HISTORY STUDIES
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HISTORY

Adopting the "*Other*": A Peculiar U.S. Orientalism in the Response to the Circassian War, 1838-1859[1]

"Diğer"i Kabullenme: Çerkez Savaşı'nda (1838-1859) Olağandışı Amerikan Oryantalizmi

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Abstract

This study seeks to complicate the rather one-dimensional character of so-called "Orientalist" discourse as outlined by Edward Said by examining the way in which periodical literature in the United States during the early nineteenth century looked at a particular set of events in a particular region of the Greater Middle East: the so-called Circassian War in the Caucasus Mountains. There clearly was a variety of U.S. Orientalism that was partially a product of an imperialist project, though only partially. The attention paid to the Circassian War by nineteenth-century U.S. newspapers and magazines provides a unique window for understanding how and why this U.S. Orientalism abandoned the usual strategy of distancing and instead adopted a strategy of bonding with at least one Oriental other.

Key Words: *Caucasus, Circassian War, Edward Said, Orientalism, United States, periodical literature*

Özet

Bu çalışma, Edward Said tarafından çerçevesi çizilen sözde "Oryantalist" söylemin bir yönünü, 19. yüzyılın başında ABD'deki dergilerin Büyük Orta Doğu'nun belirli bir bölgesindeki (Kafkasya Dağlarındaki sözde Çerkez Savaşı) olaylar zincirine bakışını inceleyerek daha da karmaşıklaştırmayı amaç edinmiştir. Kısmen emperyalist bir projenin ürünü olarak çeşitli ABD oryantalizmi vardı. 19. yüzyıl Amerikan dergi ve gazetelerinde yer alan Çerkez Savaşı haberlerine bakıldığında, bu ABD oryantalizminin nasıl ve niçin geleneksel uzak durma stratejini terk ederek en azından bir tane Doğulu "diğer" ile bağlantı kurma stratejini oluşturduğunu anlamada eşsiz malzeme sağlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kafkasya – Haçlı savaşı – Edward Said – Oryantalizm – Amerika – Periyodik Literatür*

On January 5, 1854, an anonymous correspondent writing for the *New York Observer and Chronicle* asked an intriguing question. In an article headlined "People of the Caucasus; and their Struggles against the Russians," this journalist queried: "What interest or sympathy could this interminable quarrel between the soldiers of Muscovy and these savage tribes in a

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[1] Portions of this paper were first presented at the 2009 annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic. The author would like to thank Kenneth Stevens and Robert May for commentary. The author would also like to thank Eric Norquest, whose work as a research assistant on this project was invaluable.

remote part of the globe inspire?"[2] Clearly quite a lot: he followed up this question with two closely-spaced printed pages of explanation for why Americans, removed half-a-world from the mountains of the Caucasus, should take interest. This was not the first, and would not be the last time that a U.S. periodical publication showed enormous interest in what was happening on the far-distant northern frontier of the Greater Middle East. Between the late 1820s and the late 1850s, hundreds of news stories—some less than a paragraph, some nearly book-length—graced the pages of the burgeoning number of periodicals published in that era. While interesting for a wide variety of reasons, these articles are particularly valuable for the insights they can provide into what editors, writers, and their readers were thinking about the people and cultures of this exotic and distant place.

In his classic study *Orientalism*, Edward Said makes an interesting, if passing observation about a distinction between conceptions of the "Orient" held in Europe and the United States. After a passage reviewing European nostalgia toward a vanishing "place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" in what this issue of *History Studies* is calling the "Greater Middle East," Said observes that "Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly)."[3] Yet in her study, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890*, Malini Johar Schueller clearly disagrees, pointing out that in nineteenth-century U.S. literature there were multiple "Orients" of which the Greater Middle East occupied at least three.[4] This study also conceives of a U.S. Orientalism of a sort, though different from either Said's or Schueller's conceptions, by examining the many newspaper and magazine treatments of what in the U.S. was known as the Circassian War, the war of resistance fought by mountain tribes in the Caucasus Mountains against Russian incursion between the 1820s and 1850s. Contrary to Said's characterization of the West's conception of the "Oriental" Middle Easterner as "gullible, 'devoid of energy and initiative,' much given to 'fulsome flattery,' intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; … inveterate liars, … 'lethargic and suspicious,' and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race,"[5] nineteenth-century U.S. newspaper writers characterized the "Oriental" mountaineers in the Caucasus as being peculiarly like themselves.

The conflict that formed the centerpiece in these discussions was one remote theater in the larger diplomatic struggle popularly known as the "Great Game." After the 1814 defeat of Napoleon, Russia had a political upper hand in European politics and wanted to turn its reputation as the liberator of Europe into actual gains. The aging Ottoman Empire provided an excellent opportunity. Increasingly incapable of maintaining its far-flung domains, other powers began moving in to assert their own political and economic interests. Seeing a chance to interrupt and perhaps capture Great Britain's Far Eastern monopoly, Russia longingly eyed the Black Sea as a potential conduit for channeling global commerce. Having seized the

[2] "People of the Caucasus; and their Struggles against the Russians." *New York Observer and Chronicle*, January 5, 1854, 5.

[3] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (25th Anniversary Ed., New York: Vintage Press, 2003), 1.

[4] Malani Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 3-4. The vast majority of Schueller's book deals with what is defined here at the "Greater Middle East," only two chapters in her study focus on the Far East.

[5] Said, *Orientalism*, 38-39.

Crimea in 1783 and large chunks of Persia in 1813, the Russians took over most of the Turkish Black Sea coast in 1829. These strategic holdings might be used to strike through Afghanistan directly at the British in India. At the very least, such holdings would provide a valuable commercial potential, channeling goods from northern India by way of the old Silk Road to the Caspian Sea, across Georgia to the Black Sea, and then on to Russia, Western Europe, and other consumers.[6] In the long run, Russia aimed to take over the Anatolian plains and reach to the Mediterranean. In order for any of this to work, however, Russia needed to maintain strict control of both Transcaucasia and Greater Circassia.[7] Because of the extremely mountainous terrain and long-standing independence of the tribal peoples who occupied it, pacifying this region proved to be an extremely difficult task, and it was this effort that captured Americans' interest in the early nineteenth century.[8]

As noted by the commentator in 1854, it is curious that this literature existed at all. The Caucasus was extremely remote from the United States and the young republic had little, if anything, to do with the region. In official government documents, there are no references to the Circassian War; a word search of government records from this era brings up only one mention of "Circassia" (a reference to a class of tobacco used by Inuit natives in Russian Alaska).[9] And while trade with Constantinople and other prominent Near Eastern ports was highly sought after and often brisk, the Caucasus region was off most Americans' commercial radar. For one thing, trading there was dangerous because of the prevailing international conflicts—one American considering a trading venture into the region commented "I was told, moreover, that, in case I was captured by the Russian cruisers, I should inevitably be hanged."[10] Braving the risk, however, this self-proclaimed "Yankee peddler" described business conditions in the most discouraging of tones:

[6] For a general overview of this military/diplomatic struggle, see Martin Ewans, *The Great Game: Britain and Russia in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2004). A somewhat more accessible account may also be found in Karl Meyer, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and Race for Empire in Central Asia*, (Rev. paperback ed., New York: Basic Books, 2006).

[7] The term "Transcaucasia" refers to the territory occupied by the modern states of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia as well as the Georgian breakaway territories of Ossetia and Abkhazia. "Greater Circassia" includes parts of present day Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai as well as portions of the Russian republics of Karachay-Cherkessia, Adyghe, and Kabardino-Balkaria and the independent republics of Dagestan and Chechnya. In the news items discussed and quoted in this paper, the terms Circassia and Caucasia were often used interchangeably.

[8] The most comprehensive modern history of this conflict is Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Cass, 2001). There were a number of accounts of Russia's larger aims that were published at the time, many of which formed the basis for U.S. press accounts. One of the earliest and most interesting of which was Jacques François, le Chevalier Gamba, *Voyage dans la Russia Méridionale, et particuliérement dans les Provinces situées audelá du Caucas,* 2 vols. (Paris: C. J. Trouvé, 1826), an interesting review and summary of which may be found in "Article 4 -- No Title," *The Southern Review*, August 1, 1828, 114-152. See also "Invasion of British India," *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, January 1830, 80-88. Another, somewhat later, account was published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, XLII, CCLXVI (December, 1837), 747-759 and reprinted in its entirety as "Circassia," *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, April 1838, 487-495.

[9] Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1879), 229. U.S. Serial Set, Number 4014, Library of Congress American Memory, A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875 http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(ss40146)): (accessed 06/17/2009).

[10] Thomas Trotter, "Travels and Adventures in Circassia: Chapter I," *Robert Merry's Museum*, July 1845, 200.

> To tell the truth, I must say that Circassia did not seem to be the country for large mercantile operations. A Yankee peddler might, indeed, get rid of a tolerably rich stock of notions, by perambulating the country; but he would find a great difficulty in realizing the result of his sales, in a convenient shape. As the Circassians have hardly any trade among themselves, they have no money. … I was compelled to put off my wares along the road, and this could be done only by bartering my trinkets for the very few productions which the country afforded, such as fox-skins, beeswax, &c.[11]

As noted by Mary Ann Heiss, in the absence of security and/or commercial "need and interest," "the United States is—and always has been—a nation like all nations, motivated by practical and realistic considerations and calculations."[12] Lack of U.S. interest in the rest of the world is often spoken of as characteristic of the early republic. As long ago as the 1950s, Marshall Smelser identified "isolationism" as a fundamental founding principle, extending beyond official diplomacy to the very core of national values, and Bernard Fensterwald described both the official and unofficial posture of the nation toward Old World affairs as "aloof."[13] In his many essays on early U.S. attitudes toward foreign affairs, Lawrence Kaplan consistently emphasized U.S. isolationist tendencies. In discussing the Greek Revolution in the 1820s, for example, Kaplan pointedly observes that it "failed to elicit U.S intervention and led instead to the triumph of isolationism."[14] Nonetheless, despite official inattention to the conflict in the Caucasus, the press afforded it significant and sympathetic interest.

The initial press coverage of Russia's activities in Transcaucasia and Greater Circassia came in response to the publication of *Voyage dans la Russie Méridionale, et particuliérement dans les Provinces situées au-delá du Caucase* (*Voyage Through Southern Russia, And In Particular Through The Provinces Situated in the Caucasus*), a two-volume memoir written by the former French consul to the Russian viceroy in Georgia, Jacques François, le Chevalier Gamba. Published in Paris in 1826, this hybrid travel narrative/policy review got quite a lot of attention in Europe and reviews were picked up here and there in the United States, often reprinted verbatim or occasionally paraphrased with editorial insertions.[15] At this early stage, little attention was being paid to the Circassians and their struggle against Russian pacification efforts, but when mentioned tended either to neutrality or sympathy to the forces of the Tsar. The *Southern Review* for example noted:

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[11] Thomas Trotter, "Travels and Adventures in Circassia: Chapter V," *Robert Merry's Museum*, December 1845, 358.

[12] Mary Ann Heiss, "The Evolution of the Imperial Idea and U.S. National Identity," *Diplomatic History* 26(4) (2002), 540.

[13] See Marshall Smelser, "Whether to Provide and Maintain a Navy (1787-1788)," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 83(9) (1957), 944-953; Bernard Fensterwald, "The Anatomy of American 'Isolationism' and Expansionism," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2(2) (1958), 111-139.

[14] Lawrence S. Kaplan, "The Monroe Doctrine and the Truman Doctrine: The Case of Greece," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13(1) (1993), 1. For a broader cross-section of Kaplan's writings, see his *Entangling Alliances with None: American Foreign Policy in the Age of Jefferson* (Kent Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1987).

[15] See, for example, "Miscellaneous: Southern Russia and Georgia," *Western Recorder*, May 15, 1827, 80; "Literary and Philosophical Intelligence, etc." *The Christian Advocate*, January 1, 1827, 36; "Review 2 -- No Title," *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, November 1, 1828, 640; "Article 4 -- No Title," *The Southern Review*, August 1, 1828, 114-152.

> Such has been the condition of the Caucasian tribes for the last ten or twelve hundred years, perhaps, for many more, so wretched among themselves, so useless to the human race, that we should not regret to see them, for a time at least, subjected to the powerful dominion of Russia.[16]

After this brief spurt of attention to the problems in the Caucasus, the American mind wandered away for most of a decade, but wandered back with markedly greater passion and significantly changed attitude beginning in 1838. *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, a Philadelphia-based magazine, launched this new attention to what was happening in Circassia by reprinting an article formerly published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* criticizing Russian actions in the region and opening the door to a more sympathetic view of the Circassians. Drawn largely from a book-length account of the region by British travel writer Edmund Spencer, the essayist reports that the negative picture of the Caucasian mountaineers was a concoction whipped up by the Russians to bias the world in their favor, pointing out that

> The reports which he and other travelers give of their reception there, must go far to redeem its inhabitants from the imputations cast upon them by the Russians of being an irreclaimable banditti of robbers. … The hospitable kindness and rigid good faith experienced by Mr. Spencer and the other travelers alluded to, of whose progress there is as yet less known to the public, prove the Circassians to possess these and many other virtues.[17]

"The Russians have found them what they have made them," the article proclaims, "fierce, implacable enemies, keeping neither faith nor terms with those who have kept none with them."[18] Over the next several months, numerous articles began appearing, many of them citing Spencer's *Travels in Circassia, Krim-Tartary, &c.* For example, *The Friend; a Religious and Literary Journal* published a four-part serialization of portions of Spencer's narrative, containing its own editorial insertions, all laudatory of the Circassians and their resistance to "Russian aggression."[19] Publication in 1840 of another British travel narrative, *Journal of a Residence in Circassia During the Years 1837, 1838, and 1839* by James Stanislaus Bell, occasioned another flood of anti-Russian articles. In 1841, the same magazine that had launched American interest in the region, *The Museum of Foreign Literature, &c*, lionized the Circassians as "a people totally unoffending, yet punished with all the inflictions of military violence." They were, it went on, "A nation of fishers, hunters, and tillers of the land, seeking only to live by the labour of their hands and in the enjoyment of the blessings of nature" yet "are forced into the field, to defend their families from the most intolerable insults, and themselves from the most remorseless slavery."[20]

But a more interesting turn in the attention given to the conflict also took place during the 1840s, one decidedly contrary to Said's characterization of casting the "Oriental" as the

[16] "Article 4 -- No Title," *The Southern Review*, August 1, 1828, 131.

[17] "Circassia," *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, April 1838, 494.

[18] Ibid.

[19] The quote is from "Circassia and the Circassians," *The Friend; a Religious and Literary Journal*, June 23, 1838, 297. The other three chapters in the serialization appeared under the same title in the June 9 (pp. 281-282), June 16 (pp. 289-291), and June 30 (pp. 306-307) issues.

[20] "The Caucasian War," *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, January 1, 1841, 175.

"Other". Voices in the U.S. soon began associating the Circassians' war against Old World tyranny with that in their own history. In August 1845, *Niles National Register* proclaimed that the mountaineers were "fighting for their altars and their hearths, under almost the identical declaration of rights which formed the basis of the American revolution."[21] These sentiments continued to hold sway; as late as 1854, American journalist William Dowe trumpeted that "The Caucasus is certainly a place worth the attention of those who love liberty, and of ourselves especially—not to mention the curious likeness between our flag and that of the hill-folk, which is the "Stars and Arrows"—a blazonry, it must be admitted, somewhat more poetical than our own."[22] Throughout the 1840s and well into the 1850s, American editorialists repeatedly reinforced the similarities between the Circassians' "desperate valor and innate love of freedom" and that of their own Revolutionary ancestors.[23]

Contrary views were occasionally expressed, but met with largely negative reaction. When Boston-born adventurer/travel writer George Leighton Ditson published his memoir of travels in the region in 1850, he took a cautious, but generally complimentary tone toward the Russians, associating their activities in the Caucasus with American activities on its own frontiers. Comparing the Circassians with American Indians, Ditson observes:

> I was more than ever impressed with the importance of a new system of things—a new religion, and a new government, and with the inestimable value of those institutions compared with their present ones, with which Russian intelligence is now surrounding them. For, when one looks on the primitive state of this people—the condition in which, without advancement, they have existed for long ages; when one sees that they cannot retrograde, there being no position in the scale of human existence beneath them, he has a confidence in the advantage of any change of whatever nature it may be.[24]

Reviewing the book, noted American Orientalist J. D. Woolsey dismissed Ditson's claims out-of-hand—incidentally without ever addressing the comparison of Russia's and the U.S.'s indigenous insurgents—and ridiculed him as follows:

> he has persuaded himself that Russia is accomplishing a good work in these countries; that she will Christianize the Circassians, (if she can catch them,) and civilize them to boot,—seeing she is so highly civilized herself, and seeing that her soldiers are patterns of civility and refinement.[25]

Several months later, a letter from an anonymous Philadelphia man to the editor of The *Albion, A Journal of News, Politics and Literature* was equally unimpressed with the Russians' civilizing potential: "Civilization in Russia itself, what is it?—That of the ball-room and parade—a top dressing of forced culture for effect: while the mass of the soil beneath remains,

[21] "Foreign: Great Britain. France. Spain. Persia. Russia. Buenos Ayres. Hayti and St. Domingo. West India. East Indies. India. China. Turkey," *Niles' National Register*, August 23, 1845, 386.

[22] William Dowe, "The Caucasus And Schamyl," *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*, June 1, 1854, 618.

[23] "Circassia," *The New-Yorker*, July 25, 1840, 290.

[24] Ibid., 381.

[25] J. D. Woolsey, "Art. VIII--Caucasus," *New Englander*, February 1, 1851, 89.

as it came from the elaboration of nature, crude and inert, and impervious to every principle of vivification."[26]

In fact, in the minds of many, the struggle in the Caucasus was as much about trying to destroy true culture and liberal opinion in Russia as it was to subdue territory and extend autocracy. Noting that Pushkin, "the Russian Byron" had been subjected to military exile in Circassia, *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* declared in 1853 that "poets who have made verses on liberty, wear a common uniform in the Caucasus."

> That involuntary army is recruited by those whose liberal opinions make them distrusted in Russia … The poor poets … have little heart to stand their mountain charge, very probably. Of the 30,000 irregulars and 40,000 regulars that besiege that unconquerable range, the Circassians and the severity of the climate destroy about 15,000 yearly.[27]

But despite the odds against a Circassian victory in the long run, American writers remained optimistic. Some even went so far as to suggest that if the mountaineers could hold out against the juggernaut of Russian military power, they might not only preserve their own freedoms but liberate the Russians as well. Though acknowledging that "The great mass of the Russian population are so ignorant and slavish, they could not comprehend any constitutional movement or revolution," still, *Graham's Magazine* concluded that "these tyrants are not so firmly fixed in their places that they might not be shaken in them, or out of them, by the storm of circumstances. They are still liable to those revolutionary winds that so often teach—'Those idols of brass that their feet are of clay.'"[28] And, according to a German writer whose observations on the Caucasus were widely quoted in the American press, those "revolutionary winds" were destined to waft from the heights Circassia. "'Invigorated by this atmosphere, even Russian hirelings would grow into men eager for freedom; and among their descendants a new race of heroes would arise, to point their weapons against that servile constitution, to extend which their fathers had once fought, as blind, unquestioning slaves.'"[29]

Thus far from seeing these "Orientals" as, in Schueller's words, "passive, supine, available woman/body," i.e., the diametrical opposite "Other" of Said's characterization, U.S. newspapers' depictions of the Circassians were decidedly masculine, even hyper-masculine, and emphasized similarity, both in character and circumstances, between the Caucasian mountaineers and themselves. Is it possible, however, that the exception of the Circassians from the category of Orientals stemmed from the fact that these people were literally "Caucasian" and that they were thus perceived as being racially the same as the dominant race in the United States. This begs the question of how extensively the term "Caucasian" was used to convey the state of "whiteness" in that era. While it is true that the term "Caucasian" was first applied to the "white race" in 1795 by German anthropologist Johann Blumenback, it would seem that this concept did not become widely known or accepted in the U.S. until after

[26] "A Plea for Circassia," *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics and Literature*, August 30, 1851, 414.

[27] "Russia and Her Serfs," *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*, April 1, 1853, 500.

[28] Ibid., 502.

[29] Friedrich Bodenstedt, Die vo□lker des Kaukasus und ihre freiheitska□mpfe gegen die Russen. : Ein beitrag zur neuesten geschichte des Orients, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Lizius, 1849), quoted in translation in "The New Prophet in the East," *The International Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science and Art*, August 26, 1850, 302.

1850.[30] As late as the 1849 edition, Webster's dictionary defines "Caucasian" as "Pertaining to Mount Caucasus in Asia".[31] There is no reference to racial or ethnic implications, suggesting that, at least in the United States, this term had not yet been associated with whiteness. Even as late as the 1895 edition, Webster's primary definition remained geographical, with reference to "the white race" coming only as a subsidiary definition.[32] Hence, I would conclude that readers of articles about the Caucasus in the early nineteenth century would not have tended to "de-Orientalize" Circassians on the grounds that they were racially "white" and thus not truly"Asian".

The only real source of distancing that came up in the periodical literature, not surprisingly, was in the area of religion. No matter how similar in character and historical circumstances the Circassians may have been, a U.S. audience could not ignore the fact that the tribesmen were not Christians, while the Russians were. As sympathetic as he may have been, Woolsey could not help but observe, "Three religions have contended for mastery in the Caucasus; Mohammedanism, heathenism and Christianity. Of these, the two last are in the wane…".[33] And the Christian-oriented magazine, *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, characterized the people of Greater Circassia as "bigoted Moslems in religion."[34] At this time in the United States, matters of religion were of particular importance as the nation was caught up in the throes of what is often referred to as the Second Great Awakening, a period of evangelical Christian enthusiasm that dominated the cultural scene nation-wide.[35] This fact notwithstanding, the occasional reference to "bigoted Moslems" when discussing the Circassian resistance were far outnumbered by much more moderate and conditional references to Islam.

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[30] Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms,* 34; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 120.

[31] Noah Webster, *An American dictionary of the English language; containing the whole vocabulary of the first edition in ... quarto; the entire corrections and improvements of the second edition in ... octavo; to which is prefixed an introductory dissertation on the origin, history, and connection, of the languages of western Asia and Europe, with an explanation of the principles on which languages are formed. By Noah Webster ... Rev. and enl. by Chauncey A. Goodrich ... With pronouncing vocabularies of Scripture, classical, and geographical names* (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam, 1849), 183.

[32] *Webster's Academic Dictionary, A Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam, 1895), 97.

[33] Woolsey, "Art. VIII--Caucasus," 96.

[34] "A Remnant of Israel." *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, October 8, 1845, 162.

[35] On the Second Great Awakening and its political, economic, and cultural influence in the early nineteenth-century U.S., see Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade* (New York: MacMillian, 1938); Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Richard J. Carwardine, "The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers: An Examination of Methodism and the 'New Measures'," *Journal of American History* 59 (1972): 327–340; Whitney, R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790–1837* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1960);. Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York : Hill and Wang, 1978); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

One of the key ways that U.S. periodical writers softened the Muslim character of the fighters in the Caucasus was to point out that Islam was in a sense forced upon them. In the same 1854 essay cited above, William Dowe observed that

> Since the times of Justinian and the later period of the Genoese intercourse, the mountaineers were familiar with the observances of Christianity; but, after the middle of the eighteenth century, their hatred of the Russians disposed them toward the doctrines of Mohammed.[36]

Woolsey concurred, stating that

> Before neither Persian nor Greek, Byzantine, Tatar nor Turk, disturbed these children of nature in the possession of the sweet gift of freedom. That was reserved for a nation *calling itself Christian*. Christianity, as they must consider it, coming in such a shape, can only be hated. It would not be strange if they should be among the last of nations to receive its light. Political oppression, as so often happens, will prove a mordant to fix fast the dye of Islam upon them.[37]

Woolsey was not the only observer who considered Russia as a nation only "calling itself Christian." In 1854, *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* denigrated Russian Christianity, asserting "Europe has stood by while the faith of Poland was supplanted by the *grovelling idolatry of the Greco-Russian Church*, and has beheld, unmoved, the constitutional liberties of Hungary trodden under the heels of the drilled *forçats* of Russia;"continuing that despite being Muslim, "how much nobler is the nationality of the free Caucasian than that of the slaving Russ."[38] Thus Islam was characterized as more of a liberationist ideology than the backward and sacrilegious faith that Said claims was typical of Western observers.[39] As *The Eclectic Magazine* pointed out:

> Two things the Mollahs taught were necessary for all believers—to keep the *Scharyat* [Shari'a], and to destroy the infidels. "All your alms, all your watchings and prayers, all your pilgrimages to Mecca, avail you naught, so long as the eye of a Muscovite looks upon them. Your marriages are bad, your children are bastards, and the Koran is your destruction, so long as there is a Muscovite among you. Who can serve both Allah and the Muscovites?"[40]

And at least one source thought that once the Russians had been defeated, the Circassians would throw off Islam: "They were formerly Christians," said the *New York Daily Times*, "and, if freed from the fear and hatred of the Russians, would doubtless lose their dislike of Christianity, and—for reasonable considerations—receive baptism."[41]

How should we account for this seeming exception from the discourse of "otherness" that Said and many other scholars have claimed dominated (and continues to dominate)

[36] Dowe, "The Caucasus And Schamyl," 621.

[37] Woolsey, "Art. VIII--Caucasus," 109, emphasis added.

[38] "Schamyl, the Prophet-Warrior of the Caucasus," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, June 1854, 285, emphasis added.

[39] Said, *Orientalism*, 71-72.

[40] "Schamyl, the Prophet-Warrior of the Caucasus,"273.

[41] "Schamyl's Caucasian War.," *New York Daily Times*, August 11, 1854, 4.

Western writing about what we are calling the "Greater Middle East"? In my analysis, I see this as an expression of an ideological commitment to the abstraction of anti-imperialism on the part of early nineteenth-century U.S. writers. It is clear to me after reading through these many, many articles that the interest and sentiment expressed in the American press was a product not of anything implicit, or even real, in the conditions that existed in Greater Circassia—one thing that becomes quite clear in comparing the literature with actual historical details is how incredibly inaccurate almost all of it was—but was, rather, part of an evolving discourse among Americans about their own historical experiences and their national destiny. According to Said, Orientalism as he discusses it was a product of and, at the same time, productive of Western imperialism.[42] As such, the view of the "Oriental" quoted above—or as put more succinctly by Malini Schueller as "despotism, sensuality, idleness, moral flaccidity, effeminacy, and sexual aberrance,"[43]—serves as both the explanation and causative justification for dominating and controlling such backward, but dangerous "others." But looking eastward, editors, writers, and their readers in the U.S. saw in the Circassians a reflection—admittedly a cartoonish one—of their historical resistance to "Old World tyrannies" that could be held up as reinforcement of their own exceptionalism. Just as the Circassians of the popular imagination were "brave people struggling hard to defend their liberty,"[44]Americans had been, and continued to posture as the defenders of liberty. Just as the "air of liberty wafted from its heights"[45] would lead Circassia eventually to liberate Russia, the American "empire for liberty" would liberate its own neighboring despotisms. As Seymour Martin Lipset presciently noted back in the 1970s, and is now emerging as a paradigm in examining the era of the early republic, this was a profoundly postcolonial moment, calling for ideologies and images that could justify both the throwing off of legitimate authority and the imposition of new legitimate authority.[46]

It is ironic to note, however, that these same editors, writers, and readers carefully avoided applying their eastward-looking perceptions when looking westward. It is extremely telling that at the same time Russia was being chastised for attempting to "civilize and Christianize" the mountaineers in the Caucasus, the U.S. was fully engaged in an exactly parallel process of conquest on its own frontiers. In fact, it may well be that one reason that writers in the U.S. did not tend to "other" Circassians was because they already had an object for Orientalization in Said's sense closer to home. Richard Drinnon made this point clearly in his 1980 exposé, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*, which places the exoticization of Native Americans at the heart of white U.S. identity-creation.[47] In

[42] Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

[43] Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms*, 4.

[44] "Circassia," *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, April 1838, 489.

[45] Ibid.

[46] See Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979). Two excellent collections dealing with the postcolonial nature of early American history are Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts, eds., *Messy Beginnings; Postcoloniality and Early American Studies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003) and Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). Also, one cannot approach this subject without reviewing Benedict R. Anderson's, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

[47] See Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

this light, it is extremely telling that only one of the many observers of Russian expansion and Circassian resistance even mentioned any comparison to what was happening on the U.S. frontier at the same time; and that this one observation was met with ridicule and derision.

As the discussion above would suggest, in the early nineteenth century, when the articles concerning the Circassian War were being written, published, and read, two conflicting cultural forces were playing on the national consciousness in the U.S. The first was fear and envy of the great empires of Europe and a post-colonial insecurity that was expressed as rabid, though timid anti-colonialism.[48] It was this cultural force that gave rise to the perceived similarity between the U.S. and the beleaguered Circassians. The other force, however, was the ambiguous state engendered by the peculiar quality of ethnic existence in the U.S. As Schueller notes, U.S. culture had to allay "fears about the wholeness and stability of the nation in the face of diverse ethnic immigration."[49] Unity could be maintained through the assertion of perceived universal traits of U.S. culture as "democracy, rigorous Anglo-American morality, industry, healthy heteronormativity, and masculinity,"[50] traits as we have seen that could equally be ascribed to the Circassians, signifying that such traits could, indeed, transcend ethnic identity. At the same time, their own imperialistic activities in the American West challenged this reassuring and normalizing cultural invention in the U.S.[51] Hence when overt comparisons were offered between U.S. and Russian behavior and between Native American tribal people and the tribes in the Caucasus, it was immediately dismissed and ridiculed. The depth of this avoidance being clearly revealed in the fact that while J. D. Woolsey dismissed George Leighton Ditson's attribution of a "civilizing mission" to the Russians in the Caucasus, he did not address the comparison to U.S. activities on its own frontiers; to have addressed it would have been to breach the seal in the two-way compartmentalization of U.S. responses to colonialism, both in its recent past vis-à-vis Europe and its present and future vis-à-vis the American West and beyond.[52]

Of course it is possible, however, to view this literature in another way. Clearly in its tone, this discourse can be perceived as being as much or more anti-Russian as it was pro-Circassian. Certainly Russians in the nineteenth century thought that they were perceived as the "oriental other" by Westerners. Dostoevsky noted this, saying "This shame that Europe will consider us Asians has been hanging over us for almost two centuries now" and advocating that "[w]e must cast aside this servile fear that Europe will call us Asiatic barbarians."[53] Certainly there was some justification for this. One of the architects of the Great Game, Britain's Lord Curzon, was known to have quipped that Russia's efforts in Central Asia was a case of "a conquest of orientals by orientals."[54] Still, it does not seem to be the case that

[48] This forms the entire thrust of Sam W. Haynes's *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

[49] Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms*, 4.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 18.

[52] The existence of yet another major racial presence, African Americans, complicates the picture even more, creating what Schueller characterizes as "a triadic encounter in which the Africanist and Native American presences returned to haunt and question the cultural and political hegemony of the New World." Ibid., 9-10.

[53] Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Geok-Tepe. What Does Asia Mean to Us?" in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, trans. Kenneth Lantz, vol. 2 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 1369.

[54] Quoted in Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 219.

people in the U.S. generally shared that view, and with the exception of references to the Circassian War, statements about Russia in the popular press of the time were generally either neutral or flattering. As the title of Norman E. Saul's study of early relations between the U.S. and Russia makes clear, the two nations were "Distant Friends."[55] Hence it was only when Russia was conducting itself as an aggressive empire that U.S. writers found the nation reprehensible, reinforcing the interpretation that this discourse was rooted in ambivalent anti-colonialism rather than a general dislike for Russia and Russians.[56]

This study has sought to complicate the rather one-dimensional character of so-called "Orientalist" discourse as outlined by Edward Said by examining the way in which periodical literature in the United States during the early nineteenth century looked at a particular set of events in a particular region of the Greater Middle East. There clearly was a variety of U.S. Orientalism going on that was partially a product of an imperialist project, though only partially. Having the peculiar status of being, in Seymour Martin Lipset's words, "the first new nation," the U.S. had special needs in terms of framing a cultural justification for its existence and its actions. Malini Schueller notes many more examples of the role that the Greater Middle East played in this process, but the attention to the Circassian War by nineteenth-century U.S. newspapers and magazines provides a unique window for understanding how and why this U.S. Orientalism abandoned the usual strategy of distancing and adopted a strategy of bonding with at least one Oriental other.

[55] Norman E. Saul, *Distant Friends: the United States and Russia, 1763-1867* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991).

[56] No doubt, some of the anti-Russian tone stemmed from the fact that much of the news reported in U.S. periodicals originated from Great Britain, where anti-Russian sentiment was particularly strong. It should be noted, however, that U.S. publications also had direct news sources in Constantinople and elsewhere and, as noted, editors frequently inserted their own original commentary into stories reprinted from European and other sources. It would be a mistake, then, to assume that British biases were the exclusive or even the primary source of U.S. sympathy for the Circassians.

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