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## *Uninvited Guests. Circassian Migrants in the South Slavic Lands (1860s–mid-1870s)\**



In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire became a destination for large waves of immigration that played a key role in destabilizing the Sultan's rule in the Balkans. Muslims were fleeing the newly created and expanding states in the region, such as Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>, as well as from the territories taken over by the Russians on the Black Sea coast. The latter group included the Tatars whose country was annexed by the Romanov Empire in 1783, but most migrants left Crimea after the War of 1853–1856<sup>2</sup>, and the Circassians whose resistance against the Tsar's state collapsed in the late 1850s and early 1860s.

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<sup>1</sup> See K. POPEK, *Muslim Emigration from the Balkan Peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: A Historical Outline*, "Zeszyty Naukowe UJ. Prace Historyczne" 146.3, 2019: *Migrations, Migrants and Refugees in 19<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Centuries in the Interdisciplinary Approach. Selected Topics*, eds. P. SĘKOWSKI, O. FORCADE, R. HUDEMANN, p. 517–533.

<sup>2</sup> See J. H. MEYER, *Immigration, Return, and the Politics of Citizenship: Russian Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, 1860–1914*, "International Journal of Middle East Studies" 39, 2007, p. 15–32.

Firstly, the term 'Circassian' should be clarified, because – contrary to appearances – it did not refer only to that ethnic group, but to all Muslim migrants from the North Caucasus. At that time, Muslim migrants to the Ottoman empire also included the Abkhazians, Adygeans, Ossetians, Karachays, Balkars, Ingush, Chechens, and Dagestanis. This shorthand designation was mostly used by the Russian and Ottoman authorities, as well as by the common folk, due to the Circassian domination among the migrants<sup>3</sup>. In this article, the term 'Circassian' is used in that exact sense.

There is extensive literature available on the Circassian exodus in the Western<sup>4</sup>, Russian<sup>5</sup>, and Turkish<sup>6</sup> historiography, however, the issue of the presence of the Caucasian migrants in the Southern Slavic lands is on the sidelines of these works. Research on that question, conducted by Bulgarians (Ventsislav Muchinov), Serbians (Miloš Jagodić, Danko Taboroši), or Macedonians (Marija Pandevska), does not exhaust the subject, and – to a greater or lesser extent – struggles with the negative stereotype of Circassians in the Balkans. Through the employment of a comparative approach, the use of varied sources (such as Bulgarian, Serbian, and British archives), and confronting research with radically different views, new insights have been gained on the subject of Circassians in the South Slavic lands.

The North Caucasus was conquered by the Russians between 1796 and 1829, however, they were unable to take full control over that territory. The warlike Muslims under the command of Imam Shamil launched an uprising which lasted for the next thirty years. The Tsar's troops pacified the region in the late 1850s and early 1860s – the death of Shamil in 1859 played a symbolic role in that process, but between 1861 and 1864, resistance was revived. The collapse of the movement and repressions resulted in mass migration of Circassians to the Ottoman Empire, the protector of Islam across the world. In 1863, the Sublime Porte agreed to receive 5,000 Muslims migrants, but in reality in the first half of the 1860s – according to official figures – 256,000 people entered the Sultan's domain (if illegal border

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<sup>3</sup> A. KALIONSKI, *Communities, Identities and Migrations in Southeast Europe*, Sofia 2014, p. 40; В. МУЧИНОВ, *Миграционна политика на османската империя в българските земи през XIX век (до 1878 г.)*, София 2013, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> W. RICHMOND, *The Circassian Genocide*, New Brunswick–New Jersey–London 2013; F. L. GRASSI, *A New Homeland: The Massacre of the Circassians, Their Exodus to the Ottoman Empire and Their Place in Modern Turkey*, Istanbul 2018; A. JERSILD, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917*, Montreal 2002.

<sup>5</sup> В. А. МАТБЕЕВ, *'Черкесский вопрос': современные интерпретации и реалии эпохи*, Москва 2011.

<sup>6</sup> C. YELBASI, *The Circassians of Turkey: War, Violence and Nationalism from the Ottomans to Atatürk*, London 2019.

crossing is taken into account, the figure may be as high as half a million). As a result of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, people once again fled from the North Caucasus – about 25,000 Russian Circassians fought on the Ottoman side, who, after the end of conflict, had to leave their homes together with their families. The later migrations were more spread out over time: in the 1880s–1900s, another half a million Circassians relocated from Russia to the Ottoman Empire, mainly to Anatolia. However, it should be noted that estimates of the total scale of emigration from the North Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire between the 1860s–1910s tend to be lower (starting with 200,000)<sup>7</sup>.

The Russians denied that the reason for Circassian emigration had been repressions, claiming that it had been the result of a “refusal to recognize the Russian authorities and reluctance to submit themselves”<sup>8</sup>. However, the context of the prolonged uprisings and unyielding stance of the Circassians leaves no doubt that there had been forceful expulsions – for the Russian authorities, the repressions were merely steps taken to bring order and secure the Russian rule over the North Caucasus. We also have pieces of evidence that the St. Petersburg government wanted to destabilize the Ottoman Empire with masses of refugees; it was part of the rivalry in the Black Sea region<sup>9</sup>. The Russians cynically claimed that the Turkish “open door” policy was the main reason for the Circassian exodus and that the Sublime Porte was to blame for this situation. As the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, Nikolay Ignatiev, wrote in his diaries, “In light of these complaints, we replied that the Ottoman government itself requested the ‘gift’ that had been presented to it; that the resettlement was decided with the Sultan’s consent [...]”<sup>10</sup>. It is true that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Sublime Porte pursued an “open door” immigration policy, assuming that the more subjects, the stronger the state. Muslims were especially welcomed – there was no doubt that they would remain loyal

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<sup>7</sup> Belgrade, Archives of Serbia, AC, МУД-П поля 44 II/452–455; A. KALIONSKI, *Communities, Identities and Migrations...*, p. 40; K. КАРПАТ, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914. Demographic and Social Characteristic*, London 1985, p. 66–69; M. ДЫМАРСКИ, *Konflikty na Balkanach w okresie kształtowania się państw narodowych w XIX i na początku XX w.*, Wrocław 2010, p. 76–77; D. TABOROŠI, *Circassians in Serbia and the Balkans from mass immigration to last remaining community*, [in:] *Minorities in the Balkans: state policy and interethnic relations*, ed. D. БАТАКОВИЋ, Belgrade 2011, p. 82–83; B. ŞEN, *Empires from the Margin: Bosnian Muslim Migrants between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire – Petitions of the Returnees*, “Balkanistic Forum” 3, 2015: *Emigrants and Minorities: The Silenced Memory of the Russo-Ottoman War 1877–1878*, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Н. П. ИГНАТИЕВ, *Дипломатически записки (1864–1874). Донесения (1865–1876)*, т. 1: *Записки (1864–1871)*, ed. И. ТОДЕВ, София 2008, p. 91, 93.

<sup>9</sup> В. МУЧИНОВ, *Черкезкият проблем, руската политика и Българското възраждане*, “Исторически преглед” 72.5–6, 2016, p. 6–8.

<sup>10</sup> Н. П. ИГНАТИЕВ, *Дипломатически записки...*, p. 95, 97.

and grateful to the Sultan-Caliph. The Constantinople government naively was not afraid of the massive influx of migrants who were encouraged by the prospects of free land, tax breaks, and exemption from military service<sup>11</sup>. However, it was the actions of the Russians, and not the Ottomans, that should be regarded as the main cause of these migrations.

The Sultan's state could not deal logistically with accepting such a large group of refugees from the Caucasus: There were issues with transportation, food, healthcare, and accommodation. Typhus, smallpox, and dysentery were widespread among the refugees – tens of thousands of people died from diseases during their journey to the Ottoman Empire. As Walter Richmond writes: "Smallpox spread among the Circassians, and soon the beaches [of the Black Sea coast] were transformed into mass graveyards"<sup>12</sup>. It is estimated that in the spring and summer of 1864, as many as 200 people were dying daily in Trabzon and Samsun. In October, 2,700 immigrants were sent to Cyprus – 900 of whom died during the journey, with 30–40 more deaths every day after landing. The mortality rate was so high that there were problems organizing burials<sup>13</sup>. In Gerlovo (a valley in the eastern Balkan Mountains), in the surroundings of Eski Cuma (Targovishte), Shumen, and Sliven, 2,017 Circassians settled in 1864, 566 of whom died within a year. The Ottoman authorities tried to provide medical assistance, set up hospitals, orphanages, and carried out vaccinations for children – but good intentions crashed in the face of limited funds<sup>14</sup>. At first, however, it seemed that the housing program for refugees would be successful. In the summer of 1865, in the Sofia Sanjak, 2,038 houses were constructed for about 10,000 Circassians. However, the project quickly lost its momentum, as only 108 houses were built in the following year, while 12,000 Circassians came to this region at that time. However, this may indicate that the housing estates built earlier were vacated due to the extremely high mortality rate among the settlers from the Caucasus<sup>15</sup>. Russians indicated that every third refugee died during the journey, and only half of the Circassians survived the first period of their stay in the Ottoman state<sup>16</sup>.

The Circassians who came to the Balkans in the 1860s settled mainly in the Kosovo and Danube Vilayets (northern Bulgarian lands and territories south

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<sup>11</sup> I. BLUMI, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878–1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World*, London–New Delhi–New York–Sydney 2013, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> W. RICHMOND, *The Circassian Genocide...*, p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Н. П. ИГНАТИЕВ, *Дипломатически записки...*, p. 93, 95; М. ДУМАРСКИ, *Konflikty na Balkanach...*, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> В. МУЧИНОВ, *Миграционна политика...*, p. 181–182.

<sup>15</sup> ИДЕМ, *Софийският санджак в османската миграционна политика през 60-те–70-те на XIX век*, "Исторически преглед" 71.5–6, 2015, p. 153–154.

<sup>16</sup> Н. П. ИГНАТИЕВ, *Дипломатически записки...*, p. 93, 95.

of Serbia)<sup>17</sup>. Smaller groups made their way to Thrace (in the surroundings of Adrianople and Sliven, temporarily in the Plovdiv Sanjak) and to other parts of Turkey-in-Europe: Macedonia, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Sandžak, and Thessaly<sup>18</sup>. According to comprehensive Ottoman data from the summer of 1864, 83,000 Circassians were sent to the Balkans: 42,000 to the Priština Sanjak, 13,000 to the Vidin Sanjak, 12,000 to the Niš and Sofia Sanjaks, 10,000 to the Ruse, Silistra, and Svishtov Sanjaks, and 6,000 to the Adrianople Sanjak<sup>19</sup>. In 1875, Serbian authorities reported that there were 89,000 Circassians living in Turkey-in-Europe, 25,000 of whom inhabited “Old Serbia” (Kosovo with the region of Niš and Skopje)<sup>20</sup>. High mobility and a nomadic lifestyle made it difficult to estimate the exact number of Circassian settlers.

These locations were not accidental and were related to the concept of increasing the percentage of Muslims in order to strengthen the Ottoman rule, especially in lands threatened by revolts, as well as to create buffer zones against hostile states and to resist their expansion. This mindset was most evident in the case of Serbia, which was to be surrounded by an area of Circassian settlement. Similarly, the deployment of immigrants from the North Caucasus to the Danube Vilayet was related to the expected route of the Russian advance in the event of an invasion of the Balkans, as well as to replenish the population losses resulting from earlier wars with the Romanov Empire<sup>21</sup>. In the context of projects related to Bulgarian-Serbian cooperation (Bulgarian Legions in Belgrade, the “Yugoslav Tsardom”<sup>22</sup>), this settlement was also aimed at dividing Bulgarian and Serbian lands and weakening the emerging alliance between these nations. Conscious of the threats posed

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<sup>17</sup> Б. Нушић, *Косово. Опис земље и народа*, Нови Сад 1902, p. 76.

<sup>18</sup> London, Foreign Office Archives, Public Record Office, FO, 78/1868/257–260; *From M. Contoslavos to M. Gennadius, Athenes 12.01.1878/31.12.1877*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities in the Balkan States 1860–1971*, vol. 1: 1860–1885, ed. B. DESTANI, Cambridge 2003, p. 246.

<sup>19</sup> Б. Нушић, *Косово...*, p. 76; N. MALCOLM, *Kosovo. A Short History*, London 1998, p. 214–215; В. ТОНЕВ, *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането*, София 1995, p. 47; М. ЈАГОДИЋ, *Колонизациони процеси у Европској Турској 60-тих и 70-тих година 19. века и Кнежевина Србија*, [in:] *Империи, граници, политики (XIX – почеток на XX век)*, ed. П. МИТОВ, В. РАЧЕВА, София 2016, p. 82–83. There were also some estimations about 200,000 Caucasian migrants only in the Bulgarian lands but they seem to be overrated. К. ЦУКИЋ Ј. *Ристићу из Беча, 17.02/1.03.1878*, [in:] *Србија 1878. Документи*, eds. М. БОЈВОДИЋ, Д. Р. ЖИВОЈИНОВИЋ, А. МИТРОВИЋ, Р. САМАРЦИЋ, Београд 1978, p. 98–100.

<sup>20</sup> В. НИКОЛИЋ-СТОЈАНЧЕВИЋ, *Лесковац и ослобођени предели Србије 1877–1878. године. Етничке, демографске, социјално-економске и културне прилике*, Лесковац 1975, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> М. ДУМАРСКИ, *Konflikty na Balkanach...*, p. 177–178; В. МУЧИНОВ, *Миграционна политика...*, p. 55–56.

<sup>22</sup> See В. СТОЈАНЧЕВИЋ, *Србија и Бугари (1804–1878)*, Београд 1988, p. 169–264.

by national liberation movements, the Ottoman Empire saw in the Circassians a source of resurgent military power and irregular troops who would be able to respond quickly to revolts and uprisings. It was also hoped that they could be employed in protecting strategically vital roads and mountain passes that were used by irregular groups (*chetniks*)<sup>23</sup>. At the same time, in the case of the Danube Vilayet – a testing ground for reforms in practically all aspects of state functioning – the settled population was to provide an impetus for the implementation of *Tanzimat* projects<sup>24</sup>. Of course, practical factors were also taken into account, including where there was free land for settlement<sup>25</sup>.

The Circassian settlement had a significant impact on the ethnic map of the Balkans. With the arrival of migrants from the Caucasus and the Crimean Peninsula, the Muslim element in northern Bulgaria became stronger – some historians even estimate that Muslims outnumbered Christians. Nikola Todorov calculated that in the case of the Danube Vilayet, the Circassian and Tatar settlement caused their percentage to triple<sup>26</sup>. There were allegations that the Sublime Porte deliberately wanted to change the Christian and Slavic character of the Balkans and turn it into a “second Circassia”<sup>27</sup>. Given that there were about 200,000 Circassian and Tatar settlers and considering that in the 1860s, the Balkans were inhabited by between 3.5 and 4.5 million people, refugees from Russia would have accounted for between 4.5 and 5.7% of the region’s total population<sup>28</sup>.

The Circassians who settled in the Balkans did not adapt very well to the local conditions – they had neither the motivation nor the time to do so, considering

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<sup>23</sup> В. Мучинов, *Софийският санджак...*, p. 153–154; ИДЕМ, *Черкезкият проблем...*, p. 8–9. The actions of the Ottomans were undertaken in an analogous way in Anatolia, where the Circassians were directed to the territories inhabited by the Armenians. They were to be initially concentrated around Kars, from where they could also conduct actions against the Russians in the Caucasus. Н. П. ИГНАТИЕВ, *Дипломатически записки...*, p. 91, 93; М. ПАНДЕВСКА, *Присилни миграции во Македонија во годините на Големата источна криза (1875–1881)*, Скопје 1993, p. 88–90.

<sup>24</sup> В. ŞİMŞİR, *The Turks of Bulgaria (1878–1985)*, London 1988, p. 13–14.

<sup>25</sup> До валите и каймаканите на Видин, Тулча, Варна, Разград, Русе, Търново, Кюстенджа и Шумен, 30.04.1861, [in:] *Документи из турските държавни архиви*, ч. 1: 1564–1872, ed. and trans. П. ДОРЕВ, София 1940, p. 404–405.

<sup>26</sup> Н. ТОДОРОВ, *Балканският град XV–XIX век. Социално-икономическо и демографско развитие*, София 1972, p. 307.

<sup>27</sup> Sofia, National Library of St. St. Cyril and Methodius – Bulgarian Historical Archives, НБКМ-БИА, ф. 63 а.е. 99 л. 1719–1721; FO, 78/1868/257–260; АС, МУД-П роля 44 II/474–477; М. ВОЈВОДИЋ, *Изазови српске спољне политике (1791–1918). Огледи и расправе*, Београд 2007, p. 205–206; J. MCCARTHY, *Muslims in Ottoman Europe: Population from 1880 to 1912*, “Nationalities Papers” 28.1, 2000, p. 33–34.

<sup>28</sup> W. RICHMOND, *The Circassian Genocide...*, p. 103.



their short presence there. They quickly came into conflict with other communities. The settlers were supposed to be given land set aside from government property, mainly meadows, because they worked as shepherds, and only rarely as farmers<sup>29</sup>. In reality, however, the Sublime Porte left the duty to find land to the local administration, which often had nothing available. In such a situation, the simplest solutions were employed – expropriation of Christians who were deprived of their property for the benefit of the settlers from the Caucasus. That was the case in the areas of Svishtov (north-eastern Bulgaria), where the surrounding pastures were simply taken away from the Bulgarian shepherds and given to the Circassians. Compensation was not always provided, while Muslim settlers were entitled to tax exemptions – which further incited resentment among the local population. The people of the Caucasus traditionally despised farming and a sedentary lifestyle, continuing to function as nomads. Many were (or became) bandits, horse thieves, or slave traders (rumor has it that they would sell their own children). They were perceived as wild and primitive – the locals found it unusual that horse meat was an important part of the Circassian diet<sup>30</sup>. After the settlement of Circassian families near the border with Serbia, there were reports of an increased number of attacks on border villages, of which the Caucasian newcomers were accused<sup>31</sup>. The settlers refused to cooperate with the Ottoman authorities: instead of staying in the areas granted to them, they changed their place of stay without consulting the administration after exploiting the allotted land<sup>32</sup>. Some Circassian revolts even occurred, such as in 1864 in the Anatolian town of Muş and in May 1867 in Kosovo<sup>33</sup>.

Not only did the Christian Slavs have difficult relations with the Circassian newcomers, but the Balkan Muslims as well. In Kosovo, the settlement of immigrants from the Caucasus faced opposition from the Albanian population. Similarly, in the case of Bosnia, where, despite the initial enthusiasm and declarations of assistance to their brothers in faith, the local *begs* opposed the Ottoman policy – and assuming that Circassian settlement in Bosnia was limited – their resistance

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<sup>29</sup> Sofia, Central State Archives, ЦДА, ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 31 л. 10, 41.

<sup>30</sup> ЦДА, ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 26 л. 9, л. 12, 23, 29; К. ИРЕЧЕК, *Княжество България. Негова повърхнина, природа, население, духовна култура, управление и новейша история*, ч. I: *Българска държава*, Пловдив 1899, р. 172–173; ИДЕМ, *Български дневник*, т. 2: 1881–1884, ed. Е. СТАТЕЛОВА, София 1995, р. 125; М. ДУМАРСКИ, *Konflikty na Balkanach...*, р. 78–79; N. MALCOLM, *Kosovo...*, р. 214–215.

<sup>31</sup> АС, МУД-П 1865 ф. II п. 58 бр. 911, 8772.

<sup>32</sup> В. МУЧИНОВ, *Миграционна политика...*, р. 88–91, 184–185.

<sup>33</sup> Н. П. ИГНАТИЕВ, *Дипломатически записки...*, р. 95; W. RICHMOND, *The Circassian Genocide...*, р. 104.

was quite effective<sup>34</sup>. In March 1876, before the outbreak of the April Uprising, Christians and Muslims from Pleven jointly opposed the presence of Circassians in the area. They worked on a petition calling for the resettlement of the migrants back to the Caucasus; the only dispute was over who to address it to. While the Christians wanted to send the letter to the Sublime Porte and the Russian Emperor, the Muslims refused to sign a document addressed to Alexander II Romanov<sup>35</sup>.

The Ottoman authorities were aware of the problems and ethnic tension in the region and tried to respond accordingly – in 1865, a special decree was issued which banned the slave trade and the treatment of women from the Caucasus as a commodity. Facing a growing number of robberies, Christians were allowed to apprehend criminals on their own. To have them tried, however, it was necessary to obtain testimony in court from at least two Muslims, and it should also be remembered that the *rayah* did not have access to weapons. As a result, Christians were afraid to act independently – there was a widespread belief that Circassians were protected as “the Sultan’s guests”<sup>36</sup>. There was a debate among the Ottoman elites about the optimal system of Circassian settlement. Nusret Pasha, the Rumelian Vali, supported the idea that migrants from the Caucasus should be sent to the territories that most resembled their homeland – the inner parts of the Balkan mountains – where they could continue their way of life and adapt in the easiest way possible. Midhat Pasha, the Danube Vali, opted for distributing the immigrants throughout the region to integrate them with the local population<sup>37</sup>. Eventually, assimilation was chosen as the preferred path, and Circassian families were directed only to villages with at least five Turkish families. Clans were separated and efforts were made to limit the importance of family leaders. The intention was to make them “good Turks” who would cultivate the land, attend the local mosque, and send children to school. Unorthodox religious practices and customs originating from the Caucasus were suppressed. However, the assimilation policy was not successful, and the migrants continued to isolate themselves and come into conflict with the local population. The only successes were evident in the integration into the army – several cavalry regiments made up of Circassian newcomers were formed. Learning the Turkish language and assimilation were prerequisites for pursuing a military career<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> M. DYMARSKI, *Konflikty na Bałkanach...*, p. 77–78; S. BANDŽOVIĆ, *Bošnjaci i deosmanizacija Balkana: muhadžirski pokreti i pribježišta „sultanovih musafira” (1683.-1875.)*, Sarajevo 2013, p. 344–345.

<sup>35</sup> FO, 195/1077/137–141.

<sup>36</sup> Н. П. ИГНАТИЕВ, *Дипломатически записки...*, p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> М. ЈАГОДИЋ, *Колонизациони процеси...*, p. 82–83.

<sup>38</sup> М. ПАНДЕВСКА, *Присилни миграции...*, p. 97; W. RICHMOND, *The Circassian Genocide...*, p. 104–105.



An indirect effect of the Circassian settlement was the emigration of Balkan Slavs who, facing the threat posed by Caucasian migrants and aggravating ethnic conflicts, fled the Sultan's state. This happened not without the influence of Russian agitation – the authorities in St. Petersburg considered for some time the exchange of people with the Ottoman Empire. Problems with Circassians and Russian propaganda led to the so-called Vidin Resettlement. Between July and October 1861, about 11,000 Bulgarians left the Vidin Sanjak for Crimea and Ukrainian lands. However, the life of Bulgarian settlers under Romanov rule was not a bed of roses – up to 2,000 died during the journey or shortly after arriving in Russia. As a result, approximately 8,000 people later returned to the Vidin Sanjak with the support of the Ottoman administration<sup>39</sup>. The Circassian settlement in the Niš and Bosnia Sanjaks from where people were migrating to the Principality of Serbia had a similar effect (however, in that process, the influx of Muslims from Serbian cities in 1862 was also important)<sup>40</sup>. The authorities in Belgrade, fearing that these neighboring areas would lose their Serbian character, attempted to return the refugees to their homes<sup>41</sup>.

The crucial point in the brief presence of Circassians in the Balkans was the “Great Eastern Crisis” of 1875–1878. Migrants from the Caucasus, who could not have gained a worse reputation during their short stay in the region, played a significant role in the crimes against the Slavic population during the suppression of anti-Ottoman revolts and wars. During the final crisis stage, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, as the Tsar's army and its allies advanced southward, thousands of Muslims decided to flee for fear of reprisals. By the time of the armistice between the warring parties in February 1878, most of the Circassians were already outside the territories controlled by the Russians and Serbs. After the ceasefire, no one had any doubts that the Circassians would not be able to return to the Bulgarian lands under the Russian occupation and the territories annexed by Serbia. It is estimated that in 1864, about 41,000 Circassians settled in the lands which would become part of the

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<sup>39</sup> FO, 78/1673/143–151; М. ЈАГОДИЋ, *Колонизациони процеси...*, p. 77–79; В. ТОНЕВ, *Българското Черноморие...*, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> М. ЈАГОДИЋ, *Насељавање Кнежевине Србије: 1861–1880*, Београд 2006, p. 107, 116; Б. ЛИЛИЋ, *Југоисточна Србија (1878–1918)*, Београд 2006, p. 26–27; Д. ЂОРЂЕВИЋ, *Прилог проучавања миграција из Хабсбуршке Монархије у Србију 60-тих и 70-тих година XIX века*, [in:] *Ослобођење градова у Србији од Турака 1862–1867. године*, ed. В. ЧУБРИЛОВИЋ, Београд 1970, p. 322.

<sup>41</sup> *Два службена извештаја из Алексинца о избеглицима из Турске и ослобађању српских ратних заробљеника, 17.03.1877*, [in:] *Други српско-турски рат 1877/78 и ослобођење крајева Југоисточне Србије. Историјска грађа поводом 120. годишњице 1877/1997*, ed. Б. ЛИЛИЋ, Пирот 1998, p. 32–34.

Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia<sup>42</sup>, as well as the Niš Sanjak incorporated into Serbia. After the war and border changes in 1878, they disappeared almost completely – there are only some traces of information about 100 Circassians still living in Bulgaria<sup>43</sup>. Some Circassians remained in the Southern Slavic territories that held under the Sultan's rule: Macedonia, Thrace, and Kosovo. In subsequent years, the Circassian population in the Balkans steadily declined – the main factor being departures to Asia Minor. By the early 1910s, this community numbered only a few hundred in Turkey-in-Europe. Eventually, it completely disappeared with the end of the Ottoman Empire's presence in the Balkans as a result of the Balkan Wars<sup>44</sup>.

The Balkan historiography presents the arrival of Circassians in the region as a source of destabilization. Undoubtedly, Circassian settlement in the Southern Slavic lands was a failure of the policy pursued by the Sublime Porte – it led to a serious flare-up of social tensions in the 1860s and 1870s. Thus, according to the Sublime Porte's plan, the actions of the Circassians became counterproductive: as noted by the Macedonian historian Marija Pandevska, instead of stabilizing the Ottoman rule, they destabilized the situation in the region, and later largely led to the breakaway of areas of the Balkans from the Sultan's state<sup>45</sup>. French researcher Bernard Lory formulated a thesis that the vision of the "Turkish yoke" was not the result of the entirety of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, but the effect of periods of crisis. In the case of Bulgarian historical memory, he identified two such periods of crucial meaning: the *Kardzhali* rebellions (1792–1808) and the "Great Eastern Crisis"<sup>46</sup>. Due to the role played by Circassians in the destabilization of ethnic relations in the 1860s–mid 1870s, following Lory's reasoning, it could be argued that they contributed to the demonization of the vision of Ottoman rule in the Balkans.

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<sup>42</sup> The Principality of Bulgaria, formed according to the San Stefano Treaty of March (February OS) 1878 after the Russian-Turkish War, did not survive in its primary borders (nowadays parts of Bulgaria, Northern Macedonia, part of Thrace, southern Serbia, and eastern Albania). According to the Berlin Treaty of July 1878, the state was limited to the northern Bulgarian lands as a Turkish vassal and a Russian protectorate; in the south, Eastern Rumelia was founded as an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire. The Principality unified with Eastern Rumelia in 1885.

<sup>43</sup> J. GRZEGORZEWSKI, *Za Dunajem. Bułgaria, Serbia, Czarnogóra*, Lwów 1904, p. 177; Ж. НАЗЪРСКА, *Българската държава и нейните малцинства 1879–1885*, София 1999, p. 26; М. РАКИЋ, *Из Нове Србије (Отаџбина, књ. 4, 5 и 6, 1880–1881)*, Лесковац 1987, p. 14–15; Б. ЛИЛИЋ, *Југоисточна Србија...*, p. 33–34; М. ПАНДЕВСКА, *Присилни миграции...*, p. 105–107; D. TABOROŠI, *Circassians in Serbia...*, p. 81–82.

<sup>44</sup> J. СВИЈИЋ, *Osnove za geografiju i geologiju Makedonije i Stare Srbije*, vol. III, Beograd 1911, p. 1166–1167; D. TABOROŠI, *Circassians in Serbia...*, p. 82–83.

<sup>45</sup> М. ПАНДЕВСКА, *Присилни миграции...*, p. 97–98.

<sup>46</sup> Б. ЛОРИ, *Съдбата на османското наследство. Българската градска култура 1878–1900*, trans. Л. ЯНАКИЕВА, София 2002, p. 55–56.

Western historiography attempts to revise the Balkan perspective on the Circassian question. American historian of the Caucasus, Walter Richmond, emphasizes that the accusations made against the Circassians were mostly unfounded and based mainly on stereotypes. As he notes, the allegations regarding robbery, trafficking of their own children, and contempt actually concerned a small group that stirred up anger against all Circassians. At the same time, he cites sources indicating that some of the conflicts between Caucasian migrants and the local population were inspired by Russian agents, along with reports by foreign commentators who exaggerated the ethnic situation in the region<sup>47</sup>. Although some of these claims can be considered valid, the responsibility of the Circassians for the crimes they committed in the Balkans cannot be denied. Richmond's position does not withstand scrutiny from the multitude of different sources, both of foreign and local provenance. The Pro-Muslim milieus in the West (for example, in Great Britain), and even representatives of the Ottoman Empire, confirmed the reports of crimes committed by the Circassian people. Similarly, xenophobia cannot be considered as the main source of the conflict between the local population and the Circassians. One may agree with Richmond on the claims that not all of the settlers were guilty of the alleged acts and attitudes, but we cannot condone completely justifying them or subscribe to the statements that only a few were responsible for the extremely bad reputation. It should not be forgotten that a comparable number of Tatars arrived in the Balkans at that time, who were initially treated with great suspicion, but as they were able to adapt to the new environment, they quickly began to be distinguished from the Caucasian migrants<sup>48</sup>. That is why the Tatar community survived in the Balkans (e.g. after the war emigration in 1878, approximately 18,000 of them remained in Bulgaria). Tatars concentrated mainly in the north-eastern part of the country, in the vicinity of the largest centers of the Turkish population. Until the Balkan Wars, no significant departures of this population from Bulgarian lands were recorded. As a result, the number of Tatars in Bulgaria remained unchanged during this period – in 1910, there were 18,170 of them, the same figure as in 1880<sup>49</sup>.

However, Richmond's point of view should be considered valuable, as it allows us to better understand the Circassian perspective, which so far has gone

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<sup>47</sup> W. RICHMOND, *The Circassian Genocide...*, p. 102–104;

<sup>48</sup> В. МУЧИНОВ, *Миграционна политика...*, p. 168. One can also point to the areas of the Ottoman Empire where the Circassian settlement did not take such a drastic form. For example, in Jordan, they became an impulse for economic development and the revival of trade contacts between the Middle East and the Caucasus. V. HAMED-TROYANSKY, *Circassian Refugees and the Making of Amman, 1878–1914*, "Middle East Studies" 49, 2017, p. 605–623.

<sup>49</sup> М. МИХАЙЛОВА-МРЪВКАРОВА, *За татари, татарските училища и татарските джамии в Североизточна България*, [in:] *Татари в България – общество, история и култура*, eds. Т. ДИМОВ, Н. МУРТАЗА, Добрич 2009, p. 39.

unnoticed in (especially Balkan) historiography. Circassians' attitudes and actions resulted from the harm they suffered from the Russians in their homeland. Thus, forced to wander around the world, they projected their resentment toward the Russians onto the South Slavs. According to Richmond, Circassians did not end up in the Balkans voluntarily – they were expelled from their homelands by the Russians, and criticizing the Ottomans for accepting refugees fleeing repression goes against basic humanitarian values.

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