

The Lost Circassia and the Found Circassians: Caucasian Migration to the Ottoman Empire

Kayıp Çerkesya ve Bulunan Çerkesler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na Kafkas Göçü

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the history of pan-Caucasian (Circassian) nation-building in the context of international relations, which helps to provide a new look at the migration from the North Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. The author analyses a wide range of materials including archival documents, historiographical works, and the British and French press to show that subjectification of the Caucasus in the international arena and Circassian nation-building were the real triggers of migration. The success of Western (primarily British) diplomacy can be seen in the formulation of the Circassian question and the emergence of a pan-Caucasian national project. However, Russia's military advancement in the Caucasus, and the difference between British and French foreign policy strategies halted the nation-building process. Besides, the efforts of nation-builders were not enough to unite North Caucasians, due to such obstacles as the lack of experience of common statehood, and linguistic and ethnic diversity. Thus, migration was the result of the failure of the British Circassian nation-building project, and it summed up the long period of subjectification of the North Caucasus in the international arena in the 19th century.

Keywords: Ottoman History, Caucasus, Circassian Question, Caucasian Migration, International Relations

ÖZ

Bu araştırma 19. yüzyılda Kuzey Kafkasya'dan Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na göçen yeni bir bakış sağlamaya yardımcı olan pan-Kafkas (Çerkes) ulus inşasının tarihini uluslararası ilişkiler bağlamında ele almaktadır. Yazar, Kafkasya'nın uluslararası arenada özneleştirilmesinin ve Çerkes ulus inşasının göçün gerçek sebepleri olduğunu göstermek için arşiv belgeleri, tarih yazımı eserleri, İngiliz ve Fransız basını gibi çok çeşitli materyalleri analiz ediyor. Batı (öncelikle İngiliz) diplomasisinin başarısı, Çerkes sorununun formüle edilmesinde ve bir pan-Kafkasya ulusal projesinin ortaya çıkışında görülebilir. Bununla birlikte, Rusya'nın Kafkasya'daki askeri ilerlemesi ve İngiliz ve Fransız dış politika stratejileri arasındaki fark, ulus oluşturma sürecinin duraklamasına neden oldu. Ayrıca, ulus kurucuların çabaları, ortak devletçilik deneyimi eksikliği,

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dilsel ve etnik çeşitlilik gibi engeller nedeniyle Kuzey Kafkasyalıları birleştirmek için yeterli olmadı. Dolayısıyla göç, İngiltere tarafından gerçekleştirilen Çerkes ulus inşası projesinin başarısızlığının bir sonucu ve 19. yüzyılda Kuzey Kafkasya'nın uluslararası arenada uzun süren özneleştirilmesi sürecini özetledi.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı Tarihi, Kafkasya, Çerkes Meselesi, Kafkas Göçü, Uluslararası İlişkileri

1. Introduction

Over a period of centuries, the Ottoman Empire and the peoples of the Caucasus developed a complex relationship that included military-political and economic relations based on a well-developed trade system. The key element of the latter was the slave trade, in which the Ottomans succeeded the Genoese, who had been exporting “live goods” from the Caucasus since the 13th century. The slave trade formed kinship ties between the Caucasian nobility and representatives of the Sultan’s court to whose harems Caucasian women were sold. This in turn supported the second widespread use of Caucasian slaves – military service, in which Caucasians with kinship ties in harems of Ottoman political elites received additional opportunities to build successful military and political careers in the Middle East. Moreover, since the 19th century, Ottoman sultans not only married Caucasian women, but also had Caucasian mothers.

The first instances of the term “Circassian” were recorded in the 13th century. To explain this, scholars offer Turkic, Iranian, Greek, and Italian origins. Originally only the population of the North-Western Caucasus were called Circassians, but in the 16th-17th centuries all mountain tribes of the North Caucasus that led similar lifestyles started to be perceived as Circassian. The term, as it can be seen, in the beginning had a geographical and social meaning, and it is in this sense that it began to be used in the Ottoman Empire.

The main mass influx of Caucasians into the Ottoman Empire came in the 19th century after the completion of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, when up to two-thirds of the population left their homeland. By the final stage of Russia’s military activity in the Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire provided the Caucasians with a well-known migration route, a network of blood kinship, and cultural orientation. This was because the religious factor began to play an important role in the 19th century in the North Caucasus, turning Ottoman territories into lands of Islam and the Ottoman sultan into a religious leader (caliph) for Caucasian Muslims. Due to all these reasons a very large part of the North Caucasian population decided to migrate to the Ottoman Empire.

Nevertheless, there is another underestimated factor fundamental to Caucasians’ decision to immigrate. This factor lies in the nation building process launched by nation builders of predominantly Western origin, who were also key players in national movements in the Balkans, the Arab provinces and other parts of the Ottoman Empire. I want to highlight that the use of modern, for that time, nation-building techniques in the Caucasus was aimed at the subjectification of the Caucasus in international relations being an instrument of British foreign policy.

In this regard, the main purpose of this study is to examine the history of Circassian nation-building in the context of international relations and to identify its role in the migration of Caucasians to the Ottoman Empire. I will use extensive literature in English, German, French, Russian, and Turkish languages about the history of the North Caucasus. Although there is

a research tradition of studying national struggle and national resistance in the Caucasus¹, it has been predominantly apologetic and/or ethnocentric and needs to be revised in order to understand the underlying processes that took place in the Caucasus. The British Empire's involvement in Caucasian affairs has been sufficiently well studied. However, nation building in itself in the North Caucasus in the 19th century in the context of international relations has not yet been an object of separate scientific research.

2. Methods

As I have previously stated, Circassian nation-building and Caucasian migration to the Ottoman Empire were initially conditioned by conflicts in the international arena. I support this thesis through a set of international treaties relating to the Caucasus. All texts of international treaties have been used in the Russian-language version. Since the arguments of the parties are important for international relations, I also make use of Russian and Ottoman historiographical works of the 18th and 19th centuries to substantiate the positions of the Russian and Ottoman empires with regard to the North Caucasus. I also show these positions on the basis of Russian and Ottoman archival documents. To reveal the specifics of British foreign policy on the Caucasian issue, I use records of debates in the British Parliament, Russian consular reports, and historical descriptions belonging to contemporaries of the events.

To study nation-building in the North Caucasus, I examined materials published by the nation-builders themselves – thematic books and newspaper articles. Because societies in the 19th century began to exert a strong influence on politics and vice versa, the press became an important source and tool of nation-building. A systematic analysis of British (including Irish, Scottish, and Welsh) and French newspapers of the 19th century provides a picture of the formation of public opinion on the Caucasian issue and reflects the positions of both the authorities and the opposition in Britain and France. I have used electronic press archives to access newspaper articles – “The British Newspaper Archive” (Great Britain, britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) and “Retro News” (France, retronews.fr). “The British Newspaper Archive” provides access to the British Library's press collection from 1700 to the present, and “Retro News” provides access to 1,500 periodicals published in France from 1631 to 1950.

1 See: John Baddeley, *The Russian conquest of the Caucasus*, (London, New-York, Bombay, Calcuta: Longmans, Green and Co, 1908); Peter Brock, “The Fall of Circassia: A Study in Private Diplomacy”, *The English Historical Review*, 71/280 (1956), 401-427; Willis Brooks, “The Politics of the Conquest of the Caucasus, 1855-1864”, *Nationalities Papers*, 24/4 (1996), 649-660; Moshe Gammer, *Russian Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan*, (London: Frank Cass, 1994); Paul B. Henze, “Fire and Sword in the Caucasus: The 19th Century Resistance of the North Caucasian Mountaineers”, *Central Asian Survey*, 2 (1983), 5-44; Kadir I. Natho, *Circassian History*, (Wayne-New Jersey: Xlibris Corporation, 2009).

3. Russian and Ottoman Points of View Concerning the Legal Status of the North Caucasus

The North Caucasus, or Circassia, was not a subject of international relations, including the interaction with the Ottoman Empire, for an obvious reason: the lack of statehood, for which no conditions were prepared. By the 19th century, the North Caucasus was still a mosaic border and contact zone between the Russian, Ottoman, and Persian Empires, populated by multilingual (mostly unwritten) ethnic groups with a pronounced tribal structure.

Due to its advancement to the Caspian Sea under the Tsar Ivan IV, Russia came into permanent contact with the North Caucasians as early as the 16th century. Russian tsars had been receiving petitions for allegiance and help against the Crimean khans and Ottoman troops from the population of the North-Western Caucasus since the 1550s.² Based on these petitions and the military and political support provided in the 17th century, the Russian titlature of the Russian tsars included the wording about the lord and sovereign of “the Iberian land, the tsars of Kartalin and Georgia, and the Kabardian land, the Cherkassy and Mountain princes”³.

However, the North Caucasians were equally taking oaths and receiving status gifts from the sultans of the Ottoman Empire, which dominated the Caucasus from the middle of the 15th century. The Ottomans justified their claim to the North Caucasian territories by subordination of Circassians to the Crimean khans⁴ who, since 1475, were vassal dependents of the Sultan⁵. Crimean historian Abdulgaffar Qirimi stated that by the beginning of the 18th century, Circassians had been in a subordinate state under the rule of the Crimean state for three hundred years⁶. As the secretary of one of the Crimean khans Ibrahim bin Ali Kefeli pointed out in the 18th century, the Circassian lands, which stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea had been given by Genghis Khan to his son Jochi⁷.

Another line of Ottoman historiography talks about the transition of vassalage from the Genoese to the Ottomans on the basis of the capture of Constantinople in 1453 that cut off the Black Sea routes to the Genoese colonies, and then a military campaign in 1479 by Cezeri Kasım Pasha to the Circassian region, accompanied by the capture of Anapa and Kuban. Mentions of this campaign can be found in works of the contemporaries of the events: the

2 Ekaterina N. Kusheva, *Narody Severnogo Kavkaza i ikh svyazi s Rossiei (vtoraya polovina XVI – 30-e gody XVII veka)* (Moscow.: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963), 198-207.

3 References about Georgian, Circassian and Kabardian lands in the Russian official titlature begin with Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich Romanov. See: Galina V. Talina, “Titul pravoslavnogo samodержzhtsa Moskovskogo tsarstva tret'ei chetverti XVII veka”, *Voprosy istorii*, 6 (2013), 167-172.

4 This is confirmed by the large number of references to the Circassians in the Ottoman act books with registers of Crimean possessions (Güney Kırım Tapu Defteri). See: *Osmanskii reestr zemel'nykh vladenii Yuzhnogo Kryma 1680-kh godov*. Is. 1, ed. by A.V. Efimov (Moscow: Institut Naslediya, 2020).

5 Fahrettin Kırzioğlu, *Osmanlılar'ın Kafkas Ellerini Fethi (1451-1590)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1976), 36.

6 Abdulgaffar Kyrymi. *Umdet al-akhbar*. Vol. 1: Transkripsiya, faksimile. Is. 1. (Kazan: Institut istorii im. Sh.Mardzhani AN RT, 2014), 294-b.

7 Ibrahim bin Ali Kefeli, *Tevârih-i Tatar ve Dağıstan ve Moskov ve Deşt-i Kıpçak Ölkeleri'nindir* (Pazarcık), 23, 25-27.

Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire Karamani Mehmed Pasha⁸ and the Ottoman historian Ibn Kemal (Kemalpashazade), who described it in detail.⁹

In turn, the 19th-century Ottoman historian Ahmet Cevdet Pasha specified that Kabardins and other Circassian tribes served the Sultans and were handed over to the Crimean Giray dynasty by Bayazid II in response to a request to that effect.¹⁰ As Bilge points out with reference to Ottoman archival documents, before Bayazid, the Circassians constituted a cavalry regiment in Rumelia (the so-called Circassian sipahi), but the sultan gave the Circassian tribes into the service of Mengli Giray in 1484 in gratitude for his assistance in the successful siege of the Moldavian fortress of Akkerman. As a result, the Circassians had to pay an annual tribute to Crimean Khans and provide mounted warriors for their campaigns.¹¹

4. International Treaties on the North Caucasus

The Russian-Ottoman rivalry in the North Caucasus began in the 16th century. This was self-added to the regional Ottoman-Persian confrontation and came to the foreground in the 18th and 19th centuries, having turned the Caucasus into an arena of the Ottoman-Russian confrontation. The issue of statehood of the North Caucasian territories was settled during the wars between the Russian, Ottoman, and Persian Empires and was fixed by international treaties.

The Russian-Ottoman military rivalry led to the recognition by both sides of the “free” status of the Greater and Lesser Kabarda and their transformation into a “barrier” between the empires according to the Belgrade Peace Treaty of 1739.¹² Then the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774 consolidated the right of the Crimean khans to determine the ownership of Kabarda¹³.

This decision becomes understandable in view of the Karasubazar Treaty signed between the Russian Empire and the Crimean Khanate two years earlier, the third condition of which recognized the Russian ownership over the Greater and Lesser Kabarda.¹⁴ Thus, the Ottoman Empire agreed with the Crimean khans’ right to the already completed cession of the Circassian territories to Russia, after which the inter-imperial border passed along the Kuban River.

After the loss of Crimea, the territories of Circassia (Cherkezistan in Ottoman tradition) became much more important to the Ottoman Empire. As Eshba notes, after the solution of the painful Crimean problem, both Saint Petersburg and Istanbul sought to use the peoples inhabiting the eastern coast of the Black Sea for their political and strategic

8 Mükrimin Halil (Yinanç), “Millî Tarihimize Dair Eski Bir Vesika”, *Türk Tarih Encümeni Mecmuası*, 3/80 (1340/1924), 154.

9 İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman: VII. Defter (Tenkidli Transkripsiyon)* (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1954), 126b, 127a.

10 Cevdet Pasha, “Opisanie sobytii v Gruzii i Cherkessii po otnosheniyu k Ottomanskoi imperii ot 1192 goda po 1202 god khidzhry (1775 – 1784)”, *Russkii arkhiv*, 3/3 (1888), 373.

11 Sadık Müfit Bilge, *Osmanlı Çağında Kafkasya 1454-1829 (Tarih-Toplum-Ekonomi)* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2012), 63.

12 *Dogovory Rossii s Vostokom politicheskoe i torgovye*, 19.

13 *Ibid.*, 35.

14 *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii s 1649 goda. 1770-1774. S 1649 po 12 dekabrya 1825 g.* Vol. XIX (Saint-Petersburg: Tip. 2-go Otd-niya Sobstv. ee imperat. velichestva kantselyarii, 1830), 710.

purposes, which led to the new “Circassian” problem coming to the fore instead of the old “Crimean” one.¹⁵

The Ottoman sultans considering the Circassians outside the Kabarda as their subjects, and demanded that they participate in hostilities on the side of the Ottoman Empire. In peacetime, in contrast, the sultans demanded that they refrain from raids on Russian territory in order not to strain Russian-Ottoman relations.¹⁶ Circassian military raids on Russian territories in the 18th-19th centuries repeatedly caused official Russian claims to Ottoman territories, and the Belgrade Peace Treaty gave both empires the right to punish the Circassians if they raided them.

The Russian military advance in the North Caucasus in the 19th century was determined by political and geostrategic as well as economic reasons and was accompanied by the signing of a number of international agreements. With the recognition of the protection and supreme power of Russia over Eastern Georgia by the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783 and the subsequent annexation of these territories to Russia in 1801, the conquest of the Northern Caucasus had become of paramount importance for the Russian Empire. The Treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmanchay (1828) with the Persian Empire consolidated Russia’s ownership not only of the territory of the South Caucasus but also of Dagestan.

According to the Treaty of Adrianople (Edirne), which ended the Russian-Ottoman War of 1828-1829, Ottoman Empire lost its territories to the Russian Empire, including vast coastal areas populated by the Circassians under the “perpetual possession” of the Russian Empire. The official motive for this decision was the intention to stop the raids by Caucasian tribes.¹⁷

As Bilge notes, the Treaty of Adrianople ended 375 years of Ottoman rule in the Caucasus and it was a significant loss to the Ottoman Empire, which regarded the Caucasian peoples as a source of strength and reliability against Russia and Iran. Moreover, according to the historian, Russia gained a dominant position in the Black Sea. This led to the beginning of the “Great Game” in Eurasia, which continues to the present.¹⁸

From the second quarter of the 19th century, the Russian Empire’s use of the Black Sea became the key theme of Russian-Ottoman relations, also entering the foreign policy agenda of the great powers and bringing fear, due to Russia’s strengthening in the international arena. The greatest tension happened when Russia used its naval fleet to support the Ottoman Sultan against his rebellious Egyptian vassal, Mehmed Ali Pasha in 1833, while the Black Sea squadron was stationed on the Bosphorus.

Of particular concern to the great powers was the signing of the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi, with a secret clause in which the Ottoman Empire would undertake to close the Dardanelles

15 Elana D. Eshba, 2014. “Cherkesskii faktor v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii na Kavkaze v XIX – nachale XXI vv.”. (PhD diss., Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2014), 51.

16 Zübeyde Güneş-Yağcı, “Osmanlı Devleti’nin Kuzey Kafkasya Siyaseti: Çerkeslerden Bağlılık Senedi Alınması”, *Karadeniz*, 2 (2009), 106.

17 *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Ot № 2575 do 3398*. Vol. IV (Saint-Petersburg: Tip. 2-go Otd-niya Sobstv. ee imperat. velichestva kantselyarii, 1829), 624-625.

18 Bilge, *Osmanlı Çağında Kafkasya 1454-1829 (Tarih-Toplum-Ekonomi)*, 357.

Strait in case of hostilities from the warships of third powers.¹⁹ In fact, this clause ensured Russia's invulnerability in the Black Sea in the event of an attack by any non-Black Sea state.

The treaty, which caused official notes of protest and threats from the great powers, was not renewed after its expiration. It was replaced by The London Convention of 1840, which was signed by the Russian Empire, Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and the Ottoman Empire. This treaty replaced the old one and established a temporary international protectorate over Istanbul and the straits, which in turn were closed to warships of all the powers.²⁰ These provisions became permanent under the London Convention of 1841.²¹

The Paris Peace Treaty of 1856 ended the Crimean War, and it was the culmination of the confrontation between Russia and the great powers in the Black Sea region. It declared the Black Sea neutral, prohibiting the presence of military vessels in it in peacetime and obliging the Ottoman and Russian empires to destroy their naval arsenals on the Black Sea shores and not to build new ones.

5. British Foreign Policy Strategy and the Formation of the Circassian Question

In the 19th century, under British coordination, which saw Russia's expansion into the Black Sea as a direct threat to its colonial interests in the Middle East, Central Asia, and India, the so-called Circassian question, as a question of the international political status of North Caucasian territorial-political entities, became an integral part of the international agenda.

It was from this moment on that the strategy of constructing the political subjectness of the North Caucasus (in other words, subjectification), according to the model previously applied in the Balkans, became one of the main elements of British foreign policy strategy. The hostilities of the North Caucasians against Russia were characterized by British politicians and political writers (as well as travelers, diplomats, journalists, and intelligence officers who visited the region personally) as a struggle against subjugation by Russia and a "modern struggle for liberty."²²

Great Britain made efforts to transform the raid system into an organized war against Russia with pronounced political goals, carrying out a general mobilization of the Circassians within their own state Circassia.²³ It is known that the plans of Lord Palmerston were either to create a completely independent Circassian (North Caucasus) state, or to place it under the protectorate of the Ottoman Empire with the Sultan as "suzerain", while maintaining British control.²⁴

19 *Dogovory Rossii s Vostokom politicheskie i torgovye*, collected by T. Yuzefovich (Saint-Petersburg, 1869); *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, 30-49.

20 Ibid, 95-96.

21 Ibid, 101-103.

22 Rolland, Stewart E. *Circassia: Speech [of Stewart E. Rolland.] [on behalf of the Circassians in their struggle against subjugation by Russia] at a public meeting at Preston held at the Corn Exchange, Preston, October 1, 1862 to receive the deputies from Circassia [in a report of the meeting]* (London: Hardwicke, 1862), 344; Russell Lee, *Stories from Russia, Siberia, Poland and Circassia* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1853), 344.

23 Bliiev, Mark M., Degoev Vladimir V. *Kavkazskaya voina* (Moscow: Roset, 1994), 455-456.

24 Philip Guedalla, *Palmerston* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937), 315.

British diplomacy focused on the non-recognition of Russian power in the North Caucasus, neither de facto nor de jure, and it was justified by claims of Circassian tribesmen about the illegitimacy of the Ottoman Empire's transfer of Circassian territories that had never belonged to it.²⁵ To counter Russia in the region, the British Empire used a variety of methods, including supporting the North Caucasians with money and weapons,²⁶ sending reconnaissance officers, instructors, and agitators²⁷ to the Caucasus, forming public opinion in support of the Circassian struggle for independence, and applying diplomatic efforts to recognize the independence of Circassia.

In general, Great Britain was guided by the principle of free trade, and it attached great importance in the development of Black Sea trade and carried out various diplomatic experiments.²⁸ These experiments were provocative campaigns of sending commercial vessels with weapons formally unrelated to the government to the Black Sea coast in order to challenge their belonging to the Russian Empire. This raised the question of the international status of Circassia, and at the same time provided Circassians with weapons for armed struggle.²⁹

At the same time, the Ottoman authorities prevented arms deliveries to the Caucasus from their territory outside the periods of the Russian-Ottoman wars. In 1835 an arms delivery ban and relevant instructions were sent to the governor of Trabzon,³⁰ and in the 1940s, "due to the strong friendship that exists between the Ottoman and Russian states,"³¹ the Ottoman authorities' fight against arms smuggling to the Black Sea coast became systematic.³² This course was again confirmed in 1857 at a special government meeting.³³

The British embassy in Istanbul became a center of coordination of the emerging Circassian national movement, and meetings of British emissaries with Circassians were also held in the Black Sea region of the Ottoman Empire, where Circassians had their representatives.³⁴ As a

25 *Akty, sobrannyye Kavkazskoi arkheograficheskoi komissiei*. Vol. 9. Kavkaz i Zakavkaz'e za vremya upravleniya generala-ad'yutanta generala ot infanterii Evgeniya Aleksandrovicha Golovina, 1837-1842; Kavkaz i Zakavkaz'e za vremya upravleniya generala ot infanterii Aleksandra Ivanovicha Neidgardta, 1842-1844 (Tiflis: Tip. gl. upr. Namestnika Kavk., 1884), 455.

26 Russian State Navy Archive (RGAVMF) 1071. 1/33, 27r; RGAVMF 243, 1/6749, 1-1 rev. Great Britain also carried out the plans in the 1930s to collect Circassian cavalry and later supported the creation of the Polish legion. See: Abdullah Temizkan, "Lehistanlıların İstanbul'da Lobi Faaliyetleri ve Kafkasya'ya Lejyon Gönderme Girişimleri", *Türklük Bilimi Araştırmaları*, 28 (2010), 363-393.

27 Thus, David Urquhart (1834), John Longworth, and James Stanislaus Bell (1837-1839) were sent to Circassia bypassing Russian customs regulations.

28 Vladimir V. Degoev, *Bol'shaya igra na Kavkaze: istoriya i sovremennost'*. *Stat'i, ocherki, esse* (Moscow: SPSL-Russkaya panorama, 2003), 133.

29 These activities attracted close attention and protests from the Russian side. See: RGAVMF 1071, 1/33, 27. Great Britain sent its ships to the Russian Black Sea coast from 1832. The most famous was the incident with the merchant ship "Vixen" in 1836, which almost provoked the Russo-English war and led to the discrediting of Palmerston and the removal of Urquhart from the diplomatic service.

30 Baturay Özbek (Yediç), *Çerkes Tarihi Kronolojisi* (Ankara: Kafdağı Yayınları, 1991), 61.

31 The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry (BOA). Sadaret Mektubi Kalemî Evrakı (A.MKT) 54/34.

32 BOA, A.MKT, 121/52.

33 BOA, İrade Meclis-i Mahsus (İ.MMS), 9/366.

34 Özbek (Yediç), *Çerkes Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 58.

“recruitment base,” the British embassy used Polish emigrants, who had been regularly sent to the Ottoman capital and the Caucasus since the Polish uprising of 1830-1831.³⁵ At the same time, the Ottoman authorities, apart from the time of the Crimean War, prevented Poles from entering the Caucasus, calling it their “duty of friendship” toward Russia.³⁶

6. British Nation-building Technologies in the Caucasus

The main conductor of British policy in the Caucasus and the actual inventor of the Circassian question was David Urquhart (1805-1877), a protégé of the founder and head of the newly created British secret service, Jeremiah Bentham.³⁷ From 1831 Urquhart became an employee of the Trade Mission, and in 1835 was appointed secretary of the British Embassy in Istanbul. From the same year Urquhart began to publish a weekly magazine “Portfolio”, where information support for the Circassian question was carried out.

Among other things, “Portfolio” published a declaration of independence of the Circassians.³⁸ In a letter published in the same issue, Urquhart urged all North Caucasians from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea to declare themselves as Circassians within the state of Circassia. Urquhart emphasized that the information coming from England would soon make them a people and a nation which was respected by themselves and others.³⁹ Urquhart carried out national agitation in the Caucasus as well, telling the North Caucasians about the need for political unification into a single nation,⁴⁰ forcing national assemblies and even designing a national flag (sancak şerif) for them⁴¹.

Through these documents, prepared under the guidance of British agents, Britain tried to present Circassia as a subject of international relations and took on intermediary functions as an arbitrator in the regulation of the Russian-Circassian conflict.⁴² Forced subjectification of Circassia was also manifested in the fact that British emissaries recommended that Circassians

35 Vladimir V. Degoev, *Kavkaz i velikie derzhavy 1829-1864 gg. Politika, voyna, diplomatiya* (Moscow: Rubezhi XXI, 2009), 64-65.

36 BOA. A.MKT. 66/67; Özbek (Yediç), *Çerkes Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 102-103, 147.

37 Joseph Brewda, Linda de Hoyos, “David Urquhart’s holy war”, *Executive Intelligence Review*, 26/36 (1999), 24. The King William IV is also supposed to be the protector of Uquhart. See: Charles Webster, “Urquhart, Ponsonby, and Palmerston”, *The English Historical Review*, 62/244 (1947), 339.

38 In 1834 a similar petition was addressed through Urquhart to William IV; in 1838, 1839, 1843, 1857 to Queen Victoria; in 1862 to the English Parliament; and in 1836 the Circassians sent an appeal to the British Ambassador in Istanbul, Lord Ponsoby, for the introduction of direct trade. See: George H. Bolsover, “Lord Ponsonby and the Eastern Question (1833-1839)”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 13/37 (1934), 451; Özbek (Yediç), *Çerkes Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 89; Degoev, *Kavkaz i velikie derzhavy 1829-1864 gg.*, 60.

39 “Extract of a Letter from Constantinople”, *The Portfolio; a Collection and other Documents and Correspondence, Historical, Diplomatic and Commercial*, VI/XLIII (1837), 143, 145.

40 This is described in detail by Bell, who followed the footsteps of Urquhart and collected information from those who had contact with him. See: James Bell, *Journal of a residence in Circassia, during the years 1837, 1838, and 1839*. In 2 vol. London: Edward Moxon, 1840.

41 *The Flag of Circassia: Speech of Mr. Urquhart, Glasgow, May 23, 1838* (London: The Circassian Committee, 1863), 18.

42 Degoev, *Kavkaz i velikie derzhavy 1829-1864 gg.*, 64.

should offer Russia a treaty to turn Kuban into a border between Russia and Circassia in exchange for an end to raids.⁴³

It is important to note that Urquhart fully engaged in public diplomacy both in the Caucasus and in Britain. This was aided by the Foreign Affairs Committees he created in the 1850s as public platforms for working class representatives,⁴⁴ which were used for alternative diplomacy, i.e. creating public pressure on the British government on issues related to British foreign policy towards Russian and Ottoman empires.⁴⁵

In addition, Urquhart positioned himself as a diplomatic representative of the Circassians in England,⁴⁶ organized “ambassadorial” missions of Circassians to European capitals (during such a trip in 1862, such a delegation toured major British cities, speaking about the suffering of the Circassians) and in 1862 created the Circassian Committee in London⁴⁷ as a representative body of the Circassians.⁴⁸ Peter Brock described his efforts toward Circassia, together with the activities of Polish emigrants and the Circassians themselves, with the precise term “private diplomacy”⁴⁹.

There is disagreement among scholars as to whether Urquhart was really the creator of Circassian nationalism or if it was only his wishful thinking. However, the nation-building processes beginning before Urquhart had a different orientation: in the 19th century, the Russian Empire already had a pronounced group solidarity of national or proto-national type among the Kabardins, Abkhazians, Ossetians, and Vainakhs, and a religious (Islamic) and supranational type of unification was simultaneously spreading in the Northeastern Caucasus. Consequently, it was Urquhart who became the creator or conductor of Circassian pan-Caucasian nationalism.

From the age of twenty, Urquhart directly participated in the national liberation war in Greece⁵⁰ and practically knew how modern technologies of national mobilization⁵¹ were applied. That is why he noted as paramount tasks for the Circassians the formation of a unified

43 Bliev, Degoev, *Kavkazskaya voyna*, 455-456.

44 Urquhart was engaged in their discovery after leaving the British Parliament, where he had been a member from 1847 to 1852.

45 The committees had 134 representative offices throughout England and published a monthly magazine, the Free Press. See: Charles King, “Imagining Circassia: David Urquhart and the Making of North Caucasus Nationalism”, *Russian Review*, 66/2 (2007), 246; John F. Kutolowski, “English Radicals and the Polish Insurrection of 1863-4”, *The Polish Review*, 11/3 (1966), 56.

46 *The Flag of Circassia*, 1.

47 Vice-Admiral Krabbe, the director of the Naval Ministry, called it “a society for helping the rebellious mountaineers of the Caucasus”. See: RGAVMF 1071, 1/33, 10.

48 Characteristically, the first meeting featured a presentation of high-quality cotton fabrics from Georgia and silk fabrics from Dagestan. The committee demanded free trade and transport communication with Circassia. See: İzzet Aydemir, *Göç. Kuzey Kafkasya’lıların Göç Tarihi* (Ankara: Gelişim Matbaası, 1988), 166-167.

49 Brock, “The Fall of Circassia: A Study in Private Diplomacy”, 427.

50 Margaret Lamb, “The Making of a Russophobe: David Urquhart – The Formative Years, 1825-1835”, *The International History Review*, 3/3 (1981), 332, 334.

51 For more details see: Veronika V. Tsibenko, Sergey N. Tsibenko, *Tekhnologii etnonatsional’noi mobilizatsii* (Moscow: Ves’ Mir, 2021).

language, press and national flag⁵² and dealt with this in practice. Urquhart, by giving Circassian nation-building a territorial-cultural, Caucasian form, created an international Circassian issue.

7. Preparation for North Caucasian Migration

At the end of the Crimean War in 1856, British efforts to create Circassia as a barrier to Russian advancement, expressed as a demand to create a buffer state or transfer Circassian territories under nominal control of Ottoman Empire, ended in diplomatic defeat.⁵³ The French authorities, who at the beginning of the war were considering a plan of intervention in Circassia, concluded that the significance and prospects of the Circassian movement were overestimated.⁵⁴

An important role in this was played by the Circassians themselves, who did not take a large part in the hostilities against Russia,⁵⁵ partly because of their distrust of the Allies.⁵⁶ Underestimation of the level of independence of the mountaineers in determining foreign policy priorities led to a de facto failure of the Allies' plans to use Circassians in the military confrontation with the Russian Empire.⁵⁷

As a result, France refused to include the Circassian clause in the Paris Peace Treaty, which secured Russian ownership of the Caucasus. Russia had achieved real power in the region by 1864, with the end of the Caucasian War. For Britain, as Luxenburg noted, this failure in the Caucasus set off a "chain reaction" that led to the landmark Sepoy uprising in India.⁵⁸

Under these circumstances, Britain supported the idea of migration of Western Caucasus Circassians to the Ottoman Empire, counting on using them in the next war with the Russians, and participated in developing the resettlement plan.⁵⁹ In doing so, it relied on that portion of the North Caucasian elite that embraced the Circassian identity, became part of the emerging Circassian national movement, and was subsequently prepared to fight for the independence of the Circassians, using the Ottoman territory as a springboard.

The Ottoman Empire's interest in the Circassian resettlement process (muhajirism)⁶⁰ was caused by its desire to solve the problems arising with national self-determination in the imperial outskirts through strengthening the presence of a loyal Muslim population, ready to

52 *The Flag of Circassia*, 1.

53 Joachim Hoffmann, "Die Politik der Mächte in der Endphase der Kaukasuskriege", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. Neue Folge, 17/2 (1969), 219-220, 255-256.

54 Michel Lesure, "La France et le Caucase a l'Epoque de Chamil: a la lumiere des depeches des consuls francais", *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique*, 19/1-2 (1978), 5-65.

55 Özbek (Yediç), *Çerkes Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 98-99.

56 Degoev, *Kavkaz i velikie derzhavy 1829-1864 gg.*, 150.

57 Eshba, Cherkesskii faktor v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii na Kavkaze v XIX – nachale XXI vv., 90.

58 Norman Luxenburg, "England and the Caucasus during the Crimean War", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, 16/4 (1968), 504.

59 Allen-Muratoff, *Kafkas Harekatı. 1828–1921 Türk-Kafkas Sınırındaki Harplerin Tarihi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1966), 17.

60 From the Arabic word "muhajir," a settler, used in the Ottoman Empire only in relation to Muslims by analogy with the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. See: Ufuk Erdem, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e muhacir komisyonları ve faaliyetleri, 1860-1923* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2018), 6-8.

suppress the national liberation movements in the Balkans, Eastern Anatolia, and the Empire's Arab provinces by force.⁶¹

In turn, the Russian Empire saw in the eviction of “unruly” Circassians “an important government measure to end the war as soon as possible.”⁶² and “a helping means of subjugation of the Western Caucasus, which would not ... drive the mountaineers to despair and give a free way out to those of them who prefer[ed] death and ruin to obedience to the Russian Government.”⁶³ Russian diplomacy made efforts to negotiate a ban on Circassian settlers (muhacir) from settling near its borders and preventing their return to the Caucasus.⁶⁴

Russian and Ottoman empires, as well as the Circassians themselves, viewed the resettlement of Circassians in the same context as the exchange of Christian and Muslim populations between the empires,⁶⁵ as at the time they were encouraging resettlement to Crimea and the Caucasus of Anatolian Christians,⁶⁶ similar to what had happened in the 18th century with the annexation of Crimea. Mark Pinson interprets this process as “demographic warfare” on religious grounds between the two empires.⁶⁷

In 1857, the Resettlement Ordinance (Muhaceret Nizamnamesi) was promulgated, inviting all who were prepared to swear allegiance to the Sultan and respect Ottoman laws to migrate to the Ottoman Empire. The state allocated land and exempted those who migrated from taxes and military service.⁶⁸ The decree was aimed at encouraging not the Caucasians, but the Crimean Tatar elite, to resettle in the first place. Special conditions were provided for them, and their residence in the imperial capital or major cities was secured.⁶⁹ For the Caucasus, similar schemes were applied only to Imam Shamil and his inner circle,⁷⁰ as well as to high-ranking Circassian military officers serving in the Russian army.

The Ottoman Empire migration was governed by a universal rule: the lower the status of an ethnic group, the greater its dispersal throughout the Ottoman territories and the farther its

61 Svetlana G. Kudaeva, *Ognem i zhelezom: Igny et Ferro. Vynuzhdennoe pereselenie adygov v Osman. imperiyu (20 - 70 gg. XIX v)* (Maikop: Tip. MGTI, 1998), 93-111.

62 Russian State Military Archive (RGVIA) 14257, 3/534, 16.

63 Ibid.

64 Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI), Saint-Petersburg Main Archive (F.SPb.GA) 1-9, 8/30, 34, 35 rev.

65 In 1860 Lobanov-Rostovsky noted “the popular opinion, as if by a treaty recently concluded, Russia ceded to the Porte all its Muslim subjects in exchange for the Christian inhabitants of Turkey. See: AVPRI, F.SPb.GA 1-9, 8/30, 34, 35 rev.

66 At the same time, the resettlement of Anatolian Christians in the Crimea and the Caucasus was encouraged. See: Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914. Demographic and Social Characteristics*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1985), 68.

67 Mark Pinson, “Demographic Warfare: An Aspect of Ottoman and Russian Policy, 1854-1866” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1970).

68 Ilgın Barut, “Osmanlı Dönemi’nde Gerçekleşen Göçlerin Kurumsallaşma ve Göç Politikaları Üzerindeki Etkileri”, *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi*. 40/2 (2018), 175-176.

69 David Cameron Cuthell, “The Muhacirin Komisyonu: An Agent in the Transformation of Ottoman Anatolia. 1860-1866” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2005), 128-130, 188.

70 Ibid. P. 134, 136-137.

residence from Istanbul. For the Circassians who did not have an Ottoman identity and had a problem in the form of a language barrier, the second option was applied.⁷¹ Moreover, in the case of the Circassian leaders, a different scheme was used than in the case of the Crimean Tatars: they were separated from the subordinate and serving Caucasians and co-opted into military or religious circles.⁷²

8. The Mass Resettlement of North Caucasians and British Policy

The Ottoman Empire had agreed with Russia to accept no more than 40-50 thousand Caucasians,⁷³ but the real figures significantly exceeded Russian and Ottoman plans. The resettlement process was particularly tragic: its active phase took place from 1860-1865.⁷⁴ The funds provided by the Russian government were insufficient to ensure the departure of the Circassians, which acquired a spontaneous character. The settlers, most of whom migrated from the Northwest Caucasus, died en mass during their journey,⁷⁵ and upon arrival to the Ottoman ports, died from starvation and epidemics such as cholera, plague, typhus and smallpox⁷⁶.

The unwillingness to accept the mass influx of migrants from the Caucasus was pointed out by the Ottoman government as early as 1859, when the Foreign Ministry asked the Russian side, if not to stop, then at least “to limit the flow of migrants”⁷⁷. However, as the Russian envoy to Istanbul Lobanov-Rostovsky remarked in his conversation with Foreign Minister Fuad Pasha, “The temporary effect of these measures could not hinder the unconscious desire of the Caucasian natives to migrate, the unrealistic rumors and hopes that lured so many Caucasians to the borders of Ottoman Empire continue to act on the minds of these uneducated tribes, and new settlers are preparing to cross our borders.”⁷⁸

Estimates of the number of immigrants vary greatly. The maximum is usually given by Kemal Karpat who carried out a demographic analysis of the data of the Ottoman archives – about 2 million from 1859 to 1879, of which only a million and a half survived.⁷⁹ Another historian-demographer, Justin McCarthy, gives a figure of 600 thousand immigrants in 1864⁸⁰

71 Ibid. P. 142, 158.

72 Ibid. P. 162.

73 Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914*, 67.

74 The next periods of high activity occurred during the years of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, when an especially large influx of immigrants came from Abkhazia.

75 Kemal Karpat estimates about 20% of all settlers: Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914*, 69. Маккартни указывает 30%: Justin McCarthy, *Population History of the Middle East and the Balkans* (Istanbul: Isis, 2010), 106.

76 Detailed reports by Dr. Barozzi have been preserved about this. See: Özgür Yılmaz, “An Italian Physician in the Caucasian Migration of 1864: The Mission of Dr. Barozzi in Trabzon and Samsun”, *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi – Journal of Modern Turkish History Studies*, XIV/28 (2014), 5-44.

77 AVPRI, F.SPb.GA, 1-9, 8/30, 33. In 1865 the Ottoman authorities had already asked the Russian side to keep the Caucasians from resettling to Turkey. RGVIA 38, 7/448, 52, 53-53 rev.

78 AVPRI, F.SPb.GA, 1-9, 8/30, 33.

79 Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914*, 27, 68-70.

80 McCarthy, *Population History of the Middle East and the Balkans*, 104.

and Mark Pinson points out that 470 thousand Circassians moved from the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire from 1858 to 1866.⁸¹ Besides, according to the report given to the Sultan published in the press in 1870 and the data from it, 682 thousand Circassians were settled from 1855 to 1865 in the Ottoman Empire.

The smallest figures are given in reference to Russian and Western contemporaries of the events. For example, the British Memorandum Respecting Circassian Emigrants in Turkey⁸² gave figures of 300,000; the number of 100,000-300,000 resettlers was also discussed in the British parliament.⁸³ The British Ambassador in Saint Petersburg Francis Napier wrote to Count Russell in 1864 a figure of about 100-150 thousand immigrants, which the press estimated at 300,000.⁸⁴ Bergé, Chairman of the Caucasian Archaeological Commission in 1864-1886, gave the Russian official figure of 470,000 migrants who moved to Ottoman Empire through the ports of the eastern shore of the Black Sea from 1858 to 1865⁸⁵.

While the Russian Empire was busy organizing the eviction of “unruly mountaineers,” and the Ottoman Empire was trying to cope with the massive influx of new subjects, Britain used the tragic aspects of displacement for its foreign policy purposes by raising the Circassian question at the highest level. It was discussed in the House of Lords on June 2nd: Stratford Canning, former ambassador to Istanbul, asked the Foreign Secretary to comment on press reports of the Circassians defending their “national rights” and “national independence”, as well as to provide documents on these issues and information on the actions of Russian and Ottoman empires to support resettlement. Russell responded by saying yes, but only in general terms.⁸⁶

On July 25th, the discussion was already held in the House of Commons, where the Circassian question was addressed in a more radical form – as an attempt of Russia, within the framework of its policy against “rebellious or resistant races” (Circassians, Poles), to get rid of all population opposed to its power and replace them with “the pure Russian race.” The British interest was explained at the meeting not only by general interest in humanity, but also by pragmatic reasons of opposing Russian advancement to the East. Members of Parliament requested documents to provide information to the Queen about the Ottoman Empire’s actions about the immigration of the “valiant race” of Circassians.⁸⁷

81 Mark Pinson, “Demographic Warfare”, 122.

82 King, “Imagining Circassia”, 253.

83 “Circassians (Turkey). Vol. 176: debated on Monday 25 July 1864.” *Hansard. UK Parliament*. Accessed December 1, 2021. [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1864-07-25/debates/859917b7-b5d7-4c8a-a5f7-b8ad682218d1/Circassians\(Turkey\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1864-07-25/debates/859917b7-b5d7-4c8a-a5f7-b8ad682218d1/Circassians(Turkey)).

84 *Papers Respecting the Settlement of Circassian Emigrants in Turkey. Presented to the House of Commons by Command of Her Majesty, in pursuance of their Address dated June 6, 1864*, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1864), 6-7, 9-10.

85 Adolf P. Berzhe, “Vyselenie gortsev s Kavkaza”, *Russkaya starina*, 33 (1882), 164-166.

86 “The Circassians – Question. Vol. 175: debated on Thursday 2 June 1864.” *Hansard. UK Parliament*. Accessed December 1, 2021. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1864-06-02/debates/334779d4-d275-4a79-958b-72ec0bee3fe1/TheCircassians%E2%80%9494Question>.

87 Circassians (Turkey).

Britain also made extensive use of charitable activities in its foreign policy interests. In May 1864, the British ambassador in Istanbul, Bulwer, wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Earl Russell: “Circassia is gone; what yet remains to save is the Circassians.”⁸⁸ He further proposed a plan, already approved by Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha, to settle Circassians on the Black Sea coast near Erzurum, creating a military colony, which on one hand would build a road from Trabzon to Erzurum, and on the other hand would replenish the exhausted Ottoman army.

To finance this plan, the ambassador proposed the creation of a fund-raising support committee in London and Paris and a commission in the Ottoman Empire with European delegates.⁸⁹ In the same year, this charity committee was formed in London, headed by Canning. In the course of its work between 1864 and 1865 the committee was able to raise and donate about two thousand pounds for the needs of the settlers in Istanbul.⁹⁰

A little more was provided by the British government: despite the appeals of the British ambassador to Istanbul, Henry Bulwer, it refused to provide the Porte with a loan of one and a half million pounds, limiting itself to the provision of biscuits for five thousand pounds, the delivery of which was to be paid by the Ottoman authorities. The British Parliament pointed out that the Russian government had done nothing but provide three or four ships, while the British government had provided all possible assistance – vehicles and “a large amount of biscuits.”⁹¹

9. The British and French Press and Changing Attitudes towards the Circassian Question

A key role in actualizing the Circassian question was played by the British press, which used the resettlement of Circassians as a convenient occasion to demonstrate Russian aggression. In 1864, through British newspapers, an information campaign was launched that formed an opinion about the exodus of Circassians, who were presented as exiles from their Caucasian homeland, Circassia, invaded by Russian troops (Graphic 1). The British press, quoting Ottoman diplomats and private accounts (letters from Istanbul) told extreme stories of the sufferings of displaced Circassians,⁹² who were allegedly put before the Russian authorities with a choice: to either exile to Siberia or move to Ottoman Empire.⁹³ In reality, the Russian authorities demanded them to move “to places indicated by us on the plane, or to Ottoman Empire”⁹⁴.

This campaign did not find support in France: French newspapers, whose attention was much less drawn to the mass resettlement of Circassians from the Caucasus, described it in a rather dry and informative way, using the neutral term “Circassian emigration.” Nevertheless,

88 *Papers Respecting the Settlement of Circassian Emigrants in Turkey*, 4.

89 *Ibid.* P. 4-5.

90 *The Times*, April 3, 1865, 9.

91 *Circassians (Turkey)*.

92 *See: Globe*, August 31, 1864, 2.

93 *Illustrated Times*, February 11, 1860, 81.

94 *RGVIA 14257, 3/540, 38-38 rev.*

emotional assessments of the resettlement, as deportations⁹⁵ or, for example, “a barbaric and gigantic operation undertaken by the Russians to get rid of the Circassians,”⁹⁶ were present in the French press as well, mainly with reference to British sources.

One of the authors of the anti-government newspaper “Le Siècle,” a well-known publicist and polonophile named Leon Plée, pointed out in several articles in 1864 that the Caucasus was a natural barrier between Asia and Russia, as well as Poland being a natural barrier between Europe and Russia.⁹⁷ The events were described by another opposition writer Alfred Assollant, who noted that the deportations of the Circassians and executions of the Poles were part of the general confrontation between Europe (the French Empire) as a civilization and Asia (the Russian Empire) as barbarism, with Ottoman Empire, Germany, Denmark, and other states becoming buffers between them.⁹⁸

However, the general attitude of the French elite toward the Circassian question is well illustrated by the Paris staging of the comic opera “La Circassienne” in 1861 by the famous French composer Daniel Auber. A classic example of French Orientalism, it is set during the war in Circassia, and the “Circassian Praskovia” is a disguised Russian Lieutenant Zubov, with whom General Orsakov falls in love in this guise. The real Circassians appear in the opera only to attack the Russian fort and take the girls, including Praskovia, to the Sultan’s harem.⁹⁹ This example is not the only one, and was followed in France by a series of other entertainment with Circassian themes until the end of the 19th century.

By the 1870s, interest in the Circassian question in Britain decreased (Graphic 2). This is clearly visible in publications in the British press, in which the Circassian question began to reappear in the 1880s, because of the connection with the anti-Circassian uprising in British-occupied Egypt and attempts by France to challenge the legality of British forces in the country by offering international alliance control over Egyptian territories.¹⁰⁰

The Circassian question was then replaced by a new Armenian question, which became a key one for Britain (as well as for France) from the moment it lost interest in preserving the Ottoman state. The Armenian issue was directly related to the Circassians, as they were declared the main instrument of punitive repression in the Ottoman Empire, along with irregular formations of Bashibuzuks and Kurds. Moreover, according to the investigations conducted by the Ottoman authorities, Great Britain actively participated in provoking the conflicts between Armenians and Circassians on the ground.¹⁰¹

95 Nouvelles Étrangères. Angleterre. Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur universel, Juin 5, 1864, 2.

96 Manuel général de l’instruction primaire, Septembre 10, 1864, 966.

97 Le Siècle, Juin 14, 1864, 2.

98 Courrier du dimanche, Juillet 24, 1864, 5.

99 La France Nouvelle, Mars 10, 1861, 3; Messenger des Théâtres et des Arts, Février 7, 1861.

100 The British newspapers, which supported the Circassian military elites in Egypt against the Arab ones, pointed out that it was allied control that led to turmoil in the country, and the departure of the British troops would be a tragedy for the local population and the European colonists. See: London Evening Standart, October 4, 1882, 5.

101 In 1896 the dragoman (interpreter) of the British embassy, Monsieur Shilly, sent to study the situation in the districts of Izmit and Adapazara, was seen in such activities. BOA. Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Askeri Maruzat (Y.PRK.ASK) 109/53, 12.

The actualization of the Armenian question was incomparable with the Circassian question and reached almost twelve thousand articles during 1895 (Graphic 3). The Daily News, which opposed the British government, noted in 1888 that the resettlement of “the bands of Circassians” (600 families) from the Anatolia territories occupied by Russia ten years earlier to the Armenian regions of Van and Erzurum caused panic among the Armenians. It was pointed out that the placement of such “bad neighbors” near Armenians was a deliberate plan of the Ottoman authorities.¹⁰²

A wave of articles describing Circassian atrocities towards Armenians was published in the 1890s. Moreover, as the following graphic (4) clearly shows, the main peak of articles concerning Circassians in the British press was observed during the suppression of the uprising in Bulgaria and the mass killings of Armenians in 1895. Although the peak in 1876 is also associated with public interest towards the high-ranking Circassian military leader Hasan,¹⁰³ there were 593 articles about “atrocities” of Circassians in Bulgaria in 1876-1878. The graphic clearly shows that press interest towards Circassians began to disappear by the end of the 19th century.

The French press had been following a similar process since the 1870s (Graphic 5). Many newspapers showed anti-Circassian sentiments. Thus, in 1876 *La France* reported: “Despite the armistice, yesterday the Turks attacked, and the Circassians burned two villages in the area of Alexinac.”¹⁰⁴ One of France’s largest regional newspapers, *Le Petit Marseillaise*, described murderous gangs in Bulgaria consisting of Bashibuzuks and Circassians who competed in criminality and barbarity and committed horrible crimes. The newspaper stated that the only occupation of the Circassians in Ottoman Empire was theft and banditry, which made even the Turks afraid of them. It concluded with descriptions of the massacres in Bulgaria with the words: “If it continues in this vein, Bulgaria will be completely pacified for the simple reason that there will be no more Bulgarians there.”¹⁰⁵

In the 1890s, the French press actively covered the bloody clashes of the Circassians with other ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire, such as the Druze,¹⁰⁶ but the main focus was on the Armenian issue. Claiming massacres (carnage, boicherie) of Armenians by Circassians and Kurds in Trabzon, Erzurum and dozens of other places, newspapers summoned the government to intervene. However, by the end of the 19th century, the French press also showed a cooling of interest in the Circassians, although the demand for Circassian exotics persisted, which can be seen, for example, in the popularity of the “Circassian fantasy” in the Parisian circuses in the 1890s.

102 Daily News, July 9, 1888, 5.

103 The brother of Abdul-Aziz’s wife, who, after the overthrow and death of the sultan in 1876, killed the instigators of the plot and was himself executed.

104 *La France*, Septembre 20, 1876, 1.

105 *Le Petit Marseillais*, Juin 23, 1876, 1.

106 *La Mayenne*, Septembre 12, 1894, 1.

10. Discussion

Thus, we can see the constant attempts by Britain throughout the 19th century to artificially subject the North Caucasus as Circassia. As a legitimate basis, Britain adopts the thesis of the struggle of the North Caucasians as a single Circassian nation for independence against the Russian Empire. This thesis did not have a legal basis in the form of internationally recognized treaties. It was supported, on the one hand, by accelerated nation-building among the Circassians through nation-building technologies, including the development of national symbols. On the other, it was supported by the formation of the image of the Circassian nation in the European public consciousness through the media, which also partially affected France.

Since the idea of the Circassian nation was born and its first national leaders appeared in this period, we can speak of the existence of the Circassian national project, national mobilization and movement launched by it (though it had not yet acquired a mass character) since at least the second half of the 19th century.

There was no ethnic basis (common language, common ethnic identity, etc.) to unite the North Caucasians into a single nation, which is why the national unification was built on a political pseudo-state basis. In other words, the Circassian national project attempted to turn the constructed Circassian nation into a modern-style state. This was not based, for example, on the Kabardian ethnic unity, which already had its own proto-statehood and was fixed in international treaties.

The success of Western diplomacy (including public diplomacy) was the subjectification of the North Caucasus as Circassia in international relations, the formulation of the Circassian question and the emergence of a pan-Caucasian national project. However, Russia's military advancement in the Caucasus, the fractured state of the North Caucasians and their unwillingness to unite in a war against Russia, and the difference between British and French foreign policy strategies led to pausing the nation-building process and also to the mass expulsion of North Caucasians to the Ottoman Empire. Hence, we can see that the subjectification of the Caucasus in the international arena and that forced nation-building were the real triggers of migration.

11. Conclusions

After the completion of the mass and tragic resettlement of North Caucasians to the Ottoman Empire, the assessment of their perception by the political elites of the Western powers changed dramatically. This is especially true for Great Britain, which focused its foreign policy on the Circassian issue as an instrument to contain Russia on the world stage. One can note a consistent loss of British interest in the Circassians after the end of the Caucasian War. After the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877-1878, it accepted the Russian presence in the region as fact.

Under the terms of the Berlin Treaty,¹⁰⁷ the Sultan undertook not to use irregular troops – Bashibuzuk and Circassians – in the border regions and to ensure the safety of Armenians from attacks by Circassians and Kurds. For the first time, Circassians appeared as the aggressor party in international treaties with the great powers. Negativization of their image was enshrined in the European press, further reducing the importance of subjecting the Caucasus to the international agenda.

Attempts by Western powers to use the Circassian issue to counter Russia in the Black Sea ended in failure, with the most negative consequences for the North Caucasians themselves. Nevertheless, for the Ottoman and Russian empires the results can be considered rather positive. They did not get another British colonial state on their border. At the same time, Russia was able to “pacify” the North Caucasus, and the Ottoman Empire was able to improve its demographic situation and replenish its army with loyal and combat-ready Muslim Caucasians.

As a conclusion, I can note that the consideration of nation-building among North Caucasians in the context of international relations makes it possible to take a new look at the migration from the North Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. On the one hand, migration was caused by nation-building, as it motivated North Caucasians to continue their military action as a war for national independence and to assert the rights of their nation in the international arena, making it impossible for them to remain in the Caucasus under the conditions that the Russian authorities put before the local population.

On the other hand, migration became a consequence of the failure of national mobilization in the North Caucasus, which did not get a mass character due to the weak and unrooted idea of a united nation. In fact, despite the efforts of nation-builders, the obstacles in the form of the lack of experience of a common statehood, linguistic and ethnic diversity, were too strong for the North Caucasians to unite. Thus migration was the result of the failure of the British Circassian nation-building project, and it summed up the long period of subjectification of the North Caucasus in the international arena in the 19th century.

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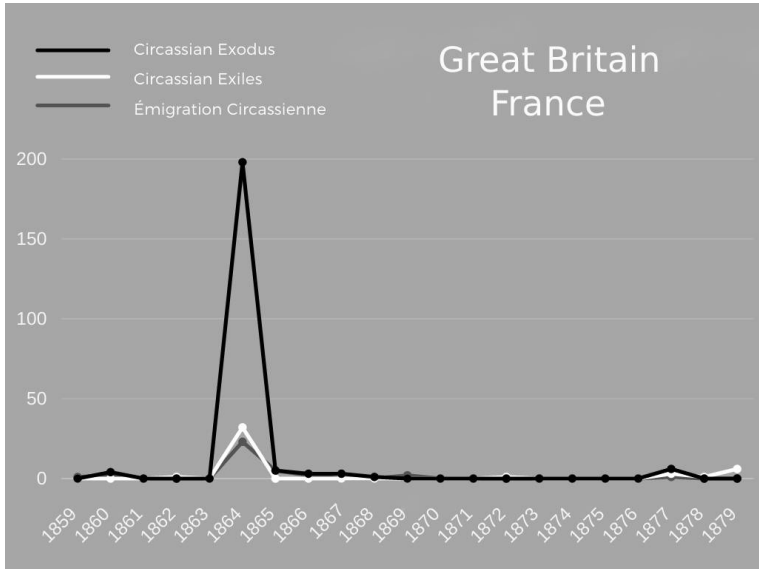
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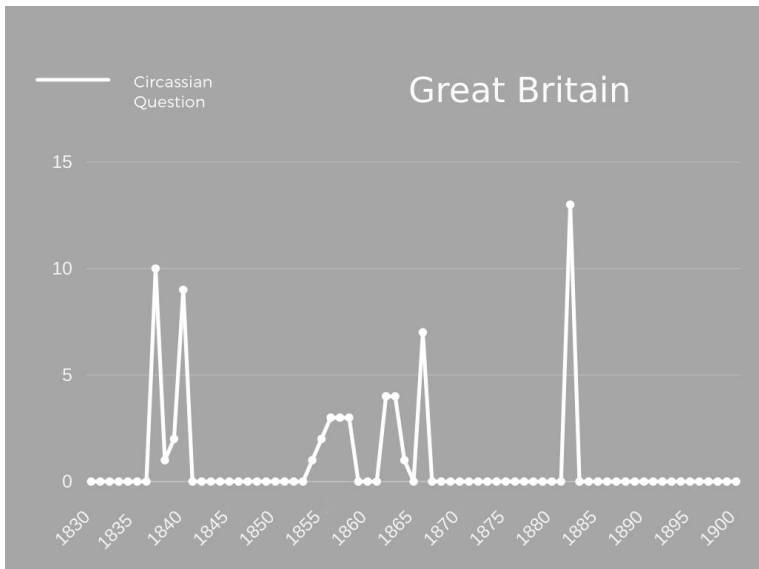
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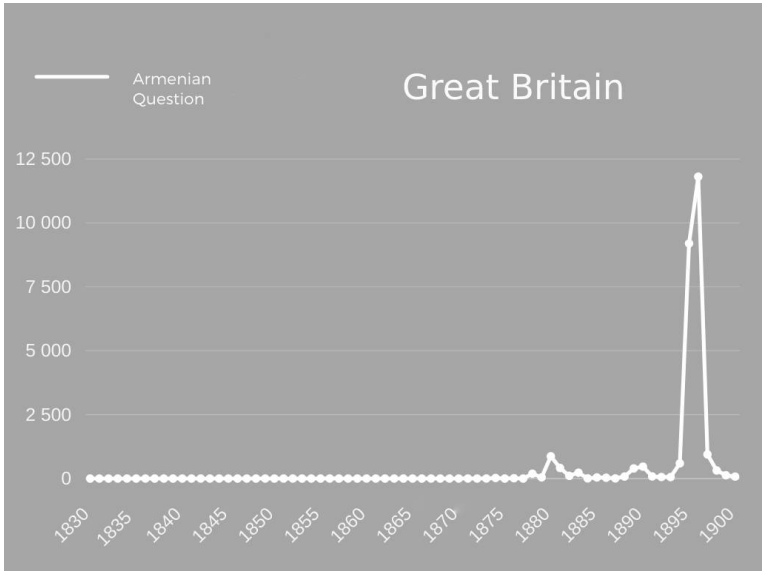
Figures, Tables and Graphics



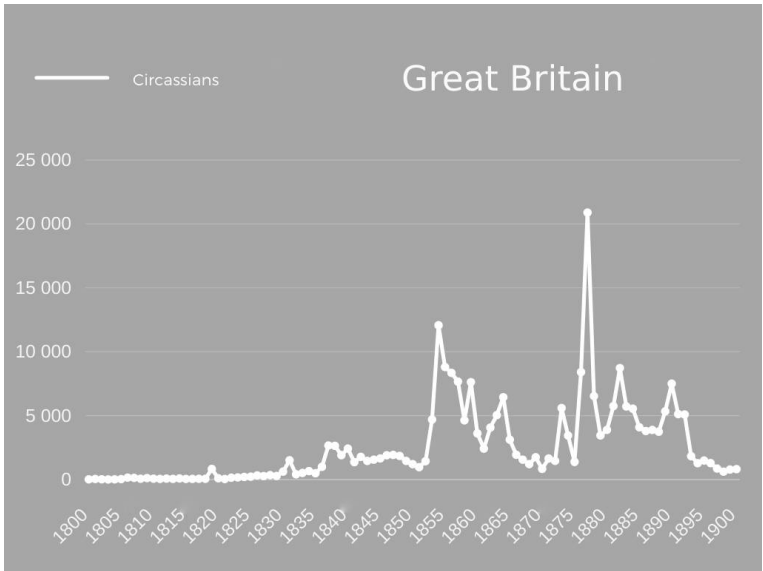
Graphic 1. Number of newspaper articles mentioning Circassian migration.



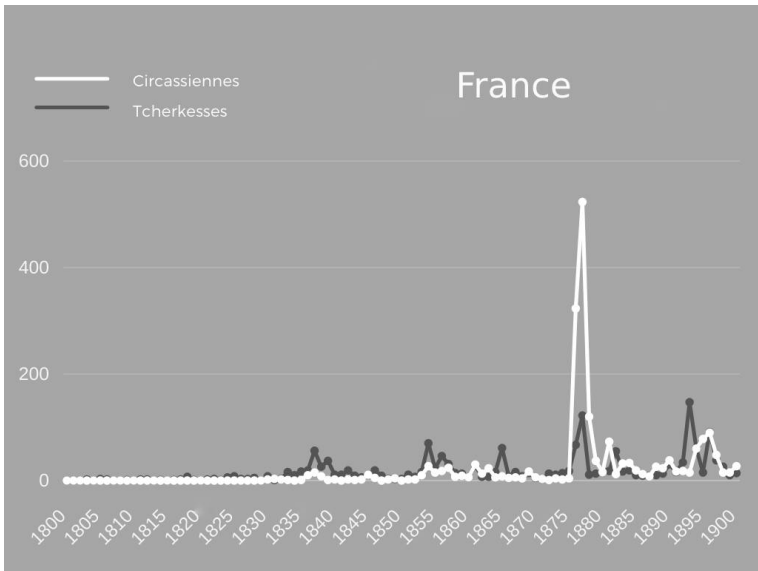
Graphic 2. Number of newspaper articles mentioning the Circassian question.



Graphic 3. Number of newspaper articles mentioning the Armenian question.



Graphic 4. Number of newspaper articles mentioning Circassians (Great Britain).



Graphic 5. Number of newspaper articles mentioning Circassians (France).

