

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

**THE TRUE NATURE OF ARMENIAN MIGRATION  
ON THE EASTERN FRONT:  
THE CASE OF THE BİTLİS PROVINCE (1914-1922)\***

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**Abstract**

On 28 July 1914, when the First World War started, the Russian Caucasian army attacked the Ottoman lands in November 1914 and many Armenians joined the Russian army. Taking advantage of the this rebellion, Russian troops occupied Van on 20 May 1915 and dominated the region. With the occupation of Van, the Ottoman Government enacted the Law on Relocation and Resettlement on 27 May 1915 and relocated some Armenians in the war zones to the southern provinces of the Ottoman Empire for military reasons. In July 1915, the Russians, were forced to migrate the Armenians in the zone of occupation to the Caucasus. With the Russian occupation of Eastern Anatolia in 1916, the Armenians who had migrated returned. In 1917, with the withdrawal of the Russian Caucasian army, these Armenians had fled with the Russians. With the signing of the Armistice of Mudros, some Armenians came to Bitlis. In 1922, following the success of the Turkish War of Independence, Armenians who did not want to stay in Anatolia migrated to Istanbul and various Western countries.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Armenians experienced a continuous migration movement due to the war conditions. Bitlis was one of the provinces where this migration movement took place. One of the main reasons for choosing Bitlis as a sample is that it is a province with a high Armenian population density. Secondly, the occupation of Bitlis by the Russians. It is assumed that the Armenian migrations in Bitlis were political in nature rather than war-related. In this respect, it was determined that the Armenian population mobility in Bitlis took place eight times. As a result, it is possible to say that the main reason for such frequent mobility was that the Armenians acted with the Allies.

**Keywords:** *Ottoman Empire, World War I, Bitlis Province, Armenians, Migrations.*

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*There is no study that would require the approval of the Ethical Committee in this article.*

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## DOĞU CEPHESİNDE ERMENİ GÖÇÜNÜN MAHİYETİ: BİTLİS VİLAYETİ ÖRNEĞİ (1914-1922)

### Öz

28 Temmuz 1914'te Birinci Dünya Savaşı başladığı zaman Kasım 1914'te Rus Kafkas ordusu, Osmanlı topraklarına saldırmış ve birçok Ermeni, Rus ordusuna *iltihak* etmişti. Kalanların bir kısmı da Osmanlı Hükümetine *isyan* etmişti. Bu isyandan faydalanan Rus birlikleri, 20 Mayıs 1915'te Van'ı işgal ederek bölgeye hakim olmuştu. Van'ın işgaliyle birlikte Osmanlı Hükümeti, 27 Mayıs 1915'te Sevk ve İskân Kânunu'nu çıkarmış ve savaş muntıklarında bulunan bir kısım Ermeni'yi askerî gerekçelerle Osmanlı'nın güney vilayetlerine *sevk* etmişti. Temmuz 1915'te de Ruslar, işgal muntikasında bulunan Ermenileri, Kafkasya'ya *göç ettirmişti*. Rusların 1916'da Doğu Anadolu'yu işgaliyle birlikte göç eden Ermeniler, dönüş yapmışlardı. 1917 yılında ise Rus Kafkas ordusunun çekilmesiyle göç eden bu Ermeniler, Ruslarla beraber kaçmışlardı. Mondros Mütarekesi'nin imzalanmasıyla da Bitlis'e bir kısım Ermeni gelmişti. 1922'de ise Türk İstiklal Harbi'nin başarısıyla Anadolu'da kalmak istemeyen Ermeniler, İstanbul ve çeşitli Batı ülkelerine göç etmişlerdi.

Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın başlamasıyla birlikte savaş koşullarına bağlı olarak Ermeniler, sürekli olarak göç hareketi yaşamışlardır. Bu göç hareketinin yaşandığı vilayetlerden biri de Bitlis idi. Bitlis'in örneklem olarak seçilmesindeki ana sebeplerden biri öncelikle Ermeni nüfus yoğunluğunun olduğu bir vilayet olmasıdır. İkinci olarak da Rusların Bitlis'i işgal etmeleridir. Bitlis'teki Ermeni göçlerinin savaştan ziyade siyasi bir mahiyet taşıdığı varsayılmaktadır. Bu minvalde Bitlis'teki Ermeni nüfus hareketliliğinin sekiz defa gerçekleştiği tespit edilmiştir. Netice itibarıyla bu kadar sık hareketliliğin ana sebebi olarak Ermenilerin Müttefiklerle hareket etmesinden kaynaklandığını söylemek mümkündür.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Osmanlı Devleti, Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Bitlis Vilayeti, Ermeniler, Göçler.

## Introduction

As is well known, wars are one of the main factors that trigger migration. This was also the case during the First World War. For example, when the Russians occupied provinces such as Van, Trabzon and Bitlis, hundreds of thousands of Muslims migrated to the interior of Anatolia as refugees.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, non-Muslims migrated from the internal regions of Anatolia to the occupation zones. Therefore, there were migration movements of various elements in the Ottoman geography according to the course of the war. Armenians were one of them. Armenians migrated to various regions after the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War. However, the majority of this migration movement was due to the efforts of Armenians to establish an Armenian homeland in Anatolia, rather than being a migration due to war conditions. One of the places where the migration movement took place was the province of Bitlis.

The province of Bitlis consisted of Bitlis, Mus, Genc and Siirt sanjaks and their sub-provinces, and these settlements were inhabited by Muslims, Armenians and Assyrians. According to the 1914 Ottoman census, there were 119,096 Armenians in Bitlis.<sup>2</sup> Armenians were scattered throughout the entire Bitlis province. According to Kevorkian, at the beginning of the 20th century, Bitlis province had a dense Armenian population with 510 churches, 161 monasteries and 207 educational institutions (9,309 students). It was also a central station within the Eastern Turkey Mission. Bitlis was therefore an important settlement within the framework of the activities of the American Board organisation in the Ottoman Empire. In 1914, there were 13 elementary schools and two colleges affiliated with the American Board in Bitlis. These schools had a total of 489 students.<sup>3</sup> These schools founded by American missionaries had led to the emergence of the idea of nationalism among Armenians. American missionaries, who instilled the idea of an independent Armenia in Armenians, supported Armenians in every step they took, and assumed the role of their spokesperson and protector against the state.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, with the increase in the number of American missionary stations in Anatolia, the number of Armenian immigrants also increased.<sup>5</sup>

1 For the refugees of Trabzon, see: Güzin Çaykırın , “Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Trabzon’un İşgali ve Müslüman Mültecilerin Durumu” [The Occupation of Trabzon in the First World War and the Situation of Muslim Refugees], *Askerî Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol.19, No.33, December 2021, pp. 123-150.

2 Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı Nüfusu 1830-1914* [Ottoman Population 1830-1914], Timaş Publications, İstanbul, 2010, pp. 366-368.

3 Ayşegül Kuş and Gülbadi Alan, “Amerikan Board ve Bitlis’teki Çalışmaları (Amerikan Board Belgeleri Işığında)” [American Board and Its Works in Bitlis (In the Light of American Board Documents)], *History Studies*, Vol.11, No.5, October 2019, pp. 1405, 1424.

4 Dilşen İnce Erdoğan, “American Board Of Commissioners For Foreign Mission (ABCFM) Near East Relief’e Amerikan Misyonerlerinin Anadolu’daki Faaliyetleri” [The Activities Of American Missionaries From American Board Commissioners For Foreign Mission(ABCFM) To Near East Relief], *Belgi*, Vol.14, Summer 2017, pp. 563.

5 Hale Şivgin and Meryem Günaydın, “Amerika’dan Osmanlı Devleti’ne Ermenilerin Geri

Bitlis had an important place for Armenians. It was considered as a religious center. According to Armenians, the first Christianity was born here.<sup>6</sup> There were also pre-Christian pagan temples here. On the other hand, Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian alphabet, was born in these lands.<sup>7</sup> Surp Arakelatos Monastery (St.Apostles) and Msho Sultan Surp Karapet Monastery (Surp Hovhannes Mgrdich Monastery/Çengelli/Çanlı Church) were located within the borders of Moush. Armenians came here from Russia, Iran and various parts of the Ottoman Empire to make pilgrimages.<sup>8</sup>

When the First World War began, Armenians having who had lived in Bitlis gradually migrated from Ottoman lands. In this study, the mass migration of Armenians in Bitlis province during the First World War will be discussed. This study aims to determine the reasons for the Armenian migration movement and the direction of migration. It should also be noted here that the question of how to characterise the migrating Armenians within the Ottoman migration terminology is very difficult to distinguish. It is quite difficult to make a distinction. In some documents they are referred to as refugees, in others as Muhajir, in others as deserters, and in still others as infiltrators.

Why was Bitlis chosen as the sample? Because Bitlis was one of the provinces where Armenians lived densely. Moreover, Bitlis was occupied by the Russians during the First World War. This occupation had a great impact on the migration movement of Armenians in Bitlis. Therefore, it is assumed that the Armenian migration in Bitlis had a political nature. It is understood that Armenians migrated from Bitlis during the First World War mostly in the categories of *voluntary, mass, impelled* and *forced migration*. Voluntary migration is the migration carried out by individuals with their own decisions in order to have better opportunities.<sup>9</sup> Mass migration is defined as the movement of a large number of people.<sup>10</sup> Migration caused by social conditions is called impelled and

Dönüşleri (1908-1914); Tâbiyyet, Emlâk ve Arazi Meselesi" [The Armenian Repatriation 1908-1914, The Question of Nationality and Property], *Gazi Akademik Bakış Dergisi*, Vol.8, No.16, 2015, pp. 8.

6 quoted by Kevorkian and Paboudjian; Kasım Ertaş, "1915'ten Önce Bitlis Vilayetinde Ermeniler ve Vilayetin İdari Hayatındaki Konumları" [Armenians in Bitlis Before 1915 And Their Position in The Administrative Life Of The Province], *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol.8, No.16, 2017, pp. 79.

7 Nina G. Garsoian, "Erken Dönem Ermeni Hristiyanlığının Merkezi Olarak Daron (Muş)" [Daron (Moush) as the Centre of Early Armenian Christianity], *Tarihi Kentler ve Ermeniler: Bitlis ve Muş* [Historical Cities and Armenians: Bitlis and Moush], Trans. Z. Kılıç, Aras Publications, Istanbul, 2016, pp. 71.

8 Christina Maranci, "Pağes/Bitlis ve Daron/Muş'un Sanatı ve Mimarisi" [Art and Architecture of Baghesh/Bitlis and Daron/Mush] *Tarihi Kentler ve Ermeniler Bitlis ve Muş*, [Historical Cities and Armenians: Bitlis and Moush], Trans. Z. Kılıç, Aras Publications, Istanbul, 2016, pp. 127.

9 Salih Barışık, "Göç Kavramı, Tanımı ve Türleri" [Migration Concept, Definition and Types], Ed. S. Barışık, *Küreselleşen Dünyada Fırsat Eşitliği Arayışında Uluslararası Göç ve Türkiye'nin Suriye Deneyimi*, Gazi Bookstore, Ankara, 2020, pp. 12.

10 *Göç Terimleri sözlüğü*, Ed. Richard Perruchoud ve Jillyanne Redpath- Cross, 2nd Edition, Uluslararası Göç Örgütü (IOM), pp. 59.

forced migration. In this type of migration, the decision to migrate is not at the initiative of the migrants. Governments or social events have a dominant role in this type of migration.<sup>11</sup> No individual study has been found on the subject. The sources of the study are archival documents, works written in Armenian and other studies in the literature.

### **Armenian Migrations in Bitlis Province during the First World War**

On July 28, 1914, the First World War started and the Ottoman Empire declared its mobilization on August 2. The Ottoman Empire, which had to mobilize its army in a short time, entered the First World War on October 29, 1914, when the Ottoman navy bombarded Russian ports. In the face of this situation, Russia ordered the Russian Caucasian Army to cross the Turkish-Russian border and attack the Turks, and the Russian army started its offensive from the direction of Pasinler and Eleşkirt on November 1, 1914. On November 2, Russia officially declared war on the Ottoman Empire.<sup>12</sup> When the war started, the majority of Armenians started to act together with Russia. On 30 November 1914, with the declaration issued by the Armenian bureau in Tbilisi, they officially declared that they would side with Russia.<sup>13</sup>

Until the First World War, there was an intensive Armenian emigration in Bitlis. In particular, 51,950 Armenians emigrated to America between 1899 and 1914.<sup>14</sup> Between 1908 and 1914, some Armenians returned to Anatolia. Their number was about 4,390.<sup>15</sup> When the war started, Armenians from Bitlis would also join the Armenian Volunteer Units.<sup>16</sup> With the outbreak of the First World War, Armenian migrations from the Eastern Anatolia region began. According to Tatoyan, approximately 100,000 Armenians crossed into the Russian Caucasus region during this period.<sup>17</sup> Armenians in Bitlis rebelled in January 1915 in the

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11 Emre Dağaşan ve Selçuk Aydın, "Göçün Sosyal Hayata Yansımaları: 93 Harbi Döneminde Oltu'dan Tokat'a Bir Göç Hikâyesi" [Reflections of Migration on Social Life: A Story of 93 War Period Migration from Oltu to Tokat], Ed. O. Köse, *Geçmişten Günümüze Göç*, Vol.2, Canik Municipality Culture Publications, Samsun, 2017, pp. 738.

12 Kemal Arı, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Kronolojisi* [First World War Chronology], General Staff Printing House, Ankara, 1997, pp. 13, 18, 64-67.

13 Erdoğan, *ibid*, pp. 556.

14 Selim Hilmi Özkan, "Bitlis'ten Amerika'ya Ermeni Göçü ve Amerika'da Ermeni Diasporasının Faaliyetleri (1878-1915)" [Armenian Migration From Bitlis To The United States Of America And Activities Of The Armenian Diaspora In The United States Of America (1878-1915)], *Tarihi ve Kültürel Yönleriyle Bitlis*, Vol.1, Ed. M. İnbaşı and M. Demirtaş, Bitlis Eren University Publications, Ankara, 2019, pp. 523.

15 Şıvgın and Günaydın, *ibid*, pp. 24.

16 Bülent Cırık, *Doğu Anadolu'da Türk-Kürt-Ermeni İlişkileri* [Turkish-Kurdish-Armenian Relations in Eastern Anatolia], Yeditepe Publications, İstanbul, 2016, pp. 354.

17 Ռոբերտ Թաթոյան, Արևմտահայության թվաքանակի Հարցը 1878-1914 թվականներին, [The Problem of the Population of Western Armenians in 1878-1914], (Երևան: ՀՀԳԱԱ Հայոց Ցեղասպանության Թանգարան- Ինստիտուտ, 2015), էջ108.

villages of Sukur, Korsu, Ahkis, Beykeri, Arshin and Tasu<sup>18</sup>, and on February 20, 1915, rebellion broke out in the village of Viris in Bitlis and in the Muş Plain.<sup>19</sup> On February 27, 1915, near Moush, 50 Ottoman soldiers encountered an Armenian gang and clashed with them, but timely interventions prevented the incident from escalating.<sup>20</sup> According to Armenian sources, the rebellions in Bitlis were organized under the leadership of communist Rupen Ter Minassian. He had clashed with 50,000 armed Armenians and some 30,000 Ottoman soldiers and Kurdish reserves in and around Sasun.<sup>21</sup>

The Ottoman Empire was unable to prevent Armenian rebellions in the battlefields and the recruitment of Armenians to the Russian army, and decided that the Armenians in these areas should be relocated to regions far from the battlefields. Accordingly, *the law on the measures to be taken by the military for those who oppose the government during the campaign was enacted (Vakt-ı seferde icrâât-ı Hükûmete karşı gelenler için cihet-i askerîyece ittihat olunacak tedâbir hakkında kanun-ı muvakkat)*<sup>22</sup> the Ottoman Empire began to remove Armenians from the war zone. Bitlis was deemed a war zone and the Armenians there began to be relocated (sevk) the southern parts of the Mosul province and the Deir-i Zor sanjak.<sup>23</sup> It was reported that as of November 8, 1915, approximately 400 Armenians out of 109,521 Armenians had been transferred from Bitlis under the aforementioned law.<sup>24</sup> Because when the law was implemented, many Armenians from Bitlis fled to the mountains. According to the records of the General Staff, 20,000 people were displaced from Bitlis.<sup>25</sup> In another source, this number was 36,477.<sup>26</sup>

All Armenians in the center of Moush and the Moush Plain were relocated internally, but Armenians living in the mountainous areas remained where they were without being relocated.<sup>27</sup> However, some of the Armenians rebelled when they heard about the approach of the Russian Caucasian army. During the

18 Mehmet Hocaoglu, *Arşiv Vesikalarıyla Tarihte Ermeni Mezalimi ve Ermeniler [Armenian Atrocities and Armenians in History with Archival Documents]*, Anda Distribution, İstanbul, 1976, pp. 609.

19 *Cemiyet-i Akvam ve Türkiye'deki Ermeni ve Rumlar [Cemiyet-i Akvam and Armenians and Greeks in Turkey]*, Matbaay-ı Ahmet İhsan ve Şürekâsı, 1337/1921, İstanbul, (Unpublished typed text ATASE Library), pp. 23.

20 Archives and Military History Department Archives (ATASE), BDH-2820-69-2-4.

21 Güzin Çaykiran, *Erzurum, Van ve Bitlis Vilayetlerinde Ermeni-Kürt İlişkileri (1908-1920)*, Hece Publications, Ankara, 2020, pp. 134.

22 *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler (1915-1920) [Ottoman Documents on Armenians (1915-1920)]*, Devlet Arşivleri Publications, Ankara, 1995, pp. 8.

23 BDH-401-50-1-18.

24 Presidency Ottoman Archive (BOA), DH-EUM-2.ŞB-73-63-5.

25 *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914-1918 [Archival Documents and Armenian Activities 1914-1918]*, Vol.I, ATASE Publications, Ankara, 2005, pp. 147.

26 Aynur Çınar and Emir Çınar, "Tanıkların İfadeleri Işığında Bitlis-Ahlat'ta Ermeni Faaliyetleri" [Armenian Activities in Bitlis-Ahlat in the Light of Witness Testimonies], *I.Uluslararası 20.Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu Bildiriler Kitabı*, Iğdır, 2019, pp. 163.

27 BDH-401-50-1-33.

battles with the Armenians who rebelled under the leadership of Agop Kotoyan on June 28-30, 1915, 700 Armenian bouncers fled to the mountains. By the end of July, the number of Armenians who had fled to the mountains would reach up to 60.000-70.000.<sup>28</sup> In addition, migrations continued during this period and according to Demoyan, 1,500 Armenians from 109 villages migrated from Moush and its environs to Van and then to the Caucasus, to Yerevan and its environs.<sup>29</sup> On May 20, 1915, Van was occupied<sup>30</sup>, and in July 1915, the Armenians in and around Van were forced to migrate to the Caucasus by the Russians.<sup>31</sup> In Fevzi Çakmak Pasha's work titled "Eastern Front Operations in the First World War", he records the following about the migration:

*"According to Maslofski's statement, the reason why the Russians could not hold on in Kılıç Gedik was that there were many Armenian migrants in this region along with the Russians, and these migrants blocked all the roads with their herds of animals, carts and belongings and retreated with the troops in disarray. The infantry, especially the cavalry, were forced to protect the refugees. It can be seen that the Russians did not receive the help they had hoped for from the Armenians and, on the contrary, the Armenians became a nuisance. This statement also shows that the Armenians of this region were not forced to emigrate, rather they fled out of fear of the persecution of the Muslims in the region."*<sup>32</sup>

According to Fevzi Pasha, Armenians were migrating of their own wish. However, according to Armenian documents, Armenians were forced to migrate by the Russians. Accordingly, Armenians in Adilcevaz, Ahlat and Moush were also to migrate. According to Tatoyan, 34,000 Armenians from Bulanik and Malazgirt crossed to the Caucasus in line with this decision. According to statistics dated January 16, 1916, 8,965 Armenian refugee families from Bitlis province migrated to the Caucasus in one day. According to refugee records, According to refugee records, 1/3 one-third of the population died of disease and starvation during the migration.<sup>33</sup> Together with other regions, approximately 150,000-200,000 Armenians from the east were migrated to the

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28 Orhan Sakin, *Ermeni İsyanı Günlüğü 1915 [Diary of the Armenian Revolt 1915]*, Yeditepe Publications, İstanbul, 2014, pp. 233.

29 Հ. Դեմոյան, *Մարտնչուի Կյանքի ու Արժանապատվության Համար. Ինքնապաշտպանական Մարտերը Մեծ Եղեռնի Տարիներին*, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Հայոց Ցեղասպանության Թանգարան-Ինստիտուտ, Երևան, 2015, էջ25-29.

30 BDH-528-2061-23-21.

31 See: N. Günay ve G. Çaykırın, "Rusların 1915 Yılında Van Vilayeti ve Çevresinden Ermenileri Kafkasya'ya Göç Ettirmesi" [Russian Moved of Armenians from Van Province and its Surroundings to the Caucasus in 1915], *Gazi Akademik Bakış Dergisi*, 14 /27, 2020, pp. 133-150.

32 Fevzi Çakmak, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında Doğu Cephesi Harekâtı (1935 Yılında Harp Akademisinde Verilen Konferanslar) [Eastern Front Operations During The First World War (Lectures Given At The War Academy In 1935)]*, ATASE Publications, Ankara, 2005, pp. 98.

33 Robert Tatoyan, "WWI Armenian Refugees Census Data As A Source For Ottoman Armenian Population Numbers On The Eve Of The Armenian Genocide", *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies*, Vol.5, No.1, 2020, pp. 63.

Caucasus by the Russians during this period.<sup>34</sup> The refugees from Moush, Sasun and Bitlis were settled on the slopes of Mount Alagoz (Aragats), especially in Talin and the surrounding villages.<sup>35</sup>

According to Armenian documents, most of the migrations between 1914-1916 were to the Caucasus, while Armenians migrated to Iran, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, France and America. While some of these migrations were organized by the Russian authorities, others were organized by Armenian charities and Armenian churches. Various missionary organizations also provided assistance to the migrants.<sup>36</sup> The Russians captured Erzurum on February 16, 1916. After occupying Erzurum, they started their operations on Muş and Bitlis and occupied Muş on February 17 and Bitlis on March 2.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the Russians occupied Eastern Anatolia. Accordingly, Armenians who had been forced to migrate to the Caucasus began to return to the regions they had migrated to. By 1917, approximately 140,000 Armenians had returned to the region from Van to Trabzon and Erzincan.<sup>38</sup> However, there were also Armenians from Van and its surroundings who voluntarily migrated to the Caucasus.<sup>39</sup> Badalian states that the majority of these migrations between 1916 and 1917 were made up of men. With these migrations, some 2,000 Armenians returned to Bulanık and 4,000 to Malazgirt.<sup>40</sup> Tatoyan, on the other hand, states that after the occupation of Bitlis province, there were approximately 67,000 Armenian refugees between 1916 and 1917. Of these, 45,000 were from Bulanık, Malazgirt and the surrounding area, 8,400 from the Moush Plain (400 from the city of Moush), 1,000 from Bitlis and Ahlat, 700 from Varto, and 12,000 from Sasun.<sup>41</sup> In occupied Bitlis and its environs, Russian Colonel Movses Silikov in Moush had formed a gang of 300 Armenians from Moush and Sason under the leadership of Garo Sasuni. This gang made a living from looting and tried to bring the scattered Armenians to the centre of Moush. For example, the 100-man

34 Յ. Տէր Մարտիրոսեան, *Մեծ Դէպքերը Վասպուրականում 1914-1915 Թուականներին* [Important Events in Van in 1914-1915], Երևանի, Արարատ, 1917, <http://www.digilib.am/book/2100/2550/19999/Մեծ%20Դէպքերը%20Վասպուրականում%201914-1915%20թուականներին> (Access Date: 08.04.2023).

35 Aysenur Korkmaz, "At 'Home' Away from 'Home': The ex-Ottoman Armenian Refugees and the Limits of Belonging in Soviet Armenia", *Journal Of Migration History*, Vol.6, 2020, pp. 135.

36 Պ. Չոբանյան և ուրիշ, *Նոյն տեղ*, էջ 131.

37 *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekâtı* [Turkish Warfare in the First World War Caucasus Front 3rd Army Operation], Vol.II, General Staff Printing House, Ankara, 1997, pp. 114.

38 Ավետիս Հարությունյան, "Վանի Երջանային Վարչության Գործունեությունը (1917 Թ. Մարտ- Նոյեմբեր)", *Պատմա-Բանասիրական Հանդես*, Vol.1, 2015, էջ 66-67 <https://artsakhlib.am/2019/09/18/վանի-ըրջանային-վարչության-գործունեություն/>, Access Date: 05.05.2020

39 Birsen Karaca, *Sözde Ermeni Soykırımı Projesi* [The so-called Armenian Genocide Project], Say Yayınları, Ankara, 2006, pp. 93.

40 Գեղամ Մ. Բաղդյան, "Արեվմտյան Հայաստանի Պատմաժողովրդագրական Նկարագիրը Մեծ Եղեռնի Նախօրեին", *Վեմ համահայկական հանդես* Ը (ԺԳ) տարի, թիվ 3/55, հուլիս-սեպտեմբեր, 2016, էջ 6,14; Çaykiran, *ibid*, pp. 154.

41 Tatoyan, *ibid*, pp. 63.

gang of Manuk from Sassoun was able to bring 3,270 Armenians to Moush.<sup>42</sup> There were also Armenians who migrated from different parts of Anatolia and different geographies to the Russian-occupied territories under the delusion that the imaginary Armenia had been established.<sup>43</sup>

As it is known, with the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, a change occurred in the administrative structure of Russia and thus the Bolsheviks overthrew the Russian Tsardom. One of the first decisions of this new regime was to withdraw from the First World War. In this respect, the Bolsheviks signed the Erzincan Armistice with the Ottoman Empire on December 18, 1917 and began to withdraw their army from the Caucasus Front.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, with the withdrawal of the Russians, Armenians started to flee with the army.<sup>45</sup> During this escape, Ahmet İzzet Pasha, the Commander of the Ottoman Caucasus Armies Group, issued an order to the 2nd Army Command and ordered that the necessary measures be considered and taken in order not to disrupt the command and supply administration of the army due to the migration that occurred during the withdrawal of the Russian Caucasian army.<sup>46</sup> With the withdrawal of the Russian army, the Armenian Volunteer Units and the Armenian gangs that were organized in the region, starting from Erzincan and retreating to the Caucasus, annihilated the Muslim population, attacked their rape and honor, and plundered their property.<sup>47</sup> Together with the Russians, more than 300,000 Armenians migrated to Armenia. As a result of these migrations, Armenia's first president Hovhannes Kachaznuni compared Armenia to a *pile of ruins* in a speech to the Parliament.<sup>48</sup> During this period, about 180,000 people in Armenia died of hunger and epidemics. Among them was Aram Manoukian, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, during this period, Armenians migrated not only from Eastern Anatolia but also from Azerbaijan.<sup>50</sup>

42 Ռուբեն Սահակյան, «Առաջին Համաշխարհային Պատերազմի Տարիներին Տարոնահայությունը Օգնության Կազմակերպումը (1916-1917թթ.)» *Պատմա-Բանասիրական Հանդես*, Vol.1, 2011, էջ41-42, <https://artsakhib.am/2019/10/04/առաջին-համաշխարհային-պատերազմի-տարի/> (Access Date: 10.04.2023); Çaykiran, *ibid*, pp. 162-163.

43 Birsen Karaca, «Ermeni Kültüründe İdeolojik Bir Eyleme Dönüşen Anı Üretme Geleneği» [The Tradition of Producing Memories as an Ideological Action in Armenian Culture], *Ömer Engin Lüthem Konferansları 2019*, Ed. A.Kılıç, Terazi Publications, Ankara, 2020, pp. 102.

44 Nurcan Yavuz, «Erzincan Mütarekesi'nin Türk Tarihindeki Yeri ve Önemi [The Place and Importance of Erzincan Armistice in Turkish History]», *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol.17, No.28, 1995, pp. 207-232.

45 BOA, 272-10/EMVAL-İ METRUK-1-2-17.

46 Fikri Güleç, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi; 2'nci Ordu Harekatı 1916-1918 [Turkish Warfare in the First World War, Caucasian Front; 2nd Army Operation 1916-1918]*, Vol.2, part 2, General Staff Printing House, Ankara, 1978, pp. 258.

47 BDH-2910-455-9 (11 July 1917).

48 Վ.Բարխուդարյան, Ա. Հակոբյան, Հ. Հարությունյան, Վ. Ղազախեցյան, Է. Մինասյան, Է. Մելքոնյան, *Հայոց Պատմություն (Տորագույն Շրջան): Դասագիրք Հանրակրթական Դպրոցի 9-Ը դասարան*, (Խմբ. Վ. Բարխուդարյանի), Մանմար, Երևան, 2014, էջ11.

49 Ա. Ասրյան, «Արամ Մանուկյան. Ազգային Պետական Գործիչը», *Պատմա-Բանասիրական Հանդես*, Vol.1, 2019, էջ76-91

50 Վ.Բարխուդարյան և ուրիշ, *նույն տեղ*, էջ16.

On October 30, 1918, the Ottoman Empire withdrew from the First World War with the Armistice of Mondros. With the end of the war on the Ottoman front, Armenians started to return to Anatolia. Considering the massacres committed by the Armenian Volunteer Units during the withdrawal from the Caucasus Front and article 24 of the Armistice, the Ottoman Empire initially did not allow the return of Armenians to many eastern provinces and Bitlis.<sup>51</sup> In addition, these regions were excluded from the temporary settlement area due to the impossibility of transport, lack of housing and shortage of food.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, there were also complaints that they were threatened with death by local elements.<sup>53</sup> In February 1919, 551 Armenians initially returned to Bitlis province<sup>54</sup>, but by December 1922, this number had reached 13,000.<sup>55</sup> After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the Armenian population in Bitlis further decreased and many Armenians migrated to Istanbul and Western countries.<sup>56</sup>

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51 İbrahim Ethem Atnur, *Tehcirin Ardından Meseleler-Uygulamalar [Issues-Applications after the Relocation]*, Hitabevi Publications, Ankara, 2019, pp. 46.

52 İbrahim Ethem Atnur, "Osmanlı Hükümetleri ve Tehcir Edilen Rum ve Ermenilerin İskan Meselesi [Ottoman Governments and the Issue of Resettlement of Relocation Rumours and Armenians]", *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi*, Vol.4, No.14, 1994, pp. 125.

53 BOA, DH-ŞFR-108-10.

54 Bülent Bakar, *Ermeni Tehciri [Armenian Relocation]*, ATAM Publications, Ankara, 2009, pp. 190.

55 Atnur, *ibid*, pp. 70.

56 In 1923, it is recorded that there were approximately 35,000 Armenian refugees in Istanbul. BOA, HR-İM-49-67.

## **Conclusion and Evaluation**

From the First World War until the Turkish War of Independence, the main reason for the mobility of the Armenian population in Bitlis is seen as the war. However, this was not a forced migration due to the war. It was a result of the Armenians' dreams of establishing an Armenian state in the Russian occupation zones. The types of migration are *mass, voluntary, impelled* and forced. Let us categorise the Armenian migrations in Bitlis in terms of these types of migration:

1. Those who joined to support the Russian army in 1914 (*voluntary*),
2. Forced migrants under the Law on Relocation and Resettlement (27 May 1915) (*impelled, forced*),
3. Russian forced migration of Armenians from Van and its surroundings to the Caucasus (*impelled, forced*),
4. Those who returned from the Caucasus in 1916 (*voluntary, impelled*),
5. Those who migrated to the Caucasus with the withdrawal of Russia from the First World War (*forced, impelled*),
6. Those who voluntarily migrated to or from the occupation zones during the First World War (*voluntary*)
- 7-Those who returned in 1918 with the Armistice of Mudros (*voluntary, impelled*),
8. Migrants from Anatolia after the success of the Turkish War of Independence (*voluntary*).

In conclusion, Armenians in Bitlis experienced a continuous migration movement from 1914 to 1922. The main source of this movement can be attributed to the fact that the majority of Armenians sided with the Allies during the First World War. However, Muslim elements (Turks, Kurds, Circassians, etc.) were forced to migrate behind the Ottoman front when the Russians occupied Bitlis and Eastern Anatolia. When the war ended, they returned to the places they had migrated to.

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