The 1909 Adana Incident(Part1)-The Adana Province during the Nineteenth Century-

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The 1909 Adana Incident (Part 1):

The Adana Province during the Nineteenth Century

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Introduction

In 1909, thousands of Armenians were killed by the Muslim mobs in the south-eastern part of contemporary Turkey. As the center of the massacre was the Adana province of the Ottoman Empire, the incident is often called the Adana incident. Although more than a hundred years have passed since the bloodbath, a hot discussion on the root of the incident is still going on. Some claim the Armenians were massacred by the Ottoman governments as a test case of the 1915 genocide, others assert the incident was nothing but an abortive insurrection of the Armenian separatists. As conspiracy theories dominate the main course of the discussions, relatively little attention has been given to the socio-economic situation before the outbreak of the hostilities. There are serious discrepancies even in the understanding of the most basic facts among the various authors. In this essay, the author tries to analyze the socio-economic conditions of the Adana province in the years preceding the carnage of 1909.

The Land of Derebeys

The region that was to be incorporated into the Adana Province, or the Cilicia, was one of the most underdeveloped territories in the Ottoman Empire during the first half of the nineteenth century. Although

the region had wide and flat lands of high productivity, especially along the Seyhan, Ceyhan, and Göksu rivers, most of them were not appropriately cultivated, and remained wastelands. One of the reasons for this neglect derived from unhealthy conditions owing to the swampy nature of the region. Many parts of the plain were covered with ponds and marshes, and the population was suffering from various endemic diseases, including malaria. Extraordinarily high temperatures during summer also made life on the plain difficult. It was natural, therefore, that the transhumance became the major form of agriculture.

There were a number of tribes engaging in the migratory cattle breeding. Most of them were the Turkmen and Kurdish people. Their seasonal moves had the following pattern. The summer pastures were located on the plateaus surrounding the plain, in a semicircular shape stretching southwest - northeast from Eregli to Niğde, Kayseri, Gürün, and Elbistan. In late October or the beginning of November, the cattle breeders would return to their winter quarters either at the hedge of the plain, on the foothills of the Taurus, or further east in the Amanos (or Gavur Dağı) mountains, and north of Antakya. [Astourian, 1996: 168–169]

The prevalence of nomadic life, coupled with the geographic conditions, made the region an ideal space for the bandits. The mountains of Cilicia are particularly rugged and afforded a small number of rebels easy defense against a far greater attacking force. Moreover, the Çukurova plain was the natural hinge that connected the central Anatolia to the Mediterranean coast and the important trade route with Syria was running across it. The population of this area, therefore, traditionally relied on stopping caravans at mountain passes and raiding villages in the surrounding plain to supplement its meager economy. The Ottoman authority tried to contain the bandit activities of nomadic people, but the latter successfully resisted the pressure by unifying themselves under the leadership of the Derebeys. The Derebeys became, in effect, lords of the local population and gained royalty of the bandits in the course of the constant struggle against outside control. By the end of the eighteenth century, they had even become able to tax

the villagers, demand military support from the nomads, and levy toll on caravans. [Gould, 1976: 486]

There were several powerful Derebeys in Cilicia during the first half of the nineteenth century, and they virtually controlled the local politics of Cilicia. The Küçük Alioğuls of Payas were probably the best-known Derebeys of Cilicia. Halil Küçük Alioğul dominated the gulf of Iskenderun and its hinterland from 1778 until his death in 1808. Although the Porte was always anxious to eliminate Halil, it could not secure a united front of local tribes against him. Thus, it was forced to recognize his power by nominating him the guardian of the road to Mecca. Halil's position was succeeded by his son Dede in 1808. The family's influence suffered temporary setback when Dede was arrested by the governor of Adana and executed in 1817. His brother Mustuk (or Mustafa), however, took over his family business and succeeded in preserving his influence until the middle of the century.

Other Derebeys had their own kingdoms in the other parts of Cilicia. To the northeast of the Gavur Dağı were the Ulaşlı Beys. Their tribe fortified itself in the mountains in alliance with a powerful Kurdish tribe, the Okçu Izzeddinli, and controlled the region from the middle of the eighteenth century until 1865. The eastern slope of the Gavur Dağı was the territory of the Çoban-oğlu Beys. They claimed hereditary rule of the area dating from 1625. The Kozan district was largely controlled by the Kozan-oğuls. They were so powerful in the first half of the nineteenth century that they acted with complete freedom from Istanbul. The family distributed the power among the members, and many of them enjoyed the right to collect taxes from particular villages or tribes as their means of support (*yemeklik*). The family was quite extensive and obtained military support from the tribes of the area. While most of the Derebeys paid little attention to the Ottoman authority, the Menemenci-oğul in Karaisalu seem to have been responsive to orders from the Porte. Even so, they could exercise considerable influence in the local politics. [Gould 1976: 486–492, 496]

The extensive power of the Derebeys in Cilicia was somewhat curtailed during the 1830s. After the treaty of Kütahya (1833), a son of the

Egyptian ruler Mehmed Ali, İbrahim Paşa, was recognized to rule over Çukurova. He came with significant number of soldiers and stationed them at important centers like Adana, Tarsus, Misis, and Gülek Boğazı. He energetically mounted campaigns against the unruly nomads in the Gavur Dağı, confiscating their weapons, and established effective control over the province. [Yurtsever, 1983: 159-161] During the Egyptian rule, the province of Cilicia was administered by İbrahim's able and efficient deputies, Selim Paşa and Hamid Minikli. They introduced various political reforms and established well-organized jurisdiction in the province. [Barker, 1853: 90-91]

When the Egyptian rule came to an end and the province was handed over to the Ottomans in 1840, the Porte tried to introduce the Tanzimat reforms. A new administrative entity (*eyalet*) was organized and Adana was turned into its capital. The *eyalet* was divided into several prefectures (*sancaks*), each with its own lieutenant governor (*mutasarrıf*). Each prefecture, in turn, was divided into a number of districts (*kazas*) governed by a magistrate (*kaimakam*). But the new system could not produce the expected results. The Derebeys of Cilicia turned out to be the last to succumb to the expanding control of the Ottoman reformers. The officers sent by the Porte failed to establish their authority among the Derebeys, and became their puppets instead. [Gould 1976: 485] A British merchant, Burckhardt Barker, observed that the province was governed only nominally by the officials sent from Istanbul, and that the real authority remained in the hands of the *ayans* (Muslim notables). They retained the power to levy various arbitrary taxes including the *salyane*, a tax originally paid by the people for the purpose of defraying the travelling expenses of the officers. [Barker, 1853: 104]

Baker explained the reasons of the weakness of the governors in the following way:

> *"They are thrown in a strange land without sufficient means to enforce their authority, being scarcely allowed the pay of fifty saimans*

(irregular troops). They are thus placed at the mercy of the chiefs of the country, who offer them the option, viz. on one side the opportunity of becoming rich, and on the other, opposition in everything, which would completely cripple their power; and they are induced, by want of principle, to choose that which is most conducive to their private advantage." [*Barker, 1853: 104*]

It seems more plausible, however, that the new institution, *Muhassıl meclisi* (tax collector's council), which was originally introduced as an integral part of the Tanzimat reforms for the purpose of reinforcing the authority of governors, provided the grounds on which the local notables controlled the provincial administration. The council, presided over by the governor and the chief tax collector, was composed of the local notables like *Mufti,* the *Kadi,* the *Nayib,* and some of the chiefs of the Turkmen tribes. The notables, in a sense, contrived to establish an influence indispensable to the tax collection. On the other hand, however, the institution provided them with a kind of legality to continue their despotic control over the people. [Barker, 1853: 105]

The influence of Derebeys in the local administration was so strong that most foreign observers felt that neglect of the value of the Derebeys in local government forced the Porte to risk the loss of their loyalty. For example, Baker, in an occasion, recommended Mustuk Alioğlu to the governor of Adana as "the only man who could keep the tribes in order." The British Consul in Aleppo also commended him for his role in protecting Christians during the Damascus disorders of 1860. Such cordial relations between the Derebeys and foreigners were often considered as a sign of foreign intervention by the Porte. Thus, the governor of Aleppo proposed a plan to eliminate Derebeys in order to maintain firm control over Cilicia in 1846. But the local government lacked sufficient force to materialize this policy at the moment. [Gould, 1976: 489]

The 'Reform Division' and the Beginning of the Centralized Administration

The Crimean War reminded the Port of the seriousness of its backward nature of administration and precipitated it to take more drastic measures in its reform attempts. One of the most urgent issues was how to optimize the number of soldiers in the battle field. There was a discussion to enroll the Christian population into the Ottoman Army, but the option was put aside, and more practical measures to increase the number of Muslim soldiers were considered. As a result, the government turned its attention to the potential of those Muslim elements that had been hitherto out of the regular recruitment system. Hence, the Muslim tribes of Çukurova were singled out as the first target. [Yurtsever, 1983: 175–176]

Indeed, it was during the Crimean War, when the Porte was unable to take any action against the rebels, that the Avşar tribesmen that had previously forced to settle in central Anatolia sought refuge in Kozan and resumed their brigandage. Some rebel leaders, like Çardırcı Mehmed, sought further increases in their power at the cost of the central authority. The situation of the province deteriorated to such an extent that it was necessary to take some drastic measures immediately. [Gould 1976: 494]

In this way, the Porte decided to dispatch a special armed force to Cilicia. It started in March 1865 and was led by two commanders, Derviş Paşa who was responsible to the military operation, and Cevdet Paşa who was in charge of the implementation of administrative reforms. It consisted of 9,000 infantry, 2,000 cavalry, and 6 pieces of artillery. The name of Reform Division (*Fırka-ı Islahiyye*) that was given to the unit symbolized its duty to establish a regular bureaucracy under the central control. In order to realize this objective, it was indispensable to capture all the Derebeys and to neutralize their influences. For this purpose, the Beys were first to be deprived of their support by settling the tribes in the plain. Its strategy, however, was rather moderate in

spite of its threatening outlooks. It preferred reconciliation to punishment. Hence, at the onset, a general amnesty was granted to everyone who would surrender. The Derebeys were offered government positions as an inducement to surrender. Moreover, the army moved slowly in establishing control over the plains rather than risk direct confrontation with the rebels. [Gould, 1976: 497]

Thanks to the deliberation, there was little resistance from the tribes and most of the Derebeys surrendered without a fight. By early August, the Reform Division had already established control of the terrain to the east of the Gavur Dağı. On the western slopes of the Gavur Dağı, Kurdish Derebey, Deli Halil Ağa showed some signs of resistance, but they were forced to flee after skirmishes, and the rest of the mountaineers surrendered. The largest military action undertaken was a siege of the Ali Bekir-oğlus and their allies, Deli Halil and the sons of Küçük Ali-oğlu Mustuk, but it lasted only seven days. [Gould 1976: 497–499]

The Division took another initiative to perpetuate their military success by consolidating the new administrative structure. The military operation went hand in hand with the process of settlement and reforms. For example, the Division constructed a military barrack at İncesu near Tiyek. They also built a few hundred houses around the barrack and ordered the nomadic people to settle there. Together with this, the former Derebey of locality, Paşo Bey, who was still influential among the population, was appointed as the magistrate of the newly founded Elbistan district. In another occasion when the army encamped at the castle of Niğolu, they ordered the local population to build houses on the outskirt of the fortification, and settled nomads there. They also organized the new administrative council, and appointed several tribal leaders as its members. A little later, the Reform Division decided to organize a new district, and selected Hacı Osmanlı village as its center. They changed the name of the village into Osmaniye, and it soon grew into a town, as the nomadic tribes living in the vicinity were forced to immigrate. [Yurtsever, 1983: 184, 186, 194]

In this way, the expedition came to a successful end in 1866. A few

attempts were made to profit from the withdrawal of the Reform Division, but they were unable to secure support to keep the rebellion going and surrendered to the regular army unit sent against them. [Gould 1976: 499]

Cotton Export and the Development of Agrarian Economy

As mentioned above, the economic potential of the Adana plain was enormous. A correspondent of the newspaper *'Tanin,'* Ahmed Şerif once remarked: "The productivity of the soil was extraordinary high. The land is covered with one or two meters of fertile black soil, which we can reap twice a year." [Ahmed Şerif 1999: 130] It was the Egyptians who first tried to exploit the economic potential of the region. They brought with them a systematic development of cotton cultivation, sugar cane, exploitation of timber, and mineral resources in the mountains. [Astourian, 1996: 128] Thanks to this policy, Ibrahim Paşa could make use of the mineral resources in the Taurus mines. He exported vast quantities of timber from Mounts Rhosus, Amanus and Taurus to Egypt and secured enough fund to maintain his army. The Egyptian rule, however, was short lived and most of the rich soil remained uncultivated until the middle of the nineteenth century. [Barker, 1853: 91]

The real foundation for the economic development of Cilicia, therefore, was laid by the expedition of the Reform Division. During its operation, the important economic infrastructure, such as the ports of Mersin and Alexandretta, was developed and the system of drainage was introduced and the alluvial lands were brought under cultivation. [Astourian, 1996: 178] The policy was intensified in the early 1870s and large amounts of land were opened to cultivation with the draining of the delta. The crops cultivated in the newly opened lands were barley, wheat, cotton, sesame, and, to some lesser extent, sugarcane. [Pamuk, 1987: 199]

By the end of the 1870s, Çukurova had appeared as one of the most promising agrarian bases in Anatolia. A British traveler who passed the plain in the 1870s described the flourishing agrarian economy of the

region as follows: "As we drove along, we were struck with the fine aspect of the country. The soil is a rich red loam, covered with splendid crops, mostly grain, and admirably cultivated. Our companion told us that Cilicia is one of the richest provinces in Asia Minor, and that they rarely have a bad season here. The most fertile portion lies between Adana and Ayas on the Gulf of Scanderoon, and as far south as Cape Kara-tash... From Ayas one can walk in a straight line for twelve miles through nothing but cornfields." [Scott-Stevenson 1881: 127]

The cotton was the most important item during the second half of the nineteenth century, and remained as such in the early years of the twentieth century. Originally the cotton produced in Çukurova had been earmarked to the domestic markets and the method of cultivation had been primitive and archaic. The American Civil War (1861–65) changed its nature drastically. The war gave decisive impact on the expansion of cotton cultivation, as the Ottoman government introduced a series of measures to promote cotton cultivation in 1862, prompted by the British, who was hit by sudden rise in the cotton price. The government introduced the policy of exemption from customs of cotton-processing equipment and related agricultural machines, the dissemination of new cotton seeds, construction of infrastructures, and a five-year tax exemption to those who began to cultivate cotton. The British consul of Upper Syria further showed the prospect of a rapid increase in cotton production by introducing the following measures: to give the cultivators easy access to credit, to guarantee minimal prices, to reclaim land from the swamps, and to resettle the Turkmen tribes. The Ottoman government accepted the proposals, and provided the cotton cultivators with a low interest loan in 1864. As a result, the land under cotton cultivation in the Adana-Marash-Aleppo region expanded two and half times larger in a short period during the middle of the 1860s. [Astourian, 1996: 165; Yurtsever, 1983: 172–173]

As we can see in this process, the promotion of the cotton cultivation was export-oriented at the beginning. The cotton export from Adana began in 1861. Since then, the amount of cotton exports grew rapidly. The quantity exported from the Mersin port reached at 70,000

bales in 1863, and it was expected to increase twofold in the following year. [Yurtsever, 1983: 172]

Thanks to the successful development of the export business, the cotton cultivation became the most important source of income and wealth in the Adana province. The incentive coming from the export oriented agriculture also affected the growth of other commodity crops like sesame, fig, wheat, and sugar. In the meantime, the Adana region turned out to be one of the most export-oriented regions in Anatolia.

Massive Colonization during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

The rapid development of the cultivation of commodity crops necessitated and precipitated the rapid growth of the population. When the Adana region was separated from Aleppo and established as a new province by incorporating the Payas and the Kozan districts in 1867, it had 156,170 populations (139,480 Muslim and 21,690 Christians). Since then the number increased rapidly and doubled by 1892 (total 390,502 people with 345,551 Muslims and 44,951 non-Muslims respectively). In 1897, the province was divided into five districts (Adana, Mersin, İçil, Kozan and Cebel-i Bereket) with a total of 1629 villages and 404,929 inhabitants. Despite the rapid growth, the province was apparently under-populated during the second half of the nineteenth century. Average population per square kilometers was 10.80 in 1897, and the figure was strikingly moderate if we take into consideration that the average in Turkey was 12.15. [Bayraktar, 2007: 409–410]

Several measures were taken to increase the population. The forced settlement of the nomadic populations was the most important option of all and one of the main causes of the economic upturn after the 1860s. There were twenty-six nomadic tribes active in Cilicia during the 1860s. [Astourian, 1996: 168] Measures were taken to permanently settle down the nomads at their winter residences. The Reform Division sent an order requesting the nomads to stay at the place where they were temporarily camping and prohibited them from leaving the location. To

turn them into a sedentary population, however, was by no means an easy job. While the Derebeys accepted their new posts with little resistance, their tribesmen found it difficult to adjust themselves to sedentary life. Many people couldn't easily quit their long-accustomed nomadic life, and fled into the pasture. [Yurtsever, 1983: 182, 221]

Although the initial uprisings aiming at the restoration of the old regime were thwarted with ease in 1866 and 1867, the sources of discontent were smoldering and turned into an insurrection in August 1878. Ahmed Paşa Kozan-oğlu was used as a figurehead for the rebellion. As all troops in the Adana area were busy fighting rebels in Zeytun, the rebels quickly captured Haçin, Belenköy, and Sis. The rebellion eventually took a form of anti-Tanzimat popular uprising, as the *Ulema* of Kozan sided with Ahmed Paşa on condition that he would restore "the true Islamic law." Ahmed Paşa himself justified his action by claiming that the people of Kozan had been complaining of the oppression of their lieutenant governor for the past three years and that he had come to put this tyranny to an end and restore "good Islamic government." A petition from the village headmen and notables of Kozan supported these claims and requested his appointment as a new governor. The government dispatched troops to Kozan early September, and the rebels were dispersed. [Gould 1976: 501, 504]

It was true that the uprising of Ahmed Paşa was the last remnant of the tribal rebellion led by the Derebeys, small scale expression of local discontent in the forced settlement of nomadic people were smoldering for a while and there were frequent disputes caused by the intrusion of nomadic tribes into the lands of settled peasants. Not only were they the sources of concern, their number was by no means sufficient to cover the growing needs of the working force in the region. Therefore, the government had to find other human resources elsewhere. As a result, measures were taken for the increase in the working force by the colonization of outsiders. Already, as early as the Egyptian period, agrarian workers, know as *Fellahs*, were introduced from Syria. It is also known that Black Africans were brought into as working force. [Yurtsever, 1983: 160] Many Arabs, or Arab-Uschagi are transplanted

from the Lazkie district during the reign of Sultan Abdül Aziz. [Djemal,1922: 257] During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the Porte drastically enlarged the scale of immigration drastically by incorporating the refugees from Russian territory.

As early as the latter half of the eighteenth century, many Muslims began to immigrate to the Ottoman territory from those regions that were bought under Russian control. The migration of Crimean Tatars began shortly after the Russian annexation. Approximately 80,000 Tatars left Crimea in the years 1783–1784 alone and settled in Bessarabia and Dobruca and, eventually, in Anatolia. The migration intensified after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1812, and continued until major fighting was resumed in 1853. The Russian conquest of the northern Caucasus also forced tens of thousands of Circassians and Nogays to push into the Ottoman lands. [Karpat, 1985: 65]

The Crimean War drastically accelerated the process. According to Kemal Karpat, it was during the War that forcible eviction became the Russian official policy: "During and after the Crimean War, the Russians began to suspect the Tatars of disloyalty and the Tatars began to fear Russification as well as forcible resettlement." [Karpat, 1985: 66]

The total number of Tatars who migrated to Ottoman territories between 1783 and 1922 was estimated about 1,800,000. The forced migration of the Circassians began shortly after the war as well. During the early 1850s some Circassians migrated voluntarily on their own initiative or were peacefully persuaded to move. During the Crimean War, however, the emigration became a mass movement that reached a peak in the three-year period from 1862 to 1865 and lingered on well into the 1920s, with sporadic waves of intensification of resettlement in 1877–1878 and again from 1890 to 1908. As a result, approximately 2 million Caucasians, mostly Circassians, left Russia in the period from 1859–1879. From 1881 until 1914 there was a further emigration from Russia of approximately half a million more Circassians, along with a large number of Muslims from Kazan and the Ural. [Karpat, 1985: 66–69]

Such an enormous influx of refugees created a crisis in the Ottoman government. The Porte tried desperately to find empty lands that could

accommodate the huge number of refugees. Therefore, it was natural that it found the Adana province as a convenient destination for the immigrants. The first refugee groups that came to the Adana region were Nogays. More than 20,000 Nogays were settled down during 1859–1861. The real beginning of massive colonization, however, was after the completion of the activities of the Reform Division in 1869. In this year, 1,500 Karaçays and Circassians came to settle down in the province. After the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, a much larger number of Muslims from the Caucasus immigrated in the region. The influx continued intermittently, and approximately 20,000 Caucasian refugees had been eventually settled in the Adana province by 1907. [Bayraktar, 2007: 413, 431] Along with the refugees expelled from the Russian territory, a number of people began to come from the Ottoman Balkans toward the third quarter of the nineteenth century. According to the official register, 28,730 refugees from the Balkans were sent from Istanbul to the Adana Province from 1877 to 1891. [İpek, 1999: 203]

In spite of the massive influx of immigrants, the province never had difficulty in accommodating them, as it had a plenty of empty land. In 1887, the local government of Cebel-i Bereket explained the Refugee Commission that the district had wide and rich empty lands that could accommodate 1,000–2,000 refugee households. Two years later, the governor of Adana estimated that the province could accept 3,000–5,000 refugee families. In 1890, the Refugee Commission again investigated the capacity as 120,000 people had showed their will to immigrate into the Ottoman lands from the Kuban region. The Commission decided that 2,000 households were to be settled in the Adana district alone. In order to accommodate them, the Commission estimated a total 100,000 dönüms of land (50 dönüms per household: one dönüm is approximately 940 m^2) would be necessary, but the amplitude was no challenge to the capacity of the province. By 1897, more than 4,000 refugees had settled in the province, while the province still had the capacity to accommodate 5,000–10,000 households. Even, in 1903, it was reported that the province could accept as many as 300,000 refugees. Three years later, owing to the rapid increase in the number of refugees from the Balkans,

the Taylan region of Adana was allotted to the immigrants. Even so, the authorities of the Cebel-i Bereket announced that the district had ample land for colonization. [Bayraktar, 2007: 410-411]

Land Accumulation

The limited population, the abundance of vacant lands, and the growing needs for commodity crops in the international market created the prerequisites for the proliferation of large land ownership in the Adana province. The process of land accumulation seemed to have been set in motion as early as the 1830s. The Egyptian rule destroyed the public domain system and several big farms were established around the Yüregir plain and in the vicinity of Tarsus. [Yurtsever, 1983: 160] It was, however, after the arrival of the Reform Division that the rapid increase in the number of big farms was observed.

In the 1870s, the government issued title deeds of land ownership to the new settlers in Çukurova. In the process, they introduced several differential measures. While the nomad leaders were allotted with approximately 60 dönüms of lands, those who lived in mountain villages got 5 dönüms each. [Yurtsever, 1983: 225] There were even cases that a landmass was given to a tribe as a whole and the lands were considered as personal possessions of the tribal leaders. The opportunity for large income provided by the crop export stimulated them to enlarge their possessions. Given the impetus for the growing demand for the commodity crops, the tribal chiefs leased the plots to the other tribesmen, having them cultivate cotton and other items on the vast stretches of lands that they had taken over. In this way, the forced settlement often brought about semi-feudal land regimes. Now, the tribal elite formed most of the new class of large landowners. [Kıray, 1998: 12]

The situation was partly due to the confusion in the land register and its manner of administration. The title deeds were often issued in the following way: The boundaries of the land strip were quite ambiguously defined and often intentionally blurred. The real surface of the land seldom coincided with the registered area. There were frequent

cases where several hundreds of dönüms of land existed within the boundaries of a title deed registering only ten dönüms. The powerful landowners could enlarge their estate by exploiting this ambiguity. They just expelled the small holders neighboring their estates, and annexed their possession. [Şerif, 1999: 173]

Emergence of New Local Bosses: The Ağas

The concentration of huge estates in the hand of the former tribal leaders was further precipitated by the policy of the Porte to transform them into a kind of provincial notables by appointing them as magistrates and members of administrative councils and the local court. While the government expected to be able to establish the firm control over the locality by making use of their influence over the tribesmen, the tribal leaders utilized their new positions for their personal benefits, and succeeded in consolidating their power at the cost of the rest of tribe members as well as the officials sent by the Porte. As they monopolized the positions in the local administration, the jurisprudence was usually manipulated for the advantage of the notables. It became impossible for the ordinary peasants to seek recourse by any official means, even when it was obvious that their judicial right was intruded by the large estate owners. A British Consul in Tarsus, for example, described the powerful local elite in the following way in 1879. "These men claim as their own the villagers' lands, and take from them in kind pretty much what they like as rent. In most cases these men being Notables are themselves the members of local Councils; redress for the peasants is impossible." [Astourian, 1996: 188]

In this way, the newly emerged local elite, often called *"Ağas,"* became the successors to the former Derebeys. These local bosses were especially powerful and influential in the relatively backward regions like the Cebel-i Bereket prefecture. In the worst case, the İslahiye district, the influence of the Ağas was so strong that the most of Muslim population identified themselves as clients of a particular Ağa, as Ahmed Şerif put it, "If you ask a peasant: 'To which congregation do

you belong?' They will reply, without hesitation, 'I belong to the Hasan Ağa's (or Huseyin Ağa's) congregation." [Şerif, 1999: 167] Their influence and control over the local population was so strong that the villagers couldn't utter a word of protest, even when they saw the Ağas committing crimes and other illegal activities. According to the same author, "the villagers serve the Ağa as if they worshiped him. The reason is simple. In their eyes, the Ağa is so strong that he can do everything he wants, by using his own influence or by the help of government officials. Some cunning Ağas intentionally displayed their good relations with the officials to increase their influence among the villagers. For example, it is a great lesson for the villagers to see the Ağas sitting together with the magistrates and talking with each other in a friendly manner." [Şerif, 1999: 167]

As mentioned above, the Ağas widely made use of the weakness of the local government and succeeded in securing support, complicity, and even passive obedience of the Government officials. These "special relations" with the authority, in turn, further fortified the positions of Ağas. Ahmed Şerif reported as the typical local boss in the case of Hacı Ağa of İslahiye, who was the most influential figure in the district at the beginning of the twentieth century. He owned many buildings in the town of İslahiye and possessed huge amount of lands in the countryside. It is noteworthy that his realm was constructed in a relatively short time. He had been a poor shepherd by the time when he was enrolled into a police department of İslahiye. While in office, he became acquainted with Bahri Paşa, the governor of Adana. He sent him various presents on each occasion, accordingly gained his confidence, and was eventually appointed as the constable. Thanks to this position and connection with the governor, he could now fence off every kind of accusation against him. Therefore, he could freely deprive the peasants of their lands and cattle, and accumulated the wealth. He also embezzled a portion of their taxes, and exploited the public works. Even after the Young Turk revolution, the situation didn't change and his influence remained intact, as he had already constructed a solid network within the local authorities. [Şerif, 1999: 151–152]

The Plight of Muslim Peasants

The emergence of powerful Ağas and the prevalence of their influence over the local government had already made the life of the people difficult and oppressive. When mixed with the ineffectiveness of the government in controlling the land dispute, it exacerbated the situation. The report by Ahmed Şerif accurately describes the mechanism. When a villager had his land violated, he, at first, tried to appeal to the court. But the court procedure, as a rule, was no help to him, so he decided to receive compensation for his damage at someone else's cost. This was the reason for the frequency of land disputes and was the main source of local disorder. [Şerif, 1999: 174]

An Armenian observer, who visited the Cebel-i Bereket prefecture in 1908, described the situation as follows: "Every town, every village had its own tyrants, the Ağas, who were responsible for all offenses and crimes that were committed. They could exercise enormous influence over the populace and the villains blindly obeyed them like a lord or a master." [Seropian, 1909: 9] Although the author of this report intended to highlight the harsh conditions of the Christian population, it was the Muslim population that was subjected to even harsher oppressions. The following observation by a British archaeologist, who was well informed with the local situation of Central and Western Anatolia, can be applied to the southeastern Anatolia as well. "It was the Mohammedan peasantry who on the whole seemed to me to suffer most from the perversity and iniquity of government. The Christians, even in the villages were richer and cleverer than the Mohammedans; and they could better avail themselves of those ways by which matters can be made easy with the officials." [Ramsay 1897: 173]

The rapid growth of the agrarian sector in the Adana province also precipitated the difficult circumstances of the Muslim peasants. During the nineteenth century, two different types of process were under way in the Adana plain and surrounding regions. While the export oriented commercial agriculture was rapidly developing in some parts, the small

holders engaging in the subsistence farming increased in number as well. The latter was composed of the former nomads or immigrants from the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Arab regions. The economic situation of these small holders were extraordinary harsh. It was especially the case for the refugees. Many of them came from the northern regions and didn't know the method of cultivation appropriate for the Mediterranean climate. Moreover, the different environment, coupled with poor sanitary conditions, resulted in a huge number of death. In the case of the first Russian migrants, the Nogays, who came to the region in the middle of the nineteenth century, almost all of their descendants had disappeared by the end of the century. The situation was not so different from the other refugees. In the case of the Balkan immigrants who settled in the Örfiye districts, their number diminished by one-tenth within five years. The reason was simple. They were forced to settle down in a swampy and marshy location. [Şerif, 1999: 130, 136] Even for those lucky refugees who could sustain themselves, the situation was all the same, as they were the most vulnerable to the arbitrary violence of the local bosses. It was often the case that the lands opened and improved by the colonists were usurped by the large land holders.

The situation of the small land holders was further deteriorated by the accumulation of debts. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the rural population in Çukurova lived, by and large, in an economy based on barter. They were forced to be drawn into the market economy after the arrival of the Reform Division, as the rapid development in crop export precipitated a money based exchange which extended to those living in a subsistence economy. It was quite natural that many peasants who weren't accustomed to a money economy began to suffer from heavy debt in a short period and the situation soon became very critical. The Ottoman state, however, did not do much to change the debt relations in the countryside to protect cultivators. State intervention on rural indebtedness occurred rarely and exceptionally, and the government took almost no action even when confronted with the possibility of the massive dispossession of the peasantry. In general, the

state involvement was unconnected with a concern for the well-being of smallholding peasants. [Aytekin, 2008: 308]

Many small landowners, hence, were forced to become sharecroppers. It was the sharecropping system that enabled the rapid development of export-oriented agriculture in the Adana plain. During the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, a huge amount of lands, specialized in the production of commodity crops, was cultivated by a number of sharecroppers. The farms were usually possessed by the former tribal chiefs and other local bosses. The Sultans, Paşas, and wealthy Armenians also purchased lands and employed the same system. Thanks to the constant growth of export crops, they could earn much profit by exploiting the small surplus produced by sharecroppers. On the other hand, the life of the producers was difficult and miserable. The sharecroppers were provided with land and seeds, as well as huts, tools, and other materials. In return, the land owners got approximately a half of the harvest. [Kıray, 1998: 13]

The growing tendency of the class differentiation in the agrarian sector was especially dangerous in the Adana province as it had another source of concern: The creation of ethnic diversity.

A Multi-Ethnic Society and the Ethnic Division of Labor

The Adana province had a complicated ethnic composition at the turn of the twentieth century. Owing to a long and continuous influx of agrarian workers and refugees, the Muslim population was composed of a variety of peoples, even though the authorities usually paid no attention to their ethnic diversity. The same attitudes were shown by the many Christian observers who couldn't distinguish the ethnic subdivisions of the Muslim population, and often called them generically as 'Turks' with a tone of contempt. But in reality, ethnic Turks were only a part of the population and the ethnic differences within the Muslim population had a major influence on their communal relations.

The descendents of the Fellahs and Sudanese who had been brought in by the Egyptians continued to maintain their social ties and

lived in their own villages or in special neighborhoods in the towns. [Davenport-Gibbons, 1917: 52, 72-73] Former nomadic tbibes, many of them were either Kurdish or Turkmen origin, also kept their tribal ties after they accommodated to a sedentary life and often maintained relations with those who continued the transhumance. The refugees from the Caucasus often built their own villages and lived in compact forms. It was especially the case with the Circassians who distanced themselves with other populations and preserved their particular culture and life style. [Scott-Stevenson 1881: 103] The refugees from the Balkans also lived separately from the indigenous Muslim population. They must have been of various ethnic backgrounds; ethnic Turks, Slavs, and Hellenic Muslims. There was also another group, called the Affschars. They settled mostly in the east of Taurus and formed a distinct ethnic group within the Muslim population. A British traveler in the 1870s put it: "The customs, habits, and physical appearance of the race strikingly indicate that they are [of] Armenian origin, and all [of] their own traditions point to the same fact." [Scott-Stevenson 1881: 218]

The Christian population was also of various origins. The majority of them were Armenians, but they were divided into three religious groups: the Armenian Gregorians, Catholics, and Protestants. The second largest group was the Greeks, or more accurately, the Greek Orthodox. There were Assyrian, Keldanian, and Keldanian Catholic communities as well.

During the 1850s, the rough sketch of the ethnic map was as follows. The sedentary peasants like Ethnic Turks, Fellahs, and Ansarians lived in the villages on the plain. The Armenian peasants mostly concentrated in the mountainous regions of the Kozan district. There were few places that could be called towns, other than Adana and Tarsus. The inhabitants of the two towns were mostly ethnic Turks, Armenians, and Greeks. The rest of the area were the places where the Kurdish and Turkmen tribes fed their flocks. They stayed in the pasturages of the Ceyhan, Sayhan, and their tributaries during the winter, and returned to the uplands of Taurus and Gavur Dağı during the summer. [Barker, 1853: 113]

After the Crimean War, the map began to change drastically. Thanks to the flourishing export trade, towns like Tarsus, Mersin, Adana, and Alexandretta grew rapidly. Adana and Tarsus doubled between 1830 and 1890. The population of Mersin jumped from less than a hundred inhabitants before the Crimean War to about 2000 by 1876, and 9000 by 1890. On the other hand, the towns created by the Reform Division in the eastern part of Çukurova, such as Osmaniye, İslahiye and Kars Bazar, mostly stagnated. The only notable exception was Payas, the population of which increased from 525 in 1865 to 6300 in 1890. [Astourian, 1996: 210]

The vivid discrepancy between the western and eastern parts of the province reflected differences in agricultural utilization. While the western part, roughly coincided with the territory of the Adana and the Tarsus prefectures, saw the development of the commodity crop production, the eastern land, where tribal groups were forcibly settled, showed a stronger preponderance of subsistence farming.

Most importantly, the nineteenth century economic growth of Çukurova not only brought about a regional discrepancy, but also a clear pattern of ethnic division of labor. Traditionally, the Armenian merchants played an outstanding role in the trade in the eastern Anatolia. As early as the 1830s, when most of the trade was carried out within the local market composed of Anatolian hinterland and Syria, the Armenian merchants from Kayseri consolidated their position in Çukurova. They, together with the Greeks, had constituted the large part of the population of Tarsus, the most important trade center, by the 1850s. [Astourian, 1996: 129, 136] The increase in the European trade from the 1860s offered even more opportunities for them, as the export of commercial crops and related businesses developed under the aegis of the Western-Christian capitals.

The first cotton-processing factories were founded by a French engineer, Justin Daudet, in Adana in 1864. The next year, James Kot, a British merchant, built three cotton-sorting factories in Adana, Mersin and Tarsus. The French, the British, then, the German, the Swiss, and the Austrian financiers invested heavily in the cotton business in

Çukurova and helped to construct large factories and trade companies. As the western capital preferred to employ Christian managers, it was the Armenians that benefitted most. Although the most important factories in the region were owned by Greeks, the Trypani Brothers, many Armenians achieved success in the cotton business and related areas. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Armenians controlled most of the handicraft and trade of the region. They also dominated the local banks. [Astourian, 1996: 166, 524; Woods, 1911: 128]

While the Armenians were quite successful in such sectors as commerce, industry, and finance, they were less active in the agricultural sector. A British traveler wrote in the 1870s, "One rarely hears of an Armenian as an agriculturist; they are all traders." [Scott-Stevenson 1881: 210–211] Although the wealthy Armenians began to purchase a large amount of lands after the 1870s and engaged in farm management toward the end of the nineteenth century, the agrarian workers were mainly composed of Muslims. Most of the Armenians in the Adana plain continued to be engaged in commerce or manufacturing, and rarely worked in the fields. [Ener, 1955: 220; Arıkoğlu, 1961: 42]

While the indigenous Armenians were less active in agriculture, it is also true that a significant number of Armenians came to the Adana province as seasonal workers. As the province was always in short of an agrarian working force, a fairly large number of workers came to the plain during the peak harvest season. They usually came from the mountainous regions and the central Anatolia as far as Urfa, Kharput, Diarbakir, Mosul, or Bitlis and stayed in Cilicia from April to September. [Pamuk, 1987: 199–200; Kıray, 1998: 12] There are different estimates of the number of seasonal workers. While Astourian claims that up to 100 thousand migrant workers would move to Cilicia in the 1880s, [Astourian, 1996: 234] Bayraktar claims that the region accepted 50,000–60,000 seasonal workers at the beginning of the twentieth century. [Bayraktar, 2007: 410] The two observers are unanimous in that most of the seasonal workers were Kurdish and Armenian peasants, but there is no statistical data on their ethnic compositions. It seems plausible, however, that the majority of them were Muslims. Even Vahakn Dadrian

admits that the number of Muslim seasonal workers exceeded that of the Armenians by a ratio of more than two to one. [Dadrian, 1988: 14]

Muslim-Armenian Relations

It is a kind of stereotype, or an established style of writing on the side of Turkish authors to describe the Turko-Armenian relationship before the tragic events as a positive and unproblematic relationship. In his memoire, Damar Arıkoğlu described harmonious relations between Muslims and Armenians in Adana town, before he became a young member of the CUP local branch. He illustrated the friendly interactions using several examples of personal and family level of contact, and claimed as follows: "Before the Young Turk revolution, the relations between the Turks and the Armenians were very good, and they respected each other. Turks would address Armenian elders by calling them "Dayı (Uncle)," and they would call them back "Yeğenim (My nephew)." [Arıkoğlu, 1961: 42] Likewise, Cemal Paşa stresses the heartfelt amity between the two peoples: "In family affairs there was no limit to Turco-Armenian friendship. When a Turk left his village in Asia Minor for some business journey he left his Armenian neighbours in full charge of his family, honours and rights, and the Armenians on their side showed equal confidence in their Turkish neighbours." [Djemal, 1922: 241]

Although much exaggerated, these allegations reflect a certain amount of truth. The Armenians of the Cilician Plain were linguistically a Turkified group, as they spoke Turkish in daily life and wrote in Turkish using the Armenian alphabet. [Woods 1911: 126] In a sense, the Armenians were the most intimate people to the Turks in the region. They resembled each other more than any other ethnic groups, as Süleyman Kâni İrtem put it: "Especially in the villages, it was very difficult to distinguish one's ethnicity by looking at the way of life or costumes. The difference became clear only when they went to mosques or churches." [İrtem 147] Moreover, the urban dwellers and the sedentary elements in the countryside had common interest in defending their

living space from the outside intruders. As the Turkish and Armenian population constituted the majority of the settled element, it was no coincident that Turks and Armenians had worked together to prevent the spread of disorder at the time of the disorders and massacres of 1894–1896, and they succeeded in maintaining peace in most part of the Adana vilayet. [Djemal, 1922: 257] It is necessary, however, to avoid over-simplification. The relationship between the two communities was more complicated and nuanced, and in some cases, tense and distrustful.

As noted above, the Muslim community of the Adana province was not composed of Turks alone. There were various ethnic groups who maintained a semi-nomadic life. As usual, the tribes had a disruptive relationships with the sedentary population. When they came down from their summer pastures, they created problems with the sedentary population, especially Armenians who engaged in commerce, crafts, and agriculture. In the mountains and the caravan centers of the plain, the Armenian traders were often harassed by the nomadic tribes and the Circassians. [Astourian, 1996: 172–173]

The system was controlled by the Ağas was also detrimental to the Armenian population. They were usually marginalized and were even excluded from the judicial and political process. It is true that the Christian members were accepted in the administrative and judicial councils introduced by the Tanzimat reforms, but there were always less delegates than the Muslim members and couldn't provide effective protection for their fellow Christians. Moreover, it was often the case that the Christian delegates appeared to be nothing but the hangers-on to the Muslim lords. The following description of Burckhardt Baker is a good summary of the situation:

> *"The introduction of Christians into the councils, as ordained by the Porte, has not in Cilicia as yet gone beyond the summoning of some illiterate follower of the Messiah, who sits on his knees near the door, and never opens his mouth but with low obeisances to confirm their nefarious decrees. He is generally a servant of the Mufti, and officiates*

as Sarraff or banker of the government, a lucrative employment, which throws much floating capital into his hands." [*Barker,1853: 106*]

As suggested by these remarks, there seemed to exist a covert alliance between the Muslim and the Armenian notables. Andrew Gould describes this 'intimate' relation between the Kozan-oğlus and the Catholicos of Sis in following way:

"In theory the Catholicos was elected by the bishops. In fact the Ajapahian dynasty had perpetuated its power with the help of the derebeys. Kiragos II took office in 1855 without election and used the Kozan-oğlus to eliminate the opposing bishops." [*Gould 1976: 494*]

Not only the Catholicos, but also the Armenian notables generally profited from their alliance with the Derebeys. The leader of Kozan-oğlus took Armenians as advisors and entrusted them with the financial affairs of his realm. On their part, the Armenian notables of Haçin would call on the help of Derebeys to eliminate their rivals, asked them confiscate the property of anyone who seemed to prosper, and divided the booty with them. They also collected the amount of money, under the pretext of "taxes," four times larger than actually demanded by the Kozan-oğlus, keeping three-fourths for themselves. [Gould 1976: 495]

Intimate relations between the Armenian notables and the Muslim authority continued after the elimination of the power of Derebeys. Alarmed by the events like Damascus incident and the Zeytun uprising, the Ottoman authorities turned their eyes on the possibility of foreign intervention in Cilicia on the pretext of protecting its Christian subjects. Hence, Cevdet Paşa conceived a plan to separate the Ottoman Armenians from the influence of Russia by turning the Sis Catholicos into an independent religious authority. He bestowed several new properties on them, and financed the restoration of their monasteries. He also constructed a new highway connecting Sis with Adana, and secured the safe passage for the Armenian pilgrims. Special credit was accommodated to the Armenian bankers and merchants in the hope

that the local economy of Sis would rapidly revive. [Yurtsever, 1983: 210]

Thanks to the Ottoman policy in part, and owing to the development of the export oriented sectors in general, the Armenian merchants and businessmen grew powerful in a short period and some became extremely rich. The Armenians now played a dominant role in the local economy. They controlled the wholesale business and financial section of the province. In Adana, they became much more influential than the Greeks, and the main wealth of the city was in their hands. In Tarsus, the Armenians dominated the cotton trade and the industrial quarters, and controlled the whole section of retail trade. [Ener, 1955: 230–231]

It goes without saying that those who succeeded in business constituted only a part of the Armenian population and the majority of them lived moderate, or even miserable, lives, but it was undeniable that the prosperity of the Armenian part of town became conspicuous to anyone. In Tarsus, it was the Armenian quarter that everyone called "the best part of the town." [Institute für Armenische Fragen, 1987: 256] The same was true to the other towns and cities in Çukurova. Damar Arıkoğlu describes the central part of Adana before the 1909 incident as follows:

> *"There were two covered markets and two Bedestans in Adana. Large commodity shops and silk traders were concentrated in the Bedestans. All the shop owners, except for four Muslim and Syrian merchants, were Armenians. There were other Muslim shops in the covered markets, but the number could be counted on your fingers."* [*Arıkoğlu, 1961: 38*]

The visual wealth and prosperity of the Armenians inevitably provoked the resentment of the Muslim population. [Ternon, 1981: 141] Mrs. Scott-Stevenson observed the situation; "The Greeks and the Turks seem to have an instinctive dislike to have any dealings with them [*Armenians – Author*]. Their secretive disposition does not win them friends, and their parsimony and greed have gained them the silent

contempt of the Mahomedan." [Scott-Stevenson 1881: 210-211] Likewise, William Ramsay claims; "They are not popular, and they do not deserve to be, so far as my experience goes." [Ramsay 1897: 203]

The unpopularity of Armenian merchants among the Muslims was reinforced by their monopolistic position with the local creditors. Damar Arıkoğlu describes the relation between the Armenian merchants and Muslim peasants in the Adana province as follows:

> *"There was at least one Armenian money-lender in each Turkish village. All the necessary things for daily life were provided by them, and all the harvests were purchased by them. The account was settled once every year, and the bills were sincerely recorded by the Armenians. But they never let the peasants rise up beyond the level of half-hunger and half-naked life."* [*Arıkoğlu, 1961: 43*]

Therefore, just like the Jews in Ukraine before the pogroms, the Armenians were forced to expose directly to the enmity and hostility of the poor Muslim peasants in the Adana province.

Conclusion

The Adana province had experienced a rapid and drastic political and socio-economic transformation by the eve of the 1909 incident. The province changed itself from an economically backward region in the Ottoman Empire to the rich and export-oriented agrarian economy during the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period, several attempts were made to increase the working force for the cultivation of commercial crops. Nomadic people were forced to settle on the plains and Muslim refugees from Russia and the Christian Balkans were also invited. As a result, the region saw a rapid growth in population and had had a highly complicated ethnic composition by the end of the century. In the meantime, the accumulation of the landed estate in the hands of the Muslim land-lord was underway. They eventually established themselves as local bosses and controlled the life of the small

peasants and sharecroppers. The rapid economic growth in the export-oriented agriculture brought about another outcome. The local Christian elements, especially Armenians, succeeded in controlling commerce and industry in the province due to their traditional mercantile function in society as well as their intimate ties with Western capital. Within the population, there developed a system of economic stratification in which former nomads and refugees constituted the lowest strata. Those poor Muslims were doubly oppressed by the Muslim local bosses, but in spite of their oppressive characteristics, or more accurately because of them, the Ağas succeeded in controlling the Muslim masses. As a result, the Armenians were forced to become the easy targets of accumulating Muslim discontent. They could not enjoy the appropriate judicial protection whereas their wealth increasingly attracted the enmity of Muslim masses.

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