

The 1909 Adana Incident(Part2): The Young Turk Revolution and the Muslim-Armenian Confrontation in Adana

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The 1909 Adana Incident (Part 2) :

The Young Turk Revolution and the Muslim-Armenian Confrontation in Adana

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Chapter 1

The Young Turk Revolution and its Impact on the Adana Province

CUP Takeover of Power and its Weakness

On 23 July 1908, Sultan Abdülhamid II accepted the request to reinstate the constitution that had been suspended for more than thirty years, and the Ottoman Empire entered into a new era. The revolution was enthusiastically welcomed everywhere in the empire. Various ethnic groups and religious communities simply expressed their joy over the event. Main avenues of the cities were filled with flags, and people went out the streets, all yelling out, "Liberty," "Equality," "Justice," or "Fraternity."

The constitution and its government created a positive mood for the multi-ethnic empire. Intellectuals and progressive leaders of all congregations expressed their will for the solidarity. An American missionary in Beirut described the situation as follows: "There has been a great drawing together of the Moslem and Christian populations. For the educated portion, at least, the old religious gulf of separation has been partially bridged over. In consequence a new fund of common national ideals is being gradually accumulated." (Crawford, 1911: 106) This positive mood helped to eliminate the religious tension to some

extent in many parts of the empire, and the situation in the provinces improved in the months following the 1908 revolution.

It was especially so in the eastern provinces of Anatolia, where the security conditions improved noticeably in the two and a half years following the revolution and the hopes for prosperity increased among the non-Muslims subjects. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) took such measures like the prosecution of the Kurdish perpetrators of assaults and robberies, and the removal of reactionary officers. The result of all these steps was a significant decrease in violence in almost all the provinces. (Kaligian, 2008: 81, 90)

The revolution, however, was an unexpected success for CUP. As they had not prepared to take over the administration of the Empire by themselves, they could not help entrusting the old generals with the task of running the cabinet. The leadership of CUP was in no position to directly impose its will on the government. As a result, the newly appointed Prime Minister, Kamil Paşa, pursued the freehand policy that ended up in a serious confrontation with the CUP leadership. Finally, the CUP decided to dismiss Kamil by a vote of no confidence in the parliament on 13 February 1909. Even after the 31 May event, however, the presence of the CUP leadership in the cabinet remained small and they had to satisfy themselves to have an “inspective power” in the central government.

In the case of the provincial administration, the power and influence of CUP was far more moderate. Generally speaking, the CUP was an elite organization that was mainly composed of civil and military officers with a Western styled educational background. Only a handful of people could get such training in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the membership of CUP was not strong enough to take over the administration from the old cadre in many places. In large part, they had to rely on those officers who had been long accustomed to the autocratic style of rule in the running the local government. The sudden end of despotism, however, seriously damaged the morale of the local officers and brought about the malfunction of the administrative machinery in many places. To make matters worse, ordinary people reacted too

hastily. They misunderstood the revolution as the total annulment of existing laws and institutions, and began to solve their questions by themselves. As a result, serious anarchy took place in many provinces. (Ahmad, 1971: 31) Cemal Paşa, one of the CUP troika and the former governor of Adana 1909–1910, complained about the situation as follows: “The word ‘freedom’ was interpreted both by the Press and the public in a very erroneous sense, and every man thought he could do exactly what he liked without penalty.” (Djermal, 1922: 255)

Moreover, the support of CUP was neither uniform nor omnipresent in the entire country. Nor was its authority integrated and consolidated. The CUP was relatively strong and well organized in the Balkan provinces where Abdulhamid had stationed a large number of modernized troops to fight with the Macedonian rebels. On the other hand, the presence of the CUP membership in the Eastern provinces was by far smaller, almost unfelt. As a result, the measures to check the reactionary elements brought about a backlash and eventually weakened the general political position of the CUP. (Kaligian, 2008: 81, 90) The case of the Adana province was one of the worst examples of the political instability in the area.

Ambivalent Characters of the CUP Adana Branch

The CUP branch of Adana was founded immediately after the revolution. Various elements rushed into the organization. Aside from progressive Muslims, there were many Greek members. (Arıkoğlu, 1961: 43) The Armenians also massively joined the party. The Armenian members were so active that their representative, Karabet Çallıyan, was appointed to be the member of the central committee of the Adana branch. It shows that the CUP accepted everyone who declared to be supporters of the constitution and that neither ethnicity nor religion was of any significance. The free entry policy, however, created unexpected difficulties. According to Cemal Paşa, the problem lied in that “men who had never even heard the name of ‘Unity and Progress’ before the promulgation of the constitution often paraded as ‘heroes of liberation’ and went so far as to interfere with Government officials in the execution of

their duty.” (Djema1, 1922: 256) Indeed, there were many newcomers who entered the party to exploit the influence and reputation of the CUP for their own profit. Karabet Çallıyan expressed his regret in this process as follows: “I must confess, as one of the founding members of the club, that the lavish policy for membership allowed the dishonest, despotic, fanatic, corrupt and, reactionary elements to creep into the organization. Their number was so large that the serious supporters of constitutionalism, unfortunately, fell into a minority.” (Abdurrahman Şeref: 121)

Indeed, the policy allowed such conservative Muslim notables like Bağdadizâde Abdürrahman to play a certain role in the organization. The Bağdadizades were the wealthy Muslim family that had been influential in local politics. Although the family was relatively a new comer to the province, they succeeded in constructing big estates and consolidated their influence among the local Muslim notables. (Ener, 1955: 225; Çallıyan, 1325: 3) After gaining the membership, Bağdadizâde even succeeded in becoming a member of the central committee of the Adana branch. When he got this office, he exclusively devoted his energy to factional activities. He first set up an organization called “CUP agrarian club.” The club was eventually led by his father, Abdülkadir, and composed of several notables of the city, like Boşnak Salih, Batumlu Osman, Debbağzade Hacı Ali, Bayraktar Bekir, and Rasih Efendi, former chief of city council. The club gradually grew into an oppositional center of the CUP, and the central CUP committee of Adana dismissed Abdürrahman Efendi. In response, Abdürrahman Efendi embarked on an open criticism against the CUP. As the club, in theory, could not refuse Christian members, the Muslim conservatives led by the Bağdadizâdes decided to organize another association, “Enlightenment Society (Cemiyet-i İ1miye).” The society attracted many Muslims who felt alienated from the new era. (İrtem, 2003: 163)

The reason why those conservative Muslims initially wanted to join the local CUP can be explained within the following context. By the turn of the centuries, the Adana province had already experienced a relatively tense situation. Originally, the tension derived from a

contest between the governor and the local Muslim notables.

In 1896, several months after the 1895 massacre, Bahri Paşa was appointed the governor of Adana. When he came to Adana, Bahri tried to check the Bağdadizades and confiscated some of their properties. In response, Bağdadizade Abdülkadir drew up a petition signed by the local Muslim notables and sent it to the Porte demanding the dismissal of Bahri. (BOA, DH. MKT. 2434/140) The governor, however, had already taken a preventive measure. As soon as he found out about the intrigue, Bahri Paşa carried out an investigation, and sent all the petitioners into exile. But the preventive measure didn't last long. His opponents managed to return to Adana the next year, and the contest continued for several years. (Arikoğlu, 1961: 4)

The struggle with the Muslim notables may partly explain the reason for the Bahri Paşa's alleged pro-Armenian policy. Originally, the Armenians acted as the local mercantile class, but after the middle of the Nineteenth century, they embarked on agrarian businesses and recorded noticeable success. As a result, Muslim notables began to cast watchful eyes on the Armenians. (İrtem, 2003: 152) It is logical that Bahri thought that Armenians would be his ally in curbing the Muslim magnates. According to Süleyman Kâni İrtem, Bahri Paşa had been famous as a "friend and protector" of Armenians. "Thanks to his support, Armenians could freely engage in religious and educational activities. They opened large shops and accumulated wealth. They could comfortably live in luxurious residences and villas." (İrtem, 2003: 149) The information is confirmed, albeit with a moderate tone, by Armenian witnesses. The Armenian Bishop of Adana, Moucheq Seropian, admitted that Bahri Paşa was responsive toward Armenian concerns in many circumstances. (Seropian, 1909: 10) Karabet Çallıyan, likewise, applauded the policy as follows. "The Armenians in Adana had enjoyed economic prosperity during the governorship of Bahri Paşa. He didn't pay attention to the groundless rumors against the Armenians. On the contrary, he gave them protection. Owing to his help, the Armenians in Adana saw a rapid development in their culture and education as well as in their religious activities." (Çallıyan, 1325: 2-3)

The Paşa's friendship with Armenians was strongly felt especially after 1905, when a young and talented priest took the office of the bishop of Adana. The newly appointed bishop, Mouchegh Seropian, further developed a good relationship with Bahri Paşa. But their intimacy was another cause of concern with the Muslim notables. The followers of Bağdadizades sent a secret report to the Palace, claiming that Mouchegh urged Armenians to immigrate to Cilicia, with the intention of staging an insurrection as soon as the Armenians would be strong enough numerically. They also wrote up a petition of grievances and complaints against Bahri. Bahri denied both the allegations and the investigation committee confirmed his conclusion on May 1907. (İrtem, 2003: 152; Seropian, 1909: 6-7, 11; BOA, Y. MYV. 291/66) In this way, the disagreements between the governor and the Muslim notables gradually became an Armenian-Muslim controversy.

As we can see in this context, the local politics of Adana didn't fit into the generally accepted picture in which the progressives supported the CUP, while the conservatives opposed it. The conservative Islamic elements led by the landowners had been dissatisfied with the existing government which they regarded as pro-Armenian. They must have had enough reason to support CUP as long as the latter would ensure the overthrow of the old administrators.¹ And this indeed happened in 1908.

After the declaration of freedom in 1908, the supporters of the revolution organized a large meeting and launched for enthusiastic demonstrations demanding a constitutional regime all over Adana province. Amid this excitement, the newly formed local CUP committee began to criticize the governor, Bahri Paşa, and eventually forced him to resign. This action gives rise to a considerable amount of speculation by contemporary scholars. Raymond Kévorkian claims that the dismissal was carried out by the initiative of the local Muslim notables who had already dominated the local CUP. He also asserts that Bahri Paşa was accused of being "a sympathizer to the Christians." (Kévorkian, 1999: Section 3) His reasoning does not seem quite plausible when we take into account of the fact that the CUP committee in Adana had many

Christian members. It is more plausible that the CUP branch wanted to show its influence by reshuffling the local government. Indeed, the massive dismissal of the governors, police officers and civil officials were taking place on a massive scale all over the empire at that time. Not only Bahri Paşa, but also many other officials, including the lieutenant governor of Mersin, were forcibly thrown out of the office by the alleged supporters of the CUP in the Adana province. (Kansu, 1995: 144–145)

The membership of Bağdadizades also reminds us of the fact that the CUP committee of Adana had an ambivalent character. The membership, including the leadership, contained a variety of people with quite different creeds and principles. Therefore, it is necessary not to identify the behavior of each member with the policy of CUP. This consideration must be applied to the other branches of the CUP in the Adana province, as they had more or less the same conditions. Thus, we must consider the following complaint by Mehmed Asaf. “I was surprised to find that the state of anarchy had dominated entire the district, even in the smallest villages. Almost all the villages had two parties, antagonistic to each other, and both of them camouflaged as a branch of CUP, often possessing self-made seals. Those who were cunning would open a branch of CUP, gather 5 or 10 guys, and, try to use it to outwit their opponents, because the shameless people considered the name of the committee as a shield for everything.” (Asaf, 1986: 6)

The New Provincial Government

The acquisition of local power by the CUP by no means brought about the consolidation of their political principles and constitutionalism. On the contrary, the basic principle of the constitutionalism – the rule of law – was seriously undermined, and an anarchic situation was created. After the expulsion of Bahri Paşa, the office of the governor remained vacant for two months. As a result, the local government lost its authority and almost ceased to function. Both police and gendarmerie lost their credibility and could not enforce judicial measures. The people began to bring their petitions directly to local

CUP offices, but the CUP branches neither had the competence nor the capacity to handle their demands. (Arikoğlu, 1961: 44)

In such an abysmal situation, the new governor, Cevad Bey, arrived at Adana in the middle of September. A local CUP member, Damar Arikoğlu described Cevad Bey as “young, inexperienced, and didn’t know anything about administration.” (Arikoğlu, 1961: 48) This remark seems irrelevant, as Cevad Bey was an administrator with a certain amount of experience. He was first appointed as the governor of Ankara from his former post of lieutenant governor of Jerusalem on January 1902. (BOA, İ. DH. 1393/1319/L-24) Five years later, he was transferred to Konya as the governor and stayed there for one and a half years. (BOA, İ. HUS. 1452/1325/M-13, DH. MKT. 2719/98) Therefore, his problem was not a lack of experience, but his indecision and reluctance to take any drastic measures in areas that were his responsibility. Cemal Paşa mockingly commented: “He may certainly be regarded as a model of uprightness, but, unfortunately, he was also a model of administrative incapacity. He was in no way equal to the demands made upon a Vali of Adana.” (Djermal 1922: 259)

Indeed, as a governor, Cevad Bey was an authoritarian type and quite unpopular with the population. Even during his office in Konya between 1907 and 1908, he was so disliked among the citizens that, after the news of his misconduct during the Adana incident arrived in Konya, he became the object of almost universal abhorrence in the city. When he passed through the city on his way back to Istanbul, it was rumored that he would stand for trial, and it was fervently hoped by many that he would be hanged. (Ramsay, 1909: 206, 253)

Cevad Bey was also notorious as an officer hostile to Christians. William Ramsay explained the reason as follows: “He had a hostile encounter with American missionaries, with whose rights he tried to interfere; he was worsted in the encounter, as their rights were incontestable; but he felt the humiliation bitterly, and thereafter devoted himself to annoying all English and Americans, whom he regarded as one people.” (Ramsay, 1909: 251) One of the backlashes was the forceful closure of an American Mission School for girls in Konya.

Ramsay himself had an encounter with Cevad in 1907, when he went to Konya and asked permission for an archaeological excavation. Ramsay took deliberate measures and had prepared an official letter authorizing the work in Istanbul. Nevertheless, Cevad actually forbade the British team to move "a cupful of earth on the site." Ramsay appealed to the Grand Vizier, and the governor had to obey the request of his superior. He expressed his utmost displeasure when he issued permission. (Ramsay, 1909: 252) Such an attitude didn't change when he came to Adana. Karabet Çallıyan put it; "While Cevad Bey visited the CUP club only once during his term of office, he frequented the Agrarian Club and Enlightenment Society, and stayed there for many hours having pleasant conversations with the other members." (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 123) In light of those episodes, it is not altogether without reason that Mouchegh Seropian condemned Cevad using with such hostility: "a former courtier of Abdul-Hamid, a sworn enemy of the Armenians, a reactionary, and a traitor to the motherland." (Seropian, 1909: 17)

The appointment of Cevad Bey to the Adana governor, in a sense, reflected another weakness of the CUP that Vahakn Dadrian explained in the following way. "There were no preparations to take over the reins of government, no trained or experienced civil servants to administer the provinces in the spirit of the liberal constitution that had keynoted the advent of the Ittihadist regime. As a result, many governors and their subalterns, holdovers of the Abdul Hamid era, were allowed for extended periods to retain their posts." (Dadrian, 1988: 3) Other staff of the provincial government were more or less similarly incompetent to cope with the unusual situation created by the Revolution. According to Cemal Paşa, the military commander of the province, Mustafa Ramzi Paşa, used to be an energetic soldier and always maintained the traditions of "honorable patriotism." But "it cannot be said that this officer, who was both old and without any police powers, possessed the qualifications required by the military commander of Adana." (Djermal, 1922: 259) The chief of police, Hacibeyzade Kadri Bey, was the same kind of personality. "Although he was appointed among the locals, he was an amateur and had no experience in police duty." (Arıkoğlu, 1961: 48)

With these weak administrative cadres, it was impossible to restore the order and check the deviatory activities of various political elements. As Arıkoğlu put it; “The influence of the government fell completely to the ground. No one paid attention to the officials. They almost entirely forgot them.” (Arıkoğlu, 1961: 45)

Anti-CUP Sentiment among the Muslims

The CUP was an elite political organization whose cadre was composed of highly educated elements in the Ottoman society such as officials, journalists, attorneys, intellectuals, and, above all, military officers. They were powerful and popular in the big cities that tended to be concentrated in the Balkans and western Anatolia. They were especially powerful in the Balkan based Third Army whose military potential was, in a sense, the principal factor that made Abdülhamid II renounce absolutism. On the other hand, they had been almost unknown in the eastern and central parts of Anatolia at the time of the Revolution and continued to be weak in presence thereafter. In these regions, the Muslim population was less sensitive to the possibility of the dismemberment of the Ottoman territory and more indifferent to the importance of the CUP slogan of “The Unity of Different Elements.” Hence, it was natural, as the case of Adana demonstrates it, various Christians, especially Armenians, constituted a significant part of the newly founded CUP branches. The Christian membership of the local CUP committees, mixed up with the sudden ascendancy of the Party, provoked a certain amount of suspicion among the Muslim population who were still under the influence of old clerics. For all the initial excitement, they soon came to feel somewhere out of place with the new regime as the difficulty of their lives increased due to political disturbances and accidental crop failures. “In the eyes of the Anatolian masses the Young Turks were miscreants, traitors to Islam and the Sacred Law.” (Abbot, 1909: 293)

The British ambassador, G. Lowther, explained the roots of Muslim antipathy to the CUP when he commented on the Harput case. “The Turks of the district are increasingly jealous of the liberty enjoyed by

the Armenians, and increasingly suspicious of the local branch of the Committee of Union and Progress, and have formed a rival "Committee of Islamism" in the parliament, discussing the measures to be taken for the relief of those who have suffered from the bad harvest in Asia Minor. A Deputy said that the Government was to blame for this, for they did not make the people respect the command to pray five times a day." (Demirel, 2002: 496)

The same kind of development was observed in the Adana province. The first sign of disturbance appeared in the Haçin district. The mufti of Haçin, İلمي Efendi, and three other priests reported on Sept 1908 the following event to the local authorities.

"Ahmed Efendi, a son of the former mufti of Haçin, had been looking down upon those who favored liberty, and organized a committee together with his brother İzzet, vice inspector Sabri Efendi and others. They armed themselves, visited the market place and propagated against liberty and fraternity. They instigate a revolt against authority, displaying strong hatred against the Christians. The number of their followers is increasing and the preparation to massacre the Christians are well under way. Ahmed Efendi secretly keeps contact with Aziz Efendi, a former member of local court in Kozan. They agreed on the plan that Ahmed Efendi would instigate the Muslim population of Haçin against Armenians, so did Aziz Efendi in Sis and Kars. He also confessed to have killed two Armenians from Haçin, five or ten days ago, and declared to continue similar activities and instigations. For this purpose, they even distributed arms to the population. They have already succeeded in agitating Muslims from the Haçin district and setting them against the Christians. They came to our place and explained the above mentioned story in secrecy. Then, they asked us to join them, but we declined." (İrtem, 2003: 159)

Ahmed Efendi, or Kör Ahmed, indeed disseminated letters among the Muslim peasants and called them to massacre Armenians in the town of Haçin during the Şeker Bayramı (27–29 October 1908). One of the letters, however, was seized by the magistrate of Kars, and the lieutenant governor of Haçin, Abdül Halim Bey, set up an investigative committee. The CUP branch of Adana also ordered its Haçin office to

investigate the situation and to take preventive measures. Upon the report prepared by them, Kör Ahmed, together with his brother Izzet and Sabri Efendi, was summoned to Adana and taken into custody. Thanks to these swift and appropriate measures, nothing serious took place during the Bayram. (İrtem, 2003: 159; Seropian, 1909: 16)

After the arrest of Ahmed Efendi, the province remained calm and peaceful at least on the surface. The British consul of Mersin reported that “on the whole things are quiet” in the province, except that a few murders of Armenians are reported as having taken place. (Demirel, 2002: 496) Several fatal processes, however, were under way, indeed.

Struggle between the Pro- and Anti- Cevad Blocks

Roughly one month after the arrival of Cevad Bey, two fractions were formed among the Muslim population in Adana. One was led by İhsan Fikri, a journalist. Some sources claim that he was the head of the CUP branch of Adana, and it seems probable in light of the fact that he was once arrested for attending a meeting of the CUP in Istanbul and banished in Diyarbakir. (İrtem, 2003: 161) He later transferred to Payas district and made the acquaintance of Bahri Paşa. The governor subsequently gave him amnesty, and appointed him as the director of a vocational school in Adana. It is also reported that he was charged with an offence and dismissed from the job, and the post was eventually occupied by one of the Muslim notables from the city, Gergirili Ali. (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 109) After the Revolution, he participated in the foundation of CUP branch and began to publish local paper, “İttidal.” The paper happened to be seen as an official organ of the Adana CUP, but in fact, it was a private paper owned by İhsan Fikri, albeit sympathetic to the cause of CUP.

The other faction was led by Bağdadizâde Abdülkadir. As noted above, the faction was composed of Muslim notables and religious figures. It first appeared as a fraction of the CUP in the form of the CUP agrarian club. Later, it took more concrete form as an organization of conservative Muslims by setting up the Enlightenment Society. The faction had its own media as Abdülkadir began to publish a weekly,

“Rehber-i İttidal.” Making use of this journal, the circle openly criticized constitutionalism and judicial equality. (Kévorkian, 1999: Section 3)

The rivalry between the two Muslim factions gained momentum day by day. The governor Cevad Bey described the process as follows. “The two newspapers issued in Adana, ‘İttidal’ and ‘Rehber-i İttidal,’ disseminated mutually contradicting point of views reflecting different personal ideas of the editors with derogatory words. In this way, they instigated the population... The government took all the possible measures to appease the excitement of public opinion caused by the rumors, but their efforts turned out to be in vain.” (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 77) This description is, however, somewhat misleading, because the central figure in the mutual slander was the governor himself. He was in no position to distance himself from the process. The main target of the party of İhsan Fikri was Cevad Bey. They vehemently criticized the governor, and their newspaper embarked on a campaign against him. (İrtem, 2003: 168) The British consul of Mersin reported the situation as follows: “The Vali of Adana was being strongly attacked in the local paper, which observed that he was a good clerk, but a bad Governor; an honest man, but one who was incapable of action; and recommended him to return to Constantinople and resume his avocation there as a Secretary.” (Demirel, 2002: 498)

On the other hand, the conservative Muslims generally upheld the governor. Therefore, he sided with this faction and constructed good relations with them. (İrtem, 2003: 161) This, in turn, added fuel to the enmity of the supporters of İhsan Fikri.

Some sources tried to understate the Muslim rivalry by describing it as having arisen from the personal enmity of İhsan Fikri to Gergirili Ali that had originated from his dismissal of the director of a vocational school. (İrtem, 2003: 161–162; Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 109; Kevorkian, 1999: Section 3) But Mouchegh Seropian gives a different story. According to his explanation, the source of the Muslim discord was the reactionary attitude of the governor and his alliance with the Muslim notables. As he put it: “However, the Vali didn’t cease to pursue his criminal conduct, and came more seriously under the influence of the

reactionary circles. He pushed the audacity and cynicism so far that even the so-called Turkish liberals, members of the İttihad, began to criticize and to openly vilify him; İhsan Fikri published *İtidal* a journal, a violent diatribe against Vali that blamed him for his inability to maintain order. Instead of introducing reform, Cevad-Bey did no more than tighten the tie of friendship that had united the supporters of the former regime.” (Seropian, 1909: 25)

Mouchehgh's allegation seems to hit the point. Until the eruption of the final hostilities, the relationship between İhsan Fikri and the bishop was cordial. The following event demonstrates their good relationship. On 14 February 1909, İhsan Fikri proposed a meeting to protest against the draft of press law in the city garden of Adana. According to Mouchehgh, the meeting was a big one and as many as 10,000 people were present. Moreover, the meeting was organized by an Armeno-Muslim joint committee composed of İhsan Fikri, Tevfik, Hacı Süleyman, an imam of Sis, from the Muslim side, and Karabet Çallıyan and Mouchehgh from the Armenian side. At the meeting, Mouchehgh gave the following speech: “All crimes that have sullied Turkey and the Ottoman homeland have caused its ruin. They were the consequences of the enslavement of the population. In whatever form, the slavery can't be acceptable. But it is slavery of speech and writing that is the worst form of submission. So many crimes and injustices have been committed, which the Ottoman Empire has so far systematically declined. The main reason for this is that we have been deprived of free speech, the right to protest, and the right to defend these legitimate rights in our sacred homeland: they have oppressed the voices demanding justice and they have broken the pen fighting against injustice.” (Kevorkian, 1999: Section 3) It is apparent that Mouchehgh and İhsan Fikri were allied themselves as the defenders of constitutionalism against the governor and his conservative supporters.

Their alliance, however, was eventually cracked when the scandal of Gergirili Ali came to the surface. The casher of the vocational school, Hayri Efendi, and a teacher, Vasif Efendi, charged Gergirili Ali with misappropriation, and the latter was sent to the local court. They had

enough proofs of his guilt, but the judicial procedure didn't produce the expected result. While the Christian members declined to acquit the case, the Muslim notables who controlled the court were reluctant to condemn their friend. Therefore, İhsan Fikri prepared a protesting meeting. The supporters of Gergirili Ali warned of bloody consequences if the meeting should take place and began to organize a counter meeting. As the situation became extremely tense, the governor stepped in, but apparently in support of the conservative faction. He stopped the İhsan Fikri's meeting and Gergirili Ali was eventually set free. During this event, both İhsan Fikri and the supporters of Gergirili Ali asked the support of the Armenians. But the leadership of the Armenian community refused to cooperate with either side for fear of being mix up within the Muslim dispute. The attitude disgruntled both Muslim factions. (İrtem, 2003: 162-163; Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 109; Demirel, 2002: 498)

Muslim-Armenian Tensions after the Revolution

In a sense, the seed of rupture between the progressive Muslims and Armenians had already sprouted long before the Gergirili Ali affair. As noted above, the relationship between the Muslim and the Armenian communities had been tense even before the Revolution. And after the Revolution, it became even more difficult, as the social security deteriorated seriously owing to the misrule. Cases of inter-communal violencer had been happening sporadically. Armenians were attacked by Muslims and Muslims were assaulted by Armenians in the countryside, along the highways, and even inside the town. Some of them were apparently provoked, others were accidental but they were exploited by this or that party, contributing to increase in religious tensions in Adana. (İrtem, 2003: 169; Kevorkian, 1999: Section 3)

These days, various malicious rumors were disseminated among the population: "Massacres will be carried out by Armenians," or "Muslims are preparing wholesale slaughter of Armenians." One of the first rumors concerning the alleged Armenian provocation was reported by the French Vice-Consul in Sivas, H. Rouland, who wrote to S. Pichon, 29

January 1909; “There are rumors here that the Armenians are intriguing, as soon as they are armed, to rise up against the Ottoman government to proclaim their independence and to restore their ancient kingdom of Armenia. It is also claimed that they are waiting for a favorable opportunity.” (Kevorkian, 1999: Section 3) Cemal Paşa confirms this information and explains the effect as follows; “At the beginning of the year 1909 a rumour was going round that the Armenians would rise and destroy the Turks in the immediate future. They would use the opportunity to let the vilayet be occupied by contingents from the fleets of European Powers, and then proceed to form an Armenian State. The Turks were so convinced of the truth of these rumours that many reputable people took their families to a place of safety.” (Djermal, 1922: 259)

Some of these rumors were disseminated by the conservative Muslims circles with malicious intentions. In early February 1909, Kőr Ahmed sent a false telegraph to the governor that a revolt of the Armenians of Haçin was under preparation. In early March, another provocation took place at the Ulu Mosque in Adana. Two softas (Muslim students of religious school) alleged that they apprehended the guys who were about to sprinkle excrement in front of the main gate of the mosque. The local police, however, found out the intentions that they would agitate religious sentiment of Muslims by ascribing this offense to the Armenians, and reported it to the governor and Cevat Bey gave instructions to the Muslim population not to react to such trivial matters. (İrtem, 2003: 168)

Shortly thereafter, another rumor was disseminated saying that Armenians were preparing to attack the army barracks by using a secret underground passage. The Armenian Archbishop protested and required an investigation to identify the perpetrators of the rumor. The commandant Mustafa Ramzi Paşa didn't think it necessary to make an investigation, but he ordered to put the guards on a high alert. Muslims noticed the unusual attitudes of the guards and became excited. The event further accelerated anti-Armenian feelings among the Muslim population. (İrtem, 2003: 169; Kevorkian, 1909: Section 3)

As the governor couldn't take appropriate measures to chase down

the sources of vicious rumors, the population was thrown into a state of fear. The consequences were very grave. Süleyman Kani İrtem describes it as follows; "As the hostilities of the two elements accelerated, Turks and Armenians competed with each other to arm themselves. The government lost control, and anarchy prevailed." (İrtem, 2003: 160-161)

The Smuggling of Fire Arms

A large scale of importation of arms and ammunitions had been underway since the summer of 1908. As the ban on the imports and use of firearms was lifted, even the revolvers sent by post freely got through custom. According to the official register, total 12,804 fire arms were imported through the ports of Mersin and Alexandretta from the July 1908 to April 1909. (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 110) No doubt, thousands more arms were smuggled into the Adana province. Making use of the weakness of the government, smugglers were freely carried arms by traditional routes via Aleppo and Beirut, and the number of firearms smuggled by way of Cyprus extremely increased. The British vice-consul of Mersin, Major Doughty Wylie, estimated that 40,000 guns, revolvers and automatic pistols had been imported into the province since the restoration of the constitution. (Sonyel, 1987: 1319)

What was more serious was that these arms and ammunition were openly sold in the market along with other commodities for daily use. Damar Arıkoğlu recollects the scene as follows: "Various weapons were sold without any restriction, in markets, shops, and along the streets. The most popular was the Mauser gun with quick action cartridge. The weapon vendors even walked around shouting loudly, but no one stopped them. There was common understanding that 'liberty' meant 'no one interfered in any one's business.'" (Arıkoğlu, 1961: 45)

The dealers publicly sold revolvers and rifles, and they even frequented the government offices. The arms dealers even encouraged people to buy more weapons, by spreading a rumor that either Christians or Muslims would carry out massacre in the near future. About two month before the Adana incident, 25,000 kilogram of gunpowder

was sent to Adana from Istanbul and many people rushed to purchase it. (İrtem, 2003: 167-168)

Some Armenian authors claim that it was the Muslim element that profited from the process, but it is of no doubt that the Armenians also sold and purchased the arms. Even Helen Davenport-Gibbons, who was sympathetic to the Armenians and carefully avoided writing anything disadvantageous to them, witnessed in her memoir: "The Constitution has lifted the prohibition of owning firearms. We hear the Armenians have been buying them in large quantities." (Davenport-Gibbons, 1917: 11) The British vice-consul of Mersin also describes the enthusiasm in which Armenians purchased firearms: "From the delightful novelty of the thing, many thousands of revolvers were purchased. Even school-boys had them and flourished them about." (Gürün 1985: 131) The practice was wide-spread and went well beyond the border of the province. The British consul of Aleppo told an American admiral that there was no chance of an Armenian massacre taking place now in these regions, as every man was armed with a revolver. (Ramsay 1909: 137-138)

To get arms was not the thing that was connived, but recommended. Several Armenian leaders and priests, including Mouchegh, actually urged their congregations to buy arms.² The Armenian newspapers justified the arming of the population and claimed it to be lawful, as it was necessary to defend their life, honor, and property. (İrtem, 2003: 161)

It may be true that the Armenians had the right to bear arms, but to possess the firearms and to use them are quite different things. Many Armenian youngsters not only purchased weapons, but also practiced them publicly. Arıkoğlu recollects his personal experience in the following way: "The young Armenians began to practice shooting. They usually engaged in the training on Sunday. They would go out to orchards and made target practice. One day, I passed orchards owned by Armenians on the way to our farm in Büyük Dikili. It happened to be Sunday, and coincided with the training hours of the Armenians. I still remember the buzzing sound of bullets coming from left and right and the fearful and thrilling feeling." (Arıkoğlu, 1961: 46) As law enforce-

ment officers could not take any action, it became common to hear sporadic gunshots even within town limits. A popular sentiment of uneasiness grew accordingly. (İrtem, 2003: 167)

It is true that shootings were also practiced by the Muslims as well, but the fact that the Armenians suddenly began to learn how to use weapons inevitably provoked suspicion about their intention among the Muslim population. It was natural that Muslim instigators exaggerated these actions, and claimed them as the token of Armenian attack on Muslim population. Mouchegh was well informed of the danger as he wrote in his memoire; "The Turks viewed with evil intention the preparations for the legitimate defense of the Armenians, and took it as an excuse to agitate Turkish fanaticism." (Seropian, 1909: 14) But a question arises: Why did he prompt an armed preparation rather than stopping his flock from participating in a dangerous provocation? An Armenian researcher claims that the Armenians armed themselves only for the sake of self-defense and insists that the armament of Armenians were caused by the threatening attitude of local Muslims. (Kaligian, 2003: 54) But this allegation contradicts the following explanation of Mouchegh Seropian; "After the revolution, the Armenians began to arm themselves." (Seropian, 1909: 14)

In the view of this deteriorating situation, the governor, Cevat Bey, finally ordered the police to arrest those who used fire arms. As a result, several Armenians and Turks were arrested. However, Mouchegh and other Armenian notables intervened, and the Armenian suspects were released, while the Turkish suspects were forced to stay in jail for some time. As a result, the Muslim population began to conceive the idea that government was persecuting Muslims, while protecting Armenians. Hence, it resulted in a further decline of the authority among Muslims. It added fuel to their propensity to defy the authority, paying no attention to official authority. (İrtem, 2003: 167)

Armenian Political Activities and their Side-Effects

After the Revolution, the political activities of the Armenians became legitimate and three parties opened their branches in the Adana

province: the Dashnaks (or ARF, Armenian Revolutionary Federation), Hnchaks (or SDHP, Social Democrat Hnchak Party) and Reformed Hnckists. (Djemal, 1922: 257) The most influential of the three was the Dashnaks. The Dashnaks cooperated with the CUP and kept, by and large, a good relationship with the Ahmed Rıza wing of the CUP under the leadership of Stephan Zoryan Rosdom, one of the three founders of the ARF, and the most influential figure in the Ottoman sector of ARF during 1909–1914. Zoryan believed their good relations with the Rızagists served for the political interest of the Armenians. (Kaligian, 2003: 27–28) On the contrary, the Hnchakists maintained the position that they could cooperate with Prince Sabahattin groups alone, and refused to collaborate with the Rızagists. But the party suffered from a serious set-back with the split in 1896 when many of its activists demanded that the party abandon socialism and concentrate on national liberation and conflicts arose between the ranks of Russian-and Turkish-Armenians. The differences could not be bridged and the dissenters formed the Reformed Hnchakians (Verakazmial Hnchakian). The damage of split lasted for a long time and both of the factions could not operate by themselves even after the Revolution. As a result, a number of SDHP and Reformed Hnchak members joined the ARF after the Revolution. (Kaligian, 2003: 42)

Cilicia was an important center of those Armenian political parties. They had already established their underground networks and carried out secret activities during the Abdülhamid period. Therefore, the opening of their offices was a mere continuation of their former activities. But, to the Muslim eyes, it turned out to be an unexpected and abrupt appearance of the revolutionaries. The return of former militants to Cilicia after the amnesty especially irritated them. Especially shocking was the event when Karabet Gökderelian, a long imprisoned convict and a former instigator of the Sasun uprising, took the lead in the founding of local CUP club in Haçin. (Kevorkian, 1999: Section 3)

Conspicuous activities of Bishop Mouchegh also provoked suspicion of the Muslims. He often accompanied a large number of young Armenians when he made provincial tours. In the Cebel-i Bereket

prefecture, his delegation would make the journey collectively, riding on horseback and with Armenian flags in their hands. (Asaf, 1986: 7) On other occasion, when Mouchegh visited an Armenian monastery in Sis to participate in a ceremony that was held every seven years in order to celebrate the refinement of sacred oil, he led as many as 800 cavalrymen. The scene of their procession astonished the Muslim villagers. (Arikoğlu, 1961: 45) Cemal Paşa claims that he was also told by Armenians that a considerable number of young Armenian acolytes of Mouchegh carried their effrontery so far as to proclaim publicly at various meetings that it would not be long before the Armenians were liberated from their Turkish yoke. (Djemaal, 1922: 258)

The policies of the main Armenian parties, however, were supportive of constitutionalism and a moderate and restrictive type of federalism. They were by no means the rebellious revolutionaries they used to be. Nevertheless, the Muslim population, as well as law enforcing officials, who didn't have minimum knowledge in the change of the political tide inside the Armenian community, was simply alerted by the sudden escalation of their activities. It is also true that the some Armenians couldn't restrict themselves and disseminated irritating remarks without being aware of their consequences. As Christopher Walker put it; "The Armenians... imagined that the moment for demonstrating their superior ability had arrived, and that self-determination was virtually theirs for the asking; and they chattered about it, in the khans and coffee-shops, endlessly, and for men who knew the temper of the Turks, tactlessly." (Walker, 1990: 183)

The ARF leadership was concerned about this development, and made the following regrettable remarks in their news paper, 'Droshak'; "Armenian youth are accused of ignorance and irresponsibility, of boasting, swaggering and provocative behavior. It is true that, in giving expression to their feelings towards the constitution, their feelings of ardour and longing, young Armenians have perhaps gone to excessive lengths and acted in a somewhat undisciplined and irresponsible manner. Their impassionate plays, their flags and national symbols are all symptoms of an unbounded nationalist enthusiasm. All this intensi-

fied the hatred towards the Armenians that already existed among the more ignorant strata of Moslem society, and confirmed Moslem belief that for hundreds of years the Armenians had nursed feelings of animosity towards them. It also convinced them that the constitutional movements had been instigated by the Armenians themselves in order to obtain greater freedom of action, and that the power and influence they had thus acquired would be employed to root out and exterminate the Moslems." (Droshak, No. 7 1909)

Cevad Bey explains the same situation in his report to the Porte prepared after the April incident. "Even now, it is reported that the Armenians, who had once yelled that they would be with us until the end of their life, began to disseminate, in a short while after the constitutional restoration, derogatory speeches filled with enmity, and that they were continuously threatening the Muslim population, by saying: 'If the Muslims attack us, we are no longer afraid of them. The old scores are not settled yet.'" (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 79)

No doubt some Armenians were guilty of these provocations, but one can't say that there was an evidence of an Armenian preparation or a general uprising. If they had had a plan to do so, it is illogical that the Armenians would openly show their will to rebel rather than conceal it. The other allegations by Cevad Bey of the Armenian intrigue are also illogical and irrelevant. For example, he blamed the following remarks of Karabet Çallıyan made at a meeting in Osmaniye. In this occasion, Çallıyan, allegedly, uttered the following words in front of the Ulemas, "You will be end up in wrapping your turbans around your necks." As Cevad didn't give us the exact context, we can't know the exact intention of Çallıyan. But it seems the most plausible things that the explanation was that it was a rhetoric designed to change the old way of doing.

Cevad also accused Karabet Gökdereliyan as he hoisted the Armenian flag in front of the local officers when he visited Haçın and at the public square in Adana, when the local CUP paid ceremonial visit to the graves of Ziya Paşa and Tefvik Nevzad. The latter accident actually took place, but it was not the threatening one as Cevad claimed. Damar

Arikoğlu recorded the same event in his memoir in the following way. "When the local CUP paid an official visit to the graves of revolutionary martyrs, Nevzat and Şair Ziya Paşa, the young Armenian members participated in the parade, singing Armenian songs under an Armenian banner. The event created a disagreeable feeling with the others." (Arikoğlu, 1961: 45) As it is clear, the action of the Armenians took place as a part of the CUP activity and it created some "discord" within its membership, but was not intended to insult the Muslim community in general.

Other "evidence" that Cevad used to confirm the existence of the Armenian intrigue is also irrelevant. Cevad denounced that the posters of imagined Armenian kings and martyrs, as well as copies of their coat of arms suddenly appeared in Adana. (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 79) The Armenian coat of arms appeared in fact, but it was a part of a trademark printed on the surface of cigarette packages. It had nothing to do with political intrigue. It is also true that the Armenians were sticking up posters around the streets. (İrtem, 2003: 169) It must have offended the religious sentiment of the Muslim population. But it was by no means proof of the Armenian aspiration to restore its Cilician Kingdom. A part of these posters was the printed photo of Bishop Mouchegh and it was taken on the porch of the church out of the Mass, a commemoration of the festival. The fable of disguise as a king of Armenia is an extensive interpretation of the dress of an Armenian prelate during festivals. (Kevorkian, 1999: Section 3)

The most frequently cited episode as the proof of the intrigue was a theatrical play held in Mersin on 29 March. Cevad wrote: "On Sunday, 29 March, the day coincided with Easter, the Armenians shouted the phrase 'Long Live Armenia!' during the notorious theatrical production of the Ziya Paşa Casino in Mersin. It later turned out that the same play had been performed in Adana and Dörtöyl fifteen days before. Süreyya Bey, a school inspector, came to Adana in a mission to investigate the seized documents written in Armenian, as he knows of Armenian language. He made a report testifying that the play was to instigate the Armenians against the Ottoman movement." (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996:

79)

In practice, this play was performed in the following way. The performance was announced long before the date and the organizer even invited the lieutenant governor and other Muslim officials, although none of them actually attended the play. The performance opened in the evening and the theater was crammed with Armenians. There were also a few Muslims and Greeks. The motif of the play was the battle of Armenians with the army of Tamberlane. As the enemy was formidable, the Armenians were decimated, but at the final moment an angel appeared to the king and his followers. The angel encouraged the dying king saying that so long as the Armenians united themselves, they could regain their kingdom in the future. (Uras, 1988: 828-829)

In the light of this context, it is obvious that the event was nothing but a cultural activity without any political intentions. Albeit with some religious flavor, the play was nothing but a cliché, a common place vision of Christian martyrdom. The fact that the play was open to everyone and that it was announced even to the authorities beforehand clearly shows that it had nothing to do with political intrigue. The following explanation by Raymond Kevorkian is quite persuasive. "The theatrical performance that caused worry both for the Ottoman authorities and the local population is a staging of the festival of Vartanants, dedicated to the martyrs of the Battle of Avaraïr, who had fallen victims to the Zoroastrian Persians in 451 and celebrated every year at the Armenian church." (Kevorkian, 1999: Section)

Conclusions

To sum up, the behaviors of the Armenians in the Adana province showed no sign of an alleged intrigue to create an Armenian state. It is true that they were excited either in politically and culturally after the Revolution, but their excitement was a natural product of the expectation of wider freedom that the constitution would accord. The political leadership of the revolutionary movement had already renounced their former strategy and demonstrated an allegiance to the constitutional

government. The massive armament was in fact a source of concern, but the fact that they did it openly confirms the absence of any plan of rebellion in the near future. It must be, and could be, checked by the authorities as a part of their administrative routines. The local authority is also to be blamed that they failed to take appropriate measures to hold back the deviatory actions of some Armenians. They should have also taken measures to eliminate the ungrounded fears of the Muslim population. Therefore, it was the dereliction of duty on the side of the local government, rather than Armenian provocation, that precipitated the deterioration in relations. In this sense, the following assessment of the Investigation Committee of the Porte is particularly relevant. "Owing to the inaction of the government, there increased a tension between those young Armenians who supported the federalism and those simple-minded Muslims who missed the despotic rule." (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 94)

Chapter 2

A Hidden Agenda:

Demographic Warfare and Land Disputes

The Armenian Nationalism and the Muslim Reaction

The development of the Armenian nationalism in the Ottoman Empire was a slow and gradual process until the middle of the nineteenth century. By and large, it concentrated on the cultural fields like literary movements based on the vernaculars and promotion of secular education. The political phase was, at best, limited in the framework of the religious community in the form of the aspiration to establish a secular leadership in the millet organization. It took, however, a sudden turn after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Berlin congress by which the Bulgarian were accorded with de facto independence.

Until the Berlin congress, Bulgarians and Armenians shared identical positions in the Ottoman society. Both of them concentrated on the cultural nationalism and more or less were satisfied with the political

rights accorded by the Tanzimat reforms. From the economic point of view, both of them were successful in securing the advantageous positions that could make most of the deregulations brought about by the reforms. Christian peasants in Bulgaria and the eastern provinces of Anatolia enjoyed more prosperity than Muslims. Bulgarian and Armenian merchants and manufacturers widely benefited from commercialization of the Ottoman economy. The Bulgarians remained thankful to the mercy of the Sultan who had approved an independent Bulgarian Church, by which they were liberated from the “Greek spiritual yoke.” The Armenians, likewise, were content that they had succeeded in consolidating semi-secular governance by the millet constitution. Therefore, the main course of the Sultan’s Armenians and Bulgarian subjects showed generally negative attitude to the political agitations of the émigré revolutionaries. They had been inactive, almost motionless, to the idea of independent state by the broke out of the war with the Russians.

For all these passive attitudes, the Bulgarians were accorded with political autonomy after the Russo-Turkish war. The development produced a destructive effect within the Ottoman society, especially detrimental to the relations between Muslims and Armenians. As Kemal Karpat put it, “the events in the Balkans 1877–1878 showed how easy it was for any ethnic group which had the support of one of the European powers to establish its own political domination.” (Karpat, 2002: 378) The fact encouraged the Ottoman Christian subjects in general and the Armenians in particular.

Prior to 1877, the nationalist propaganda coming from Russia had had limited success among the Anatolian Armenians. But the Bulgarian case hinted them a new strategy. Indeed, the Berlin Treaty was the turning point of the radicalization of Armenian political identity. Mkrtich Khrimian, the former Armenian Patriarch who had led the Armenian delegates to Berlin, expressed his disappointment on his return to Istanbul, and gave the following speech. While the Serbs and Bulgarians served themselves from the ‘dish of liberty’ by using ‘iron ladles (i.e. weapons and force),’ Armenians failed with their ‘paper lad-

les.' By this metaphorical speech, Khrimian sanctioned the use of arms, and "reoriented Armenian nationalism toward new and revolutionary directions." (Panossian, 2006: 172)

At a glance, the new strategy was not so much different from the former one. During the 1860s and 1870s, Ottoman revolutionary nationalists were strongly influenced by the Italian model. According to this model, national liberation had to go through popular uprisings against foreign oppressors. The major activities of revolutionaries continued to focus on guerrilla tactics and subotages. But the purpose changed drastically. Now military propaganda was employed more to provoke sympathy from the Western public and the Great Powers, rather than the popular support from co-nationals. According to Richard Hovannisian, the Hnchak Party, while emphasizing education, self-defense, and the revolutionary tactics of agitation and terror against external oppressors and internal informers and collaborators, still regarded the European intervention as an important element in winning independence. (Hovannisian, 1997: 214) Therefore, the first edition of *Hnchak* appealed for its readers to spread revolutionary activity in order to create "a political upheavals that might prompt a particular European government to support forth the Armenian Dilemma." The main objective of these activities was to "profit from the retaliatory action" of the Ottoman authorities. (Nalbandian, 1963: 110)

The strategy seemed to have widely been accepted by revolutionaries. An American missionary in the Ottoman Empire, Cyrus Hamlin claimed he had heard a story on how the revolutionaries planned to create sympathy through an armed intervention. One day he met an 'eloquent defender of the revolution,' and he explained their strategy as follows: "Hintchagist [sic] bands, organized all over the Empire, will watch their opportunities to kill Turks and Kurds, set fire to their villages and make their escape into the mountains. The enraged Muslims will then rise up and fall upon the defenseless Armenians and slaughter them with such barbarities that Russia will enter in the name of humanity and take possession." When Cyrus criticized this adventurism as unrealistic, the revolutionary replied, "Europe listened to the Bulgarian

horrors and made Bulgaria free. She will listen to our cry when it goes up in the shrieks and blood of millions of men and women.” (Salt, 1993: 63)

This calculated gamble in the hope of western intervention was not the sole repercussion that the events of 1877–1878 created in the Ottoman society. The war invited a humanitarian disaster in the form of a mass exodus from Russian occupied territory. The march of the Russian army into the Balkans acquired the form of “an Orthodox Christian crusade” directed against the Muslims. Many Bulgarian peasants, partly inspired by nationalistic sentiment, but usually motivated by the chance of looting, participated in the Russian atrocities. As a result, a huge number of Muslims were killed on the spot, and the rest were forced to leave. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the refugees were Muslims strongly stunned Anatolian Muslims. They began to fear that someday the same destiny might fall on them if another intervention of Christian powers should occur. In this way, the war brought about a polarization in the Ottoman subjects in such a way that Christian communities, who had enjoyed various forms of western protection, often actively sided with Ottoman enemies, while the Muslims who were deprived of such a support, and thus hostile to the West, usually identified themselves with the political destiny of the Empire.

The Ottoman government, too, became sensitive to the change of tide among its Armenian subjects. The following claim of the National Congress of Turkey is a good summary of the new attitude of the Ottoman authorities on the Armenian question. “After the Russo-Turkish War, the Armenian nationalist who dreamed of an independent Armenian state, adopted a strategy to induce foreign intervention on behalf of their cause by provoking harsh reprisals by the Ottoman authorities. The strategy was hinted by the Western attitude to the Bulgarian situation, in which a local disturbance was falsely described as one-sided massacre of the Christian populations by the Muslim authorities. Bearing this strategy in mind, the Armenian revolutionaries lost no time in attacking Ottoman officers.” (National Congress of Turkey, 1919) Upon this understanding, the Porte drastically changed its Armenian policy

from appeasement to the forceful containment and pursued punitive measures to any subtle signs of subversion.

This new policy had another aspect. The loss of Bulgaria, one of the most fertile lands within its territory, brought about a serious shortage of food supply to the population centers in western part of the Empire. It led the Porte to exploit more of the agrarian potential of Anatolia and put more lands under plow by promoting the settlement of the nomadic tribes. The huge influx of Muslim refugees from the Balkans also necessitated the further opening of arable lands in Anatolia.

The colonization policy, at the same time, worked to fulfill another requisite. The fact that Bulgaria was taken away, notwithstanding the Muslims plurality (if not majority), alarmed the Ottoman policy makers, especially as it might give the grounds for Armenian separatism in the eastern provinces of Anatolia. Although the Armenians constituted a minority in these provinces, the territorial claims of the Ottomans were by no means secure, in the light of the Bulgarian case where Bulgarians were slightly more numerous than Muslims. In the eyes of the Ottoman authorities, it was imperative to secure an absolute Muslim majority in the provinces with a large percentage of Armenians.

Demographic Dimension

These considerations on the part of the Ottoman policy makers strongly affected the demographic policies and land policy in the Adana province. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the majority of Armenians were concentrated in towns engaging in commerce and manufactures. The reforms in the 1860s distributed the lands to Armenians and a part of them went out in the fields as peasants. But their number was moderate. Although the Armenians constituted approximately 10% of the total population in the 1860s, they owned no more than 5% of the land. (Yurtsever, 1983: 226)

From the 1870s onwards, however, an increase in the acquisition of large landholding by Armenians took place. The 1869 modification of the land law of 1858 allowed the creditor to ask legal authorities to put up for auction as much of the lands and sources of income of the debtor

as was needed to pay off his debts. In other cases, when Muslim peasants were unable to pay their taxes, their lands were confiscated by the state and subsequently sold to the highest bidders, usually native Christians. As a result, the land transfer into the hands of Christians occurred frequently from the 1870s and onwards. (Astourian, 1996: 556-557)

By 1875-1876, many Armenians had already become rich enough to own landed properties around Adana. The wealthy Armenians established large farms around Adana and in the fertile lands scattered in the south of the city. Likewise, the transfer of land benefitted Armenian money-lenders and merchants around Mersin and Tarsus. Therefore, Mrs. Scott-Stevenson, who traveled around the Cilicia at that time, wrote in her memoir that Armenians were the principal landowners in this province. (Scott-Stevenson, 1881: 129) They continued to acquire lands in the 1880s and 1890s.

The Armenian land owners seemed to have been more interested in the agrarian business than Muslims and eager to introduce more sophisticated methods of cultivation. As early as 1860, an Armenian Catholic, Mikail Nalbandiyan, opened an agrarian school and an Armenian benevolent institution was subsequently founded for the sake of the development of the Çukurova plain. (İrtem, 2003: 147) By 1891, Armenians had been introducing new methods and machines for commercial agriculture, to which their landholdings were devoted. The activities of American missionaries also contributed to this development. They instructed Christian boys in modern agriculture and advised them how to profitably manage their farms. Furnished with improved knowledge of agricultural technique, the Armenian peasants became more successful than their Muslim neighbors and their villages were more prosperous than Muslim villages. (Astourian, 1996: 552-554)

An American missionary describes the flourishing life of the Armenian rural society in the early twentieth century: "Material conditions also favored the progress of the works in this field arising the past year and lead us to look forward hopefully for the outward as well as the religious advancement of the cities on the plain. When we went down

one side of the Adana this summer and up another, I was simply amazed to see the amount of land under cotton this year as compared with former years. In places like Sis, Osmanieh and Chokmerziman also much interest had been awakened in the silk industry. Marked progress has been made in agriculture and the use of agricultural implements." (ABCFM, *Report of Evangelistic... 1904*) Urged by the success, many Armenians began to migrate into Çukurova plain from the hinterlands. The process accelerated after the bloody incidents during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Armenians from the eastern part of the central Anatolia purchased lands in Çukurova and invited their fellow peasants to settle there. (Yurtsever, 1983: 226)

The process continued well into the first decade of the twentieth century owing to the crucial shortage of labor force which was caused by the rapid growth in commercial agriculture and the abundance of uncultivated lands. The same missionary report testifies to the favorable labor conditions for Armenians. "Practically all of the thousands who [came] from far and near flocked to the Adana plain seeking employment had no difficulty in securing all the work they could take and at tolerably good wages. Many having been induced by the improved conditions have moved permanently with their families to Sis, Pazar, Osmanieh, Adana or some other points." (ABCFM, *Report of Evangelistic... 1904*) The investigation made by the court-martial after the 1909 incident confirmed the trend and revealed that the registered number of Armenians had increase by 48% within six years. (İrtem, 2003: 150)

The process, naturally, resulted in an increase of Armenians in the rural population and the concomitant change of demographics. Cemal Paşa explained: "The majority of the Armenians now dwelling in the vilayet of Adana had their original home in Dia[r]bekir, Sivas and Mamuret-ul-Asis. They migrated during the nineteenth century in the hope of improving their economic situations. Real Adana-born Armenians are to be found in the town of Hadjin, on the northern border of the vilayet, in a few villages in the neighbourhood of Sis, the chief town of the Sandjak in Kozan, and in Dortyol, on the shores of the Gulf of Alexandretta, and some villages in its vicinity." (Djermal, 1922: 257) But

this explanation needs some clarification. As the table 1 shows it, the total number of Armenians in the Adana province did not drastically increase for more than thirty years. It means that the population influx from the other provinces was minimal. On the other hand, a radical change took place within the Adana province. While the number of Armenians decreased in the Kozan district, the other districts saw a rapid increase in the number of Armenians. The number of Armenians doubled in Cebel-i Bereket and the Mersin districts and increased by one hundred and fifty percent in the Adana district. The process shows that the migration of the Armenians from the mountainous regions to the flat lands took place mainly within the administrative boundary of the Adana province.

Table 1 The Number of Armenians in the Adana Province

District	1,882	1,906	1,914
Adana	9,651	14,472	15,795
Cebel-i Bereket	6,571	12,537	12,308
Mersin	1,604	4,173	3,719
Kozan	26,786	15,494	18,317
Total	44,612	46,676	50,139

Source: Karpat, Kemal (1985) *Ottoman Population 1830-1914, Demographic and Social Characteristics*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

The reason for slow influx of Armenians into the Adana province was due to the restrictive policy of the Ottoman government. Cilicia was a strategically important region because of its proximity to the sea, its position on the Bagdad railway and its strategic importance for various foreign powers. Against this background, the Porte began to show concern about the increase in number of Armenians and a kept watchful eye on the process. On 27 January 1882, the minister of gendarmerie presented a report on Armenians in the Adana province. Which suggested a mounting problem from on the sudden increase in number of seasonal workers: "It has become common for about three thousand of Armenian workers to come from Adana to Harput, Diyarbakir, Van and

Bitlis every year at the beginning of March and return in autumn. This year, however, the number reached approximately twenty thousand.” (BOA. Y. MTV. 56/60) Although he admitted that the increase was due to the successful growth of the agrarian sector, the minister believed in that Armenian political conspiracies were being carried on in Adana and other regions belonging to the jurisdiction of the Catholicos of Sis and that arms and ammunitions were being smuggled into the Armenian villages from Europe by way of Cyprus, Mersin and Yumurtalık. So, he claimed, “It is against the national interest if we fail to pay attention to the arrival of a large number of Armenian workers in such a center of Armenian terrorism like Adana at the very time when the Armenians do not cease to carry out their subversive political activities.” (BOA. Y. MTV. 56/60)

In the same report, the minister showed particular concern about Armenian land ownership in the Cebel-i Bereket. According to his opinion, each of four large villages with a pure Armenian population (Evzerli, Çaylı, Ocaklı and Dörtyol) had its own “terrorist organization” and became the incubus for their political intrigue. Therefore, he claimed, “The inhabitants of Dörtyol are hindering Muslim settlement in order to freely carry out political subversion and have occupied thousands of dönüms of lands between the Yumurtalık port and Payas either on the pretext that they had the title deed or that they received the right of possession in exchange for an unpaid loan.” (BOA. Y. MTV. 56/60)

With this understanding, the minister emphasized the necessity to settle the Muslim refugees into heavily populated Armenian regions in order to counterbalance the increase in Armenians. More concretely, he proposed to settle them on vacant land or national property in districts and counties like Sis, Payas, Çokmerzeman, Yumurtalık, Zeytun, Çaylı, Ocaklı, and Maraş. In order to justify this proposal, the minister stressed the following benefits: “If the Muslims succeed in consolidating themselves in the regions of Armenian majority, subversive activities will be prevented. So, if we promote the settlement of the refugees, we will be able to avoid various difficulties and it will surely contribute to

the peace and prosperity of the state.” (BOA. Y. MTV. 56/60)

The proposal subsequently approved by the cabinet and the Interior minister ordered the governor of Adana to prepare for the forced relocation of the Muslim refugees on to vacant land and national property in regions heavily populated with Armenians. Subsequently an investigation was carried out to assess the capacity to accommodate the refugees and it turned out that, the Kozan prefecture didn't have enough room to accommodate a large number of refugees, but the Cebel-i Bereket prefecture could accept twenty or thirty thousand households to move into this area. (DH. MKT. 2006/33) In this way, the Cebel-i Bereket arose as a focal point for the massive colonization of Muslim immigrants.

Socio-Religious Differentiation and the Rising Tension in Communal Relationships

The proposal of the gendarmerie minister in 1882 helps us to understand the following contradiction in the Ottoman colonization of the Çukurova plain. The Ottoman government had been especially eager to settle the Russian and the Balkan refugees in this area. It had been carrying out an active policy of colonization in the wasteland of Çukurova as early as the 1860s and invited a large number of immigrants. At the same time, they showed little interest in the efficient exploitation of land. Although the government gave the settlers land plots and temporary tax exemption, it paid little attention to the promotion of the effective land exploitation by them. (Kıray, 1998: 13) The authorities gave little help in accommodating the settlers to the special conditions of the Çukurova. As most of the settlers had come from the northern territories, they had serious difficulties in adopting themselves to semi-tropical type of agriculture of this region. As a result, the settlers could not even establish subsistence farming and many of them starved to death. It was natural that a large number of new comers were forced to rely on short term credits and soon became burdened with crippling debts. However dire their situation was, the government seldom took measures to alleviate the multiple debts of the peasants

and acquiesced to the proliferation of an unproductive system of share cropping. (Aytekin, 2008: 308)

The apparent contradiction becomes understandable when we take into account the fact that colonization was first of all considered as a counteraction to Armenian revolutionary activities and the authorities expected to contain them by a policy of the separatism and the forced migration of Muslims to places where Armenians constituted a majority. This policy also coincides with the fact that the Ottoman government didn't care about the ethnic origins of the refugees and that the only condition it required was whether they were Muslims or not. (Bayraktar, 2007: 413)

In due course, the policy intensified the dualism of the local economy in Çukurova. While the Armenian farmers succeeded in establishing their prosperous cultivation of commercial crops and were eager to enlarge their enterprises by employing seasonal workers, the Muslim refugees continued to engage in subsistence farming and often lived from hand to mouth. The increase in their number didn't bring about the overall development of the productivity in regional agriculture. On the contrary, the increase of Muslim settlers further precipitated the ethnic contortion.

A journalist of the pro-CUP newspaper '*Tanin*,' Ahmed Şerif, noticed the stark contrast between the prosperity of Armenians villages and the lamentable situation of Muslims when he visited the Cebel-i Bereket in 1910. He met Muslim colonists who had been left destitute in almost all of prefectures. For example, he came across a desperate village on his way to Erzin from Örfiyye. The village had forty or fifty huts, all covered with grass and were very run down. Only a small part of the fields around the village was cultivated. Everybody looked white-livered and unhealthy. More conspicuous was a large and new grave yard spreading below the village. There were as many as two hundred tombs, which all looked new. He asked one of the villagers about the reason for the unusual number of new tombs. The villager replied; "We fled from the coolest part of Rumeli. Although they gave us a field in the site of village, we were forced to settle down in this

swampy and marshy place. Four or five years have passed since we came here. Less than one tenth of the first settlers are still living. Every day, a mother, or a father, or a brother, or a child, or even a couple passes away. Hence, as you see, we are sending one of them into the earth today.” (Şerif, 1999: 136)

In contrast to the destitution of the Muslim settlements, the Armenian villages in the region were generally better off and proud of their prosperous appearance. The disparity could be observed not only in the fertile plains of their highly developed commercial agriculture but also in the mountainside. For example, the Bahçe district was in a rocky barren region with a clear Muslim majority. There was no cultivation of commodity crops, except for sesame, and the local people were primarily engaged in subsistence farming. Even so, there was sharp contrast between the Muslim and Armenian villages. Ahmed Şerif describes the prosperity of Hasanbeyli, an Armenian village amidst a poverty-stricken mountainous region: “Here and there, either in a depressed ground or a valley, we saw villages of fifteen or twenty houses. They looked very miserable and poor. We couldn’t see them from a distance, as the houses were only two meters high and hidden in the earth... But Hasanbeyli, an Armenian village, is a very different from this one. Although it is on the same road, this village is fairly big and built on flat land. Well cultivated fields and meadows around it also look amiable.” (Şerif, 1999: 159)

Understanding these economic gaps exacerbated communal tensions between Armenian and Muslim villagers. The Muslims who were forced to live in the serious condition constantly threatened with starvation envied and even felt hostility to the more affluent life-style of their Armenian neighbors. On the other hand, Armenians suspiciously viewed the poor Muslim transplants whom they believed to be a source of local unrest. They were also discontented with an immigration policy that undercut their vigorous entrepreneurship.

The petition presented by the Armenian Bishop of Adana, Mouchegh Seropian, to the governor, Cevad Bey on 23 January 1909 quite vividly shows the Armenian discontent to this immigration poli-

cy. It elucidated the case of Neccarlı and claims it as the typical oppression that the Armenians were facing at. According to his explanation, the problem arose in the following way. When a group of refugees arrived from the Balkans in 1899/1900, the Armenian village, Neccarlı, was selected as one of the candidates to accommodate them. But the investigation carried out by the district head revealed that the Armenians had the title deeds over the lands around the village and that there was no empty land to settle the refugees in the neighborhood of Neccarlı. Nevertheless, the members of the refugee committee insisted on the initial decision and forced the villagers to accept refugees. The refugees subsequently set up their new village, Narlı, in the vicinity of Neccarlı. In order to give them arable lands, the provincial authorities confiscated 700 dönüms of lands from the Armenian villagers by rescinding their ownership. The government also gave an additional 1480 dönüms to the refugees but the plot was a rocky waste land and completely unsuitable to cultivation. Therefore, the refugees began to occupy the remaining Armenian properties. In the view of this apparent transgression, the Armenians protested and filed law suits against their illegal occupation. But these actions were blocked by local authorities and those who protested openly were arrested. The attitude of the authorities encouraged the refugees to seize more lands. As a result, a total of 2,100 dönüms of land had been seized by 1905. The plight of the Armenians was more serious as they were compelled to pay taxes on their usurped lands. Bishop Moushegh protested the provincial authority and a special commission was established. The commission ascertained the violation and ordered the return of the property to the Armenian owners. But the decision was sabotaged by the lieutenant governor and the problem remained unsolved until 1909. According to the Bishop, the case of Neccarlı was by no means an isolated one. There were many similar cases in the prefecture. In conclusion, Moushegh asserted that "one of the most serious problems" of the Armenians in the Cebel-i Bereket was "the terrible violation of property rights." (BOA, DH. MKT. 1303/39)

The Armenian discontent intensified because of the under-

development policy of the government. Along with the colonization of the Muslim refugees, the government was hindering the enlargement of Armenian agriculture. In order to prevent Armenian land ownership, the Porte encouraged Muslim high officers to buy lands in Çukurova. During the Abdülhamid II era, it was urged that the governors and the commanders purchase lands at their own cost. In order to take the lead, the Sultan himself, bought 300,000 dönüms of land. (Kıray, 1998: 12) As those figures were hardly interested in agriculture, a huge quantity of land was left unused. The same was true of state owned lands. While the private lands were generally under plow, most of the national lands were left uncultivated. According to one estimate, the latter exceeded the former by a five to one ratio. (Bayraktar, 2007: 410) In light of this situation, the Armenians convinced themselves of the existence of an anti-Armenian land policy by the Ottoman government. Mouchegh himself claimed the Neccarlı problem had been a part and parcel of the anti-Armenian policy of the Hamidian regime to dispossess them. He made the following allegation. “Albeit there were plenty of vacant land for the settlement of refugees in the Osmaniye and Hamidiye districts, an Armenian village, Neccarlı, was singled out and the title deeds of the Armenians were to be annulled. There is no room to suspect the evil intention behind this policy.” (BOA, DH. MKT. 1303/39)

Repeated Dispute over the Taylan Çiftliği

The restrictive policy of Armenian land ownership provoked another tension between Armenians and Muslims. Capitalizing on the negative attitude of local authorities to Armenians, Muslim landowners often violated Armenian possessions. The Armenian owners were generally vulnerable to the arbitration of the Muslim “Ağas” as the latter dominated the local courts. Muslim notables and their cronies were collectively taking actions to prevent the reparation of Armenian land. The violation of the Armenian farms by nomadic elements was also taking place frequently.

The situation led to the growing discontent of Armenians. Their feelings of oppression occasionally took the form of open complaint

especially when their religious foundations were threatened. The repeated violation of the monastery fund of Taylan Çiftliği was one of the central concerns of the Armenian community in the Adana province.

The monastery belonging to the Sis Catholicate possessed a farmland called Taylan Çiftliği. The origin of this foundation was old and the ownership and the boundary of the farm had been sanctioned by Kozanzade Mehmed Bey as early as 1841. According to the regulation, the farm spread across 10,000 dönüms of land although half of it was not cultivated because of the marshy conditions. The rest of the land was utilized for the supply of provisions for the monks of the monastery. After the date, the land was subjected to repeated disputes. In February 1851, the Catholicos appealed to the provincial authorities for indemnity for the violation of land rights and the governor reconfirmed the ownership of the monastery. Roughly ten years later, the farm was seized again by nomadic tribes. Upon the protest of the Catholicate, the governor of Adana issued a mandate and ordered to prevent further intrusion. But another dispute arose in 1883. The acting Catholicos appealed to the local court of Kozan and the court issued a sentence confirming the ownership of the monastery on 16 June 1883. (BOA, A. MKT. MHM 529/22)

A part of the reason for the frequency of disputes derived from the way that the land was registered in the name of incumbent Catholicos. Owing to this procedure, the farm was often confused with the personal property of Catholicos and subjected to the confiscation when they died. Therefore, a renewed dispute arose in 1906.

Faced with the rapid increase in number of refugees from the Balkans, the special committee for refugees decided to settle immigrants in Taylan Çiftliği this year. (Bayraktar, 2007: 411) With this decision, the local authorities announced the confiscation of the farm of the Armenian monastery on the grounds that the registered owner, the former Catholicos of Sis, had long since died and that the land was vacant from a legal point of view. (BOA, İ. HUS. 142/1324 R-79) The Catholicos of Sis became upset by the decision and reiterated the claim that the land was a religious possession of his monastery and had been cultivated for the

monk's provisions. As the local authorities didn't concede to the appeal, he sent a petition directly to the Sultan and requested the land should be excluded from the plan to colonize. (BOA, A. MKT. MHM 529/22) The plea was subsequently heard and the ownership of the Catholicate was recognized but with the condition that no Armenians would be settled there and that the land would be utilized exclusively for agriculture. (BOA, İ. HUS. 142/1324 R-79)

New Demographic Pressure after the Young Turk Revolution

After the constitutional restoration, a lot of Armenians began to immigrate into the Adana province. Some of them were those who had fled from the province for political reasons, others were those who were attracted by the better working conditions of this fertile plain. Both of them expected a change of policy that had been unfavorable to their enterprises. But the local authorities were not well prepared to cope with this new situation and were simply perplexed by the sudden influx of Armenians. Hence, the governor of Adana, Cevad Bey, reported that, within five or six months, a lot of families came in such an extent that it was not rare to see several families living together in the same building. (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 80)

Another reason for this abrupt increase in the newcomers was the serious crop failure that had plagued the mountainous regions in Anatolia. There were two consecutive years of bad harvests in 1907 and 1908. The winter of 1907 was extraordinarily long and severe and the snow lay deep on the ground until late in the spring. As a result, an epidemic struck the cattle and a huge number of livestock, up to 50 per cent of them, died. This caused serious destitution to the people living on the mountainside. Owing to bad dietary conditions, the people fell victim to disease. (Ramsay, 1909: 280) The next year, the situation turned out to be worse. The climate was even more unfavorable for agricultural production and many people began to starve. A British citizen, who happened to be in Istanbul at that time, described the predicament as follows: "Throughout the winter of 1908 and the spring of 1909 Constantinople shuddered over the accounts of distress which

reached from the Asiatic vilayets. From Erzurum came heart-rending appeals for the rescue of the thousands that perished for want of food, clothing, and fuel. Similar appeals poured in from Caesarea and Bursa, describing how men, women, and especially children, were either dying or were reduced to skeletons. In the region of Mardin, twenty thousand villagers were at the point of starvation. The visitation was due partly to the failure of the crops, partly to the severity of the winter, partly to the absence of any reserve either in kind or in cash, and partly to the depredations already described." (Abbot, 1909: 182)

The situation in the mountainous regions of the Adana province was no better than the Anatolian interior. An American missionary reported the plight of the peasants: "The harvest was great failure. In many places they did not reap 1/5 of the amount of seed sown. Consequently not only is there great scarcity of wheat for seed and flour. It is also very dear. The price has come up to nearly double the price of a few years ago, at least 1 1/2 of last year's price. There are many people who have no wheat and no money with which to buy." (ABCFM, *Missionary Report Dec. 20 1907*) The condition was especially bad in the Kozan district. As a result, many people descended into the plain in the hope of finding food or work. The same author warned of the serious situation: "Whole families are coming. They have nothing to bring with them." (ABCFM, *Missionary Report Dec. 20 1907*)

The famine struck people regardless of their religion. But the human society showed different attitude to the victims. The Christians were treated relatively better than the Muslims. Western Christian missionaries did everything to alleviate their privations, and the Armenian landowners provided them with work and shelter. (Abbot, 1909: 182) In the case of Adana province, the Armenian Church took the lead in mitigating the misery of the poverty-stricken migrants and tried to find places to accommodate them. They distributed lands owned by the monasteries to the refugees and asked permission to purchase vacant public lands for their accommodation. Bishop Mouchegh was especially active on this issue. At first, he tried to settle them in the vacant land near Kozan and Çukurova çiftliği. When it turned out to be impossible,

he raised a charity to purchase lands and planned to make trip to Egypt for this purpose. (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 80)

On the other hand, the Ottoman Government was slow to act. The authorities didn't take the situation seriously, and couldn't even understand the reason for the sudden increase in the influx of population. Cevad Bey took it for granted that the influx was nothing but an earlier arrival of seasonal workers: "50,000 or 60,000 seasonal workers would come to Adana from the other provinces every year. This year, the number of workers of various ethnicities had reached 15,000 by February. It continued to grow day by day." (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 81) The same was true for the Muslim citizens in Adana. They were simply puzzled at the sudden growth of the Armenian population and were a suspicious glance with the relief work initiated by the Armenian Church. Hence, Damar Arıkoğlu wrote in his memoire: "After the revolution, many Armenians whose origins were unknown began to settle in Adana with their families. Bishop Mouchegh very zealously engaged himself with their settlement. As he showed no sign of restraint, Turks began to suspect his intentions." (Arıkoğlu, 1961: 45)

Dispute over the Armenian Land Ownership after the Revolution

The arrival of many Armenians created another tension in the province. The Armenians expected that the promise of civil rights in the constitution would protect their property and demanded that their stolen properties be restored. Hence, many Armenians began to sue for the return of their lands on the grounds that were usurped by reactionaries during the ancient regime. It sparked a slew of additional land ownership disputes that raised inter-communal tensions. The Muslims notables were especially alarmed by this development and they tried to find help through local authorities. (Kalligian, 2003: 77; İrtem, 2003: 158)

As the provincial government had its own concern about the increase of the Armenian population, it began to feel uneasy about the claims for the land ownership by the Armenians. Urged by local Muslim notables, some of the officers dared to take preventive measures and Mehmed Asaf, the lieutenant governor of the Cebel-i Bereket, took the

lead.

As a newly appointed chief officer of the Cebel-i Bereket prefecture, Asaf arrived at Erzin in the middle of September 1908. He soon noticed the new demographic process that was underway in his prefecture. After the Revolution, a number of Armenians had come down from the mountainous regions and began to gather in three Armenian villages: Dörtyol, Ocaklı, and Çaylı. While many of them were seasonal workers, some seemed to want settle there permanently and began cultivating new lands. They also began to purchase vacant lands or to work at the lumber factory owned by a British consul of Alexandretta, Catoni. This development alarmed Asaf. He first nullified permission to exploit the forest that had been given to Catoni by the former governor Selim Melhame Paşa on the pretext that "it was procured by bribery." (Asaf, 1986: 10, 37)

After cancelling the title deeds of the British consul in an assertive manner, Asaf took a series of measures to curb Armenian land-ownership. This method was quite controversial. For example, in his memoire, he wrote. "The late Abdin Paşa registered about several hundreds thousands of dönüms of state-owned lands as he and his son's possession, when he was governor. According to the regulation, the government could confiscate those lands that had been left uncultivated for more than three years. Upon this regulation, we confiscated as much as 500,000 dönüms of lands, and turned them into public possessions." This action, seemingly, was a routine administrative procedure, but quite mysteriously, he added the following sentence. "Concerning this case, we were exposed to a serious scandal which provoked enmity. These problems later accumulated like an avalanche, and fell upon us like a bolt out of the blue." (Asaf, 1986: 13)

This "serious scandal" coincides with the following event which Asaf explained as follows: "The Christians living in the vicinity of the barracks in Dörtyol brought in about five hundreds of women and children, and occupied as much as 1,000 dönüms of empty land belonging to the government. They divided them into several pieces and began to dig ditches around them. The prefectural government tried to prevent

this occupation, but the delegation sent *protesting letters and petitions* to the provincial authorities. (Italic is added)” (Asaf, 1986: 66)

According to this explanation, Armenians illegally occupied state property. If so, it is illogical that they “sent protesting letters and petitions to the provincial authorities.” A part of the answer can be found in the other part of his memoir where he describes the same event in a different tone: “The Armenians tried to lay their hands on the vacant lands in the vicinity that *the government had been forced to sell*. When they were denied access to these lands, they went to the area, and organized a demonstration, gathering as many as 500 women and children. They even defied authorities and the law and order by illegally building homes without a permit. (Italic is added)” (Asaf, 1986: 35) This testifies that the government had already sold the lands in question to Armenian owners.

Asaf gave more detailed information on this case in his report to the governor, Cevad Bey, on 2 February 1909. This report helps us to understand that the so-called “illegal occupation of national property” was nothing but a result of authoritarian interference by Asaf into an approved plan for the residential quarter of Dörtyol. According to this report, the disputed lands had been used as pastures. So, from a judicial point of view, they would be considered to be uncultivated public lands. But a significant part of the lands had been sold to Armenian owners several years before.³ As the new owners could not cultivate all the land, a significant amount of purchased lands, together with the rest of vacant lands, remained as pasture land. Therefore, the villagers of Dörtyol petitioned that the lands should be turned into a new residence quarter on the ground that the present state was improper and that the village had already been overpopulated. The village priest supported the plan and testified that the lands in question were pastures and that the owners had agreed to give up their right for the sake of new residential plots. As the local authorities confirmed the Armenian claims, the proposal was subsequently approved. A land survey was carried out and, upon the newly drawn-up map, avenues and public squares were laid out. The rest of the lands were divided into residential plots and

distributed by auction. When villagers were about to construct new houses, Asaf intervened with the process. He cancelled permission on the pretext that the procedure had not been carried out with due process. (TTKA, EA 70/3) In light of this context, it was natural that the Armenian villagers considered the action as a dereliction with evil intention. Therefore, they staged protests.

When the protests broke out, Asaf reacted even more aggressively. He not only sent gendarmerie to stop the construction, but he slandered the Armenians of Dörtyol as if they had been perpetrators of the crime. In his report to the governor on 26 January 1909, Asaf claimed: "The population of a Christian village as known as Çokmerzemin has been intruding into every kind of public land since the declaration of the constitution. They have seized lands with various measures, from embezzlement to intimidation which forced the government to sell the lands in an auction. When they were *prevented* from occupying the public lands once or twice, they mobilized nearly 500 women and children to stage a demonstration, and forcefully construct buildings and plant crops. In the light of this event, we can't help suspecting their evil intentions (Italic is added)." (TTKA, EA 69/57) But if we take into account the real nature of the event described above, it was Asaf, not the Armenians, that had the "evil intentions." Asaf's allegation of an Armenian attack on the public property was groundless and apparently irrelevant. The Armenian villagers of Dörtyol didn't start obtaining land until after the revolution, but they had long since purchased them as lawful acts. They asked for permission and their application was subsequently endorsed by the authorities. Moreover, Asaf revealed his real intention by admitting that he was *preventing* the Armenians from obtaining real estate. Albeit he pretended to have followed due process by mentioning the legal default in his report of 2 February, his real intention was to restrict the expansion of the Armenian village at all costs. The reason is obvious. Asaf was obsessed by old prejudices against the Armenians and clung to an old policy to dispossess them.

This was not the only case of Asaf's misconduct against the Armenians. He frequently abused his power against the Armenians and the

action naturally caused an increase in communal tensions. The most serious case was the confiscation of the property of the Mariakop monastery. Asaf explained it as follows: "Before the incident, I filed a lawsuit against the arable land that had been in the possession of the Catholicos of Sis, and turned huge amounts of olive orchards and other lands into public properties. Then, I took up the work to settle the refugees there. The Armenians organized big meetings both in the province and in Istanbul." (Asaf, 1986: 63) According to Süleyman Kani İrtem, the story was somewhat different: "There was an olive orchard that the Sis Catholicos had claimed to be their property. The governor of Cebel-i Bereket, Asaf Bey, confiscated it on the pretext that it had turned out to be a national property. The event caused their subsequent estrangement." (İrtem, 2003: 165) The explanation of İrtem seems to be more accurate as it coincides with the following plea of Bishop Mouchegh. "There was another dispute over lands in the Payas region. The plot was composed of two thousand dönüms of olive orchards. The ownership of the land by the Sis monastery had been ascertained by the decision of local court in 1883/1884. But the local government tried to confiscate it on the pretext that it was a public property." (BOA, DH. MKT. 1303/39)

These actions of Asaf naturally caused an angry reaction on the Armenian side. As they still had vivid memories of the dispute over Taylan Çiftliği, a forceful confiscation of religious property which provoked great indignation by the Armenian Church. The Catholicos of Sis resigned in protest against the court decision on 17 February 1909. Three days later, the deputy Catholicos sent telegrams to Adana, Ayıntab, Maras, Zeytun, Yozgad, Diyarbakir and Malatya and instructed the people to organize protest meetings. With this appeal, the Armenian schools went on strike. The protest grew massively and meetings were held in Istanbul, Ayıntab, Maraş, Yozgad, and Malatya. In this way, the protest began to take on the form of an Armenian national movement. (BOA, DH. MKT. 2745/71)

The event further deteriorated inter-communal relations in many places in the Adana province. The situation of Haçin became especially

serious. The excitement brought Muslim and Christian communities to the brink of confrontation. Many people appeared in the streets and gathered at various corners in small groups of five or ten. Some were even using arms for target practice. As a result, it was rumored among Muslims that the Christians had completed military preparation to embark on a massacre. Alarmed by the situation, the lieutenant governor of Kozan set out for Haçin to appease the population and Cevad Bey asked the Interior Minister to review the suit over the property in question. The situation caused anxiety in the central government and the Interior Ministry ordered the governors of Aleppo, Ankara, Sivas and Mamuretülaziz to take necessary measures to stabilize the situation. (BOA, DH. MKT. 2745/71)

The Repercussions of the Land Dispute over Armeno-Muslim Relations

Asaf's policy duly collided with the policy of Bishop Mouchegh, who was eager to accommodate the Armenian settlers. Urged by the diocesans who had suffered harassment by the nomadic tribes, Mouchegh embarked on an investigation in Cebel-i Bereket during the winter of 1908-09. He stayed there for about one month and visited all the Armenian villages in the prefecture. (Seropean, 1909: 21)

In the course of the investigation, he came to realize that, after the Revolution, the control over local politics by the "Ağas" (local bosses) became even more oppressive than before. Some of them intentionally deprived people of their cattle as if they had openly defied the new regime. Urged by their misconduct, the activities of unruly Kurdish tribes revived and extortions to the settled peasants were frequently taking place. As we can see in the following quote, Mouchegh strongly condemned the arbitrary actions of the "Ağas" and appealed to the governor: "The local bosses treat the district inhabitants as if they were their possessions and divide them among themselves. They behave as if they are heads of a band of brigands... They dislike Christians so completely that they never let them possess properties in the district." (BOA, DH. MKT. 1303/39)

What was more serious, however, was the fact that the local officers didn't take any effective measures to curb the transgressions. (Seropian, 1909: 72-75) Mouchegh became especially irritated by their negative attitudes to Armenian claims of landownership. During those days, many Armenians filed lawsuits re-claiming the properties that had allegedly been grabbed by the "Ağas." But the court decisions usually turned out to be favorable to the "Ağas." Although a part of the reason must have been found in the fact that the local courts were dominated by allies or henchmen of the "Ağas," Mouchegh put the blame on the officers and condemned them for having abetted the "Ağas." For example, he strongly denounced the behavior of the magistrate of Osmaniye:

"The effect of the constitution and freedom that had brought about great innovation all over Turkey is still not felt in the Osmaniye district. The reason for the continuation of this reactionary regime is, first of all, the action of the local officers and, secondary, the existence of local bosses. The district head is an incapable and rude person. He doesn't allow the population to benefit from freedom and the constitution. He didn't take up the petitions of Armenians who had come to ask for help in defending their rights and seriously insulted them. He is no more than a tool of the local bosses and is simply carrying out their desires." (BOA, DH. MKT. 1303/39)

If we take into consideration the above mentioned policy of Asaf, these allegations were not altogether without justification. It was also reported that the Armenian request for empty land in the Payas district had been rejected on the pretext that it was earmarked for Muslim refugees. The magistrate of Osmaniye even purchased an estate himself at a much cheaper price than an Armenian bidder, saying that "the Armenians had no right to the property there." (*Tasvir-i Efkar*, 13 July 1909)

Mouchegh worked uncompromisingly to publicize the Armenian request heard at the local authorities and was not even afraid of an open confrontation with the officers in charge. He made an official protest against the dereliction when he visited magistrate offices and threatened them with a possible dismissal of the case if they didn't yield

to his demands. It only stiffened the resolve of the officers and made them more hostile to the Armenians. Mouchegh became especially offended by the attitude of Mehmed Asaf and wrote in his memoir: "In the course of this trip, we had the opportunity to meet the Governor of Cebel-i Bereket and to watch very closely his way of behavior that was not at all within the bounds of the constitution." (Seropian, 1909: 21) With the conviction that the hostile policy against Armenians had been carried out by his instruction, Mouchegh filed a petition to the governor Cevad Bey and requested the dismissal of Asaf and his subordinates on 23 January 1909. (BOA, DH. MKT. 1303/39)

The Mouchegh's trip to the Cebel-i Bereket constituted one of the most important causes of the bloody incidents that were to break out during the April in 1909. The event created a drastic change in the attitude of both the Armenian population and the Muslim bureaucrats. Mouchegh himself admitted in his memoir that the experience in the prefecture led him to the following conviction: "Having completed our investigation, we became convinced that, under the leadership of the notables and Muslim religious figures, a vicious conspiracy was underway amongst the Turkish population against the Constitution and its supporters. The conspiracy was targeting the Armenians as the first victims. Therefore, we thought it our duty to urge our flock to arm themselves as much as they could." (Seropian, 1909: 21) This statement is apparently illogical as it relates the conservative land policy to a prelude to the Armenian massacre; however, deep distrust and personal hostility to Asaf, coupled with the aggressive attitude of the latter, led Mouchegh to believe in a conspiracy. With this ungrounded conviction, he encouraged the Armenian parishioners to arm themselves and encouraged a tax boycott.⁴ These instigations, in turn, gave additional grounds in Asaf's belief that the Armenians were preparing for an armed uprising.

So far, the governor of Adana, Cevad Bey, had distanced himself from the overt anti-Armenian policy pursued by Asaf.⁵ But the growing tension between the two communities gradually affected Cevad's view on the question⁶, and finally, the governor decided to side with Asaf, as

the situation mushroomed into an air of Armeno-Muslim confrontation. It is most probable that the dispute over religious property and the roundtrip of Mouchegh constituted an important turning point. Mouchegh's request to remove Asaf and his subordinates and the threat to publicize the petition in case Cevad should not yield to the demand might be a part of the reasons for this deterioration in relations. But the incitement of tax boycott and the dispute over the monastery's orchards seems to be fatal, as Cevad created the conditions which led to the expulsion of Mouchegh in his report to the interior ministry dating from 31 January 1909: "We must pay attention to the following facts. The above-mentioned prelate went around the Armenian quarters and inspired them not to pay taxes and military exemption fees. He should be held responsibility for this. Moreover, he has openly intervened into the dispute concerning the olive groves of Tırıncalı and Lece, which he claimed to be the property of a monastery under the jurisdiction of the Sis Catholicos. By doing so he exceeded his competence and intruded into the duty of Catholicate." (*Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 13 July 1909)

This statement confirms that Mouchegh was dismissed because he had intervened into the land dispute, not because he had staged intrigue as was alleged by Asaf. Therefore, the dismissal of Mouchegh was no help in ameliorating the situation. As the principal source of the unrest was the dispute over Armenian land ownership, it couldn't be solved by the dismissal of a Bishop. On the contrary, his expulsion caused further confusion. The reason was obvious. Mouchegh had been hitherto functioning as the emblematic figure of the Armenian interest in the land dispute,⁷ so his dismissal caused great disappointment among the Armenians. It was no coincidence that the principal request of Mouchegh's petition contained the following two basic demands on the land ownership: 1) "To set up a committee to investigate the lands that had been usurped by the tyrants, to commit the usurpers to the prosecutors, and to return the violated properties to the owners without delay," 2) "As there is a plenty of vacant land in the province, it is necessary to distribute plots to the landless peasants and nomadic people and let them engage in agriculture." (BOA, DH. MKT. 1303/39) Both of the two requests

were of general concern to the Armenians in the Adana province. Therefore, his dismissal was seen by the Armenians as an official rejection to their demands.

The claim was reiterated when the land question became the main agenda of the provincial assembly held in March 1909. During this meeting, an Armenian representative from the Kozan district proposed that, that since Haçin was located on a hilly site and its lacking in arable land, it was preventing the poor population from producing more, and the government should settle five hundred households into other places in Kozan, other farmlands in Çukurova, or other locations specified by the authorities. As the proposal aimed to promote the local economy, the other Christian delegates supported the idea. But the governor, Cevad Bey, opposed it on the grounds that there were nomadic tribes which needed to be settled in the province, and that, if this measure was introduced, other members of the population would claim the same treatment. Instead, the governor suggested that needy Armenians should find their living in trade and in crafts. This contention apparently stemmed from an old policy consolidated during the Hamidian era that had restricted the enlargement of Armenian farms and promoted the Muslim population in the countryside. The policy was also favorable to the Muslim landowners as they could avoid the competition with Armenian producers. As a result, the Muslim delegates who constituted the majority of the assembly sided with Cevad and the plan was abandoned. (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1996: 80; Kévorkian, 1999: Section 3)

This decision seriously deteriorated the Armeno-Muslim relations that had already gone into a delicate stage. In the eyes of the Armenians, the Muslim delegates and the provincial government were carrying out a concerted obstruction to their demands. Moucheq condemned the action as follows. "Muslim members of the General Council of the province, led by Vali, showed a systematic and stubborn opposition to all proposals of the patriotic Armenian delegates, and sought to prevent the implementation of all reforms, and all work that might benefit Armenians in any way." (Seropian, 1909: 26) In this way, the Armenian

distrust on the restrictions to their land ownership grew into a total hostility to the provincial government and the Muslim community, and led them to believe that the situation had become even worse than in the Hamidian period.

Conclusion

The dispute over Armenian land ownership had a long history in the Adana province. As early as the beginning of the 1880, the Abdülhamid regime felt uneasy about the increase in the Armenian population and the spread of their land ownership. The government introduced restrictive measures and tried to curb the proliferation of the Armenian possessions. While promoting the Muslim immigration, it urged Muslim magnates to purchase land regardless of their proper utilization. The policy resulted in the underdevelopment of the Muslim sector of society and enhanced the disparity between the two communities. It also bred the discontent of Armenian farmers who had been eager to enlarge their enterprises. The excessive concern to curb Armenian property provoked communal tensions as in the case of the abortive confiscation of key religious properties.

After the Young Turk Revolution, the situation became even worse, as the Armenians expected a change of policy and filed suits to re-claim their rights which were allegedly violated. They also tried to obtain new lands and requested the local government to sell their non-utilized properties. The action alarmed the Muslim local bosses who had enjoyed a privileged position during the Hamidian era. Therefore, the dispute over land ownership appeared to be the focal point of the tension between the two communities.

What was crucial in this context was the behavior of the local officers. A group of officers led by Mehmed Asaf apparently sided with the Muslim landlords. They assisted the Muslim local bosses to rule out the Armenian claims for restitution and demonstrated a negative predisposition to their petitions. They even tried to dispossess Armenians in through illegal and through questionable practices.

These actions led the Armenians to convince the local government

abetted the Muslim reactionaries even after the Revolution and this belief eventually consolidated into the conspiracy theory that the Adana incident was a well-prepared conspiracy to annihilate the Armenians by the Muslim authorities. But such an assessment grossly betrays the real picture.

Firstly, there was no clear policy to the Armenian land ownership on the side of the provincial government. The anti-Armenian policy of conservative bureaucrats was motivated by their personal dislike of this minority. The case of Mehmed Asaf clearly demonstrates this point. He was apparently obsessed by the old stereotype of Armenian separatism and looked at their community as politically monolithic. The intervention and the confiscation of Armenian property were carried out by his personal initiative. The governor, Cevad Bey, didn't give order in these matters and even declined a part of his proposals. Equally important is the fact that Asaf was a hostile critic, if not an open opponent, to Constitutionalism and the policy of the CUP. Therefore, it is irrelevant to identify Asaf's conduct either with the politics of the new constitutional government or those of the CUP.

The behavior of Mouchehgh Seropians was no less problematic. But this is not because he staged the uprising, as was claimed by Asaf and other bureaucrats. His Ramkavars membership may give room to hypothesize an Armenian conspiracy. But, given the insignificance of his party and the apparent lack of concerted action at the time of the outbreak of hostilities, this conspiracy theory is unrealistic. The general course of his activities can be explained in an alternative way. The motivation to colonize Armenians in the Adana plain derived both from the urgency that was created by the massive influx of the homeless and from the expectation of a change in policy based on the new principles of Constitutional, "Unity in Variety." The instigation of a tax boycott can be explained as a form of protest to the authoritarian rule of conservative bureaucrats. But the method Mouchehgh employed in pursuing his goal was improper. It was following a collision course with provincial authorities. These measures not only gave the conservatives a justification that the Armenians were committing anti-government ac-

tions, but also made it impossible to establish a compromise with the authorities. His hasty and stubborn tenacity also produced suspicion among the Muslim population and exacerbated tensions within the community.

Notes

- 1 The Bağdadizades seem to have had a connection with some CUP members long before the revolution. Abdülkadir Kemali witnesses that Mehmet Bağdadizade, a son of Abdülkadir, had had critical views on the Abdülhamid's regime and he was entrusted a novel by Namuk Kemal and a work of Murat Bey, both of which were banned by the government. (Abdülkadir Kemali, 2005: 29–30)
- 2 The aims and motives of Armenian armament must have been defensive. The following episode suggests it. After the April incident, the court-martial of Maraş charged the Armenian prelate of Haçin, Dernesses veled-i Ohannes Vanperyan with the following offenses. He was a supporter of the separatist movement and declared so in a speech given at a school in Maraş. He also urged the audience to arm themselves, and tried to provoke a fratricide between Muslims and Armenians by instigating mutual hatred. Against these charges, the priest explained his intention had been to persuade the people to take up arms to defend the government from the reactionaries. The lieutenant governor of Maraş investigated the case, and found that the assertion of the accused was true. (BOA: MV. 133/85)
- 3 According to Asaf's allegation, "*For unknown reasons*, three or five villagers obtained the title deeds of a total of 80 dönüms one or two years ago. (Italic is added)" TTK Archive, EA 70/3
- 4 According to Mouchehgh, the tax boycott had two aims. One was a protest to illegal taxation and the other was a demonstration of a collective will of the Armenians to be enrolled in military service. The latter was justified by the following rhetoric: "The collective approach by which the Armenian population of the province showed the Government their refusal to pay military tax for fiscal year 1909 and their legitimate desire, their willingness to do military service prescribed by the Constitution." (Seropian, 1909: 26)
- 5 If we consider the fact that Cevad didn't sanction the proposal to confiscate the Armenian property around Ocaklı, notwithstanding the request of Asaf

- (Asaf, 1986: 66), we can conclude that the decisions to nullify the Armenian title deeds in the Cebel-i Bereket were initiated by Asaf.
- 6 The author is by no means claiming that Cevad was convinced of the Armenian conspiracy as early as February of 1909. He had been skeptical of Asaf's allegation of how the incident broke out on 16 April. Until the moment he saw the opening fire of the Armenian fedais (volunteer soldiers), he remained optimistic about the situation.
- 7 Mouchegh intentionally identified himself as such. In his circular of 7 November, he appealed to his flock as follows: "If ever you are the victims of arbitrary acts... appeal without fear to the local authorities, and if your appeal remains fruitless... apply to the Metropolitan, which is ready... to take in hand the defence of your disregarded rights." (Ferriman, 1913: 18)

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