

## **EXPLORING KURDISH MIGRATION IN HAKKÂRI IN 1915 USING A CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH**

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### **Abstract:**

The First World War stands as a pivotal moment in history, marked by the collapse of three major empires and the emergence of new states. Alongside the staggering human toll of the war, forced migrations catalyzed by the conflict resulted in profound human tragedies. Prior to the war, individuals of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds coexisted under the Ottoman Empire's rule. However, the imperial policies of various states during the war led to tensions between non-Muslim subjects and Muslims. These tensions culminated in conflicts that forced both Muslims and non-Muslims to flee their homes. In the region of Hakkâri, clashes between Nestorians and Kurds prompted the mass emigration of both groups. Kurds, an ancient people of Hakkâri, had previously cohabited with the Nestorians/Assyrians in the Hakkâri mountains until 1915.

**Keywords:** First World War, forced migration, ethnic conflicts, Ottoman Empire, Hakkâri.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The First World War is a historical turning point in which three great empires collapsed and new states were formed. In addition to the great human losses caused by the war, there were also forced migrations in which human tragedies occurred. Before the war, people with different ethnic and religious affiliations had lived together under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. However, non-Muslim subjects who were influenced by the imperial policies of different states during the First World War came into conflict with Muslims. As a result of these conflicts, Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, were forced to migrate (Tekir, 2016: 43 to 63; Turan, 2012: 80 to 120). The Nestorians and Kurds in Hakkâri clashed with each other and both had to emigrate from the region. The Kurds, who are one of the ancient peoples of Hakkâri, lived together with the Nesturi/Assyrian people in the Hakkâri mountains until 1915. These two peoples had lived together for centuries in friendly and good neighborly relations. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the missionaries sent to the region by the states such as England, America, France and Russia (Verheij, 2016: 79), caused religious, linguistic and ethnic divisions between the neighboring peoples (Bar Mattay, 1996: 14 to 15). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Nestorian Patriarch was in constant contact with the Russians, and this relationship paved the way for the transition of a large number of Nestorians to the Russian Orthodox Community (Yonan, 1999: 36 to 37). On the other hand, English Anglican missionaries such as William Browne stayed in Hakkâri for a long time and kept reports on the demographic, political

and geographical structure of the region and sent them to their state (Verheij, 2016: 82 to 87). As a result, the Nestorians considered the representatives of the foreign states as a guarantee of their security, and severed their relations with the Ottoman State and their neighbors, the Kurds. Nevertheless, in order not to lose the ancient relations with the Nestorians, as well as with all minorities of the Ottoman Empire, the Governor of Van, the local representative of the state, invited the Patriarch of Nesturi to the province of Van and tried to understand his relations with foreign states. During the negotiations, the governor stated that the Patriarch's demands would be met, but he wanted his relations with foreign states to be cut off (Stafford, 1935: 18-20; Surma, 2015: 82 to 83). It is clear from the archival documents that the Ottoman Empire ordered its representatives in the region to resolve the Nesturi and Kurdish conflicts with constant reconciliation, which arose intervally during the period from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1915 in order to ensure peace in the region (BEO.223/16719-001, June 7, 1309; BEO.227/16960-001; A.MKT.MHM.670/13-002, June, 3 1313). When the First World War began in 1914, the British advance through Iraq and the Russian movement through Northeastern Anatolia caused panic in Hakkâri. As a result of these movements, the Nestorian Patriarch and his family left the village of Kochanis (Mansion), which was the center of the Patriarchate, in March 1915, and settled in the Nesturi Dêz tribe (Surma, 2015: 81 to 89). In the face of the Russian invasion that started towards Van, the Hakkâri Kurdish tribal leaders held a meeting with the Nesturi Patriarch, who was in the village of Dêz, to reach an agreement and develop a common strategy. During the meeting, Kurdish leaders made statements such as "Nasturi and Kurds have a common history based on friendship, it would be harmful for both communities to act together with the Russians ..." (Kaplan, 2020: 274; Xet Nezan, the interview dated 17.04.2019). But the Patriarch and the Nestorians did not step back despite all the efforts of the Kurds, saying that they would act together with the Russians in the war, and, indeed, Hakkâri would remain under Russian rule and the Nestorians would also be granted status (Korkmaz, 2021: 151 to 152). In addition, the Patriarch's relative Nemrut Efendi also told the Patriarch that, if the Nestorians acted together with the Russians and the British, they would lose everything, especially their lives (Parhad, 2009: 31). Starting from the spring of 1915, Nesturi and Kurdish tribes clashed in the region. Therefore, when the news of the Russian advance into the region reached Hakkâri, the Kurds in Hakkâri began to migrate towards Iraq in the spring of 1915. Bahdinan Kurdish tribes living in Iraq, together with the emigrating Hakkâri tribes and the military units under the command of the Governor of Mosul, Heydar Bey, after heading to Hakkâri in June 1915, forced the Nestorians to migrate to the Iranian territory by breaking the Nestorian blockade in September 1915 (Korkmaz, 2021: 155 to 156). Since there is no information in the literature about the Kurdish migration, the data were collected entirely based on field research-related testimonies and Ottoman archival documents. Both Nasturi and Kurds emigrated during the events that took place in Hakkâri in 1915. Although there is certain literature about the Nasturi migrations, there has not been any text written on the Kurdish migrations. In this respect, a field study was conducted in Hakkâri and Northern Iraq to determine the causes and consequences of the Kurdish migration that took place one hundred and seven years ago. In addition to the field research, the study was supported by several documents that could be

found in the Archives of the Ottoman Empire. This article, consisting mostly of data obtained as a result of field work, is the first study conducted in the field of Kurdish migration in Hakkâri in 1915. Therefore, despite the difficulties of collecting data, an original study has been conducted and made public.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study is about Kurdish migration that started as a result of Russian occupation of Hakkâri in 1915. Kurds, who are the ancient people of Hakkâri, lived together with Nestorians in friendship and good neighborly relations for centuries. Missionaries sent to the region by states such as England, America, France and Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Verheij, 2016: 79) created religious, linguistic and ethnic distinctions between neighboring peoples (Bar Mattay, 1996: 14-15). Especially for the Nestorians, the Assyrian identity defined by the British Archaeologist Henry Layard has been influential in these distinctions. With Layard's excavations in the Mesopotamian region, it has been claimed that the Nestorians living in the Hakkâri region are ethnically descendants of the Assyrian Empire (Verheij, 2016: 82-87). This identification was accepted by the Nestorians. However, Kurds and Nestorians living in Hakkâri lands did not question each other's ethnic bases. In fact, Nestorians living in Hakkâri and its environs lived under the Ottoman Empire's millet systems, depending on the Armenian community living in Van and its environs. Since this system is based on religion, ethnic bases were not important. In addition, in daily life, Kurds and Nestorians de facto considered themselves to belong to the same nation. Despite the situation described above, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nestorians and Kurds entered into tribal conflicts. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Nestorian Patriarch was in constant communication with the Russians. In this sense, many Nestorians passed to the Russian Orthodox Community (Yonan, 1999: 36-37). On the other hand, British Anglican missionaries, such as William Browne, stayed in Hakkâri for a long time and made reports about the demographic, political and geographical structure of the region and sent them to their state (Verheij, 2016: 8287). English and American missionaries have caused the deterioration of Kurdish and Nestorian relations and the unraveling of their historical ties (Bruinessen, 2003:343). In particular, the Nestorian Tiyar tribe, under the influence of missionaries, not only refused to recognize the authority of the Ottoman State, but also constantly attacked the Muslims around them (Deniz, 2021:174). According to Ely B. Soane, American, French and English missionaries who came to the region of Hakkari where Nestorians lived, caused the deterioration of the relationships between Nestorians and Kurds (Soane, 2007:178-181). As a result of all these developments, the Nestorians cut off their relations with the Ottoman State and its neighbors Kurds because they saw the representatives of foreign states as the guarantee of their security. Despite this, the Governor of Van, as the local representative of the Ottoman State, invited the Nestorian Patriarch to the province of Van and asked about his relations with foreign states. The governor told the Patriarch that his demands would be met on condition that they cut off relations with foreign states (Stafford, 1935: 18-20; Surma, 2015: 82-83). However, the archive documents show that the Ottoman Empire tried hard to solve Kurdish and Nestorians conflicts by reaching a consensus (BEO.223/16719-001, June 7, 1309). When the First World War started in 1914, Russia and Britain's appearance in Northeast Anatolia and Iraq caused

panic in Hakkâri. In the face of the Russian invasion towards Van, the Kurdish tribal leaders from Hakkâri held a

Meeting with the Nestorian Patriarch in the village of Dez. In this meeting, the Kurdish leaders made statements: "Nestorians and Kurds have a historical background based on friendship, if they act together with the Russians, it would be harmful for both communities ..." (Xet Nezan, interview dated 17.04.2019). However, despite all the efforts of the Kurds, the Patriarch and the Nestorians did not take a step back; they wanted to act together with the Russians in the war and that Hakkâri and its surroundings would now remain under Russian domination (Korkmaz, 2021: 151-152). In addition, Nemrut

Efendi, the relative of the Patriarch, told the Patriarch that, if the Nestorians acted together with the Russians and the British, they would lose everything, especially their lives (Parhad, 2009: 31). Nestorian and Kurdish tribes clashed in the region after the spring of 1915. Therefore, when the news of about Russians reached Hakkâri, the Kurds in Hakkâri started to migrate to Iraq in May 1915. After that migration, Bahdinan Kurdish tribes living in Iraq, along with the migrated Hakkâri tribes and military units under the command of Mosul Governor Haydar Bey, headed to Hakkâri in June 1915, breaking the Nestorian blockade and forcing them to migrate to Iranian lands in September 1915 (Korkmaz, 2021: 155 to 156). Since there is no information in the literature about the Kurdish migration in Hakkâri that took place in 1915, which is the subject of this study, the data were collected entirely through field research-based testimonies. Because this migration includes aspects such as structure-actor, identity, discourse, and social reality, the analysis of the research data was analyzed with constructivism or social construction theory. In the research, it was found that the immigrants suffered great losses as a result of hunger and diseases. In this sense, the Kurdish migrations have been preserved in the memory of the Kurds of Hakkâri for many years. It is important that the findings related to these migrations are collected and are subject of scientific analyses.

## **METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH (CONSTRUCTIVISM)**

Nestorian people recorded their experiences on the migration routes after they migrated from Hakkâri. However, Hakkâri Kurds could not write about the migrations they made in the First World War, the tragedies they experienced, or different events. When the field research was initiated, the people who had the knowledge about the Hakkâri migration of 1915 were carefully selected. Given the fact that one of the researchers in the study was born and grew up in the region that is researched, he is not a stranger to the subject and he learned about the immigration from his relatives. Therefore, the fact that the researcher is an insider has made a great contribution to the in-depth study of the research field. However, there have also been times when this situation has affected the researcher's assessment of events with a less objective eye by including his own feelings in the work. At such moments, questions and comments posed by the other researcher,

who is an outsider without knowing the subject at all and without any emotional involvement, played an important role in bringing the events back into the academic perspective. For example, a group of people

who are close relatives of the field researcher immigrated to Iraq in 1915 and still reside there. These people have provided important information about the period of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the study (Appendix-2). The answers to the questions asked in the interviews were usually in the style of a story, as they tried to illuminate the events of one hundred and seven years ago. Before starting the interview, the interviewee was informed about the research and permission was requested to record the interview. In order for the interviewed people to remember the events related to the study period, the interview was started by drawing up a historical framework about the period. Interviews were conducted individually and detailed interviews were also conducted with people who are experts in the subject. The total number of 17 Kurdish interviewees who were found to have knowledge about the subject were interviewed (Appendix Table 1). The interviews lasted between half an hour to an hour. The interviewees' age varied from 50 to 100. The reason for selecting this age group is because the interviewees have heard about these events from their ancestors, that is, their grandparents and greatgrandparents. According to the interviewees, they learned about the 1915 migration from their elders, and these information are still passed down today. Indeed, historical events in Kurdish geography are passed down from generation to generation, preventing them from being forgotten. On the other hand, there is no document available on the research topic.

Kurdish language was used in the interviews and the interviews were translated into Turkish language during the deciphering process. As the audio recordings were kept, the names of the participants in the interview were coded, whereby the scientific ethics was respected. Although the migration did not occur long ago from the historical perspective, the number of people who have knowledge about the period is very limited. The research questions were prepared in accordance with the purpose and problematic of the study, and everything was done to ensure the validity of the questions. In the interviews, audio recordings were taken without interfering with the participants' narratives and these recordings were analyzed after being written down. The interview texts that were deciphered for the analysis process passed through three stages of reading. In the first reading, all the texts were just read without any classification and intervention, in order for the researchers to understand the events in the spirit of the specific time and from a holistic point of view. In the second reading, the common topics in the interviews were identified and the texts related to the common topics were collected in a single file. In the third reading, texts classified according to the topics were read and the researchers tried to decipher the relationship between the events and the meanings which were hidden between the lines. The findings of the field research were analyzed with the help of the aforementioned method by blending them with the principles of constructivism. Constructivism was applied as the research model of the study to test whether the findings obtained in the study are consistent. Historically speaking, the relationship between Kurds and Nestorians has developed in a social context. However, with the events of World War I, these relationships came to the forefront in a political aspect. In this regard, constructivism theory allows for events to be structured and evaluated from a socio-political perspective by focusing on identity, interests, and sociological construction. Additionally, constructivism prioritizes the interpretive and



explanatory aspect of sociology. Therefore, constructivism was considered appropriate for the analysis of this research. The best way to understand the accuracy of a narrative is to provide detailed information about the event from the narrator. If there are no contradictions in these details, this is an important clue of the reliability of what has been described. However, the data obtained due to the disclosure of people's traumas in this study, which examined the forced migration event of a certain period, also could not stay away from the neuro-psychological effects. Nonetheless, since the study data showed consistency in terms of consistency of location and time, it was evaluated that they had a high accuracy rate. According to Medved and Brockmeier (2010), it is not important whether a narrative is true or not, but that it is consistent in terms of time and space. The consistency of the stories depends on the fact that they are well structured. In this direction, if a narrative can get a context by organizing the dramatic complexity in an understandable way, this narrative is considered a good story (Medved and Brockmeier, 2010: 19).

After the Cold War, the rational approaches of mainstream international relations (IR) theories (such as realism, liberalism) began to be questioned. Attempts were made to state that international politics cannot be conducted only through power, interests, economy, and security. Different conflicts of thought have arisen on this issue, and the theory that draws the general framework of these conflicts of thought has become constructivism. This theory has started a new debate by claiming that the concepts such as discourse, culture, identity and ideas are also effective in IR beyond the concepts such as power, interest or anarchy. Thus, constructivism has emerged as an alternative to realism (Akdemir, 2012: 18; Walt, 1998). Constructivism has been referred to as the "middle ground" between positivism and post-positivism or as the "third debate". The most important founders of the theory are Nicholas Onuf, Stephen Walt and Alexander Wendt (Emeklier, 2011: 141). The history of constructivism can be dated back to Kant, Vico and Hegel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These thinkers said that knowledge is built socially. Accordingly, knowledge emerges not theoretically and philosophically, but ontologically. In this ontology, meaning is based on phenomena such as norm, structure, idea, identity (Büyüktanır, 2015). The main originating point of constructivism is that it determines an approach that rises above the previous approaches and draws them into a different field. In his book "Social Theory of International Politics", Alexander Went emphasizes the importance of the concepts of "power", "interest" and "identity" and puts forth that these concepts have an important place in the processes of social construction (Wendt, 1999: 92 to 120). All constructivists have made the following three main statements about social life. The first is that structures shape the behaviors of social and political actors (individuals and states). In addition, while neo-realists emphasize material elements such as the balance of military power, and Marxists emphasize the structure of the capitalist world economy, constructivists argue that the system consisting of shared ideas, beliefs and values is in structured form and these qualities affect political and social action. Accordingly, material elements can have an effect on human action only through the structure formed by shared knowledge (Reus-Smit, 2013: 294). Secondly, constructivists have recognized that discourse, ideas and meanings have an important mission in explaining the identities of societies and, moreover, that these identities constitute interests. Thirdly, the structure and the actor build each other bilaterally. As a result, subjective

and intellectual structures determine the identities and interests of those who make them through three basic mechanisms such as imagination, limitation and communication (Ari, 2013: 507).

The theory of constructivism is built on social structuring, social interaction, social reality and common ideas. In addition, concepts such as structure-actor, identity, power-interest have also entered the research field of constructivism. Since these concepts will be used in the analysis of the study, it is important to briefly explain them. In order to reach social reality, it is necessary to focus on the social processes that reveal reality. According to Berger and Luckmann, social life has emerged as a subjective reality, in which the world is interpreted subjectively by people (Berger and Luckmann, 1991: 33). Social interaction is the transfer of information, culture, etc. to each other, as well as the mutual influence of individuals and societies. In the same way, this interaction is important in the emergence and change of human behavior. Human behavior has also largely been shaped by taking others as an example and being influenced by them (Bandura, 1977: 197). The common idea refers to thoughts on which a large number of people have a consensus in a certain time and space. According to Henry Mendras, if all members of a social group agree on something, it can be said that it is a common idea, since it has been shared by all the members of the group (Mendras, 2014: 83 to 85). Being a member of a particular group can be measured in the same way by adherence to the common ideas and values determined by that group (Smolicz, 1981: 75).

Wendt emphasizes in the structuring approach that both structures and the doers (actors) cause mutual dependence on each other. Structures include material elements as well as intellectual factors. In this way, Wendt does not reject the ties of material forces which are independent of ideas; he only assumes that these material forces are less important than the meaning imposed on them (Ekici, 2018: 35). Identity can be defined as the person's answers to the questions such as "who am I?" and "who are we?" and as a "collective identity" as a plural sign of social belonging (Alpman, 2018). According to the constructivist understanding, the international community affects the identities of states in different ways. In particular, membership in well-known international organizations leads to the acquisition of certain identities, as well as providing legitimacy to states. This gives information about the direction in which the states will act (Ari, 2013: 501).

Constructivism clarifies the asymmetries of power between states through the balance of power concept. The balance of power can be explained by two methods. According to the first method, when one state accumulates more power than others and begins to dominate IR, other states accept this power as a threat to them and act together to unite against this threat and they try to eliminate it. According to the second method, the state or states prefer to achieve the balance of power by increasing their military forces in the face of a threat (Urkan, 2016: 58).

## **THE KURDISH MIGRATION IN HAKKÂRI IN 1915 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

### **Developments forcing Kurds to migrate**

At the beginning of 1915, when the sound of war began to reach the Hakkâri mountains, a delegation of twelve people consisting of Hakkâri Kurdish tribal leaders and the aforementioned people held a number

of meetings with the Nasturi Patriarch Mar Shimun Beyamin, but the Patriarch did not give them a positive return. On the other hand, the Russians occupied the region in May 1915 (Günay and Çaykiran, 2020: 137) and began to come towards Hakkâri. Realizing that their lives would be endangered by the Russians advancing towards Hakkâri, in contact with the Nasturi leaders, the Kurds began migrating towards Iraq in May of the same year. Detailed narratives about this migration are given below. Because the Kurdish migrations in Hakkâri and its districts occurred at different times and routes, these migrations have been explained under different headings. The Kurds in Hakkâri city center, Yuksekova and Semdinli migrated to Iraq in 1915. The Cukurca Kurds, on the other hand, had to emigrate in 1916.

### **Migration in Hakkâri City Center**

The findings about the migration of the Kurds in Hakkâri to Iraq in 1915 were obtained from the interviewed people who heard about it from their grandmothers and grandfathers. In May 1915, the Kurds both in the villages and the city center in Hakkâri, set out towards Kurdish Region of Northern Iraq by following the route of Durankaya, Gecitli and Kavakli. The route set for the migration towards the area in Iraq was meandering; and, since there were Tiyyar and Tuhup tribes of the Nesturi in the Zap valley, which was closer to the destination, it was dangerous for Kurds to advance from Zap Valley (Çölemerikli, 2006: 372 to 375). According to the narrating from Xet Nezan, the migration process was difficult because there was a lot of hunger and diseases on the migration route. On the other hand, there was also a Russian danger in the Farashin plateau located on the migration route. During the war, the District Governor of Hakkâri and few soldiers in the neighborhood withdrew from Hakkâri (Xet Nezan, interview dated 17.04.2019). As a result, the Kurds who migrated from Hakkâri reached Iraq in the summer of 1915 after various difficulties. Negative stories about the migration were recorded in interviews with different people. According to a narration from Hatem, who lived in the Feqiran neighborhood and was nicknamed Kurdish Seyda:

“When the Kurds migrated to Iraq, they became miserable both on their routes and in the destinations, and they were not even able to meet their basic needs such as food, water, etc. And this situation continued for months. Apart from hunger and misery, diseases and climate change also negatively affected their lives. Many people lost their lives in Iraq and some even got lost there. As a result, two-thirds of the population lost their lives. My grandfather's relatives and sons of our uncle died in Iraq. When the Bolshevik Revolution broke out in Russia, our people gradually began to return to Hakkâri” (Seyda, the interview dated 27.06.2019).

Prof. Hoger Tahir from Zaho University also conveyed the migration narrative of the Kurds from Hakkâri in 1915 as follows: “According to what I have heard from our ancestors, Dr. Istirciyan of Armenian in Zaho said that the situation of Kurds who migrated to Iraq was very bad at the time of migration, that a starving mother would eat the body of her dead baby. In 1920, according to the Governor of Mosul, Abdulaziz-al-



Kasap, the funerals of Kurds coming from Van and Hakkâri were held in the area the surviving Kurds were also in significant financial difficulties<sup>1</sup>” (Prof. Hoger Tahir, the interview dated 20.09.2019).

The following data were obtained in an interview with the Kurd Hacı Colemergi:

“Missionaries from other countries spoiled the relationship between the Nestorians and the Kurds. The main purpose of the missionaries was to bring together the Armenians living in Van and the Nestorians in Hakkâri under their domination and to make the Kurds migrate from these places. My father was two years old during the war and was taken to Iraq on his father's lap. My father and his family settled in the Iraqi town of Bamernê. According to my father's determination, the Kurds suffered great losses due to the migration that took place in 1915, because the Russian state protected the Nestorians and the Nestorians did not remain unprotected wherever they went. But the Kurds from Hakkâri also remained unprotected and miserable in Iraq, in addition to the difficulties on the migration route” (Hacı Colemergi, the interview dated 04.09.2019).

### **Yuksekoa and Şemdinli migration**

The majority of Kurdish migrations in Hakkâri took place in 1915, but the people of Hakkâri city center, Yuksekova and Semdinli did not migrate via the same route. Some of the people in Yuksekova migrated to Iraq and some to Iran. The people of Semdinli, on the other hand, usually migrated to Iraq. Each region or village migrated to the nearest place to them. Hacı Mehmet Diri described the migration of 1915 as follows:

“Kurds in Yuksekova migrated to Iraq and Iran through Dağlica as a result of Russian attacks in 1915. However, there was no conflict between the Nestorians and Kurds in the center of Yuksekova, because the Nestorians in Yuksekova left the region without fighting with the Kurds since they were raiyat<sup>2</sup>. The most important reason for the migration was that the Kurds were afraid of the Russians and the Nestorians were afraid of the danger that might come from the Ottoman Empire. Big states bred bad blood between both groups of people for the sake of their interests. But before the war, both groups were in mutually friendly relations” (Hacı Mehmet Diri, the interview dated 29.06.2019).

Hacı Hasan Oramari also described the migration of 1915 as follows:

“The Nestorians in the Daglica region (Serpêl and Ştazin villages) left their villages without a fight; however, the Cilo tribe living in the mountainous region had violent clashes with the Kurds and migrated from their areas. When the Nestorians emigrated, the rumors that the landlord of Daglica called Sûto or Star massacred them are baseless. I heard all this information from my ancestors” (Hacı Hasan Oramari, the interview dated 29.06.2019).

Esfendiyar Diri, who was interviewed in Yüksekova, said that during the war period, the Nestorians killed many people from the Diri tribe living in Yüksekova. However, the Diri tribe helped the Nestorians reach Urmia comfortably during the migration period (Esfendiyar Diri, the interview dated 29.06.2019). This section may seem conflicting, but according to Esfendiyar Bey's narratives, there has been an understanding of a longstanding history between the two groups. As a result, even in times of war, the

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hoger Tahir told us that he got this information from the page 152 of the book “The Memoirs of Abdulaziz Kasap”, compiled by Abdulaziz Kasap's son Xalit Abdulaziz in 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Nestorians are not affiliated with any tribe.

understanding between the groups has not been entirely lost. For instance, the Nestorian Tuhubilers' capture of Çukurca Kurds in 1917, without committing any harm and subsequently releasing them, can be seen as a reflection of this longstanding understanding. According to Surma Hanım, the Russians took Assyrian /Nestorian men to armed training in Iran in

1916 and sent them to fight with the Kurds in Şemdinli in the summer of 1917. The Kurds were expelled from there, but when rumors of the Russian Revolution emerged, the Russians withdrew from Iran (Surma, 2015: 91). Muzaffer İlhan Erdost conveys from Semdinli people that they completely evacuated this place in 1916 and migrated to Iraq. The Russians stayed in Semdinli (Navsar, Nehir and Diman) for about two years. The Zerza, Humaro and Gerdi tribes, who resided in the places under the Russian occupation, also had to immigrate to Iraq later. There were clashes between the Nestorians and the Kurds supported by the Russians on the Semdinli border, but the armed forces of the Kurds were insufficient against the Nestorian and Russian armed forces. The weapons in the hands of the Kurds were the old single-shot mauser guns, whereas the Nestorians had modern weapons such as Russian cannon, etc. In addition, the Russians also provided soldier support to the Nestorians. This military support consisted of four battalions, eleven cavalry troops, six artilleries (Erdost, 2016: 70). According to Mehmet Zerza, who conveyed from Hacı İbrahim Kelêti<sup>3</sup>, a member of the Gerdi tribe, there was a Kurdish military force of three hundred thousand people in Şemdinli against a military force of about a few thousand people consisting of Russians, Armenians and Nestorians, and this military force of Kurds made it possible for the Kurds to emigrate to Iraq. Apart from the villages of Kelat, Herki and Bêdav, which were not noticed by the Russians, a large part of Semdinli migrated to Iraq. The people in Semdinli stayed in Iraq for about two years (Mehmet Zerza, the interview dated 28.11.2019). According to the narratives collected in the Semdinli region, military forces consisting of Russians, Armenians and Nestorians attacked the Kurds and forced them to migrate to the Acre region of Iraq.

Kurdish fighters were few in the face of these attacks and a large number of Kurds lost their lives in asymmetric events (Mehmet Zerza, the interview dated 28.11.2019).

### **Cukurca migration**

Unlike the Nestorian-Kurdish migrations in Hakkâri city center, Yuksekova and Semdinli, the Kurdish migration in Cukurca started in 1916. The Kurdish migration in Çukurca took place in 1916 as a result of the return of warrior Nestorians to the region, and hunger and misery that arose due to the difficult conditions of the war. However, the people of Cukurca (Nesturi and Kurdish) had cooperated to protect themselves before the war. For example, the Kurds in the villages of Bêlat, Bê and Bêrewil in Cukurca and the Nestorians in Guzeres (Cevizli) exchanged their villages in June 1915<sup>4</sup> (Hacı Akın and Seyfullah Güzereşi, the interview dated 13.11.2019). The main reason for the migration in Cevizli village and its

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<sup>3</sup> Hacı İbrahim Kelêti, who was a resident of Semdinli, lost his life at the age of 120 and fought against the Nestorian-Russian troops in the First World War (Şükrü Nurçin, the interview dated 07.09.2020.).

<sup>4</sup> The reason of the exchange is that the Kurds wanted to take precautions against the Russian invasion and the Nestorians wanted to take precautions against the possibility of an attack from the Ottoman Empire. As a result of this exchange, both communities mutually left their crops to each other. The main message of this paragraph is that even during the war period, the Nestorians and the Kurds did not lose hope for each other and expected that historical friendship and neighborly relations would continue as before.

surroundings in Cukurca in 1916 was the lack of agricultural products as a result of the locust invasion in the same year (Hacı Marufi, the interview dated 21.12.2019). The Nestorians returned to Hakkâri in 1917 with a large military force. When the Tuhup and Tiyyar Nestorian tribes returned, they plundered and destroyed everything. In addition, the Nestorians caused great losses to the Kurds in Hakkâri, in Urmia and Selmas in Iran, in Zibar, Nêrve and Rikan regions in Iraq (Wigram, 2004: 490 to 491). Apart from this destruction, when the Nestorians came to the Cukurca region in September 1917, they burned the Çukurca castles and captured an estimated two hundred people consisting of the elderly and children and took them to Urmia. The routes of the transfer of the prisoners were as follows: The village of Mezri in Tuhup region, Baz, Deriye Cehver,

Dêz, Xirwate and Urmia (Seyfullah Güzereşi, the interview dated 12.02.2020). Hacı Ahmet Agha was also among prisoners (this person is the father of Macit Pirozbeyoglu, who was prominent in the Pinyanisis of Cukurca in recent history). Hacı Güzereşi and others narrated the experiences of Kurdish captives on the way as follows:

“According to the narratives of the captives, they were taken to Iran, but they were not mistreated by the Nestorians on the way. The Nestorians repeatedly stated that they had a long history with the ancestors of captive

Cukurca People. Ahmet Agha, mentioned above, was released by a Nestorian named Cecikê Tiyyari. Mewcê<sup>5</sup> from the Tuhup tribe met with Aga Petrus, one of the Nestorian chieftains, to free the captured Kurds, and Aga Petrus released the captives and sent them back to their homes. However, the captives suffered many casualties due to the cold weather conditions on the way back.” (This information was obtained in interviews conducted with people such as Xet Nezan, Hac Dec Abdurrahman, Hacı Tuhubi, Abdullah Route, Seyfullah Guzereşi, Hacı Guzereşi, Mehmet Zerza on different dates between 2019-2021).

Hacı Abdurrahman narrated Cukurca migration as follows (the interview dated 28.01.2020):

“The vast majority of animals in the Cukurca district of Hakkâri perished due to war conditions in 1916. In the same way, agriculture could not be done. Accordingly, the people living in Çukurca had to migrate to the villages of Spindar and Bêtkar in Iraq due to hunger and misery. But economic and social conditions in Iraq became even worse during the same period. It became difficult for our people to continue their lives in Iraq under these bad circumstances”.

The narration implies that the people of Çukurca stayed in Iraq for more than a year.

### **The situation of the migrating Kurds**

Deaths due to poverty also increased significantly in Iraq in 1916. The Iraqi people themselves were also affected by the migration in all respects. According to Ihsan Colemerikli, the Kurds who migrated from Hakkâri took food supplies with them to last for only a few days. After the journey with many troubles, the people of Hakkâri were not provided any help by people in Behdinan region when they arrived there, and many people lost their lives due to diseases similar to the plague. Thus, only two people out of ten in a

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<sup>5</sup> Mewcê's family migrated to northern Syria from the Slemun neighborhood of the Gundik village in Guzeres region. Mewcê himself referred the incident described above to writer Vasfi Ak from Hakkari in 2010.

family were able to survive during the migration (Çölemerikli, 2006: 375). According to Mehmet Zerza, only two women and eight men out of 60 people from his own family, who migrated from Semdinli to the Accra region of Iraq, were able to survive. The rest of them lost their lives due to plague and hunger (Mehmet Zerza and Şükrü Nurçin, the interview dated 07.09.2020). According to the narration of the interviewed people, two thirds of the total emigrating population lost their lives due to the poor living conditions. On the other hand, sheep flocks, which were the main source of livelihood, perished in Iraq due to thirst and hot climate.

### **The return of the Kurds to Hakkâri after the war**

Kurds of Hakkâri, who stayed in Iraqi cities between 1915 and 1917, began to return slowly with the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. According to Xet Nezan, only residents of ten houses out of a hundred were able to return. When the Kurds returned to Hakkâri in 1917, they tried to live in the ruins of their houses, which the Nestorians burned down and destroyed. After some time following the return, the Kurds tried to improve their deteriorating economic situation with the crops such as corn, barley and wheat seeds that they brought from Iraq and planted them in the ground (Vasfi Ak, the interview dated 20.11.2019). The Kurds who returned settled in a place called Biçer Neighborhood in the center of Hakkâri. The Kurds tried to live in the ruins of their homes and under poor conditions.

It is written in a document belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> Branch of the General Directorate of Security that a total of 390 Kurdish immigrants from Hakkâri, including 196 men and 194 women, from one hundred and four houses who migrated from Hakkâri to Mosul in the First World War and then returned, began to rebuild their homes

(BCA.TİGM, 272/45-76-8, August 8, 1341, August 8, 1925). As it is understood from this document, the number of people who came to Hakkâri from Mosul province was 390. However, the number of people who migrated to Zaho, Duhok and Baghdad and lost their lives there remains unclear.

According to a document taken from the Internal Coding Secretary of the Ottoman Archive of the Prime Ministry, while the refugees of Gevar (Yüksekova) consisted of five hundred people while migrating, three hundred of them died due to hunger on the roads, the rest was able to survive despite hunger and being unclothed and no one helped them. It was also mentioned that the refugees were treated very badly by the Erbil Refugee Commission (DH. ŞFR. 67/26.001, 16.10.1334, August 16, 1916). There are no Ottoman archive documents that provide statistics on how many Kurds migrated from Hakkâri to Iraq and Iran.

### **ANALYSIS OF KURDISH MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSTRUCTIVISM**

The Nestorians and the Kurds are two peoples who had lived together in Hakkâri mountains for centuries, and only their religions were different from each other. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were no significant conflicts between these two peoples, except for petty crimes such as theft and pillage of sheep, which sometimes occurred in villages. Since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Nestorian leaders fell into a number of negative events with the incitements of external states, which resulted in conflicts with the Kurds, and this situation continued until the First World War. Thus, both peoples had to emigrate from Hakkâri with the war. Migration can have negative consequences due to its nature. When Kurdish

migration in 1915 were evaluated with its causes and results, Russia and England mobilized peoples living under the rule of other states by exploiting the characteristics such as religion and ethnic structure, and this migration emerged as a result of the collapse and restructuring of the existing social structure. The social structure of Nestorians and Kurds in Hakkâri had been in tribal forms, and the social structure sometimes was built in disjoining, and sometimes in reconciled dimensions. But the structure did not reach a level that brought breakaways. During the First World War, the existing structure deteriorated with activities of the states intervening in the region in order to occupy more space and spread their political power over a wide area. As a result of these activities, the cultural, historical and social structure accumulated by the Nestorians and Kurds for centuries began to unravel, and social reality was ignored. When the common past, on which social reality is built, disappears in a moment, people become alienated from each other and enter into a position of conflict. In this case, the structure is transformed by an actor in the direction of certain interests. Political and social structures change in accordance with the preferences of the actor. In the same way, social institutions are organized according to the interests of the actor, and, thus, a close relationship is formed between the actor and the structure. The main object that connects the actor and the structure are the rules; when these rules disappear, the structural link between societies decays. The conflicts and migration began when the historically established structure and *de facto* rules between the Kurds and the Nestorians disappeared with the influence of the external states or actors.

When societies live on the same land for a long time, they interact and unite as a result. As a result of this interaction, social and emotional bonds are strengthened. When these values are eliminated by actors who are alien to these social ties and values, the social structure disappears. Nestorians and Kurds developed very similar cultural structures based on common values described above. The reason why the Nestorians entered into the war on the side of Russia in the First World War and why the migration tragedies occurred in both peoples in the subsequent period is that the old structure was changed by the missionaries and a new structure was built. While the previous structure was in the form of historical and social unity between the two peoples, the new structure was based on making the two peoples hostile to each other by mobilizing them in the direction of the goals of missionaries since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The activities carried out by the missionaries towards the Nestorians caused the traditional ways of life that they had formed with the Kurds for centuries to change. In this context, the Nestorian-Kurdish relations based on friendship and neighborliness were replaced by new searches and separations of religion and ethnic identity due to the influence of the actor on the structure. Of course, it should also be emphasized here that the Kurds' old perceptions of the Nestorian people with religion changed with the arrival of Russia to the region. According to constructivist view, no matter how strong the social ties are, because they are socially constructed in the context of religion, culture, identity and interests, they possess a variable structure. For centuries, the Nestorian and Kurdish tribes had developed a common idea by acting together due to the proximity of their living areas. In this regard, it turns out that other elements besides religion are also effective in social unity in Hakkâri. The power struggles of states can also destroy common ideas and



thoughts by disrupting social unities. While Russia was planning to radically change the social structure in the region through religion by taking the Nestorians on its side, the Kurds from Hakkâri found a way to emigrate in order not to be a party to this structure. From the beginning of migration in Hakkâri in May 1915 until the end of returns in 1917, the Kurds lost a large part of their population on both the migration routes and in Iraq. In the same way, the Nestorians suffered a large number of losses both in the war and during and after the migration.

The fact that these two communities had lived together in peace for centuries, formed an environment for cultural richness. Although Nestorians and Kurds have their own language, their own way of life and beliefs, the Hekariyan identity formed by the social life in Hakkâri became more prominent in the life of both peoples. In addition to the common belonging of the two peoples, aspects such as their aspirations, utopias, imagining themselves, and establishing a relationship with life became determinative of Hekariyan identity. However, this identity underwent a change with the forced migration in 1915. The main factor behind the loss of identity was that the actor or actors changed the social structure in Hakkâri. However, since this identity is based on a long historical past, it still maintains its vitality in the context of coexistence practices in the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq today. Although both peoples in Hakkâri were forced to emigrate due to clashes brought by differences such as religion, nationality and language before 1915, the unity in the historical genes of both peoples has blossomed again in Iraq. In this sense, even if the concepts of structure-actor referenced from constructivism cause social divisions, concepts such as identity, culture, idea, value ensure the continuation of social reconciliation. Therefore, although the Kurds suffered great pain and losses as a result of the Kurdish migration, the conditions for meeting Kurds and Nestorians or ethnically Assyrian people on a ground from the constructivist point of view still existed. Constructivism's view on identity implies that identity changes direction according to interests, but this rule was valid only during the war period in Hakkâri. After the migration, the above-mentioned Hekariyan identity of the Nestorians and Kurds revived again. For example, even today, the Nestorians living in Northern Iraq refer to themselves by the name of villages such as Tiyar, Baz, Tuhup in Hakkâri. This situation is a proof that both space and past belongings have an unchangeable effect on identity. The main point in identity is that whichever of the belongings such as religion, language or culture that the societies belong to is in danger; identity becomes the main actor against the dangers. With this perspective, religious identity was at the forefront in Hakkâri during the First World War, whereas culture, coexistence and historical background were the elements of the identity during the pre-war period. All of these explanations emphasize the variable nature of identity in constructivism.

One of the areas where identity has an impact on migration is the direction of migration. The Kurdish migration that started in Hakkâri in 1915 was in the direction of the Northern Iraq. The main reason was the high density of people living in that region that adhere to the Kurdish ethnic identity, and the expectation that the Kurds who migrated from Hakkâri would receive economic support and be safe there. From a constructivist point of view, the migration of Kurds to Iraq was correct, but due to the conditions during the war, the Kurds living in Northern Iraq did not provide significant aid to the migrant Kurds,

either economically or in terms of security. Safety is one of the main factors of forced migration. Although Kurds also migrated from Hakkâri because of insecurity, they were not able to find secure environment due to the housing and nutrition problems and diseases in the places where they migrated. On the other hand, the Nestorians who migrated from Hakkâri also migrated first to the Iranian lands dominated by Russia with the influence of religious identity. When the revolution broke out in Russia, the Nestorians migrated to the Iraqi lands dominated by the British. The direction of this migration is also evaluated as the feeling of security related to identity. However, both migrations to safe areas resulted in negative consequences.

Power, in the political sense, is the ability of other people to influence people in a different direction from their own preferences, that is to say, to have influence over the other. Physical or mechanical power is the ability to carry out one's own ideas and actions through someone else. When the issue of migration is evaluated in this context, it can be concluded that the migration that took place in Hakkâri in 1915 was aimed at causing conflicts between and separating the neighboring peoples in order to achieve a certain goal. Therefore, the external influences on the Nestorian people were realized in accordance with the power policies of the states that wanted to establish dominance in the region through them. Russia, whose main policy in the region was to expand the territories into the warm seas, pursued a policy of pulling the Christian peoples living in the Ottoman Empire to its side.

However, Russia started to occupy Eastern Anatolia by claiming that "these people were massacred, the Ottoman State did not give them their rights, and the future of the Nestorian people was under its own protection. As soon as the Kurds heard that the invasion had started, they emigrated to save themselves. During this period, the majority of the Ottoman soldiers fought on fronts such as Çanakkale, Gallipoli, Sarıkamış and Syria, so there were no soldiers in places such as Hakkâri. Therefore, the Kurds of Hakkâri had to defend themselves when the First World War began. However, since they could not cope with the large tribes of the Nestorians (Tiyar, Tuhup), migration was considered the most reasonable solution. In addition, the Kurds of Hakkâri realized that it was not possible to resist Russia, which had the powerful armies of the time. Asymmetric elements of war such as power, interest and structureactor relations became dominant over the constructivist concepts such as idea, identity and culture.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are different theories that evaluate the concept of migration both from the point of view of international relations and political science. Some of these theories approach migration from a state-centered perspective of war, conflict and power; while others present a normative perspective with concepts such as identity, culture and social reality. In this study, a reading of the Kurdish migration that occurred in Hakkâri in 1915 was made with constructivism or social constructionist direction. Although there are many studies on the migration of Nestorians, the issue of Kurdish migration was discussed for the first time in this study. In particular, there have been many complementary narratives about the Kurdish migration in Hakkâri that have not been the subject of written texts. It has been found in these narratives that many negative situations happened during the migration process. The loss of lives

experienced during the migration and the situations they encountered when they returned still remain vivid in people's memory. The narratives obtained about the Kurdish migration in Hakkâri through field research have been transformed into a scientific study. The migration stories of isolated societies can be brought to light through narratives or testimonies. Especially in the periods when there was no press or publication, the witnesses of events people experienced are the people themselves. Therefore, a researcher needs to interview the people themselves or the generation after them who are faced with events such as war or migration. Otherwise, as time progresses, narratives can be forgotten. Although the Hakkâri migration took place one hundred and seven years ago, there are many narratives about the migration. Nevertheless, these narratives are remembered only by the pre-1980 generation. The next generation has remained indifferent to these narratives. Therefore, there has also been a significant decrease in the number of people who remember the migration event.

In the study, it was found that Hakkâri migration remains in the minds of some people who are still living in the neighborhood. The basic perception of people about migration in their minds has been that the old experiences have been disrupted by external influences. In addition, in the study, it was observed that the unity of neighboring peoples on common cultures and ideas was disrupted due to religious and ethnic differences. As stated in the question of the study, the researchers tried to determine people's perceptions of the past through their narratives. The research has revealed negative aspects of the Kurdish migration of 1915. As a result, it is understood that historical and social dynamics are important in the unity of people, and social collapse and migration arise after the destruction of these dynamics.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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