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Reasons for Migration of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire before 1915

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Abstract

Migration has been common throughout human history and has been part of Armenian history for many centuries in varying degrees. However, at the end of the 19th century and in the early years of the 20th century, Armenians experienced an unprecedented rate of migration. The large outflow caused complications that affected many aspects of the social life of Armenians. They had lived in peace throughout the Anatolian territory without any geographical limitations until the last period of the Ottoman Empire when they began to be radicalized by some countries that wished to make Christian Armenians and Muslims enemies. Consequently, Armenians started to migrate abroad from Anatolia. This article examines the reasons for the migration of the Ottoman Armenians before World War I by reference to Ottoman archival documents.

Keywords

Ottoman Empire – Armenian – migration – Armenian migration

1 Introduction

Migration can be defined as the demographic process of moving, either across an international border or within a state. It is evident that migration has played a pivotal role throughout the years in shaping the world as we know it today. This process is certainly not a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, it has been a part of human history since the very beginning. The main purpose of migration is to find a better quality of life and to that end people migrate from one

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continent to another, from country to country, or internally inside the same country. These migrations can be classified into the following: individual, massive, temporary, free, compulsory and permanent migration. The Armenians migrated from Anatolia especially to the United States of America, Russia, European countries, Caucasus region and Iran for reasons that were political, religious and economic, but freedom and permanency were also important.[1] A great wave of migration took place in the Ottoman period before World War I when the empire was beginning to dissolve as populations resettled after the establishment of many new states.

During the Ottoman Empire, many Anatolian cities became political, religious, economic and cultural centres of Armenian life. Under the traditional Ottoman millet system, Christians and Jews were allowed to have recourse to their own legal institutions, which included both episcopal and communal courts, and to develop their own regulations according to their customs and traditions within the empire.[2] The Ottoman Empire itself was not a nation state, but a multinational theocracy. For the first centuries of its existence, the Ottoman Empire had the majority of the population was Muslim. By the sixteenth century, the split between the Muslim and the non-Muslim population in the empire had flipped to approximately 55%-45%. According to Hupchick's guess, "in the early sixteenth century the total population of the Ottoman Empire numbered some 12 million people, of which the five million inhabitants of the empire's Balkan possessions comprised 41.7 percent. The 4.1 million Christians living in those territory represented 81 percent of the Ottoman Balkan population and 34.2 percent of all Ottoman subjects."[3] According to the census of 1844, Muslims constituted about 60 percent and Christians 35 percent of the total Ottoman population in the Balkans and Anatolia. The ratio had not changed much in 1875. After the loss of Macedonia and Northern Greece in 1913, the Christian population decreased to barely 10-15 percent, while the Turkish or Muslims percentage of the overall population increased rapidly.[4] On the eve of the end of the empire in the early twentieth century,

1 İpek, Nedim. "Anadolu'dan Amerika'ya Ermeni Göçü." *OTAM* 6, (1995): 257-279.

2 Diap, A. Razi. "Religion and the law in Syria" http://www.acihl.org/article.htm?article_id=26, Accessed May 10, 2018.

3 Hupchick, Dennis P. *The Bulgarians in the Seventeenth Century: Slavic Orthodox Society and Culture under Ottoman Rule,* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company Publishers, 1993); McCarthy, Justin. "The Population of the Ottoman Armenians", *The Armenian in the Late Ottoman Period*, Edited by: Turkkaya Ataov, (Ankara: *The Turkish Historical Society*, 2001).

4 Karpat, Kemal. *An Inquiry Into the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State: From Social Estates to Classes, From Millets to Nations,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

ideas might have been instilled into their minds.[92] Under these circumstances, the Ottoman government sent a circular to local trade consuls on Russia's borders in August 1900. This circular mentioned that some persons had come to the port of Trabzon who claimed to be citizens of Dagestan and Georgia but it was very difficult to determine from which tribe and sect they had come. In such a way, Armenian communities might have tried to pass through the Ottoman border. The government warned local trade consul's staff to be careful and examined their passports and visa documents thoroughly before giving them permits.[93]

6 Conclusion

Armenians lived in peace and tranquility under Seljuk, Mameluke, and Ottoman rule for hundreds of years until European countries became more concerned about the fate of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. Armenian nationalism resulted from this concern. Subsequently, many fled to the United States, Russia, Iran, Georgia and European countries. As a result, Armenians migrated for various reasons such as political factors, environmental factors, extradition to home countries, economic and educational factors, and temporary emigration. This migration activity which took place in the 19th century satisfied neither the Armenians nor the Ottoman Empire. However, some Armenians who migrated to Russia, Iran and Georgia came back to engage in rebellion against the Ottoman government. The Ottoman Empire took some precautions against the Armenian migration but the migration just increased. Ottoman administrators did not put political pressure on the Armenians who willingly migrated from Ottoman territories. In fact, the Ottoman Empire tried to prevent Armenian migration and established a commission to investigate the reason for this migration. Unfortunately, the French Revolution affected Armenian people like other Ottoman minority groups. At the same time, missionary activities took a leading role in the rise in Armenian nationalism. This nationalism affected Armenian migration.

92 Ekinci, *Ibid*, 50.

93 BOA, *Y.MTV*, 204/63.

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