordan and around the world

One of the things most people I spoke to have agreed on is that the internet and social media give us a fantastic, previously unthinkable opportunity to communicate with people from all over the world. In the diasporic context, connecting across borders can matter even more, as people are scattered yet still carry a very strong connection to their homeland. People described this pattern with a few examples. First, Bashar, 30, shared that when there is worrying news about a country where a lot of Circassian people are known to live, Circassians residing elsewhere become increasingly active in trying to extract any information about how the situation in the region looks for Circassians specifically:

That's what it was like during COVID. There was a political disturbance in Jordan, where the royal family had some internal issues, and it became big news; they were talking about coups and so on. And immediately, the same day, this very famous Circassian contacts someone from Jordan, and he says, "I want to do a public interview. People from all countries are asking me what is happening in Jordan. And we specifically want to know if our Circassian brothers and sisters are okay or not?" When the earthquake happened - the same thing and so on...

This example shows how, in moments of uncertainty, Circassian people seek information about one another on social media networks, as the general news outlets not only have their own agenda when framing and reporting on political events, but in a situation of crisis, the reporting is rather general, covering the bigger picture and rarely focusing on the situation of a minority. Social media, despite frequent questioning, has become an alternative source of information through which people can share exactly what they are experiencing in the moment. Those images are also framed; they also have agendas, just like traditional news, but they are still helpful for seeing the broader context.

Looking at the behavior from a more positive angle, Participant 5, a 36-year-old woman, has shared a story with me and called it a wonderful experience of connecting and cooperating with

an artist online, who is a Circassian Syrian but is currently living in Russia, which resulted in a new song being made:

... so, he recorded from Russia, I recorded from Jordan, and we did 2 songs and released them on YouTube. So, we didn't need to be at the same geographical location to make music [...] and we did things together, and for me this was magic, you know?

Participant's story shows how social media makes it possible to connect and create together despite geographical distance. Moreover, it highlights the importance the Circassian community in Jordan places on connecting with other Circassians around the world, as well as their desire to keep creating as the Circassian people, not only as individual artists.

Participant 4, a 27-year-old woman, provided me with a different example of such connections. She told me about a public Instagram account and a private WhatsApp group chat, that were interconnected. The idea was for Circassians around the world to share knowledge and skills with one another. The special, very "sophisticated" procedure was in place for people to enter the group. You had to fill out the questionnaire before entering, introduce yourself, and share something about your interests and skills, but ideally, you had to have or know something you could share with others. You could be a graphic designer and prepare an online workshop for everyone, or have a political science degree and prepare a talk about what you have learned during your studies - anything that in any way could benefit the community was seen as helpful, welcome, and celebrated. When I asked what workshop she was most impressed by, the Participant shared her memories about one with me:

I think this guy was from Germany or Austria, like one of those countries. And since the Syrian Circassians were mostly migrating there because of the war, he conducted a workshop to help them write their CVs so they could find jobs, which was super helpful. Like, that one was packed with mostly Syrian Circassians. And I mean, that one was really, really helpful for them.

This account illustrates how social media became a space for Circassian people from all over the world to socialize, learn from one another, and improve each other's lives without being in the same location. The calls were held every week, and the Participant always looked forward to them. In the WhatsApp group, the organizers would share a poll where members could vote

on which topic they were most interested in discussing the following week. She said that she also enjoyed it because it was not like anything else she experienced within the Circassian community:

I think it was like around 25 to 40 people maximum. But it was really, really knowledgeable. And it was outside of the medium that we're used to, like going to classes, where we just like dance and get to know each other. This was more involved because we would go into more serious topics and, in a way, more engaging content.

This example demonstrates how social media facilitated transnational collaboration between Circassian people when organized in a caring and pragmatic way.

Finally, I have already mentioned visiting the Al Jeel Club in Amman during my fieldwork and conducting an interview with Participant 6, a 31-year-old woman there. During a small tour of the club she gave me, she showed me a map of the Caucasus before the forced deportation happened and told me about a man who could trace a Circassian family all the way back to that time, name a village where their ancestors lived, and maybe also tell if any of their relatives still live there. She said that he was able to do that exactly with the help of social media:

...he used social media a lot to contact people to trace back his family tree...And he does it for all the families. So if he's curious, you know... So if he wants to find out something about someone, he will contact people in Turkey and the Caucasus and Germany. Anywhere he finds the family name he needs, he will contact them.

With the exception of instances in which the connection is intended to achieve a particular result from the beginning, such as the group mentioned by Participant 4, where members often left the dialogue with a newly acquired skill, I believe that the purpose of these connections is often the connections themselves. The goal is to feel Circassian and to be recognized as such by other Circassians worldwide. For a diaspora scattered across several regions, social media becomes a site where this mutual recognition is possible.

Sharing knowledge about Circassian history

Many Circassians living in Jordan shared that most of the information about Circassian history, important dates, and traditions they have found on social media, as there has been very little consistent documentation previously. Additionally, before social media emerged, Circassian people living in different places had few stable communication channels with one another, which could make it challenging to imagine, share, and document their common and divided histories. I was curious about how the process of uncovering and sharing history happens online, since we all know that social media discourse tends to become very chaotic very quickly. When attempting to describe this process, the image that comes to my mind is of a soup that is prepared collectively by all those who are willing to take part. People with the capacity and motivation try to save, protect, and make sense of old papers and artifacts that have been in their families for generations. Old documents, mythologies, and songs are constantly being discovered, translated, and shared on social media by individuals and associations. People shared that they have found songs written about their families, dances performed by their families, family emblems on social media, and much more. Finding something new tends to spark strong emotions in people - feelings of pride, joy, and belonging often come up when discussing the existing knowledge.

Naturally, these reflections tended to spark conversations about misinformation on social media and distrust. People often share their frustrations about how much freedom social media offers, as it often leads everyone to share their thoughts and opinions on a topic, “even if they are not right, not professional in the matter.” Moreover, some participants expressed frustration with the conventional narrative of Circassian history, which was introduced by Circassian elites in the 1990s. The narrative was accepted as a complete and only true representation of the forced deportation from the Caucasus and Circassian settlement in the Ottoman Empire and is rarely challenged. This is where misinformation and distrust become very sensitive topics for many Circassians, as they often feel lied to by the people who represent them on the institutional level. The situation escalates when one considers the possible consequences of decades of carefully curated historical discourse about a displaced community. Some participants reported that they feel that Circassian people are being manipulated by more powerful actors, both inside and outside the community, for their own advantage. “Alien

ideologies”, concepts like religion and nation, contradict what Circassian people have been finding out about themselves and their history through these old texts and artifacts, which are shared and discussed on social media.

According to some of the people I spoke with, Circassians have come to embrace the exoticized and orientalized representations of the Circassian created by outside forces. They have added that the community has extracted the flattering notions of those images to deal with the collective trauma of the genocide and the deportation. After spending time in the field and growing up somewhat close to the Circassian discourse, having been taught similar rules and ideas, I can understand where that opinion comes from. You would hardly ever hear anyone openly criticizing anything, be it the decision-making of Circassian institutions or the actions of individuals. The picture you’re painting should always look perfect. This issue goes hand in hand with the misinformation, because this ideal identity the Circassians are trying so hard to uphold is arguably coming from the same place the false narratives are coming from - positions of power. Belal has shared his thoughts on the matter with me during the interview:

“... because misinformation is a Circassian trademark. We like to post stuff without sources. We like to over-romanticize ourselves. We like to believe in the orientalized version that the Russians, the English, and the Ottomans made of us. And rather than challenge these ideas of what a Circassian is, we take these, this caricature of what... And we like to feed ourselves this because it makes us feel better about ourselves, our situation, and us as a people. So you'll find many essays talking about us as angels, talking about the men historically, about the strength of a Circassian warrior and the beauty of a Circassian maiden.”

This pattern is not unique to the Circassian community. As I discussed in the literature review, Hall wrote that for communities whose histories have been distorted, history and identity are usually reconstructed rather than retrieved from selected materials (Hall, 1990, p. 394). The materials available, more often than not, present narratives that outsiders impose, “the Russians and the English and the Ottomans”, in the Circassian case (Hall, 1990, p. 394).

Event promotion and strategies

Another major reason Circassian people in Jordan rely so heavily on social media is that it helps them stay connected offline as well; however, this tendency is true for many communities, not only the Circassian one. When an event is organized, whether large or small, social media is one of the easiest and most effective tools for promoting it, helping people learn about it, and encouraging them to attend. This also closely relates to the idea of a community's continuous production. For people to continue coming together from time to time and maintain a shared sense of identity, there needs to be an accessible way for them to learn about activities and events they can participate in. Participant 7, a 36-year-old woman who regularly volunteers in the community, shared that promoting events on social media also helps attract different kinds of people who might not have learned about them any other way or who are into similar activities. Participant 6, a 31-year-old woman, is part of the group that organizes a book club in one of the Xasas. They choose a book relevant to Circassian history, meet in person at the Xasa building, and discuss it together. She spoke to me a lot about how much the group relies on social media to keep this book club running. She explained that when an event occurs regularly, it is important to post about it consistently so people know the activity is ongoing. Very quickly, I realized that when it comes to people promoting events on social media, I should be asking the "how" question, rather than an "if" question, because there seems to be a consensus on its necessity and usefulness. I started asking people whether there are any rules they try to follow when sharing information about events or strategies that have proven effective.

Based on the responses I received, I have divided the promotion strategies into two types: promotion from Circassian institutions' official pages and promotion by individual users. As I described at the beginning of this chapter, all Circassian institutions in Jordan have large followings on social media. When Xasa organizes an event, it is always shared online, and such posts gain good traction and visibility. Moreover, Circassian people also expressed trust in the official social media pages of Xasas, so if they see an event advertised on social media that is organized by Xasa or, at least, with its support, they are almost certain the event will be good. One of the rules the Participant 6 has shared with me is that it's important never to change dates when you're advertising the event on social media:

If you set a date for 22 November, you'd better have it on 22 November. No rescheduling, because people are gonna stick to those dates and plan their time accordingly.

Based on this information, I suggest that while people place a lot of trust in the events organized by Xasas, they also hold them to higher standards than they do smaller initiatives.

The other form of event promotion is by individual promoters, which does not necessarily mean famous people with a big following. Of course, when a “respected” person organizes an event and posts about it, or reshapes an event organized by Xasa, their name tends to attract more attendees. However, while speaking to young people, I found out that sometimes when they see a friend or simply someone whom they know is interested in similar things, resharing or organizing an event, they tend to feel more drawn to attending that event as well. Participant 10, a 25-year-old woman, who shared that she tries to attend community events as often as she can, brought this up:

When I hear about an event on social media, I do feel encouraged, especially if I see friends of mine interacting with that post. So it means that I... It raises a chance that I might be interested in it, and it might be something that I would enjoy. So that's how I decide to attend.

This example shows that it is not only the content of the post that matters, but also who engages with it and how. Seeing peers or famous people show interest in the topic, or the event motivates others to join and take part. However, the issue here is that the absolute majority of events organized by the Circassian community are meant exclusively for Circassian people. There are tensions between Circassians and Jordanian Arabs, even though not too hostile still exist. For that reason, the Circassians, who are in charge of event promotion, always have to find a way to make it clear that only Circassians are welcome at certain events, which can be challenging at times.

Artistic practices

Many Circassian people use social media to share art and find inspiration. I was lucky enough to interview a few people who participate in the art production in different ways – some write

songs, some make traditional Circassian jewelry, some paint, some edit videos, and some do photography. Participant 6, a 31-year-old woman, has shared that she recently discovered painting and now shares her art on her personal Instagram account. She also follows other artists whose work she admires on social media to get inspired. Looking back, I remember that while my uncle was driving me to the interview, he asked whom I was interviewing with. When I told him her name, he asked if she paints. I did not know at the time, and he told me that he saw her work on Instagram. Now, this moment feels very illustrative – the Participant makes art and uses social media to make it visible, and as a result, Circassian people who do not know her personally sometimes know her work and her as an artist.

Participant 5, a 36-year-old woman, whom I have mentioned a few times already in this paper, is a famous singer in the Circassian community, but she also has a full-time corporate job. She says she doesn't have the luxury of being a content creator, but she posts from time to time, when she has an idea. She writes her own songs, collaborates with artists from around the world, performs at the most important Circassian concerts, and is invited to various podcasts to speak about her art and experiences. Social media has a few functions in her life: first, she uses it as her professional platform, as a lot of people in the industry know her "as a singer from Instagram"; second, for her Instagram is also a space where she searches for inspiration, because it is easy to find it, with the help of algorithms; and finally she uses it as a creative outlet, where she showcases her art, that often has to do with music, but not always.

Belal, 27, claims to have been close to and interested in Circassian discourse people since he was a kid. He dances in the troupe, plays accordion, writes new songs in traditional Circassian style and language, which he also speaks. He told me about "the baladi style", an accordion playing style, that was "found in Turkey or elsewhere in the Levant". The baladi style developed outside the homeland and was not heavily influenced by modern or outside music. He explained that later in the Caucasus, the Soviet theater tradition was introduced and integrated into original performances, and it changed them fundamentally:

So naturally, when they introduced structured notation and fixed tempos, they also introduced elements that move according to a strict tempo. As a result, the performances lost a bit of their original depth, and they started moving in a way similar to what we see in pop music today. There are certain fixed counts, a specific tempo, and you have to follow it.

He showed me a video on his personal account where he sits in a circle of people, gives a speech, and then starts playing and singing a song he wrote in the baladi style, a style untouched by outside influence. He told me that he also uses social media to show himself and his friends playing music casually as well, not only within a planned and structured performance:

What makes me write and sing in front of people is me knowing that I'm not a good singer nor a good musician... I believe music should belong to the everyday man and woman, not just for professionals. So my friends and I started to play music and sing songs. A few years later, we changed the community from a community that does not sing in Circassian at all, to a community that is trying to relearn their songs... We also made, like, the biggest event in the history of Jordan's Circassians: we refused to go on stage. We formed a circle and made sure the audience was part of the performance; we had everyone sing with us...

These instances show that social media can play very different roles in artistic practices. The first example demonstrates that social media can serve as a platform for artists' visibility. The second demonstrates a more complex use of social media, serving as a creative outlet where the person shares her work, a professional platform for building connections and collaborating with other artists, and a source of inspiration. The last example highlights an artistic use of social media for collective reasons. When making and sharing art, Belal's priorities are to encourage participation, revive musical traditions, and make artistic expression more accessible to the masses.

3.2.3 Summary of the subsection

Summing up, the Circassian diaspora in Jordan engages with various types of content on social media, and I was able to identify 5 recurring themes: sharing life events, connecting with Circassians around the world, sharing knowledge and learning about Circassian discourse and practices, promoting events, and sharing art. Through these interactions, social media becomes more than just a platform for communication; it becomes an essential infrastructure that sustains community life. Many people mentioned that now that Circassians in Jordan no longer

live close to each other, connecting and staying updated on each other's lives on social media is often the only way they can participate in community practices.

Sharing life updates helps document current events, track the resources of the community, and sustain the preferred image for other Circassians and external actors. This last motivation connects to what Stuart Hall describes as the continuous production of cultural identity - the idea that identity is not a stable entity, but an ongoing construction from the narratives the community chooses (Hall, 1990, p.394). It also connects to Costa's observation that public social media often becomes a "hyper-conservative" platform that allows the display of idealised versions of self and communities to a wide audience (Costa, 2016, p.170). The documentation aspect is also significant - publicly shared wins and broadcasted events contribute to a digital archive of the community.

Transnational communication, enabled by social media, reinforces a sense of belonging across the diaspora. However, as examples provided show, Circassians also frequently use their transnational connections for other, more concrete reasons – to search for alternative information, to share skills and knowledge, to keep collectively uncovering Circassian history, to make art. The exchange of historical knowledge and communal participation in the said discourse, on the one hand, supports the preservation of Circassian practices, while, on the other hand, also exacerbates the issue of misinformation, which is a sensitive issue for many people in the Circassian diaspora in Jordan.

Social media event promotion has become a crucial step in facilitating group engagement, as it allows information to spread easily and displays influential people's interests, which attracts larger audiences. At the same time, the activity complicates the process of boundary-making, as Circassians mostly prefer to keep their institutions and events exclusive. Even though social media allows for control of visibility to a certain extent, people are still conscious of the matter.

Finally, examples that focus on artistic practices highlight how digital platforms can be used as professional platforms, as sources of inspiration, and as creative outlets. Beyond individual use, sharing art on social media is at times intended to inspire others to participate in creative practices.

A theme that connects across all of these forms of engagement is the intentional control of visibility. This is illustrated by a few examples. First, there is a common preference to keep personal social media accounts private to avoid potential scrutiny and repercussions. However, I suggest that it could also be at least partially due to the fact that most Circassians in Jordan practice Islam. Elisabetta Costa wrote that “guarding privacy and protecting intimate spaces from the gaze of outsiders is indeed a very important component of Muslim cultures” (Costa, 2016, p. 52).

Additionally, visibility is also determined based on the content itself – achievements are often made publicly visible, while internal conflicts and struggles are hidden from the outside gaze. Circassians put great effort into making sure they are perceived as a respectable and successful community. This example strengthens my argument that the cultural Circassian identity is being actively produced on social media.

Finally, visibility is restricted due to the need the Circassian people in Jordan have for spaces that are only theirs. Events are made exclusive, which frequently leads to the dilemma about sharing online - on one hand, sharing publicly would attract more Circassian people; on the other hand, it would pose the risk of outsiders entering the space.

3.3 Conclusion of Chapter 3

This chapter has examined how people who self-identify as members of the Circassian diaspora in Amman use social media platforms. The chapter is split into two subchapters. In the first, I describe to the reader the digital spaces Circassian people have built and use, after which I move to the content they produce and consume. Digital spaces Circassians engage in can be divided into the pages of official organisations and informal pages that are more participation-oriented. Overall, the results show that social media serves as a complex infrastructure for Circassians, operating as a platform for artistic expression, an organizational tool, a cultural and historical archive, a forum for political, historical, and ideological discussions, and a mutual support network.

The production of cultural identity is a recurring theme in both subchapters. Circassians in Amman constantly construct their collective identity on the official pages of Circassian institutions, in informal groups, and on personal accounts by sharing information about their

customs, celebrating each other, and writing personal essays on matters close to their hearts. In this chapter, I connect Circassians' social media behavior to the work of Stuart Hall, in which he argues that cultural diasporic identity is a constant production rather than a fixed essence to be restored (Hall, 1990).

Another consistent theme of the chapter is the control of visibility. Official institutional pages restrict public participation, so that nothing that has not been approved by Circassian people with the most power becomes visible. Informal pages, even though less strictly, are still regulated by administrators who determine which narratives become visible. Many people keep their personal accounts private, while decisions about what to share publicly versus privately are often made according to a specific logic: challenges stay hidden, while achievements can be seen. These points illustrate that it is very important for the community to maintain a specific collective image of itself, one that is worthy of consideration and respect.

Social media complicates the negotiation between the visibility of Circassian discourse and its control. On one hand, digital platforms offer a broader reach, which could be very helpful for the community. On the other hand, they at the very least invite risks of misleading representation and invasive judgement. Therefore, understanding what Circassians post is only one part of the story. I see it just as important for this research to discuss what they choose not to post and why, which is the focus of the next chapter.

4 The Logic of Silence

While trying to understand why Circassian people post and what they post about, I have also had many conversations about the topics people choose to avoid on social media and the reasons for it. Even though in the previous chapter I have described a whole group that exists specifically for ideological and political discussions, many Circassian people prefer to stay away from those conversations for various reasons - some believe they are purposeless, as they see everyone involved leaving with the same opinions they entered a conversation, no matter the arguments of the opponent; some want to avoid possible repercussions that would likely follow; some prefer to discuss disagreements face to face. Political expressions specifically online are also often avoided due to the possible sanctions of the governments or institutions criticized. In some cases, postings of personal images, friends, family, and home are minimized as well, due to the worries of privacy. Lastly, women often post strategically due to safety concerns; for example, they post content about places they visit only after having left them.

I have not managed to collect more information than in this introduction on the content that the Circassian people choose not to post. However, I have had extended conversations with them about what exactly prevents them from engaging in group conversations on social media, from sharing their opinions. I saw these reasons divided into two types of influences: those coming from outside the Circassian community and those that influence people inside the community.

Among the outside factors, I outline the position of Circassians as a minority in Jordan, political worries, online safety, assimilation worries, and algorithmic influence. The latter fits in this chapter, but rather differently, and I would like to note that immediately. Social media algorithms do not prevent Circassian people in Jordan from posting completely; however, they are still recognized by the community as an outside force that affects how exactly the posting is done. Therefore, I see it fit to discuss social media algorithms in this section as well.

Among the factors affecting posting decisions from inside the community, I outline the cultural identity of a Circassian, as well as authority conflicts in the community – men vs. women and old vs. young, established narratives vs. alternative perspectives. Hence, after the introduction, the reader will proceed to the descriptions and discussions of those dynamics – starting with outside influences, followed by the inside influences.

Based on the information presented in this chapter, I argue that Circassians refrain from engaging in the political, historical, and ideological dialogues online to avoid both structural repercussions and social consequences inside the community.

4.1 Outside influences

4.1.1 Being a minority in Jordan

One of the key ropes of a diaspora, according to Cohen, is a troubled relationship with the host state (Cohen, 2022). At the beginning of this research, I struggled to understand that part when it comes to the case of Circassians in Jordan, because their coexistence with Jordanians is, at first glance, peaceful. Circassians claim to be very supported by the government of Jordan, and that there are no specific anti-minority policies in Jordan, and that they were never forced to abandon their practices. Circassian people I got to meet spoke of the royal family with respect and warmth in their voices, noting that they frequently attend major concerts and events organized by the diaspora. At the same time, all the work in Xasas is voluntary and donation-based, meaning the support from the government and the royal family is more of a symbolic endorsement than any practical, tangible assistance.

When it comes to the relationship with the civil Jordanian society, all the people I have interviewed have agreed on one thing: Circassians are not being fully understood by Jordanian people. They feel that their traditions and ways of thinking must always be defended and explained, and even after that, tend to still be looked down on. Women's roles within the community serve as a good illustration of the gap in practices between Circassians and Jordanian Arabs, one that frequently becomes a source of judgment and misunderstanding. Circassians themselves often refer to their community as “more liberal than surrounding communities” and mostly speak about women when explaining that statement. They frequently emphasize how much respect and care there is for women in the society, how they are taught from a young age that men and women should be able to sit at the same table and speak, and how Circassian women have a lot more freedom than Jordanian Arab women. Participant 3, a 32-year-old woman who works as a doctor, is married and is a mother of a 2-year-old boy, has shared bits of one conversation she had with her Arab colleagues with me as an example. She

told me how once her male cousin visited her, and she welcomed him and cooked him a meal alone, without her husband being present. Her colleagues could not understand how she was allowed to do that, as for Arab women, being alone with a man, that is not her brother, father, husband, or son, is seen as unacceptable. Another example comes from my own experiences in the field – many men, when speaking about Islam or the differences between Arab Jordanians and Circassians, have told me that I would not be allowed to sit alone with them for the interview, without a male chaperone present, if we were Arab and not Circassians.

However, the Circassian community's treatment of women is not the only difference that often sparks conversations. Circassian wedding traditions are also being judged and questioned. There is a custom of "stealing the bride" before the wedding, which initially was something the groom would do if the father of the bride did not approve of him, while now it is at times also just understood as a tradition and is something that some families decide to do even if the union is approved. Despite decades of close coexistence, the practice continues to shock many Jordanian Arabs who have never quite made sense of it. Additionally, there are different mahr (bride price) expectations in the Arab community and in the Circassian one - Arab people can pay up to 40.000 Jordanian Dinars for the bride or 3 kilograms of gold, while for Circassians, there is a fixed price of 150 Jordanian Dinars before the marriage and 300 extra in case of divorce. There is therefore an opinion that the Circassian people "sell their daughters cheap". Bashar, 30, was one of the participants who spoke to me about those dynamics and the "breathing space" Circassian people have in Jordan:

...we still have more breathing space. And this breathing space is a fragile bubble that can be popped by outside forces at any moment. So we are always worried in our interactions. We are always worried about justifying to other people that, yes, we have a different language, we have different customs. Some customs you find weird...

We are always thinking of what the bigger society thinks of us. Every move that we make can be criticized, even though we are not facing persecution. But I'm not going to say that, like, we can find genuine long-term allies. We only have ourselves.

These and other clashes affect people's behaviors both offline and online. While some people still take pride in those differences and believe Circassian traditions must be shown to the world, others believe it's best for the Circassian community to be more selective about the

practices they show, not to trigger any disagreements or social sanctions. These thoughts directly translate into social media behaviors - sometimes to avoid triggering judgments about the whole community - some people prefer not to post at all, while others prefer to put additional restrictions on the content they choose to put out there (private account or “close friends”). These behaviors and reflections support my argument about Circassian people being very invested in the collective image of their community. However, here we see it in another light - Circassians take intensive care of how they appear to outside actors, not only because they want to look respectable and deserving of consideration at a state and international level of decision-making, but also out of care and protectiveness for their internal dynamics and practices.

As demonstrated in this thesis’s literature review, Circassians occupy a specific place in Jordanian society. They are a community that has existed on the territory for more than a century, has contributed to the establishment of the Jordanian state, and has some political recognition, but there are still cultural differences between them and the majority Arab population in Jordan that lead to tension in daily interactions. Circassians arrived in the region not as voluntary migrants, looking for opportunity, but as survivors of violent displacement and genocide. They built a community under the conditions of loss in a place that was not their homeland, and have dreamt of someday returning to the Caucasus. Many of them have had no interest in assimilating, neither then, nor today. Hence, the cultural distance between Circassians and Jordanian Arabs may have existed since the beginning of their coexistence, while current tensions are most felt around gender norms, marriage customs, and social practices. Furthermore, once again, the support the Circassians receive from the Jordanian state remains rather symbolic. This indicates that Circassians remain fundamentally dependent on the goodwill of the dominant society, which makes their status fragile, even after more than a century of presence and social visibility.

4.1.2 Self-censorship due to political worries

Some Circassian people refrain from posting their thoughts on the internet also due to individual sanctions from governments that might follow for expressing an opinion threatening to the regime. As it is a dream for many Circassians to one day go back to the North Caucasus, which is nowadays a territory of Russia, many of them are being very careful when referring to the regime and the government online, as they understand that all activity on social media

platforms is being monitored. One can even frequently see them reposting videos that praise Russia and President Putin and comparing the situation in Russia to the current situation in the USA with Trump's administration and the release of Epstein files, presenting the former in a more favorable light.

However, I am not arguing that this type of rhetoric is being shared only because people are hoping to score some kind of points in front of the Russian government, though I also would not exclude that possibility. Generally, I believe many Circassians in Jordan are supportive of the Russian government, as well as Circassian people living in the Caucasus. Of course, some people do not openly support Russian politics on their social media but also do not criticize them. Bashar, 30, is one of the people who chose to stay away from this conversation online completely, as he is afraid of not being able to ever move to or even visit Russia:

Last year, two people were blocked from entering Russia for 40 years [...] So I honestly still don't know what angers the Russians and what doesn't, but that would be devastating for me.

This caution also applies to posting disapproving opinions of U.S. politics. People know that if they ever want to move there, for instance, for work, they would have issues with the visa application process and possibly would not be able to do that. However, in the later months of my fieldwork, with more Epstein files being released with horrific details of the crimes, and the beginning of the U.S. and Israel's war against Iran, I have noticed some of the participants sharing more critical content of the U.S.

4.1.3 Online safety

Online safety is a topic that has entered the public discourse not that long ago. Only in the last couple of years have people started to realize how many safety-related nuances there are to consider when one chooses to be present on the internet, not even necessarily to post, simply to be online. In this section, I am specifically referring to online dangers that are not connected to political actors and would not result in individual institutional sanctions for the participants, but personal suffering - cyberattacks, image-based abuse, and stalking.

Most people did not seem to be very cautious with their online activities, because they already have private accounts, and that adds an extra layer of protection. However, women who have open accounts and share frequently on their pages have reported that they keep their guards up all the time when posting. For instance, they have shared that they only post a story from a specific physical location, e.g., a restaurant, only after they have left it and are safe at home. Additionally, some of them, including Participant 6, a 31-year-old woman, prefer to never respond to messages from people they do not know personally, as you never know what an interaction with a stranger on the internet can lead to. Men, in turn, have reported being worried mostly about their digital footprint, but never mentioned any kind of safety measures they stick to.

4.1.4 Assimilation worries and the importance of distinction

Arguably, the biggest collective fear of Circassians in Jordan is assimilation. They consider the community to be rapidly assimilating already – they say their weddings look different, their funerals do too, more people stop attending community gatherings, and teaching children Circassian history and traditions. In the current time, social media is often understood as a tool that helps the Circassian community stay together. When asked what would happen if social media platforms disappeared tomorrow, a few participants, including Participant 12, a 41-year-old man, a highly respected person in the society, who frequently gives lectures on Circassian politics and discourse, seemed to share a worry that “many Circassians will become Arabs”, in other words, assimilate:

... They will forget that they are Circassians. There is a story from a month ago. There is a girl who came to my event. When she came here, I discovered a very sad thing. She does not know she's Circassian. Yeah, because she lives in another town, there is no Circassian. They don't know anything. She moved to Amman, so she started asking about the Circassian people. So when she asked me, she was feeling that she was a stranger, that it was not her community. That was a shocking thing for me, actually, because we're talking about a girl her age, about 22, 24. So she doesn't know if she is Circassian or not. This is a problem. So with social media, she's contacted me, and she came here, and of course, I let her know the contacts of some of her relatives and even her own village in Circassia. I found it for her. And she started to learn the Circassian language. So without social media, this girl will be...

This example tells a story of someone learning about their roots and heritage with the help of social media, and eventually finding a new community. Even though this is a very major example, there are other processes that help Circassians stay connected by engaging on social media – many of them follow the same groups, read the same news, see promotion of the same events, which helps keep the Circassian discourse and practices alive.

At the same time, some people feel very strongly about the work necessary to preserve Circassian discourse and practices, and are putting as much effort in as they can both individually and collectively. It is therefore unsurprising that it becomes very important for such a community to distance themselves from other groups, frequently emphasizing what makes them different, what makes them unique.

The importance of distinction is another rope of the diasporic identity by Cohen, and I was lucky to see how it manifests in the Circassian diaspora (Cohen, 2022). Circassian people claim to see another Circassian from a mile away– they say surnames tend to be easily recognizable and behavioral patterns are very specific. While I do not have an example of the latter, I do have a beautiful story that would illustrate the former well. Before the interview, one of the participants asked me if I had ever lived in a certain student dormitory, and I had. I got very worried about where he could possibly have known that information from. When we called for the interview, I asked him, and he told me that he lived in that dorm as well, saw my surname on a postbox, and could immediately tell I was Circassian.

There were boxes for the mail that had our names alphabetically. I wasn't reading carefully, but I have this radar that if there's anything Circassian anywhere.

The majority of people ask where my last name comes from when they see it, and when I answer them, they say they've never heard of Circassians, while this case perfectly illustrates the opposite: some Circassians, as they claim, do indeed recognize one another by distinctive surnames.

Furthermore, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, it is very important for Circassians to have spaces that are meant just for them, separate and different from everyone else, both online and offline. Circassian people value those spaces greatly and are very protective of them,

worried that the peace and the order of things might be disrupted if outsiders somehow get access. Participant 6, a 31-year-old woman, for instance, has shared that she is always cautious when she's sharing or reposting an event on her Instagram profile, because not only Circassians follow her:

I was trying to find out how to post about it on my stories without my friends who are non-Circassians wanting to come to the event, because I don't want to have to explain to them that it's just for Circassians.

Participant 6 described the need to manage audience boundaries and highlighted the discomfort of justifying exclusivity, which not only illustrates the need for distinction but also tensions with the outside community that may occur in the process of keeping Circassian spaces restricted. Other examples of online boundary-making are the settings of some of the more private social media groups, where sometimes one has to enter their "original Circassian surname" before admins decide if they will grant them access; or a unique use of a "close friends" list on Instagram, where some people decide to add only Circassians.

People also take serious offense when someone who is not Circassian decides to speak about Circassian issues publicly, on social media. Many people, including Participant 9, a 19-year-old woman, have shared their frustrations with me regarding misleading informational content about Circassian dance and traditions, people pronouncing Circassian names wrong, and one of the Circassian Facebook groups' administrators not being Circassian.

[It causes negative emotions for me] when people post about us, but they're not Circassian. So they don't know what they are talking about... Someone posted a reel. Talking about Circassians, but he doesn't know where we are from. Or pronounce our names incorrectly. That's very sad.

These examples once again demonstrate that maintaining full control over its representation is very important for Circassians, while also highlighting that misleading content is seen as disrespectful and harmful. Who gets to speak about the community is not seen as neutral, which I can also confirm based on this fieldwork experience. The majority of people I spoke with either pointed out that Circassians are very cautious with outside researchers because they do

not trust their interpretations and intentions, or they specifically asked me if I was Circassian before agreeing to an interview.

I believe that even though social media is an important tool in preserving Circassian discourse and sustaining the community, assimilation worries directly connect to people's decisions not to post. When the collective image of your community has such great value and must always be so distinct from other communities, maintaining it can become very overwhelming and stressful, because so much is always at stake.

4.1.5 Algorithms

As I have noted in the introduction to this chapter, algorithmic influence is somewhat of an exception in this chapter, as it does not completely prevent Circassians from posting on social media, but rather forces them to compromise the ways they choose to do so. There is nothing random about the content we “randomly” see on social media. There are algorithms in place that are controlled by many actors: people in power, the governments, a company that owns some of the most popular social media platforms (among them are Facebook and Instagram), Meta Platforms Inc. The general public outside of those influential circles knows very little about how exactly those algorithms work and what they prioritize, but knows that they exist, and that knowledge comes from observations and analyses, more than anything else. Algorithms are known to be modified according to the traces of the information we leave online. It is hard not to notice, because the moment you like at least three reels about, let's say, coffee on Instagram, you should be ready to start seeing all kinds of advertisements selling you coffee machines everywhere. It is also known that algorithms show us content that triggers strong emotions - stress, joy, sadness, or anger - because something called “rage-bait content” (content that is made specifically with the intention of triggering anger and engagement on its basis) appeared in recent years. Finally, we know that social media algorithms show us content that is most likely to keep us “scrolling” for longer because “screentime” and “how to get off your phone” conversations have entered the mainstream public discourse.

When asked about algorithms, most participants did not seem to have reflected on the issue deeply before the interview. Some claimed to be satisfied with how algorithms work, with seeing things that they like or could potentially be interested in. Some, like Participant 5, a 36-year-old woman, a known singer in Jordan, saw the positive and the negative aspects of it.

It is smart enough to just show me music, because it knows that I love music... Like, I wouldn't find anything else,[...] so it is limiting a bit also...

Some people, especially those who are somehow connected to the social media field, with their job or with their volunteer activities, sounded very displeased when speaking about algorithms. Topics of target audiences, shorter attention spans, and polarised narratives naturally came up in the conversation about algorithms as well. Bashar, 30, who works at a digital media agency, shared that having to consider those things when posting frustrates him:

Constantly, I think of the target audience. The analytics of the YouTube videos affect my decisions. I'm not a paid ad specialist or something; it's not my specialization, but it still affects my work really hard. And my frustrations stem from this, having to consider this. People with increasingly shorter attention spans, polarised narratives, increasingly short-tempered, and increasingly judgmental, have ready-made answers for everything. Accusations are ready. They get bored very quickly.

What Bashar highlights here is the extent to which social media algorithms shape not only what content is visible, but also how it is produced. Indeed, a conversation about the pressure to adapt formats to what's "trendy" at the moment or what algorithms appear to reward exists among content creators. There's always a new text font to add to your videos, new sound effects, and a "hook" to catch viewers' attention immediately. It's not enough anymore to frame your image nicely or to communicate your thought clearly – you have to manipulate the viewer into watching your content by appealing to their cognitive processes.

What becomes clear is that even though people do not always fully understand how algorithms work, they are often very aware of their effects. Algorithms shape what people see, how they engage, and how they decide to post, making them an important but often taken-for-granted part of online social life. Creators must always keep in mind what is favorable to algorithms at a certain moment, while viewers start noticing those patterns more often. However, the issue is that having to adjust such complex things as historical narratives and cultural practices for algorithmic favor risks them being reduced to simplified, attention-grabbing fragments, which Panchal and Mago specifically caution against (Panchal & Mago, 2024).

4.1.6 Summary of the subsection

As I have briefly summarised in the introduction to this chapter, many Circassian people prefer to avoid group ideological discussions on social media pages, share their political opinions in group settings as well as on their individual accounts, and tend to be careful when putting online any information about their whereabouts, sometimes private pictures with friends and family as well. In this subchapter, I discussed outside influences that affect those decisions not to post. Those influences are: a minority position in Jordan, political self-censorship, online safety worries, the fear of assimilation, and the algorithmic nature of social media platforms.

Circassians in Jordan emphasize their peaceful relationship with the royal family - they speak warmly of the government officials who show up at Circassian events, claim to be respected and supported, and report “loving” the Hashemite family from their side as well. However, the government support is rather symbolic; no real funding is going into the Circassian initiatives. With broader Jordanian society, though, an uncomfortable tension exists: Circassians feel misunderstood and like they have to always defend their traditions. For those reasons, some Circassians choose not to be visible online, as they are not willing to be scrutinized or to justify their way of living.

Politically related worries have a big impact on online activities too - dreams of returning to the Caucasus, present-day Russia, often mean avoiding conversations about Vladimir Putin and the Russian government. Similarly, discussions about U.S. politics are also mostly avoided; however, I have observed a slight change in that, with the events of late 2025 and early 2026. Concerns about online safety add another level of complexity, mostly for women who use the internet with an awareness of its dangers. They post about places only after they have left them, and manage their visibility with care that is less common among Circassian men.

Furthermore, the biggest fear of Circassians is assimilation – their traditions changing, kids not knowing they are Circassian, not knowing history. Circassians claim to be able to spot each other instantly by surnames and behavioral patterns, highlighting the understanding of distinctiveness. They also guard their private spaces fiercely, which illustrates the need for having separate spaces from the other ethnic groups. The “maintenance of a strong ethnic group consciousness, based on particularity” is one of the defining characteristics of diaspora groups generally, according to Robin Cohen, so this concern with distinction is not exclusive to the

Circassian situation (Cohen, 2022, p.3). As I have stated in the respective section, I believe that the pressure of always having to broadcast the perfect, distinct “Circassianness” leads to many choosing not to broadcast anything at all.

Lastly, even when Circassians decide to post, the potential outcomes are shaped by an external influence. Algorithmic systems navigate what information gets the most engagement. Algorithms are known to prioritize simplicity, quickly communicated messages, and engaging visuals over the type of complex collective communication that conversations about a diaspora community's heritage demand. For Circassian content producers, this implies that the infrastructure they use to try to preserve community life also works against the depth required to do so.

When combined, these outside influences reveal that Circassian people in Jordan understand social media as a landscape that needs to be carefully navigated, rather than a space for free expression.

4.2 Internal dynamics

As I have written in the previous chapter, there are a lot of outside influences that interfere with Circassians' decisions to post on social media – possible entry difficulties from some states, tense relationships with the outside communities, etc. Nevertheless, there are also some dynamics inside the Circassian community itself that prevent individuals from engaging in an online activity. I have already briefly reflected on how challenging it can be to stay within the boundaries of what a Circassian should be in the previous section, so I see it as only suitable to build on this notion further. Therefore, in this subchapter, I will explore what constitutes the identity of a Circassian, accompanied by the conflicts and disagreements that stem from that, and how that reflects people's decisions not to be visible online.

4.2.1 Circassian cultural identity

While working on this thesis and interviewing people, I have frequently heard phrases that sounded like: “us Circassians are this way”, “you can tell the person is Circassian just by the way they are speaking”, “we have something inside of us that unites us all”. When these sentiments were voiced, people often made connections to Adiga Habze, the ethical code of Circassians, which I introduced in the section that situates the Circassian diaspora as a case

study in the beginning of this paper. Adiga Habze is not a strictly defined set of rules; each Circassian family may have their own interpretation of it. At the same time, there are a few core principles: honor, humanity, respect for elders, courage, and good manners. Many people refer to it as something that is to be followed, as something that makes Circassians Circassians. Despite its ambiguous definition, I believe that Adiga Habze determines the standard social behavior, which extends into digital space as well.

During this research, I have grown very curious about the Circassian collective identity that people understand in a very distinct way but struggle to paint a coherent picture of. In this section, I will describe and reflect on this image, which I have come to understand better after my research was done. I do not claim to know and see all of it, as well as understand it exactly as the Circassian people living in Jordan do, as I am still a semi-outsider and I am not able to escape this distance from people who are actively engaged in community practices while working on this project. Nevertheless, I will still write based on what I saw during this past year, as well as my personal experience of growing up by Circassian rules and norms, even though outside of the community.

Something I knew I was going to experience when going to Jordan was people being very, *very* nice to me, almost regardless of what I would do or say. However, I remember being more uncomfortable about it at first, rather than excited or relaxed – I could not grasp how people could be so excessively nice all the time, more so to someone they barely know. Now I see that part of it was due to me being a guest – Circassian people are known for their hospitality. Another part of it, I was told by Belal, 27, was due to me being a woman:

Women are seen as something sacred in our community; you have to be really nice with women, you can be harsher with a man.

However, I got a feeling that it had to do with something bigger, something more fundamental than my particular case and my position as a guest and a woman, as I traced the same niceness to social media conversations between people within the community. Every comment and every personal essay is filled with grand words, courtesies, and prayers. I asked my participants where this behavior is coming from and received different opinions. Some people understand this as a given and are of the opinion that Circassians have always been like this, that it's their way of living. Some people, including Bashar, 30, think that Circassians feeling like they have

to be very nice all the time is an effect of them being a minority in the society, that is not fully accepting them:

You, of course, have the easy, simple answer of, we've always been like this. Like, this has been really important. But for a domesticated community that is afraid to voice any kind of political opinion or social opinion, they don't want to anger the elders, they don't want to anger the government...

Naturally, I started wondering what would happen if one stops being so nice and uses a language that is more direct, perhaps openly showing that they are displeased with something during a discussion online. This is one of the questions all the participants had the same answer to: there will be consequences. How these consequences would look people saw differently – some said a comment would be deleted, a person would be blocked from the group, they would be messaged privately and asked to be more polite. Others spoke about the possibility of people finding where the guilty person lives and going there to speak to them personally. If no disciplinary talk is held, a person's place in society could still be under threat – they could be cut off from the community or judgmentally talked about behind their back. Even in rare cases, when no direct consequences occur, using the language that is not socially approved would take the attention away from the actual information or opinion one is trying to communicate. Even if the point made is valuable, it would be sort of annulled, not taken into consideration, if notes of disrespect or anger are read in the text. According to Bashar, 30, people often throw all of their energy into addressing the use of foul language, shaming the individual, sometimes even in a chain of comments together with other users, rather than react directly to what is being communicated:

Sometimes politeness matters more than the actual point of what you're saying. You have to be really polite because you could anger anyone and it's gonna take away from your goal. I have to recognise that any word can be picked apart, and I could be talking about one thing and the minor points could be highlighted, and you get a thread of 80 comments.

When asked what they thought about the importance of being at your politest all the time and the lack of room for a misstep, people gave different opinions. Some said that rules (Adiga Habze) are there for a reason and they have to be respected. Others said it was a tool for control, and they were not happy about it, but did not see a way of escaping it just yet. And there were

others that could not side with either party – they thought that sometimes people can be too harsh on the ones that speak differently or express an unpopular opinion, but at the same time thought that those differently thinking individuals still have to be corrected by elders, just not intensely shamed. However, they did not seem to think that elders could ever be the ones mistaken.

Overall, many Circassians refrain from expressing their opinions online due to the fear of the possible sanctions that would come if their opinion is not well-received by other Circassians. I believe that these dynamics are similar to what Elisabetta Costa observed in Mardin, Eastern Turkey. She wrote that in Mardin, people similarly avoid posting images and news that might attract negative comments from those with different views (Costa, 2016, p. 137). Furthermore, individuals are wary of contradicting others in public, as it might be interpreted as a severe insult (Costa, 2016, p. 137). Finally, as I have mentioned earlier in this work, Costa wrote about Facebook being a “hyper-conservative” place where individuals perform the perfect versions of themselves (Costa, 2016, p. 170). Considering all these notions, I would characterize these behaviours – both self-censoring and censoring of others – as a mechanism of community control.

4.2.2 Conflicts in the community

There are a few distinct conflicts in the community that stem from both their position in the bigger society, as well as from inside the diaspora itself. These conflicts, even though they have existed before social media, have now translated into the online activities as well. In this section, I am going to discuss them and reflect on how they affect people’s online activity.

Internal hierarchy

The hierarchical nature of the Circassian diaspora is quite transparent at this point in this thesis. Men have more freedoms and privileges than women, and older people often have more, often unquestionable and almost bulletproof authority than younger people. I will start this subsection by reflecting on the women’s position in this hierarchy, continue by discussing the age-specific dynamic, and finish by reflecting on the tension between the established Circassian narratives and new critical perspectives.

Gender relations

As a Circassian woman, even though not living in Jordan, I have to reflect on my positionality once again before delving into this matter. I suggest every reader take the following paragraphs with a grain of salt, as I cannot escape my experiences growing up in a Circassian Muslim context, but living in places like Russia, the Czech Republic, and Austria, where feminist ideology and movements have grown more popular in the last couple of decades. Therefore, my feelings towards the matter will inevitably leave a trace in this writing, no matter how much I try to stay neutral on the topic.

Circassian men praise Circassian women, see them as “sacred”, taking pride in the community’s relative liberalism compared to neighboring groups. During my fieldwork, they continuously emphasized that because we are Circassian, it is okay for me and them to sit at the same table and speak without the male chaperone present. Interestingly enough, only men have described the situation this way, and these are the only arguments that they used – Circassian women can somewhat freely speak to men and are loved and cherished. Circassian women almost never initiated discussions about their position in society with me. The sole exception critiqued “feminist ideology” as incompatible with life in Jordan, while the only example she used was splitting dinner bills evenly.

From my semi-insider perspective as a woman, I see the Circassian community as a strongly patriarchal one, despite their self-perception of progressive gender norms. In the existing discourse, Circassian women are referred to as beautiful, pure, skillful, and modest, which makes me suggest that they are only loved and cherished as long as they act exactly so. I argue that women in the Circassian community are treated well, not “because they are women”, but because they are the main providers of care in the community.

First, most of the domestic labor falls on women. Cooking, cleaning, baking, and taking care of the household are romanticized in everyday conversations and on social media, while marriages where women do not work outside the home are idealized.

Second, a woman’s marriage causes grief for the male part of her birth family, even though girls are socialized to become wives one day. During my fieldwork, I attended a Circassian –

Chechen wedding where the bride's male relatives were absent, a norm, I learned, as fathers and brothers view the event not as a celebration, but her "leaving their family for another family", in other words, transferred from her father's authority to her husband's. The groom's family is always present, celebrating – he does not leave the family and keeps the family name. Overall, I think that men experience the loss of a kind, patient, and loving caregiver, not only a daughter or a sister.

Third, marriage exclusively to Circassian men and motherhood are understood as women's primary functions. While some tolerance has emerged for Circassian women marrying Arab men, it is still stigmatized, while Circassian men are free to marry outside the community without issue. One reason is that, in the Circassian community, patrilineal descent is considered to preserve ethnicity. Thus, women carry the weight of reproducing the "pure" Circassian lineage through birth and marital choices.

Out of fourteen people I interviewed for this research, eight were women. Three of those women were active online in terms of posting content themselves, not simply observing. Two of them reported posting images and videos showing their faces and expressing opinions. Other 5 women reported neither posting a lot nor engaging in online discussions. While I understand that the focus group is too small to make any conclusions with certainty, these findings illustrate that many Circassian women prefer not to express themselves on social media. I suggest that they do not, at least partially, due to the position in society they occupy – the one with less authority and certainty.

Circassian women are not powerless victims. They are resilient, intelligent, and exceptionally kind. Yet they remain subject to significant male control throughout their lives, a dynamic intertwined with the community's hierarchical traditions and reproduction strategies.

Age hierarchies

Almost every participant I have spoken to in one way or another brought up the difficult relationship in the community between younger people and older people. Elders are supposed to be treated with the deepest respect, and their opinions have more weight than those of younger people. An excellent illustration of the dynamic between these two groups, although seems natural to Circassian people, felt quite distinctive to me as a semi-insider: you must stand up when an older person walks into the room and greet them. Even if you are in the room to

see someone else, even if you don't know who they are, even if they do not even look or acknowledge you from their side. There was an uncomfortable moment during my fieldwork when I, for some reason, thought that I was exempt from this rule as a guest. One of my interview participants carefully told me about it and made sure I understood the rule included me as well, so after that, I started standing up whenever I saw everyone else in the room do that. I started paying more attention to this interaction every time I had to be a part of it. Sometimes it is almost done as a chore; people just slightly move their chair, barely stand up, as if just to tick a box. Sometimes, when you are in a big space, where people constantly walk in and out, it so happens that you must stand up every few minutes. Some people, or perhaps some situations, assume a more serious "standing up" than others. The following is an excerpt from my fieldwork diary, describing one of the accounts I have observed:

... Then we went all the way up to the roof, to the open terrace, with my dad and my uncle. There was a table of teenagers and young people just spending time together. We barely walked in, and all of them immediately almost jumped out of their seats to stand up. They looked very proud, backs straight, heads held high, greeted my dad and uncle very politely, me – not so much. For some reason, it caught me off guard. I knew they would do it, of course, but it was just so quick and so intense, almost like they were soldiers.

Such dynamics are extended to digital spaces as well, where youth often self-censor to avoid conflicting with elders. Younger people (under 35) often feel hesitant to voice their ideas because they do not expect them to be taken seriously and fear the consequences that might follow. For instance, I have already mentioned a few times a story told by Participant 4, a 27-year-old woman, about an online community that used to have online meetings every week, during which Circassian people from all over the world would share knowledge and skills with each other. However, she said that eventually the group fell apart, and one of the reasons for that, she believed, was older people finding out about that space and disrupting the dynamic with their ideas on how things should be:

Everything was fine until some individuals started entering the community who were not at the same age level, let's say. They were a lot older than the people who were already in the group. So they had these older mentalities or ideologies, and it made everyone else uncomfortable in a way. The younger generation, the younger people,

started to feel uncomfortable sharing, talking, and the conversation kind of died. The first meetings I remember would go on for like an hour, sometimes an hour and a half, because everyone is engaging, everyone's really like expressing themselves and whatnot. But then certain people started joining, and things kind of fell apart because we stopped feeling the freedom that we had before, you know.

This story illustrates how elders seem to be superior in every space, while younger people became more hesitant to share after the dynamics of the online community have changed, which eventually led to them abandoning the activity completely. The dynamic reminded me of the works of two scholars – Sandra Ponzanesi and Elisabetta Costa. Sandra Ponzanesi, during her research with the Somali diaspora across European sites, observed how those who become gatekeepers and leaders in digital spaces tend to be educated elites (Ponzanesi, 2021, p.7). In the case of the Circassian diaspora in Jordan, while I do not have data on people's education levels, it is older members who frequently become the ones in charge online as well, as they socially are in positions of power. Costa's observations in Mardin also showed that on social media, those who hold more power tend to feel empowered to speak, while those in more vulnerable positions self-censor (Costa, 2016, p. 138).

At the same time, there is a different side to how this relationship sometimes manifests on social media. Belal, 27, shared that sometimes being online, rather than in close physical proximity to each other at the moment of the discussion, gives people more courage to express their opinions:

And also, when there's an age gap, we also know that Circassians still have traumas when it comes to communication between different age groups. So it might be easier for someone to communicate with an elder on social media than to communicate with him in real time or vice versa. Sometimes the opposite.

Belal's reflection demonstrates that digital spaces can sometimes reduce the barriers that come with social norms, as they let young people challenge elders or vice versa without a direct face-to-face conflict. This suggests that while social norms often restrict online engagement (as in the previous example), social media platforms can sometimes foster more open dialogue by allowing for distance.

At the same time, older people I spoke to seemed to be very curious about what younger people wanted and needed. They even asked me to ask younger participants specific questions, because they thought that their answers would be helpful for the future work of the Circassian institutions. However, one of the participants also expressed the idea that the initiatives that are marketed as for the “youth” are often used merely as promotion techniques to attract attention, rather than being actual priorities. Additionally, they said that it is important to note that younger people are not very different from the older generation and frequently paint and use this image of strict hierarchy for their own gain. Unfortunately, within this research, I was not able to gather more data on this point, but it felt wrong not to mention it at all.

In conclusion, from the outside perspective, it seems like at least some individuals from both sides prefer to find some common ground and put their resources together for the better future of Circassians in Jordan, but they are up against generations of deeply ingrained behavior and those who are invested in holding onto their positions of power.

Rejection of different ideas and sensitivity

Circassians are very sensitive about their history, the way they have known it all these years, their traditions, management of Xasas, and ideas of the Circassian identity. Almost every time a new opinion, view, or idea emerges, it faces strong criticism and rejection. Participant 5, a 36-year-old woman, the singer, often faces these challenges when she comes up with ideas inspired by old folkloric songs. She is frequently told that she is not allowed to touch those songs, as they are “sacred”. Many musicians from Nalchik, the city in the Caucasus, reportedly face similar judgment when they are experimenting with traditional music as well. Additionally, Participant 5, a 36-year-old woman, faces very strong criticism when she is making a song in two languages – Arabic and Circassian:

And let's say when I sing a song that is half Circassian, half Arabic, like for me, this is very, very nice. Like, we're being cohesive. We blend cultures together. I see it's very artistic and nice, and this is my opinion. Yeah, but you would have other people from the community who feel that this is very intimidating and it threatens the Circassian language. And they think that way, I will have more Arabic followers, and I will lose my identity, because we are a minority in Jordan, so I know where this comes from.

This example illustrates how moving away from established normative practices leads to defensive rejection, rather than encouragement or even a discussion. In this case specifically, I can also trace this reaction to the community's fear of assimilation and loss of distinctiveness. However, limited participation and innovation in both online and offline practices seem to be directly resulting from those processes.

This defensiveness, however, extends beyond creative expression. As I have already mentioned in this thesis, there is a version of Circassian history and identity that was introduced in the 1990s by the Circassian elites. That discourse paints a very specific image of the Circassian identity as people know it to this day and rarely question. Some of the participants speak about this discourse with pain and frustration in their eyes, as now they report seeing that things do not add up and that this perspective does not bring any progress to the community anymore. They say that this common history only ever describes Circassians as “angel people”, the wronged victims, who had to flee and build their lives from scratch elsewhere. They do not disagree with the fact that what happened was terrible and traumatic, but they question everything else.

They question how Circassian identity is described - they believe “the caricature” of the Circassian has been created by those elites, pieced together from flattering depictions written by Russians, Ottomans, and British, which has now also become a tool for control. They question the use of the word “genocide” to describe what happened to their ancestors; they do not understand what the recognition of it by Ukraine and Georgia has brought them; they do not see any significant changes in the life of the diaspora in the 30 years since this perspective was introduced. They see a community that lives in the past and romanticizes it, instead of investing in the future. Bashar, 30, spoke to me about this issue:

Okay, fine, but for 30 years you've been doing this. What have you brought us? They will say the recognition from Georgia or the recognition from Ukraine. So what?

Like, what did the recognition of the genocide affect?

I'm fine with anything not repeating the same old discourses. I am very bored with that, and I like to be challenged and to learn something that I didn't know before.

These passages show the dissatisfaction with a stagnant narrative that produces little progress. However, those who seek new insights face criticism for challenging sacred beliefs. To avoid disagreements and consequences that might follow (for example, exclusion), many people self-censor on social media, which further reinforces hierarchical norms that the Circassian society is used to.

4.2.3 Summary of the subsection

The internal dynamics discussed in this subchapter show that the restrictions on Circassians' use of social media are also an apparatus that reinforces itself. Adiga Habze, an ethical code, establishes the standard conduct offline, while people enforce the rules offline and in digital spaces. Social consequences, such as the removal of posts and comments, exclusion, private disciplinary measures, or public shaming, often occur when someone deviates from the norm. Internal hierarchy additionally determines whose voice carries more authority within that system: men over women, elders over youth, established narratives over emerging ones.

What connects these influences again is the production and maintenance of a collective cultural identity, as per Stuart Hall (Hall, 1990). To remind the reader of the concept, cultural identity is always in creation, produced through representation, and not a stable and defined essence (Hall, 1990). The creation frequently happens from the selected materials that are available, often imposed from the outside (Hall, 1990). As I have illustrated in this chapter, some participants describe almost the same process to me - “we like to believe in the orientalized version that the Russians and the English and the Ottomans made of us”. Currently, I see that this constantly produced cultural identity, as well as the traditional discourse around Circassians' history, is both a source of communal pride and a tool for control.

As a result, people participate in social media activities, but they never feel fully safe to do so, often self-censor or remove themselves from online conversations entirely. People can post and engage, but they must do so not only within the boundaries of what is enforced by external authorities, but also by the community itself.

4.3 Conclusion of Chapter 4

This chapter, contrary to the first one, discusses what and why Circassian people do not post on social media platforms. Topics that are frequently avoided are related to political, ideological, and historical debates. Many Circassian people prefer to stay silent and not express those opinions, both on their individual pages and in informal groups. Some people also choose to avoid posting personal images due to privacy concerns, while among women specifically, a tendency to only share the spaces they have visited after they have already left them occurs, due to physical safety considerations.

The influences preventing individuals from online engagement that I have divided into 2 groups: the ones coming from the outside of the community, and the ones coming from the inside. Outside influences include complex and challenging relationships with other ethnic communities in Jordan and Circassian position as a minority; political worries, such as not being able to the entry Russia or the United States, if the need arises; online safety considerations (especially for women); assimilation fears; as well as algorithmic nature of social media, that even though does not stop posting completely, severely affects the ways Circassians do. Being seen online feels dangerous because of these factors, and Circassian people frequently approach public visibility with caution.

In the second subchapter, I described the dynamics of the Circassian community itself that tend to prevent some people from participating in online activities more often or at all. Adiga Habze, the ethical code, establishes standards of social behavior, which strongly affect people's decisions both offline and online. Internal hierarchical structure further determines whose voices are important and whose can be put aside. Finally, the community's sensitivity and protectiveness over their historical discourse and traditional practices discourages honest engagement in online conversations. As a result, some people prefer not to attract attention, not to risk deviating from what is socially allowed. Others choose to speak but are forced to adjust their messaging accordingly to be heard and considered.

5 Discussion

This thesis examines how people who self-identify as members of the Circassian diaspora in Amman use social media. This topic has been addressed from complementary angles in the two empirical chapters. The first chapter showed that social media serves as a complex infrastructure for Circassians in Jordan, operating as a platform for artistic expression, an organizational tool, a cultural and historical archive, a space for political and ideological discussions, a support network, and ultimately a site where Circassian identity is actively produced and performed.

The second chapter showed that even though Circassian people from Jordan have a wide presence on social media, many of them prefer to remove themselves from online activities, especially from conversations on political, ideological, and historical topics. I argue that this is being done with the hope of avoiding both structural repercussions as well as social consequences; hence the second chapter is split into two subchapters - one highlighting outside influences that prevent people from posting online, and one highlighting influences coming from within the community itself.

One of the main arguments of the first chapter is that social media serves as a central site for the identity production of the Circassian diaspora. It fits smoothly within Stuart Hall's theoretical framework of cultural identity. He argued that cultural identity is a continuous production, affected by the “continuous ‘play’ of history, structure and power” (Hall, 1990, p. 394). The case of Circassians in Jordan offers a strong empirical illustration of this argument: cultural identity production happens on social media on both official pages of Circassian institutions and informal pages and is put together from available materials – historical narratives, traditional practices, achievements, and artistic expression. However, that production is organized and controlled by administrative gatekeeping, institutions, and social norms. Many people do not feel safe fully participating in these activities, not because it is unimportant to them, but because they hope to avoid the consequences that will likely follow. As a result, the identity produced on Circassian social media is carefully curated by elites, while many politically relevant voices have been systematically removed from the process.

Additionally, the first chapter also shows that one of the most common uses of social media among Circassians in Amman is the development and monitoring of bonding social capital -

networks of mutual support, resource sharing, and practical assistance that circulate within the community through digital platforms. People are promoting their catering services, looking for doctors, lawyers, blood transfers, and keeping track of other people's professional occupations - all to know whom to turn to when the need arises. These findings resonate strongly with what Elisabetta Costa observed in Mardin, Turkey, where Facebook was also used to maintain local networks crucial to accessing resources, employment, and everyday favors (Costa, 2016, p. 133). Miller et al. offer a complementary observation from India, finding that many people who are already employed often use WhatsApp to share information about vacancies within their personal networks before they are officially advertised, which can be seen as the implementation of the community's bonding social capital (Miller et al., 2016, p. 89).

The results of this study also support the body of research that focuses on social media being used as a tool for the preservation of cultural heritage of diaspora groups. Similar processes can be observed in the Filipino diaspora, which frequently engages in online groups such as "Filipino Food Lovers," and the Indian diaspora, among which YouTube Channels like "Indian Tradition Today" are widely popular (Panchal & Mago, 2024, p. 17). In the context of the Circassian diaspora, people and institutions frequently share footage of traditional dances and music, celebrate Circassian costume and language, and organize heritage documentation projects, reflecting a strong motivation for cultural preservation.

The second chapter's argument adds to the existing research on self-censorship in digital spaces. According to Elisabetta Costa's ethnographic research in Mardin, the culture of silence that governs offline public spaces is replicated on social media, and the fear of social punishment and state surveillance similarly translates into individuals' online behavior (Costa, 2016, pp. 136-137). The case of Circassians in Jordan confirms this exact dynamic – at the very least showing Circassian discourses and practices is considered unsafe by many.

Elisabetta Costa also wrote about self-censoring due to concerns about one's reputation in the community. She writes that in Mardin, people do not go beyond the limits of what is commonly considered to be an acceptable presentation of oneself in public (Costa, 2016, p. 170). People construct personalities that fit the expectations of relatives and family friends and keep their social media activity strictly within those behaviours (Costa, 2016, p. 67). The dynamics inside the Circassian community show a very similar situation. Many Circassians take pride in the common ethical code, *Adiga Habze*, and do their best to follow it publicly. One participant

even shared that following the code and staying within the boundaries of what is socially allowed matters even more than the message one is trying to communicate. These dynamics lead many people to withdraw themselves from public conversations in order to avoid potential social consequences.

Madianou and Miller's concept of polymedia is also confirmed in this study, particularly in relation to political discourse. The concept of polymedia refers to the idea that people use the full range of available communication channels as a single environment, selecting them for the social and emotional benefits they provide (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Many Circassians do not entirely avoid political dialogue, but relocate it. What is dangerous to say on a public Xasa page may occasionally be discussed in a private group; what may cause issues in a private group can perhaps be expressed on Instagram “close friends” or in a private message. Differentiating platforms based on the risk they carry is a form of polymedia navigation in which the choice of medium is based on the social and political implications rather than on technological affordances.

6 Limitations

This study has its limitations. First, the language barrier presented a significant methodological setback. I do not speak Arabic or Circassian, which meant that I often had to use online translators during the digital discourse analysis and fully relied on my friends and relatives during fieldwork whenever I needed something translated. Secondly, my positionality, as a semi-insider and someone who was brought up by Circassian rules and norms but outside the community, can be considered both a limitation and a strength. There are many aspects and details of Circassian life in Jordan that I am unaware of and do not understand, as I have never lived there. At the same time, this position allowed me to note and question things that an insider might have taken for granted. My positionality has also prevented me from opening and engaging in conversations about aspects that would add significant value to this study, such as courtship, kinship, marriage, and dating traditions. Those topics felt particularly intimate for me to discuss openly and extensively with my interlocutors during this research, but I understand that it would make the results of this study much stronger. However, this could be an angle for future research with the Circassian diaspora in Jordan, which I am coming back to in the conclusion.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to examine how the Circassian diaspora in Amman engages with social media - what people use it for, and what those choices reveal. The guiding research question was simple: what do people who self-identify as members of the Circassian diaspora in Amman use social media for? What emerged in the research process was that the question about people's participation choices cannot be investigated separately from their abstinence choices and reasons for all those decisions.

This thesis argues that for the Circassian diaspora in Amman, social media serves as an important site of cultural identity production. By sharing informational or celebratory content about Circassian traditions, language, and artistic practices; by actively honoring wins of Circassian individuals and the community; and by frequently negotiating online what it means to be a Circassian, people continuously produce the cultural Circassian identity.

This thesis also finds that many people choose to withdraw from online activities, and therefore, from participating in identity production in this way, due to the risks associated with social media visibility. Some Circassians believe that even aspects seen as "positive" in Circassian discourse are best kept private to minimize intrusive scrutiny and tensions with surrounding societies. Furthermore, people self-censor to avoid judgement, conflicts, and exclusion from the Circassian society itself. I suggest that there is a lot of pressure to be a "true" and respectable Circassian online, which is why many people choose not to risk their social positions by engaging in digital practices. Summing up, political, historical, and ideological online discussions are often avoided by Circassian people in Jordan.

Among other notable findings regarding Circassian social media use in Amman, I highlight the development and monitoring of the community's bonding social capital or networks of mutual support, construction of counter-narratives, documentation of the current history, and organizational communications. Overall, the results of this study show Circassian people in Jordan do not use social media for a single function but as a complex infrastructure, choosing platforms and adjusting privacy settings based on what they want to achieve.

I believe the findings of this research to be significant for the intersection of diaspora and media anthropological disciplines. This thesis complicates the more optimistic literature on media as

a tool for cultural preservation, as discussed by Panchal and Mago (2024), by showing that this does not occur naturally or without cost. It takes place in conditions of constant tension: one must always find balance between community-enforced norms and longings for alternative approaches, between maintaining a clean digital footprint and speaking out for one's values, between what is advantageous to show and what is safer kept invisible. This study additionally extends Elisabetta Costa's (2016) account of political silence in minority digital spaces by showing that internal community dynamics, reinforced through ethical codes, hierarchies, and defensive protection of established narratives, prove to be just as powerful mechanisms of self-censorship as state surveillance and majority society pressures. Finally, this study presents the first ethnographic account of the Circassian diaspora in Jordan through the lens of media and diaspora anthropologies.

Naturally, this research has its gaps. As mentioned earlier, I was not able to explore in depth the matters of kinship, courtship, marriage, and dating traditions within the Circassian diaspora in Jordan, nor how these may have transformed with social media. Future research could focus on or include these angles, exploring Circassian dating practices and whether dedicated to this purpose online spaces exist in the diaspora, especially given the emphasis the Circassians place on marrying within the community. Additionally, while this thesis touches on gendered posting behaviors, noting that Circassian women tend to factor physical safety into their participation decisions, it does not examine gender and social media use in the systematic way the topic deserves. This remains another important direction for future research, particularly given the patriarchal dynamics documented in the empirical chapters.

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List of images used

Image 1: Circassian Charity Association. (2025). *The Emblem of Circassian Charity Association*. Facebook. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1020038536950284&set=a.419343730353104>

Image 2: Circassian Charity Volunteer Club. (2023). *The Emblem of Circassian Charity Volunteer Club*. Facebook. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=314764047573356&set=a.314764027573358>.

Image 3: Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club. (2024). *The Emblem of Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club*. Facebook. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1320300142281825&set=a.104302700548248>.

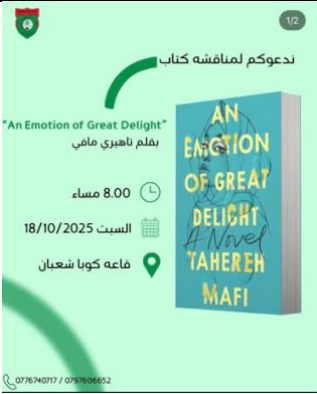
Appendix A: List of images collected

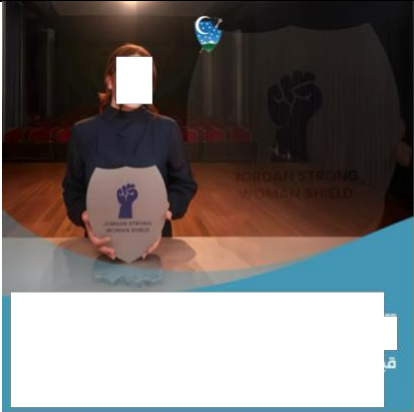
Post Number & Theme	Screenshot (identifying details are removed due to privacy concerns)	Citation
1 – an educational video about the Circassian costume		Circassian repatriation organization - CRO. Facebook. (2024, September 27). https://www.facebook.com/C.R.Org/posts/pfbid0Uqt1EnaSqCvNWSLbmKvyprxofnBHszbtc3vwCgNMRcEkgeNyjHcvzcast3czdcaXl
2 – an interview with the Circassian designer		New episode of “Гум Къыдэкъы - From the Heart”. Facebook. (n.d.). https://www.facebook.com/reel/456265335430880
3 – an invitation to the lecture about Islam		CCA Volunteer Club. (2025). <i>Post from 02.09.2025</i> . Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02G9NR3tW72uEC39ZTLZt8uUJ7SKK6ZfyudeCvjUANySHC7Y4fJAQypno8ueX6Q4CPl&id=100071192890839
4 – a recap of the event held		CRO. (2025). <i>Post from 27.10.2025</i> . Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/C.R.Org/posts/pfbid096ieFdxCDRco1XKdqpR78pobsyub5V2pBReeJauhfEcv8rxqlgMHjWwpa1BBJx75l

5 – a recap of the volunteering event held	 نادي متطوعي الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية 14 сентября 2025 مشاركة نادي متطوعي الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية مع مبادرة وقف أريد في تجهيز الوجبات وتوزيعها على المارة في منطقة وسط البلد أمام المسجد الحسيني السبت ٢٠٢٥/٩/١٣ Показать перевод	CCA Volunteer Club. (2025b). <i>Post from 14.09.2025.</i> Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02vmwNbfyLXtqP8uyxrcQHGKrETAFGypwBvB7GsF1rhWgavZjeQ9ym5dSe4cFZySR1l&id=100071192890839&_rdc=1&_rdr
6 – an invitation to an event	 لتشرف اللجنة التنسيقية لجمعية ويتعاون مع نادي متطوعي الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية وتدعى لاجتماعية بدعوتكم لحضور "اللقاء الخيري الأول" لتخريجي الجامعات والتدخين في شاهدة فكتورية العامة والشهادات الخيرية والادبية السبت ٢٠٢٥/٩/١٣ الساعة ٦ مساءً الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية / الخبز قاعة أو ساحة نادي / موسيات ايف حضوركم بدمعنا وافتحنا وسنفتنا الدعوة عامة ملاحظة: يرجى الحضور قبل الساعة ٥:٣٠ مساءً	A post made by CCA Volunteer Club on 14.09.2025. Currently deleted/achived.
7 – an invitation to a bike ride	 يعلن نادي متطوعي الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية عن اقامة جولة دراجات هوائية بالتعاون مع AMMAN CYCLING في منطقة دابوق وذلك يوم الجمعة ٣-١٠-٢٠٢٥ الساعة ٦ مساءً سعر التذكرة ٦ دينار فقط عدد المقاعد محدود للحجز والاستفسار:	CCA Volunteer Club. (2025c). <i>Post from 24.09.2025.</i> Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0VctjEVFanTQurWj1UiX9DxtJrfrWHAMQ1BrC673oR8LANST3c9GXhVyMmyfKiRSSl&id=100071192890839&_rdc=1&_rdr
8 – a video recap of the event held	 CCA Volunteer Club 102 2 1 30	CCA Volunteer Club Instagram. (2025). <i>Post from 28.09.2025.</i> Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/reel/DPJ0ZZVjHcE/?igsh=eGk2ajR2Y2oyeWRk

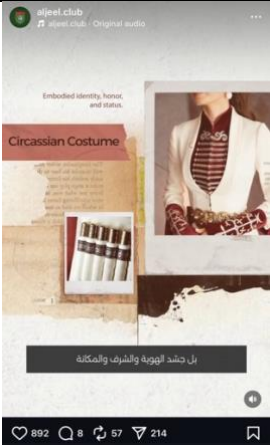
9 – a video recap of the volunteering event held	Показать перевод  27 3 комментария Поделились: 1	CCA Volunteer Club. (2025a). <i>Box of Wishes for Orphans, Post from 25.10.2025</i>. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/reel/2002987710459799
10 – a video recap of the bike ride advertised previously	 adiga_volunteers_club adiga_volunteers_club · Original audio (may incl.) 44 19	CCA Volunteer Club. (2025e). <i>Post from 16.10.2025</i>. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/reel/DP4UdolDIA4/?igsh=MWV6YjR2M2MyZWVyOA%3D%3D2F1EKXM7uvwS%2F%3Fmibextid%3Dqi2Omg&_rdc=1&_rdr
11 – an invitation to visit Petra	 يلا عالبترا؟ الجمعة 7-11-2025 سعر التذكرة 13 دينار تشمل المواصلات - فطور على الطريق - دخولية البتراء للحجز والاستفسار	A post made by CCA Volunteer Club on 17.10.2025. Currently deleted/achived.
12 – an announcement inviting bids for finishing the building	 ترغب الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية بطرح عطاء لإنهاء أعمال تشطيب المبني متعدد الأغراض التابع لها في الجمعية /المركز. من يرغب بتقديم لهذا العطاء فليواصل مع إمامة سر الجمعية على البريد الإلكتروني : SECRETARIAT@CCA-JO.ORG وذلك في موعد العطاء الساعة الثانية من ظهر يوم السبت الموافق ٢٠٢٥ / ٩ / ٦ مقدماء المعلومات التالية : - اسم الشركة أو المؤسسة . - رقم هاتف التواصل . - البريد الإلكتروني للتواصل . - مؤهلات الشركة أو المؤسسة وتصنيفها.	CCA. (2025). <i>Post from 03.09.2025</i>. Facebook. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/adiga.xaca1932/posts/pfbid0iHjFWgjafTAcV4UAxcWpYjdZXD6w9nREen38giBoTEhHu1mrGZU8ksGZ8tynNDb1?_rdc=1&_rdr.

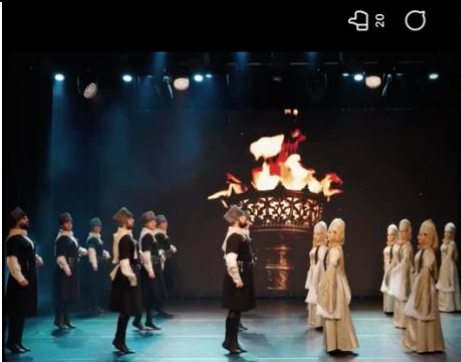
13 – a post congratulating an individual	 تتقدم الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية بالتهنئة من (تايبة مدير مكتب اليونسيف في اليمن) وعائلتها الكريمة لمودتها بالسلامة والإفراج عنها . وتوجه الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية جزيل الشكر والتقدير لكل من ساهم في الإفراج عنها وتأمين عودتها سالمة إلى أرض الوطن وعلى رأسهم وزارة الخارجية وشؤون المفترين والأجهزة الأمنية . حمداً لله على السلامة حامي الله الأردن بقيادة مليكنا المفدى حفظه الله ورعاه.	CCA. (2025b). <i>Post from 11.09.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DOd9v7TDPi3/?igsh=MXVtaDg3azE1Zm9wdA%3D%3D.
14 – an invitation to the job fair	 تدعو لجنة اليوم الوظيفي الهيئة العامة والمؤسسات الشركسية لحضور محاضرة مميزة بعنوان: "إعداد السيرة الذاتية والتحضير للمقابلات وبناء صفحة LinkedIn احترافية". محاور المحاضرة على النحو التالي: - أهم خطوات كتابة سيرة ذاتية ناجحة. - كيفية التحضير لمقابلات العمل بطلاقة. - استراتيجيات إنشاء صفحة LinkedIn احترافية. يوم السبت ١٠-١١-٢٠٢٤ من الساعة ٩:٠٠ صباحاً فرع نابعل - فرع ربيعة	CCA. (2025c). <i>Post from 19.09.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/adiga.xaca1932/posts/pfbid021StaEx1T66CPpX4jZHcxPZqnNhnwWUuw79gVzigiq5GucNHE3wr9c5WEnpaiXiybl?_rdc=1&_rdr
15 - a post congratulating an individual	 تتقدم الجمعية الخيرية الشركسية باسمي آيات التهنئة والتبريك للاعب [REDACTED] ، لاعب المنتخب الأردني للجمبار، بمناسبة حصوله على ميداليتين فضيتين في بطولة الفراعنة الدولية للجمبار، على جهاري حسان القفر و المتوازي "كل الامنيات له بمزيد من التناق والنجاح ورفع راية الوطن عالياً"	CCA. (2025d). <i>Post from 24.09.2025</i>. Facebook. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/adiga.xaca1932/posts/pfbid02Td8QZChDSYrSiCbzYdSvXhuLeWza2yC3krtRWAcAhnuZVPB6v4znnyYZFjUGGri8l?_rdc=1&_rdr
16 – a recap post from the previously advertised job fair		CCA. (2025c). <i>Post from 11.10.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DPrcc8NjKy t/?igsh=cGtvN2ZlOGJqMWhi

17 – an invitation to a book club		Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club. (2025). <i>Post from 18.09.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DOwB9tjCIRB/?igsh=MTFtM3o5d2hwcHp1Mg%3D.
18 – an invitation to submit designs of the Circassian costumes as a competition		Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club. (2025b). <i>Post made on 20.09.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DO1kU7ujv1N/?igsh=MW5sdWZlaml3aWYzaA%3D%3D.
19 – an invitation to an event in Vienna		Nart TV. (2025). <i>Post made on 24.10.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10163054307859194&set=gm.4055435991344081&id=1862793400608362&_rdc=1&_rdr.
20 - celebration of the 93rd anniversary of the CCA		CCA. (2025d). <i>Post from 17.10.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/adiga.xaca1932/posts/pfbid021CamfAVsde5m8tjZgQW8CGtUu66A2MTm2FULSDwUSUSY56Q4KiSP5fw3PMz8UNZQl?_rdc=1&_rdr.

21 - a post congratulating an individual		CCA. (2025g). <i>Post made on 12.10.2025.</i> Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/adiga.xaca1932/posts/pfbid02NWjRdALsr6E7Mr2uEf3Q5FJjCjgCNCnDV4nr1LXT6aM7EKe2DpUAV4Xnr3Rj5gu7l?_rdc=1&_rdr.
22 – a post expressing gratitude		CRO. (2025b). <i>Post from 29.10.2025.</i> Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/C.R.Org/posts/pfbid0QaySzkrlFj2PUWuefow5tESx6yVyQswSfjSo4ARfgNuQat9y4Gt25W4zEX3RBGjEl?_rdc=1&_rdr.
23 - a post of grief in regards to an individual's death		CRO. (2025c) <i>Post from 09.11.25.</i> Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DQ2NNrfDdXL/?igsh=M3N6aWk1MWRvcmp3.
24 - a call to contribute to students' tuition fees		CRO. (2025a). <i>Post from 25.11.2025.</i> Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DRfbc25DTsM/?igsh=djl6aDZkbTdyZDJr.

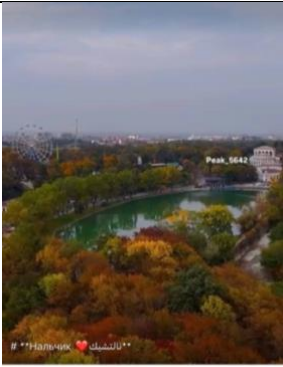
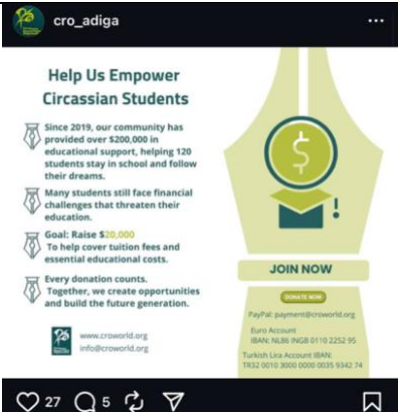
25 - celebration of the new administration of the association in Jordan		CRO. (2025a). <i>Post from 03.08.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DM5z9RptqOm/?img_index=1&igsh=NWlwN2IwZXZydnlz.
26 - a post offering to buy tickets to an event celebrating the 75th birthday of the club		Al Jeel Al Jadeed. (2025). <i>Post from 23.10.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DQKULM7CODo/?igsh=MTcyczdsbnp5aXJ0YQ%3D%3D.
27 – a post reflecting on the representative of the King attendance of an event		Al Jeel Al Jadeed. (2025b). <i>Post from 28.10.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DQWQZ3iiE65/?igsh=MWh5MzBlZzRvODc1eA%3D%3D.
28 – a recap of the event held		Al Jeel Al Jadeed. (2025c). <i>Post from 31.10.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DQePGExDaCf/?igsh=YW9jNXpza3c3em55.

29 – an educational video about traditional Circassian costume		Al Jeel Al Jadeed. (2025b). <i>Post from 26.09.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/reel/DPEhNS6CPBe/?igsh=MTExa2Z3M216eGJubg%3D%3D.
30 – a post congratulating an individual		Al Jeel Al Jadeed Club. (2025a). <i>Post from 01.09.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DODUIKWCFJk/?igsh=MXBjczAwMGZvcXdocA%3D%3D
31 - a post expressing gratitude		Al Jeel Al Jadeed. (2025c). <i>Post from 27.09.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/DPHfuCECPtL/?igsh=ZDd0NXNjaXJwa3ls
32 – a video of the Circassian dance		ICCA. (2025). <i>Post from 31.10.2025</i>. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/reel/1495593904819773

33 – announcement of the new dance class		ICCA. (2025a). <i>Post from 16.10.2025.</i> Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/reel/25048143098209283
34 - launch of the second phase of heritage preservation and documentation project and call for contributions		ICCA. (2025a). <i>Post from 13.09.2025.</i> Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/CircassianAcademy/posts/pfbid02aDi5MnkrwmP6Ycf6DaYFuZah5gbicX8eVzhDvLQnsqVKswBsExTSAuWR3FDXwdQMI
35 - a video of the Circassian dance		ICCA. (2025c). <i>Post from 30.10.2025.</i> Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/reel/2368620120261722
36 – a video recap of the event		ICCA. (2025a). <i>Post from 10.10.2025.</i> Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/reel/DPnpUpYjfFZ/?igsh=c3ZtamZ4ODAwajA4

37 – an educational post about the Circassian costume		ICCA, & Almamlaka. (2025). <i>Post form 28.09.2025</i>. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DPKBqhfDG5E/?igsh=MWl0ZjJ3MXdwZ3loMQ%3D%3D
38 – a recap of the event		Jendar Khemesh, & ICCA. (2025). <i>“A flame of hope.”</i> Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DQcJ6d6DC=/d/?igsh=MXN0c3hkeTAwNXlkdg%3D%3D
39 - a recap of the event		Jendar Khemesh, & ICCA. (2025a). <i>“A flame of Hope 2.”</i> Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DQeJUGiDGgD/?igsh=aGh3ZGFzdGo4eWN0
40 - A personal essay about minority rights and justice		Basel Hajtas, & Nart TV. (2025). Post from 28.10.2025. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1862793400608362/permalink/4059315874289426/?rdid=P91wSJPh9ODM2C7

41 - introduction of the designer from Nalchik		Basel Hajta, & Nart TV. (2025). <i>Post form 18.10.2025</i>. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1862793400608362/permalink/4049031008651246/?rclid=NVMNYAnIQAhT5OI
42 - an essay on the job fair held		Basel Hajtas, & Nart TV. (2025a). <i>Post from 11.10.2025</i>. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1862793400608362/permalink/4042437235977290/?rclid=1lgIKmSidMk1oYh9
43 - an animation of the historical image		Basel Hajtas, & Nart TV. (2025a). <i>Post from 10.10.2025</i>. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1862793400608362/permalink/4040933669460980/?rclid=A75E40MVHOylYZFI
44 - a personal essay about a historical event		Adnan Kalmykov, & Nart TV. (2025). <i>Post from 10.10.2025</i>. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1862793400608362/permalink/4040784172809263/?rclid=KIgigmfLH6zE0mw0

45 - a post reflecting on this year's bazar (fair)		Basel Hajtas, & Nart TV. (2025c). <i>Post from 20.09.2025</i>. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1862793400608362/permalink/4020028148218199/?rdid=8W6cNpnKY1X3yN
46 – a video from Nalchik, the Caucasus		Basel Hajtas, & Nart TV. (2025e). <i>Post made on 31.10.2025</i>. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1862793400608362/permalink/4062384400649240/?rdid=RaDaX2S5Sj3zWjmT
47 - a call to contribute to students' tuition fees, in English		CRO. (2025e). <i>Post made on 25.11.2025</i>. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DRfbVLQja3E/?igsh=MTcyems2dWlpaXl5eA%3D%3D
48 - an informational post regarding the reopening of the CCA kindergarden		CCA. (2025g). <i>Post made on 02.09.2025</i>. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DOGGkXYjKHC/?img_index=2&igsh=MXRl azdoNT NzOHZnYg%3D%3D