

**HAMIDIAN POLICY IN EASTERN ANATOLIA
(1878-1890)**

A Master's Thesis

by

S. ASLIHAN GÜRBÜZEL

**THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA**

July 2008

To Minire and Merve

HAMIDIAN POLICY IN EASTERN ANATOLIA
(1878-1890)

The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences
of
Bilkent University

by

S. ASLIHAN GÜRBÜZEL

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in

THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
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ANKARA

July 2008

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the Master of Arts in History.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Oktay Özel
Thesis Supervisor

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the Master of Arts in History.

Dr. Eugenia Kermeli
Examining Committee Member

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the Master of Arts in History.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Jeremy Salt
Examining Committee Member

Approval of the Institute of Economics and Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Erdal Erel

ABSTRACT

HAMIDIAN POLICY IN EASTERN ANATOLIA

(1878-1890)

Gürbüz, Aslıhan

M.A., Department of History

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Oktay Özel

July 2008

The Treaty of Berlin, signed in July 1878, marks the appearance of new political dynamics for Eastern Anatolian affairs. The stipulation of the reforms for the protection of the Armenians from Kurdish and Circassian attacks, and the supervision of these reforms by the British authorities were to effect the relations of the Eastern Anatolian populations with the state. The thesis examines the roots of conflicts between the Kurdish and Armenian populations, which was problematized by the aforementioned treaty. Moreover, state policies towards the region are discussed in detail. The state had now two equally important concerns regarding its dealings with the Muslim populations. The first was the immediate attainment of a state of security, for insecurity was used as an argument against the legitimacy of the Ottoman state ruling over Christian populations. The second was abstaining from actions which would alienate the Muslim populations from the Ottoman state. The notables were the agents who held practical power in the region, and the state was too new and foreign to the area to break their influence. This made conciliation with notables imperative. The state was hence faced with the formidable task of balancing

the need to conciliate with the notables and the need to keep their actions under control. This thesis examines the situation of the tribal structure with a focus on the peculiarities of the socio-political traditions, as well as the state's perception of this structure and its concerns in dealings with the region in the specified period.

Key Words: Abdülhamid II, Berlin Treaty, Eastern Anatolian Tribes, Provincial Politics.

ÖZET

II. ABDÜLHAMİD DÖNEMİ DOĞU ANADOLU POLİTİKASI

(1878-1890)

Gülbüzel, Aslıhan

Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Assist. Prof. Dr. Oktay Özel

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Temmuz 1878’de imzalanan Berlin Anlaşması’yla birlikte, Doğu Anadolu’da yeni politik dinamikler ortaya çıktı. Ermenilerin Kürtlerin ve Çerkeslerin saldırılarından korunması için idari reformlar yapılması ve bu reformların İngiltere tarafından denetlenmesinin öngörülmesiyle, devletin Doğu Anadolu’daki topluluklarla ilişkisi yeni boyutlar kazandı. Bu tezde, sözü geçen anlaşmada işaret edilen Kürtler ve Ermeniler arasındaki çatışmaların kökenleri üzerinde durulmaktadır. Ayrıca, devletin bölgedeki politikaları detaylı bir biçimde ele alınmaktadır. Yeni durumda, devletin bölgedeki Müslüman nüfusla ilişkilerini yönlendiren iki temel kaygı vardı. İlki kısa zamanda güvenliğin sağlanmasıydı, zira bölgede güvenliğin olmayışıyla Osmanlı Devleti’nin Hristiyan toplulukları yönetmesinin meşruiyeti arasında doğrudan bağlantı kurulmaktaydı. İkincisi, Müslüman nüfusu devletten soğutacak uygulamalardan kaçınılmasıydı. Bölge, pratikte Müslüman ileri gelenler tarafından yönetilmekteydi ve devlet yerel güçlerin etkisini kırabilecek güçte değildi. Bu durum, yerel ileri gelenlerle uzlaşılı halinde olmayı zorunlu kılıyordu. Sonuç olarak,

devlet ileri gelenlerin desteęini kazanmak ve onları kontrol altında tutmak arasındaki dengeyi tutturma ihtiyacı içindeydi. Bu tez, belirlenen dönem içinde aşiret yapısının sosyal ve siyasi durumunu, devletin bu yapıyı algılayış biçimini ve uyguladığı politikaları incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: II. Abdülhamid, Berlin Anlaşması, Doęu Anadolu, Aşiret Yapısı, Yerel Siyaset.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ÖZET.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II: SETTING THE BACKGROUND: EASTERN ANATOLIAN AFFAIRS UP TO THE TREATY OF BERLIN (JULY 1878).....	5
2.1. Ottoman Administration in Eastern Anatolia Prior to the Nineteenth Century..	5
2.2. Nineteenth Century Reforms and Tribal Structure.....	11
2.3. The Rise of Armenian Nationalism.....	16
2.4. The Treaty of Berlin (July 1878).....	19
CHAPTER III: THE DISCUSSIONS OVER THE REFORMS: POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND ADJUSTMENTS FOLLOWING THE TREATY OF BERLIN.....	23
3.1. Armenian Demands.....	24
3.2. British Reform Scheme.....	28
3.3. Ottoman Response to the Armenian and British Demands.....	29
3.3.1. The Debate over Nomination: Kurdistan or Armenia?.....	32

3.3.2. Balancing Unity and ‘Image’	39
3.4. Conclusion.....	42
CHAPTER IV: THE REFORMS IN PRACTICE: PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION IN EASTERN ANATOLIA, 1878-1890.....	44
4.1. Main Problems.....	44
4.1.1. Financial Obstacles.....	44
4.1.2. Lack of Qualified Officers.....	46
4.2. Policies.....	48
4.2.1. Military Solutions.....	48
4.2.3. Local Notables and Provincial Administration.....	51
4.3. Conclusion.....	64
CHAPTER V: KURDISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE TREATY OF BERLIN, 1878-1890.....	67
5.1. Conventional Sources of Conflicts.....	67
5.1.1. Traditional Tribal Relations as a Framework of Analysis.....	68
5.1.2. The Case of Musa Bey.....	73
5.2. Political Reactions to Armenian Politics.....	84
5.2.1. The Rebellion of Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri, 1880-81.....	85
5.2.2. Other Forms of Reaction.....	88
5.3. In Lieu of Conclusion: A Critical Evaluation on the Nature of the Communal Conflicts.....	92
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION.....	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	105
APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF THE INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE TRIAL OF MUSA BEY.....	115

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Treaty of Berlin, signed in July 1878, is considered to mark the launching of the ‘Armenian issue’. The Article 61 of the treaty, pertaining to Armenian affairs, was the first formal mention of the Armenians as a community in need of specific reforms. The article stipulated that the Armenian populations were under attack from Kurds and the Circassians, and the Porte undertook the obligation to introduce reforms to solve this problem and provide the security of its subjects. The adoption of administrative reforms for this purpose was to be supervised by the European Powers. The new political dynamics emerging after this position comprises the departure point of this study.

The area I focus on is the region defined as ‘Kürdistan’ in Ottoman documentation, which corresponds to today’s Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Muş, Hakkari and Dersim. Thus, my focus is on the relations between the Kurdish tribes and the Armenians, as well as the Ottoman government. The Circassians, who are also mentioned in the aforementioned article, are left out. Because, documentation on

them is limited in the area defined and their history and social organization could be the topic of a separate study¹.

The thesis is confined in terms of date to the period 1878-1890. The period is chosen for being a little studied period. Actually, concern in Eastern Anatolian affairs in the current literature is focused on the aftermath of 1890. This period is critical for it points to a new period where the Armenian committees start active revolt with the events of Kumkapı and Erzurum in 1890. In a parallel manner, the Ottoman state starts taking more concrete steps with the establishment of the Hamidiye Regiments in 1891. The affairs of the region before this period is little studied. So much so that, there is a general tendency in the secondary literature to evaluate this period only with respect to the diplomatic developments, and to claim that the complex issues of the after-1890 situation were absent from the scene in this period.² This thesis hopes to contribute to unravel the roots of later conflicts -without attempting to adopt a retrospective look, though.

The study of the political situation in Eastern Anatolia is particularly complex for a variety of political factors. Administrative difficulties, Kurdish movements in opposition to the state's centralization efforts, Armenian revolutionary movement, missionary presence and the diplomatic dimension added due to the strategic importance of the region all intermingle to form a very complex state of affairs. For the scope of this study, the analysis of all these actors with an equal weight could not be possible. Hence, a choice of focal point was inevitable. In this thesis, special

¹ For a general frame of the problems and policies related to the Cricassian emigrants in the late nineteenth century, see Georgi Chochiev, "19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kuzey Kafkas Göçmenlerinin Toplumsal Uyarlanmasına Dair Bazı Görüşler". *Kebikeç* 23 (2007).

² See, as an example of such a problematic approach, Ali Karaca, "Türkiye'de Ermeniler İçin Yapılan Reformlar (Örtülü Bir İşgale Doğru) ve Tehcir Gerçeği (1878-1915)", in *Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu, 24-25 Mayıs 2001*, İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, 2001, 107-170.

emphasis was given to two actors: the Ottoman state and the Kurdish tribal populations; the other actors are included in the study as explanatory variables.

The reason for such a choice is that the studies pertaining to the period focus almost exclusively on the rise of Armenian nationalism and the diplomatic dimension of the affairs. The position of the Ottoman state, as well as the situation of the tribal populations remain unexplored. To elaborate on these actors and to explain how they reflected on their view of the situation, the documentation in the Ottoman archives is utilized in this study, most of which was untouched.

Besides documents in the Ottoman archives, British documents on the region are also utilized. These documents are used to evaluate the nature of the relations between Kurds and Armenians, and to point to a new framework of analysis where not only ethnicity and religion, but also socio-economical structure made up the basis of political alliances and oppositions.

The study starts with providing background information on the state of Eastern Anatolia up to the Treaty of Berlin. The traditional socio-political structure, the transformation brought about by nineteenth century reforms to the inhabitants of the region, the rise of the Armenian national movement as well as the implication of this movement for international power balances make up the main issues of the second chapter.

The third chapter deals with the immediate aftermath of the Treaty of Berlin. The Armenian demands, the British position, as well as the Ottoman perception of the newly emerging political situation will be elucidated. In doing this, due importance is attached to the impact that the discussions among these three actors had on the political importance of the Muslim tribal population of the region.

The fourth chapter analyzes how Eastern Anatolia was administered in the period under examination. The aim is to bring the practical aspects of the issue of reforms into the picture, since this matter tends to be seen as a mere pretext for the power relations between the Ottomans and the British.³ In contrast, this section attempts to elaborate on the practical aspects of the government of the region: on the capabilities and weaknesses of the Ottoman regime to control Eastern Anatolian affairs, without overlooking the power and the characteristics of the local actors.

The last chapter is intended to explain the characteristics of the relations between the Kurds and Armenians. The need to examine these relations derives from the importance of them for contemporaries, and the abundance of primary material presenting these relations as problematic. The chapter attempts to introduce a proper framework for the analysis of the issue, by differentiating between different types of conflictual relations and paying a meticulous attention to placing the reported cases in the socio-political context of the region.

³ The following works present the issue as dominantly, if not wholly, as a component of the ‘Eastern Question’ and do not elaborate on the ‘local’ roots or reflections: Ali Karaca, “Türkiye’de Ermeniler İçin Yapılan Reformlar (Örtülü Bir İşgale Doğru) ve Tehcir Gerçeği (1878-1915)”, in *Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu, 24-25 Mayıs 2001*, İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, 2001; Bayram Kodaman, *Sultan II. Abdülhamid devri Doğu Anadolu politikası* (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1987); Cevdet Küçük, *Osmanlı Diplomasisinde Ermeni Meselesinin Ortaya Çıkışı 1878-1897* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1984) ; Musa Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia 1877-1897* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000).

CHAPTER II

SETTING THE BACKGROUND:

EASTERN ANATOLIA UP TO THE TREATY OF BERLIN

2.1. Ottoman Administration in Eastern Anatolia Prior to the Nineteenth Century

The Kurdish Provinces⁴ were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire after the Çaldıran war, in 1514. The region was peculiar in its characteristics and customs, therefore demanded a form of administration different from their classical provincial administration based on the institution of *timar*, which was, in essence, “a kind of military fief system”.⁵

The special characteristic of the area stemmed from several factors. First, being a mountainous area, it was difficult for an outside authority to establish a strong control without the consent of the locals. This geographic characteristic was

⁴ The nomination “Kurdish provinces” might be seen questionable at the face of endless discussions on what “Kurd” meant in the Ottoman terminology. It is often discussed that “*ekrad*” referred to all nomadic groups, regardless of ethnic origin. The ethnic distribution of the population is impossible to know, for such a survey was completely irrelevant to Ottoman mind and hence never carried out. However, the Ottoman sources have, till the end of the 19th century, denoted the region as “Kurdistan”, not for the region was completely composed of Kurds, but since the ruling class was Kurdish tribal leaders. This is the sense in which the term “Kurdish vilayets” will be used throughout the thesis –the eastern *vilayets* of Anatolia in which *de facto* rulers were Kurdish begs till the launching of the policies of centralization.

⁵ Suavi Aydın and Oktay Özel, “Power Relations Between State and Tribe in Ottoman Eastern Anatolia”. *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 3-4 (2007).

reflected in the living style of the inhabitants: the people of the area were nomadic or semi-nomadic tribal people. As elsewhere in the empire, subjecting nomadic populations to administrative rules was not a simple task.⁶ Second, the area was constituting the border between the Ottoman and Safavid empires, two actors of perpetual rivalry. Therefore, the loyalty of the area was of crucial importance to both sides. This rendered the leaders of the population a considerable bargaining power. The chiefs bargained for higher authority and less burden -in terms of taxation and contribution by manpower to the imperial army- in return for accepting a nominal allegiance.⁷ The need to reach a compromise by bargaining was recognized from the start by Ottoman rulers, and a deal was made by the intermediacy of İdris Bitlisi, who was the advisor of Yavuz Sultan Selim in determining concerning issues over the region.⁸ As a result, the Ottoman Empire achieved the vassalage of the Kurdish *begs* in the sixteenth century by granting a degree of autonomy not granted by the Safavid side.

The Ottoman state defined and adopted three different modes of administration for Eastern Anatolia. The first and the most autonomous of these three types was *hükümet*s. This mode adopted in the most inaccessible regions. In these units, the state did not intervene in internal organization. The lands were not subject to land surveys and taxation. The taxes collected from the population were left with the local rulers entirely, in return for which the latter had to participate in military campaigns. The rulership was hereditary. The second type was *yurtluk-ocaklık* or *ekrad beyliği*, which was organizationally regular: *timar* system and taxation by the central authority were applied. The only difference was that the governorship was

⁶ For the perpetuity of problems between nomads and state, see Halil İnalcık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Ekonomik ve Sosyal Tarihi I, 1300-1600* (İstanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 2004), 71-81.

⁷ Vladimir Minorsky, "Kurds-Kurdistan", *EF*²

⁸ Hakan Özoğlu, *Osmanlı Devleti ve Kürt Milliyetçiliği* (Kitap Yayınları: İstanbul, 2005), 64-66.

hereditary. The last type was *sancak*, which had no differentiation from the rest of the empire in organization, and was governed by centrally appointed *sancakbeyis*.⁹

The special status given to Kurdish *beys* in terms of autonomy was never a one-sided concession. The state did intervene whenever it was strong enough to transform the tribal structure to a form that was more controllable. The main tool of state intervention was the privilege of hereditary rulership granted to *hükümet*s and *yurtluk-ocaklıks*. The observation of the principle of hereditary rulership was guaranteed by the state. As a result of this rule, the Kurdish *mirs* became dependent upon Ottomans in order to keep their family in power by overcoming inter-tribal conflicts. The exogenous support of the state power and the mythical justification that the great Kurdish families descend from the Arabs together ‘created’ great Kurdish emirates-or tribal confederacies.¹⁰ These emirates were more receptive to state control than tribes, since emirates were formed in relation to the state.¹¹ They ruled over large areas, controlled smaller tribal groups that were subject to them and acted as the direct respondents in dealings with the center.¹²

⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State* (London : Zed Books, 1992), 157-161; Mehmet Öz, “Ottoman Provincial Administration in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia: The Case of Bidlis in the Sixteenth Century”, *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9/1-2 (Summer 2003); Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 71-73; Tom Sinclair. “The Ottoman Arrangements for the Tribal Principalities of the Lake Van Region of the Sixteenth Century”. *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9/1-2 (Summer 2003); Mert Sunar, “Tribes and State: Ottoman Centralization in Eastern Anatolia, 1876-1914” (Unpublished MA. Dissertation, Bilkent University, 1999), 12-13. For information regarding regions in which each one of these modes were applied, see Aydın and Özel, “Power Relations Between State and Tribe in Ottoman Eastern Anatolia”.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the “unite and rule” policy of the Ottoman state, see Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 71-76. For the argument that large tribes are creations of centralist states, see Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 134-136.

¹¹ Hakan Özoğlu, “State-Tribe Relations: Kurdish Tribalism in the 16th-17th Century Ottoman Empire”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (May, 1996).

¹² The vocabulary for defining tribal groups of various sizes is rich and subject to different interpretations of definition. These terms (such as *aşiret*, *kabile*, *taife*, *oymak*, *oba*, *cemaat* etc.) are discussed especially by the anthropologists. (For details on subdivisions in a nomadic society, see Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 51-64; Halil İnalcık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Ekonomik ve Sosyal Tarihi I*, 49; Aydın and Özel, “Power Relations Between State and Tribe in Ottoman Eastern Anatolia”) The Ottoman state, however, uses these terms interchangeably without showing any interest in particularity. Hence, the discussion of these terms -except for tribe(*aşiret*) and *emirate*- is irrelevant for this study.

The Internal Organization of Tribal Communities

As for the internal organization of the tribes, there was a kind of “two-caste class system” among the Kurds.¹³ This two-layer class system was very similar to the Ottoman socio-political organization, the main division of which was between the *askeri*-military class and the *reaya*-the subject class.¹⁴ In a parallel manner, the Kurdish society was divided between a military class and a subjected class involving in productive activities, such as agriculture or animal husbandry. Conventionally, the ruling military class is referred to as the tribal class and the peasant class as the non-tribal class.

The tribal people formed the elite of the Kurdish society.¹⁵ This military elite acted in a way similar to the state’s military elite, performing the functions that the state elite performed within the Ottoman system in general:

Tribes performed many of the same functions which the state claimed its prerogative. Foremost was taxation. The military strength of the tribes also challenged the state’s monopoly of coercive force. Ottoman attempts to subordinate tribes by military means were costly and seldom effective, as soldiers were forced to pursue tribesmen on their own terrain. Tribes provided a system of justice, which proved effective at resolving disputes and preserving order. In effect, a functional chiefdom provided security and a system of justice all defined in indigenous terms in return for taxation, making the state redundant in a frontier.¹⁶

It is in order at this point to define the boundaries of “security” and “justice” within the tribal culture, to better understand the social structure. The non-tribal peasantry was considered as the productive factor, “not unlike a flock or sheep.”¹⁷

Bruinessen claims that their position was parallel to that of serfs in medieval Europe:

¹³ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 107.

¹⁴ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 161-175 explains in detail how tribes emulated the structure of the states they were subject to.

¹⁵ Bruinessen notes that ‘I am a tribesmen’ conveyed a meaning similar to ‘civis Romanus sum’, see his *Agha*, 61.

¹⁶ Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9.

¹⁷ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 105.

they were considered as the private property of the lords, who could buy and sell peasants together with the land they tilled.¹⁸ Bruinessen relates that the traveler Rich, reporting from Süleymaniye in 1836 writes:

A tribesmen once confessed to me that the clans conceived the peasants to be merely created for their use; and wretched indeed is the position of the Koordish cultivators (...) I take from them my due, which is the *zakat*, or tenth of the whole, and as much more as I can squeeze out of them by any means, and any pretext.¹⁹

Hence, the subordinate position of the peasantry to *beys* was culturally well established. Since the farmers were ‘owned’ by the *beys*, any attack on a chief’s farmer was an attack to his property rights. He, in response, retaliates by destroying the attacker’s property, namely: by killing his peasants. Bruinessen notes how atrocious this practice looked to the nineteenth-century travelers, and how ‘just’ it was for the tribal tradition. He remarks: “Tribal law is by definition law from the viewpoint of the tribesmen, not from that of the subjected.”²⁰

In such a system, protection could only be found when one ‘belonged’ to a certain chief. Hence, it was characteristic of tribal peasantry to prefer to live under a chief than to live independently.²¹

Another feature of the tribal law was that all actions, including crimes, were perceived in communal terms-leaving no room for individuality. Any murder, or theft, was perceived as a communal assault. If someone from a tribe was murdered or his property stolen, the victim’s tribe retaliated on the murderer’s or thief’s tribe, regardless of who the individual violator was.²²

¹⁸ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 66.

¹⁹ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 106.

²⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 66-67.

²¹ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 66-67.

²² Bruinessen, *Agha*, 65, 73.

In addition to these general characteristics of the tribal system, there were peculiar forms of organization in some regions. In this respect, the high plateau of the Erzurum-Van-Bitlis region is known for a particular way of symbiotic life²³. After the Çaldıran war of 1514, a significant number of Kurds were sent to this area to act as frontier wardens. These military, tribal Kurds did not settle and build houses, for they had a high degree of mobility due to their military occupation on the frontier. When they needed housing during the winter, they went to live with the local Armenians in their houses, and had stables built in the same village to use for their flocks. The Armenians provided food and fodder, in return for which the Kurds paid in kind (animal produce).²⁴ Known as *kışlak*, this practice would be one of the sore points of peasantry life in Eastern Anatolia.²⁵

Except for the practice of *kışlak* in the Erzurum-Van-Bitlis region, very little is known on the organization of the Armenian populations in the tribal setting. Studies on Ottoman Armenians have either focused on the urban Armenians, or adopted a completely theoretic framework to explain the situation of the Armenian population with the legal regulations of the *millet* system.²⁶ The position of the Armenians within the tribal system is, on the other hand, either neglected, or assumed as inferiority. However, there are documents pointing to the existence of Armenian ‘*aghas* and *beys*’.²⁷ Detailed information on the issue is, however, presently absent and thus this thesis will focus on the Armenians as forming the subjected classes together with the non-tribal Muslims.

²³ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 107.

²⁴ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 107. Jeremy Salt *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians, 1878-1896* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 24.

²⁵ Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians*, 24.

²⁶ Nejat Göyünç, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Ermeniler”, *Türkler v.1*; Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 3-6; Metin Hülügü, Şakir Batmaz, Süleyman Demirci, Gülbadi Alan (ed.s). *Hoşgörü Toplumunda Ermeniler* (4 vol.s) (Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2007). The numerous conference papers in this last book all stay within the confines of the statement made above.

²⁷ BOA. HR. SYS. 78/5.

2.2. Nineteenth Century Reforms and Tribal Structure

The reign of Mahmud II is known for an effective effort to centralize state administration.²⁸ Centralization did not only represent a transition to a ‘modern’ understanding of administration, but also, it was a necessity in the face of the increased expenditures of the state. The modernization of the state apparatus by creating a central bureaucracy, the establishment of a modernized army and other ‘modernization’ expenses also necessitated a reform in taxation. This involved the implementation of direct administration everywhere in the empire which would secure more efficient taxation and conscription. These measures of centralization were clearly in conflict with the local chiefs’ interests and thus, met serious opposition.

The first attempts at subduing the eastern *begs* was in 1826 by Reşid Mehmed Paşa, the governor of Sivas. However, this project could not be realized because of the first Egypt crisis.²⁹ The crisis was not only an intercession to the state’s interference in provinces, but for some local rulers, it was an opportunity to achieve expansion. Mir Muhammed of Revanduz was the most prominent of these *mirs*, who took advantage of the weakness of the state to expand in Süleymaniye, İmadiye and Revanduz.³⁰

After the end of the Egypt crisis, Reşid Mehmed Paşa moved to subdue Mir Muhammed with a large army. However, the *mir* surrendered without resorting to military clash. This being the first considerable achievement of the state in eastern Anatolia, the attempts to establish effective government control continued

²⁸ Shaw, Stanford, and Ezel Kural Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Reform, Revolution and Republic, 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

²⁹ Mithat Sertoğlu, “Tanzimat’a Doğru”, in *Sultan Mahmut ve Reformları Semineri (28-29 Haziran 1989)*.

³⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 176.

throughout the reign of Mahmud II. Only a few Kurdish dynasties were left in their places by the end of his reign. These families could survive by agreeing to be integrated into the Ottoman system, by taking governmental posts such as *mütesellimlik* or *voyvodalık*.³¹

The Tanzimat reformers continued Sultan Mahmud II's policies of centralization, this time not only with military action- but also with structural changes. This implied the abolishment of the tax-farming system, as well as that of the existing *timars*. Instead, a centralized revenue system was introduced, where *muhassıls* –officials appointed from the center- would collect taxes throughout the empire.³²

The implementation of the new system meant the elimination of intermediate actors, in this case the provincial lords and their deprivation from their traditional incomes, which was made up of fees and services extracted from the population. The local *mirs* were unwilling to give up on their traditional authority and economic rights over the *reaya*. This was one of the main problems that the Tanzimat reformers met in the provincial setting.

The commonly known incident of the Bedirhan Bey revolt of 1846 is an exemplar of this phenomenon. Although no comprehensive study on him is available, there is a significant body of published primary sources.³³ These sources evolve around two themes: his opposition to centrally administered governors and his relations with the Nestorians. Bedirhan Paşa was involved in numerous correspondences with local governors as well as İstanbul, in which he opposed to the

³¹ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 177.

³² Bruinessen, *Agha*, 182.

³³ Nazmi Sevgen, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Türk Beylikleri: Osmanlı belgeleri ile Kürt Türkleri* (Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü: Ankara, 1982); Sinan Hakan, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Kürtler ve Kürt Direnişleri (1817-1867)* (İstanbul: Doz Yayınları, 2007). The discussion of the Bedirhan Bey incident in this section is based on the documents published in these two sources.

administrative division of his (or his emirate's) lands between two *vilayets*: Diyarbakır and Musul. As the tension increased, mutual distrust mounted. The state documents reflect apprehensions of the state about the potential of the *beg* to revolt, while, on the other hand, Bedirhan anticipated a military campaign on the part of the state. Such a campaign was expectable, since the state's disapproval of extensive tribal authority was by then well known. As a precaution against such an intervention, Bedirhan started to gather ammunitions. The Nestorians, a population with which Bedirhan was in bad terms, interpreted this as a potential threat. The reason for the bitter relations was that the tribal chiefs forcefully extracted taxes from the Nestorians: in 1846, the latter had to pay taxes twice to Bedirhan Bey and once to Nurullah Bey -another great tribal leader of the region. The relations were further worsened when the Nestorians supported Süleyman Bey for leadership in Hakkari, against Bedirhan's ally Nurullah Bey. Finally, Bedirhan and Nurullah attacked the Nestorians in 1843. The Nestorians were saved in this case by British intervention. However, Bedirhan Bey attacked again in 1846, this time resulting in military intervention by the Ottoman state. In the end, by July 1847, Bedirhan Bey's uprising was quelled by Ottoman military action.

Besides organizing military campaigns, the Tanzimat reformers also took legal steps in order to curb the power of local chiefs. A significant Tanzimat reform in this context is the Land Code of 1858. The regulation mainly aimed at granting legal possession of the land to its actual tillers, thus distributing land from great landowners to small peasants.³⁴ As for the implication of the regulation for the tribes,

³⁴ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 182.

communal tenure was not recognized according to the code. This aimed at individualization of land ownership and hence breaking up tribes.³⁵

In practice, however, the Land Code proved to be counterproductive: rather than breaking the power of the elites, it strengthened their position. The reason was that the common public was far from getting into contact with the state. Only a small group of elites –in this case *aghas*, shaiks and urban notables such as merchants– could deal with government officials for registering large tracts of land on their possession. Consequently, the *aghas* became large landlords, which gave them excessive power over the farmers, who found themselves as sharecroppers or even hired laborers.³⁶

The central government attempted to address specific problems of the region as well. For instance, in 1842, an interest in abolishing the practice of *kışlak* was taken, by the rearrangement of the settlements.³⁷ The Kurds around Muş were allotted certain villages, which had been vacated by the Armenian emigrants of the district³⁸, in order to rid the Armenians of the heavy burden, which they previously had to bear, as well as to settle the nomadic Kurdish populations. This application remained, however, very limited in scope, covering a small area.

In sum, beginning with the reforms of Mahmud II and continuing with Tanzimat regulations, the Ottoman state aimed to consolidate state control over the frontier provinces. Of the obstacles against the imposition of direct taxation and

³⁵ Ariel Salzman, "Citizens in Search of a State: The Limits of Political Participation in the Late Ottoman Empire", in *Extending Citizenship, Reconfiguring States* (ed. M. Hanagan and C. Tilly) New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999.

³⁶ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 183-184.

³⁷ Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism, and the Ottoman Armenians*, 24.

³⁸ The reason why the Armenians migrated in the specified period is left unexplained in both the work of Jeremy Salt, and the British document he refers to. A reference to the Armenian migrations in this period is made by Cevdet Küçük, where he explains that mass Armenian migrations to Russia occurred in the early 1840s for material reasons: famine and high cost of living. He also notes related documentation in the Ottoman archives. See his "The Armenian Population in Anatolia in the Nineteenth Century", in *The Eastern Question: Imperialism and the Armenian Community*, ed. Abdülhaluk Çay, Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1987.

conscripted, the most prominent ones were the presence of local notables as influential resistant actors and the instability caused by the tribal structure. In this context, especially the Tanzimat state actively sought to settle nomadic populations. In the case of Eastern Anatolia, the settlement policies succeeded in defeating the most influential *mirs* of the region.

Hence, by the start of the last quarter of the century, the region was left without great *emirs*. However, this did not mean that security and authority was maintained. The Kurdish chiefs were doubtlessly sources of major bloodsheds, since struggle between great tribes was a consistent theme of tribal structure. They also were the main actors when a challenge to the state authority was concerned. On the other hand, they were not “absolute evils” as the state depicted them to be. They protected the peasantry from the worse excesses of pastoral tribes, for they expected to gain from peasant produce, and mediated between competing tribal claims on dependent villages. The great *mirs* mentioned here were known not only for the degree of autonomy they had, but also for the great security they provided for their dependents. Although brutal, these leaders punished the slightest offenses within their territory. Bruinessen states that Bedirhan ruled his emirate with an iron hand, and made the area a haven of security.³⁹

After the removal of the great emirs, of whom Bedirhan Bey was the last, the region was dominated by endless rivalry between numerous small tribes. The Ottoman governors were simply outsiders: not knowing the region and distrusted by all, they were unable to play a conciliatory role.⁴⁰ Thus, the nineteenth century was also a period of growing banditry and insecurity.⁴¹ In the words of David McDowall:

³⁹ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 179.

⁴⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 181. Akşin Somel states that the increasing presence of the Ottoman governors and other centralization policies in the frontier regions was seen by the public as “no different than

The Kurdish emirates were at an end, but it was not yet clear whether the Ottomans could substitute effectively for them. Just as the emirs had in the end been undone by undervaluing the importance of external recognition and support to their position, so also the Ottoman authorities were destined to underestimate the mediating role these princes had fulfilled with regard to the local population.⁴²

2.3. The Rise of Armenian Nationalism

The Development of Cultural and Ethnic Consciousness

A turning point in Armenian cultural and ethnic consciousness was the “Armenian renaissance”, starting in the eighteenth century.⁴³ Beginning in the Mechitar church⁴⁴ in Venice at the start of this century was a turn to Armenian classicals, as well as to Armenian vernacular. The Mechitarists are known for compiling the first Armenian dictionary, publishing the first grammar of Armenian, and for creating a renewed interest in Armenian history.⁴⁵ The followers of the Mechitarist movement and Armenians educated in Europe returned to İstanbul with a mission of enlightening the Armenian community. For this purpose, they set up schools in İstanbul and in Asia Minor, and stood for the use of vernacular Armenian instead of classical Armenian. The literature in Armenian language, occupied up to then with religious

foreign invasion”. See his “Osmanlı Modernleşme Döneminde Periferik Nüfus Grupları”. *Toplum ve Bilim* 83, (Kış 1999-2000).

⁴¹ For a discussion of the pros and cons of the suppression of *emirs*, see David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 40-49.

⁴² McDowall, *The Kurds*, 47.

⁴³ The starting era of the Armenian ‘renaissance’ is controversial. Some sources date it back to the late fifteenth century or even earlier (see, for example: Harry Jewell Sarkiss, “The Armenian Renaissance, 1500-1863”, *The Journal of Modern History*, 9/4, Dec 1937), while some start it in the eighteenth century (Arus Yumul and Rifat Bali, “Ermeni ve Yahudi Cemaatinde Siyasi Düşünceler”, in *Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyetin Birikimi*, edited by Mehmet Alkan, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001). Without involving in much debate, this thesis will adopt the second approach, for this is less ideologically oriented-and more to the point.

⁴⁴ The Mechitar church established in the early eighteenth century in Venice is known for stressing the study of Armenian history and literature, as well as emphasizing the necessity to establish links with Europe. Hence, the church is known as an essential element of the ‘Armenian enlightenment’ by the scholars (See Louis Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 32-34 for details).

⁴⁵ Sarkiss, “The Armenian Renaissance”, 442-443.

affairs, was more engaged in worldly problems such as materialism, the exploitation of the poor, the bigotry of the rich Armenians in İstanbul. ⁴⁶

The impact of this new class of Armenians, namely the educated bourgeoisie, was not limited to the cultural sphere. They were to take part in significant political changes within their community. By the early nineteenth century, the affairs of the Armenian *millet* were practically directed by the *amira* class, consisting of bankers, rich merchants and government officials. This class is known to contribute significantly to the educational and cultural developments of the Armenian community on the one hand, and for staying in conformity with the Ottoman state and restricting their actions accordingly on the other.⁴⁷ By the 1830s, their authority was challenged by the *esnaf* class. This latter had a claim of being the representatives of the public.⁴⁸ The educated Armenians agreed to their demands for the cause of a more democratic government for their community. The product of this political struggle was the Armenian national constitution (*Ermeni Milleti Nizamnamesi*), which took its final shape in 29 March 1863.⁴⁹

The constitution aimed at limiting the role of religious authorities and the *amira* class to democratize and secularize –to a certain extent- the government of the Armenian community.⁵⁰ Under the constitution, a General Assembly, composed not only of the bishops and the *amira*, but also the *esnaf*, hold the powers to regulate schooling, religious affairs and other cultural aspects of the Armenian life.⁵¹ The

⁴⁶ Yumul and Bali, “Ermeni ve Yahudi Cemaatinde Siyasi Düşünceler”.

⁴⁷ Hagop Barsoumian. “The Dual Role of the *Amira* Class within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian Millet (1750-1850)” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire, the Functioning of a Plural Society*, edited by Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982.

⁴⁸ Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 43.

⁴⁹ Yumul and Bali, “Ermeni ve Yahudi Cemaatinde Siyasi Düşünceler” .

⁵⁰ Yumul and Bali, “Ermeni ve Yahudi Cemaatinde Siyasi Düşünceler”.

⁵¹ Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 47.

aftermath of the constitution was a period of rampant increase in schooling, which “disseminated liberal ideas and thus led to stiffer opposition to Ottoman rule”.⁵²

It is important to differentiate at this point between the development of a national consciousness and the development of nationalist separatism as a political agenda.⁵³ The Armenian renaissance starting in the eighteenth century led to the formation of the explicitly nationalist agenda only after the mid-nineteenth century. The targeting of separation from the Turkish rule is dated by historians to almost a decade after the establishment of the National General Assembly.⁵⁴

The Development of a Nationalist Political Agenda

The Armenian General Assembly took up petitions and complaints not only from İstanbul, but also from Armenians of East Anatolia. The first attempts to take action on the part of the Ottoman Armenians in this respect was drawing reform schemes, and sending these requests to the British. Two such attempts had already been made under Archbishop Khrimian, one in 1872 and 1876.⁵⁵ These requests included measures to increase Armenian influence to the subordination of Kurds and Circassians, whom were “a people living on usurpation and theft, all to the detriment of the peasantry”.⁵⁶

These requests were unable to produce concrete results. The Armenians had to wait for the European powers to take them into the agenda, namely, until 1878. It is a generally agreed fact that the Armenian nationalism, as a serious political

⁵² Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 48.

⁵³ As a paralell, see Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 92. Here Özoğlu discusses that “Kürtçülük” (Kurdism, literally) and Kurdish nationalism must be differentiated. Although ethnic consciousness of Kurdishness is documented as early as the sixteenth century, Kurdish nationalism as a separatist political movement developed as late as the era of World War I, according to him.

⁵⁴ Anne Elizabeth Redgate, *The Armenians* (Oxford, UK: Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 269.

⁵⁵ Redgate, *The Armenians*, 269.

⁵⁶ Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni meselesi* (İstanbul : Belge Yayınları, 1987), 189-190. Uras gives a translation of the Armenian requests submitted in 1876 to the British authorities, 188-190.

movement and as part of the diplomatic relations, emerged after the war of 1877-78, with the Treaty of Berlin.⁵⁷

2.4. The Treaty of Berlin (July 1878)

Following the war of 1877-78, the Treaty of San Stefano was contracted on 3 March 1878. During the negotiations for this treaty, the Russian commander granted an audience to the Gregorian Patriarch, Nerses Varjabedian, to hear the grievances and demands of the Ottoman Armenians. This rose hopes among the Armenians that immediate change in the provinces, even autonomy, was highly likely.⁵⁸ The Treaty of San Stefano stipulated, by Article XVI, that Russia would not withdraw from the eastern provinces unless reforms about the governance of the Christian minorities were implemented.

This favorable position granted to Russia in Eastern Anatolia was unacceptable for Britain. In a communication, Henry Layard, the British ambassador to İstanbul, summarizes the potential threats to be posed by Russian presence in the region.⁵⁹ First, this would undermine British prestige with respect to the Muslims of Central Asia and India. Second, Batum, Kars and Van would serve as bases that Russia could use further advancement in Anatolia. Third, and most pronounced, the connection of Britain with its Indian colony would be left to Russian discretion. Fourth, the trade route passing from Trabzon and Erzurum would be controlled by Russia, which would seriously harm British trade.

⁵⁷ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 202.

⁵⁸ Robert Zeidner, "Britain and the Launching of the Armenian Question", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7/4, Oct 1976.

⁵⁹ Layard to Lord Derby, 04.12.1877, FO 424/63, No 124, Quoted in Cezmi Eraslan, "I. Sasun İsyanı Sonrasında Osmanlı Devleti'nin Karşılaştığı Siyasi ve Sosyal Problemler", *Kafkas Araştırmaları*, 2 (1996). Hüseyin Şükrü Ilicak, "The question of reforms in eastern Anatolia after the congress of Berlin 1878-1885 (Anadolu Islahati)" (Unpublished MA diss, Bilkent University, 1996), 17.

Thus, Eastern Anatolia's strategic importance made the British averse to any form of Russian strengthening in the region. Consequently, the Treaty of San Stefano was followed by British interference for the organization of another congress in Berlin.

During this latter congress, a separate agreement was made between the British and the Ottoman states on 4 June 1878, known as the Cyprus Convention. According to this agreement, the British would defend the Ottoman state against the Russians. In return, Britain would supervise the application of reforms in eastern Anatolia and would possess Cyprus. Shortly after the conclusion of the Cyprus Convention, the Treaty of Berlin was signed, on 13 June.

The Treaty of Berlin secured the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces. A parallel to the Article 16 of San Stefano in line with new arrangements was adopted, which reads:

Article 61: The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out without further delay the ameliorations and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds. It will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the Powers who will superintend their application.⁶⁰

The major difference of this article from the Article XVI of the San Stefano Treaty was that the privilege of 'protecting the minorities' was taken away from Russia. In theory, "the Powers" would observe the application of the reforms. Soon, the issue of reforms turned into a debate between the Ottomans and the British, almost exclusively. This was so because Britain was the only European power to have direct interest in the area.⁶¹ The nature of these reforms was also left undefined, to be determined between the British and the Ottomans.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Zeidner, "Britain and the Launching".

⁶¹ For a detailed treatment of the diplomatic reasons of the indifference of other European Powers to the issue, see Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 61-110.

The article meant, for the British, a chance to block Russian influence over the Armenians. This was especially important, since, as mentioned, the region was strategically important being on Russia's route to India. An autonomous Armenian principality would, sooner or later, come under the influence of Russia-which was totally undesirable for British interests.⁶²

As for the Armenians, the treaty was met with various reactions. On the one hand were the Armenians who were utterly disappointed by the treaty. So much so that, one of the Berlin spokesmen, the Archbishop Khrimian, gave his very famous "iron spoons" speech just after returning from the congress:

[Khrimian told that] He had gone to Berlin with a petition for reforms, which in itself was merely a piece of paper. There, in the council chamber, were the diplomats of the European Powers, who had placed on the table before them a "Dish of Liberty". One by one the Bulgarians, Serbians and Montenegrins strode into the chamber, and with their iron spoons, scooped into the delicious dish, taking out a portion for themselves. When his turn came, the Armenian was armed only with the fragile paper on which the petition was written. As he dipped into the dish on the table, his paper spoon gave way and crumpled, leaving him deprived of any share of the luscious treat.⁶³

This famous speech was a reflection of disappointment on the part of the Europeans who have not granted them autonomy and independence as was in the case of Balkan Christians. The Armenians, according to this view, should resort to armed struggle.

There was an alternative view, however: many Armenians, including Patriarch Nerses, were satisfied since they "had found, so they apparently believed, a champion at last in Britain".⁶⁴

It is plausible that the second view was dominant during the period up until 1890, which is rightly called "the incubation period of the Armenian nationalism",⁶⁵

⁶² Layard to Derby, 25.03.1878, FO 424/69, No 107, in Bilal Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians, I* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1989), 162-163.

⁶³ Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 28-29.

⁶⁴ Zeidner, "Britain and the Launching".

for armed actions were, although not completely absent from the scene, in the background. The actions of Armenian nationalists⁶⁶ for seeking autonomy in this period was mostly seeking European support, by keeping close ties with them and laying petitions of complaint about the excesses of the Kurds.⁶⁷

The next chapter elaborates on the contents of the petitions relayed to the British authorities by the Armenian representatives, and the British and Ottoman responses to these statements.

⁶⁵ Zeidner, “Britain and the Launching”.

⁶⁶ By the term ‘Armenian nationalists’ I refer to here, and will refer to throughout the study, those figures who communicated the demands pertaining to the Armenian nationalism to related authorities. These figures were, in the Eastern Anatolian setting, mostly the religious leaders of the community-who formed the elite group. When mention of the nationalist organizations are to be made, their organizational character will be emphasized to differentiate between them and the elite of the Armenian community.

⁶⁷ The Article XVI of Berlin Treaty mentions the excesses of not only Kurds, but also Circassians. However, Circassian settlement was very limited in Eastern Anatolia. Problems created by them to the Armenian populations is encountered around Sivas, which is out of the defined are of study for this text.

CHAPTER III

THE DISCUSSIONS OVER THE REFORMS: POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND ADJUSTMENTS FOLLOWING THE TREATY OF BERLIN

The Article 61 of The Treaty of Berlin had two basic implications: that the security of Armenian populations was threatened by the Kurds, and the area was in need of serious reform to be supervised by Britain. The practical application of reforms, as well as the actual cases of insecurity are the topics to be dealt with in the following chapters. In this chapter, I start with evaluating what Armenian claims and British positions were in the aftermath the treaty, and how the Ottomans perceived and responded to these claims. A significant aspect of the discussions within the Armenian-British-Ottoman triangle was the centrality of the arguments on the nature, population and position of the Kurds in the area. As a consequence, the Ottoman attitude towards the Kurdish populations adjusted to the new political importance that these populations gained. This facet, namely the repercussions of the Treaty of Berlin on the relations between the Kurds and the Ottoman state, will be discussed in a detailed manner based on the internal correspondences of the state.

3.1. Armenian Demands

As touched upon in the second chapter, Armenian nationalism was highly inspired by the nationalist movements in the Balkans. These movements are frequently referred to in Armenian demands conveyed to the British consuls. Following the examples, the priority of the movement was the appointment of Armenian officers to high governmental posts, and the appointment of a governor-general to govern “Armenia” as a province.

Armenian demands submitted to the Berlin Congress underlined the issue of an Armenian governor. According to the proposition, the governor would be sanctioned by the Porte and approved by the guarantor states. He may only be removed by the approval of the Great Powers; otherwise he will remain in office for five years. The *mutasarrıfs* at districts (*livas*) as well as *kaymakams* at larger districts (*kazas*) would be appointed by the *vali*. Except for religious courts for cases among Muslims, all other cases will be held at secular courts. These courts will have three judges, appointed by the governor general. Like all other officials of the province, the gendarmerie will be under the command of governor general. The revenues collected will be partially sent to the central government: at a rate of 20 %. The remainder will be used for the expenses of the *vilayet*.⁶⁸

The regulations about the Armenian *vali* mentioned here are perfectly parallel to the status of the Montenegrin prince prior to gaining independence. As in the case of Montenegro and Bulgaria, the governor holds all the powers of administration and appointment, and the role of the state is restricted to receiving

⁶⁸ Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni meselesi*, 225-235 includes a translation of the demands sent to the Berlin Congress by the Armenian Patriarchate.

one-fifth of the total revenue.⁶⁹ Hence the proposal calls for a considerable degree of autonomy.

Armenians communicated their demands for the creation of an autonomous status to the British prior to the Berlin Congress. The British response to Armenian demands was negative based on the fact that the Armenian population was a minority, with around one-fifth of the whole population in Eastern Anatolia.⁷⁰ Layard reflects that Armenian autonomy cannot be conceived, for a semi independent province created in the area would “sooner or later separate from the Turkish Empire, and can only become a dependency of Russia”.⁷¹ Hence, at this point the British position is against the creation of an autonomous status for the Armenians, for they might fall under Russian influence- a position that is reflected in the final form of the treaty.

When the Treaty of Berlin was contracted on 13 July 1878, it proved a serious disappointment for the Armenians.⁷² Their disappointment was on two main points: that the name “Armenia” was not placed in the Treaty, it was not even pronounced. Moreover, there was no notice about the nationality of the reform officers, and “reform was impossible with Turkish governors”.⁷³

The correspondences after the treaty do not refer to “autonomy” explicitly. Rather, they rely on a continuous demand for the appointment of Armenian officials to high posts, and especially the appointment of a governor general, to a province to be created under the name ‘Armenia’. Two months after the treaty, the Patriarch of Constantinople relates to Layard “the only thing that could induce the Armenians to

⁶⁹ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 160-162.

⁷⁰ Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914 : Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 194-197.

⁷¹ Layard to Earl of Derby, 25.03.1878, FO 424/69, No 107 in Bilal Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians vol II* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1989), 163.

⁷² Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 27.

⁷³ Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler*, 253.

refrain from listening to the advice of Russia to emigrate, and to be content to remain under the rule of the sultan, would be the appointment of an Armenian as Vali of Armenia”.⁷⁴ Layard responds negatively, with concerns about the local conflicts that such an appointment may arise. He states that it is pointless to appoint an Armenian governor unless Kurds are disarmed. If a Christian governor is appointed before this step, the Kurds will resent it and it is probable that they rise in arms to oppose this, in which case “great embarrassment would be caused to the Porte, and serious consequences might ensue to the Christians.”⁷⁵ On another occasion, Layard answers the same demands for the appointment of an Armenian governor in the same manner: since the Armenians do not form the majority in any part of Anatolia, the appointment of a Christian governor would provoke extreme reaction.⁷⁶

The argument that the Armenians formed a minority was opposed by the Armenians, on the grounds that they were the majority if Kurds were excluded from any census, administrative position and any reform measures.⁷⁷ They asserted that the exclusion of the Kurds would be the right policy, since the nomad Kurds pay no taxes and escape from conscription, in which case they do not have the slightest right to claim representation.⁷⁸ The Armenians refer to Kurds and Circassian as “itinerant and idle peoples who live at the expense of peasantry.”⁷⁹ By the exclusion of the Kurds from administrative posts, governing posts are to be filled with Turks and Armenians. In this case, the Armenians must hold at least half of the judicial and administrative posts.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Layard to Salisbury, 19.09.1878, FO 424/74, No.503, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 215.

⁷⁵ Layard to Salisbury, 19.09.1878, FO 424/74, No.503, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 215.

⁷⁶ Layard to Salisbury, 17.02.1880, FO 424/106, No 81, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 673.

⁷⁷ Mr Goschen to Earl Granville, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 17.06.1880, FO 424/106, No.50, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 44.

⁷⁸ Layard to Salisbury, 08.08.1879, *Turkey No.4(1880), No 11*, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 517.

⁷⁹ Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler*, 190.

⁸⁰ Layard to Salisbury, 08.08.1879, *Turkey No.4(1880), No 11*, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 517.

In the face of Armenian opposition to the inclusion of Kurds, the Great Powers recommended the separation of Kurdish and Armenian settlements. In 1880, the Great Powers sent the Porte a collective memorandum in which they complained about the non-observance of the Article 61. In this note, the following suggestion was made:

The Undersigned consider that it is necessary to take another peculiarity of these provinces into consideration. The Porte appears to wish to apply the same Reglement both to the Armenians and to the Kurds. It is indispensable, however, to distinguish between them in administration, as far as it is practicable, in view of the absolute impossibility to a settled population and semi-nomadic tribes in the same manner. The communes and administrative groups should consequently be so divided as to unite as many homogenous elements as possible, the Armenians, or when necessary, the Armenians and the Osmanlis, being grouped together, to the exclusion of Kurds. The nomadic Kurdish element, that lives in the mountains and descends into the plains inhabited by Christians, only in order to create disturbances, should not be included in the census by which the majority of the inhabitants of each village will be determined.⁸¹

Demands to separate the administration of Kurds and Armenians was fed by a distrust in the Porte's ability to settle nomads: "Some would-be reformers in this country talk of transforming the nomadic pastoral Kurds, by a stroke of the pen, into fixed and settled agriculturists".⁸²

One aspect to underline is the centrality of the Kurdish element in all the discussions within the Ottoman-Armenian-British triangle. Both the Armenians and the British underline the nomadic nature of Kurds and indicate them as a problematic element; they are to be excluded from censuses, and are even to be separated from the Armenians. The state, without denying the claims of savagery, still underlines the indispensability of them.

⁸¹ Collective Note addressed to the Porte, 07.09.1880, *Turkey No.23(1880),No 154/1*, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, p 120. For the whole text of the note, see Ibid, 119-124.

⁸² Trotter to Salisbury, 24.07.1879, FO 424/86, No 164, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 497.

The next section will demonstrate how strict the Ottoman position was on applying separate regimes to the peoples of Eastern Anatolia, and to any development prone to result in Armenian autonomy.

3.2. British Reform Scheme

In reports prepared by the British embassy and transmitted to the Porte, the issue of reform was defined along four lines: the establishment of a regular gendarmerie force with the guidance of a European officer, the reorganization of courts to include a European lawyer at the Courts of Appeal, the annulment of the tithes, and the provision that the governor generals, the judges and preferably the tax collectors stay at the post of employment for a fixed number of years without arbitrary dismissal.⁸³

This form of the reform proposal was subject to objections by the Porte. The first reason to oppose was the inclusion of European officers in the body of the judicial and gendarmerie organizations. The sultan objected to this point, with the argument that it is against the customs of his country (*memleket ve ahalimizin adet ve ahlakına*)⁸⁴ and told the British ambassador that it would generate reactions among the Muslims that cannot be controlled.⁸⁵ As for the abolishment of the tithes, the sultan found it inapplicable for the time being, again for it would raise serious opposition among local inhabitants. From his further remarks, it is inferable that the reaction apprehended here was reaction by the notables, whose interests would be

⁸³ Salisbury to Layard, 08.08.1878, Turkey No 51 (1878), No 1, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 190-195.

⁸⁴ Hüseyin Şükrü Ilıcak, "The Question Of Reforms in Eastern Anatolia After The Congress Of Berlin 1878-1885 (Anadolu Islahati)" (Unpublished MA diss, Bilkent University, 1996), 38.

⁸⁵ Layard to Salisbury, 30.10.1878, Turkey No 51 (1878), No 4, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 248.

harmed by this move⁸⁶. Moreover, the transition to a cash-based system was economically implausible.

The final argument was a promise on the part of the Porte to establish a regular gendarmerie, to let Europeans as inspectors of justice or military trainers, and to try a cash based alternative to the tithe system in a suitable province (namely, Kastamonu, since ‘no opposition is to be apprehended there’, because of the lack of powerful *ayan* groups) and to appoint governors for five years unless they commit any inappropriate acts.⁸⁷

3.3. Ottoman Response to the Armenian and British Demands

One of the central arguments of the British policy towards Eastern Anatolia was that it was implausible to apply the same form of government to Armenians and the Kurds. This attempt at the separation of the Armenian and Kurdish populations both geographically and administratively was strictly opposed by the sultan. The British ambassador relates the following comments after a conversation with Abdülhamid II on the issue of separation: “There is one thing, very evident, that his Majesty [the sultan] entertains a fixed determination to taboo any arrangement which might have the appearance of according a special regime to the Armenians as as distinct nationality...”⁸⁸ In another conversation with The British ambassador on the subject of reforms, one year later, the sultan stated the “impossibility of creating in Asia

⁸⁶ Layard to Salisbury, 30.10.1878, Turkey No 51 (1878), No 4, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 243-250.

⁸⁷ Layard to Salisbury, 30.10.1878, Turkey No 51 (1878), No 4, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 243-250.

⁸⁸ Foreign Secretary to British Ambassador at Constantinople, 10.01.1882, FO 424/132, No 12, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 387.

Minor an *imperium in imperio* by the grant of special privileges to his Armenian subjects.”⁸⁹

This concern about the creation of a special regime to the Armenians, or an *imperium in imperio*, stems mainly from the Ottoman experiences with other parts of the empire: Crete, Bulgaria and Montenegro. In a memorandum by Abdülhamid II, he reflects in a detailed fashion his views on the state of Crete by 1886:

Many are in favor of increased authorization [*tevsi-i mezuniyet*] for attaining better government. Higher authorization in our case is almost equivalent with autonomy. For instance, a great island like Crete has sent nothing to the state treasury since the adoption of this policy. (...) Moreover, since the governor is a Christian and the population has great powers at their disposal, whenever a conflict arises between the Europeans and the state, they utilize the situation to create further problems. (...) Although these inconveniences and dangers posed by the policy of autonomy is very self evident from the examples of Crete and Eastern Rumelia, there are people who, provoked by the malevolent, demand the implication of the policy of increased authorization to almost all provinces of the Ottoman state.⁹⁰

His relation of the reforms proposed by the British with the status of an *imperium in imperio* indicates that these reforms were seen as a start to set Eastern Anatolia autonomous under an Armenian governor.

Not only the possibility of Armenian autonomy, but also British involvement was a source of apprehension for the Ottomans. The Treaty of Berlin was the start of the Ottoman alienation from the British, a tendency deeply severed by the British occupation of Egypt in 1882.⁹¹ In a memorandum, Abdülhamit II explicitly states his mistrust to Europeans, at a time “when situations like the French conquest of Tunisia, the British conquest of Egypt -acts totally contradictory to surety (*zaman*) and openly

⁸⁹ Foreign Secretary to British Ambassador at Constantinople, 16.05.1883, FO 424/140, No 31, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 463.

⁹⁰ BOA. Y. EE. 4/31.

⁹¹ Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith and Community in Late Ottoman State* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 179, 221.

destructive to the independence and integrity of the state- are apparent”.⁹² In another memorandum, he comments:

The Europeans desire the destruction of our state. They are not only contended with the idea of seeing another *millet* instead of the noble Osmanlı *millet* at Dersaadet, but they desire it. In this vein, using the smallest and most trivial instance happening at any place of the state, and exaggerating it disproportionately, they interfere using the pretense of the protection of our own subjects.⁹³

The Ottoman experiences in the Balkans, combined with embittered relations with the British, produced a very suspicious approach to the issue of the Eastern Anatolian reforms. This is outward in a memorandum written to the grand vizierate, most probably by Abdülhamid II. This document, dated 1889, is worth quoting extensively, for it is an explicit statement of the Ottoman position about the reforms in Eastern Anatolia:

As for the issue of reforms: real reform is the attainment of security [*ırz ve can ve malından emin olma*], education, and economical development of all classes of subjects [*sunuf-ı teba*]. This is possible when the police forces are powerful in proportion to the importance of every district and the force is composed of honest individuals, when the judicial courts are regulated and schools are increased, and when the means of commerce and prosperity are facilitated. These have been commanded by our sultan throughout his accession. In whichever of the imperial provinces there is anything to be done about these principles, they are executed one by one.

However, except the principles stated, the demands made under the title “ıslahat” are in fact not only reforms, but intrigues and privileges that will result in the establishment of Armenia –a name unheard of before- instead of Kürdistan.⁹⁴

In this memorandum, along with suspicion towards the real intention of reforms, there is another facet emphasized repeatedly. That is: that the area traditionally known as Kürdistan came to be called ‘Armenia’, a name recently invented by ‘the malevolent’. In deed, the discussion over the nomination makes up an important part of the documentation of the period. In what follows, I delineate this

⁹² BOA. Y. EE. 5/24.

⁹³ BOA. Y. EE. 4/31.

⁹⁴ BOA. Y. EE. 5/24.

discussion to explain its implications about the relations between the state and the Kurdish populations.

3.3.1. The Debate over Nomination: Kurdistan or Armenia?

Written sources in Western languages dated to the last quarter of the nineteenth century use the name “Armenia” for what was widely known as “*vilayet-i sitte*” in the Ottoman administrative language - the six provinces (in which Armenian population is considerably high)⁹⁵. There is no research on whether the name was in circulation at any earlier period of Ottoman history. However, all European sources (consular reports, travelogues, newspapers) use the term at this period, and also it was the common term used in Armenian publications and correspondences.

In fact, the British documents reveal that there was a certain pressure from the Armenian nationalists for the denomination ‘Armenia’ to be used. In 1879, Layard receives complaints from the Armenian patriarch in the following manner: “Her Majesty’s Government has named a consul to Kurdistan instead of Armenia, which (...) is the proper name of the district over which Major Trotter’s consular jurisdiction extends.”⁹⁶ The protests against this denomination continued in Armenian newspapers. Many newspapers criticized the designation ‘the consulate of Kurdistan’ referring to the consular area including the provinces Erzurum, Diyarbakır, Harput, Muş, Van.⁹⁷ Armenian newspapers claim that the true name should be ‘Armenia’, and some suggest that the area be named ‘Armenia and Kurdistan’. Briefly discussing which denomination to be used, Trotter concludes that although using ‘Armenia’ would be flattering to the Armenians, it was unacceptable

⁹⁵ The area consists of today’s Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Muş, Hakkari, Erzurum, Van and Sivas.

⁹⁶ Layard to Salisbury, 01.07.1879, FO 424/85 No 223, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 463.

⁹⁷ Trotter to Salisbury, 15.06.1879, FO 424/86 No 163, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 483-485; Layard to Salisbury, 01.08.1879, FO 424/86 No 198, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 513-514.

and unknown to the Porte. Hence, a neutral term like “Eastern Provinces” could be more suitable.⁹⁸ In the end, Trotter remains to be called as the consul of Kurdistan, whereas the designation Armenia does not disappear from British documents.

The Ottoman state was strongly opposed to the use of the name, which, according to the state officers, was not an innocent geographical notation-but the denotation of a nationalist and separatist inclination, hence could not be accepted.

This viewpoint was represented in meetings with the European diplomats, and the British were warned not to use the name. The British Ambassador at Constantinople, writing in August 1881 about his conversation with Said Paşa, makes the following remark:

If the term Armenia was used, it was in a geographical rather than an ethnic sense, and the Porte would render under a mischievous misapprehension if it thought that either Europe or England were desirous of creating a hostile or aggressive Armenian Imperium in the bosom of the Ottoman Empire. The material elements of the problem did not lend itself to such a solution of the question. Unlike the Greeks in Thessaly, and the Bulgarians in Eastern Rumelia and in the Principality, who were agglomerated in homogenous masses, the Armenians were disseminated up and down the land in scattered groups, and were so dovetailed into the rest of the population as to leave few localities in which they could claim a numerical preponderance, and that, consequently, it would be the sheerest folly, if from jealousy or fear of their political pretensions as a nationality, the Porte should refuse them good government and the benefit of equal laws.⁹⁹

Two points are noteworthy in this case. First, from the text it is naturally understood that the Ottomans warn the British not to use the term “Armenia”. The British argument in this case is two-fold. First, they claim it is only a geographic term. Second, there is a realization of the biggest concern of the Porte with respect to the region: that the experience in the Balkans would be reproduced. Comparing Eastern Anatolian politics with the Balkans is a frequent motif in the Porte’s and the sultan’s statements on the issue. The region is commonly referred to as “the

⁹⁸ Trotter to Salisbury, 15.06.1879, FO 424/86 No 163, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 484.

⁹⁹ The Earl of Dufferin to Earl of Granville, 20.08.1881, FO 424/123, No 75, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 271-72.

Montenegro of Kurdistan” (Kürdistan’ın Karadağı).¹⁰⁰ Hence, the British strive to assure that the fate of Eastern Anatolia will not follow that of the Balkans.

The Ottomans, however, seem not to be persuaded by this kind of statements. An imperial memorandum written to the grand vizierate, on 17 July 1890, is a very detailed document on the Ottoman view of the Armenian and British arguments¹⁰¹:

Since Armenians are present everywhere with the only exception of Hicaz, it is impossible to define a territory as “Armenian inhabited areas”. The area, which is mainly inhabited by Kurds and has been called “Kurdistan” since the ancient times, is recently called “Armenia” by the malevolent (*bedhahan*). This is intended at creating an Armenia, just like the case of the formation of the Danube Province at the time, which provided a base for the definition of the Bulgarian territory. However, Kurdistan is currently present and populated mostly by Muslims, so it cannot be called Armenia. An instruction written in this direction has been sent to Bitlis and other provinces in July 1889.

The document rejects the usage of the term “parts inhabited by Armenians”, which is a mitigated alternative for “Armenia” and used by the foreign actors as a politically correct phrase. It is probable that there was an ambiguity about where ‘Armenia’ would be - if such an aim was realized. In a sultanic memorandum dated 1888¹⁰², there is a reference that if Armenia is established, its borders would be “all the way up to Konya”.

Although the name “Armenia” was commonly used by foreign travelogues and bureaucrats and condemned by the Ottoman state, it is interesting to see it used in the internal correspondences of the state. As early as 1879, the vali of Bitlis sent a communication to the *Şura-yı Devlet*, and following a discussion at the assembly, the case was communicated to the sultan. The summary of the governor’s point was that the *nahiye* of Bulanık had been “a source of the *Ermenistan* intrigue that had been persisting for a while”; this political situation made it imperative to pay the place

¹⁰⁰ BOA. Y. A. RES. 5/17.

¹⁰¹ BOA. Y. EE. 5/24.

¹⁰² BOA. Y. EE. 4/31.

special attention and make it a *kaza*. In this case, a talented *kaymakam* would be appointed and one or two *hafiyes* would be employed, in order to keep affairs under control, with a certain salary allocated from the state's budget.¹⁰³

This communication was discussed in the *Şura-yı Devlet* and passed to the Ministry of Interior. In these two documents by the governor and the assembly, the word *Ermenistan*, which is used in both of the documents, is encircled and crossed out, and on top of the word, "Kürdistan" is written for replacement. The sidenote of the ministry approves the administrative measures in a short sentence, after which a detailed warning against the usage of *Ermenistan* follows:

The employment of an imagined and uncertain term like *Ermenistan* in this kind of official documents will certainly appear as a sign of looseness against the delusions of those seditious ones who venture to establish in the known territories of Anatolia an administration that is extremely detrimental and baneful to the sultanate. Moreover, the forementioned province of Bitlis has agelong been inhabited by Kurds, and hence known as the name Kürdistan. Thus, the term [*Ermenistan*] used in the present communications shall be removed, and replaced by 'Kürdistan', which is the traditional name of those areas. After the correction of this mistake, the use of this phrase shall not be used in anyway in official documents. All officers concerned shall be warned to this point.

The Ottoman documents, in majority, use the term "*Ermeni sakin olan vilayetler*" – "provinces with Armenian settlement", when related issues arise. These quotations show the state's aversion to any implications of referring to Armenian nationalism- which is predictable. However, it shows more than that.

It is important to underline that both in Armenian and British documents, and in Ottoman documents, the dispute is one between "Armenia" and "Kurdistan" - "land of Kurds", literally. Hence, in spite of the great Kurdish revolts and the obvious fact that great Kurdish chiefdoms vied for autonomy when possible, the state still was not reactionary to the use of the term 'Kurdistan', which recognized Kurdish

¹⁰³ BOA. İ. ŞD. 121/7231.

ascendancy in the region. As will be explained in the next chapter, part of the reason was that the state was politically and financially unable to exercise actual power in the region. Another reason was, however, that the state had only the Kurds to rely on in order not to lose Eastern Anatolia. As one scholar put it, this was the rise of “Kurds as a base of support in Eastern Anatolia”.¹⁰⁴ The tribal Kurds were presented as, and thus transformed into, the key factor in discussing the legitimacy of Armenian claims: of calling or not calling Eastern Anatolia as ‘Armenia’.

The fact that the majority of the inhabitants were Kurds¹⁰⁵ was a fact that refuted Armenian claims to Eastern Anatolia. This was not only part of Ottoman response to Armenian claims, but it was also recognized by the British consuls and embassies. In their inner correspondences as well as communications with the Porte, the British iterated that the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia were a minority, and moreover they were dispersed among the Muslims. This made their case considerably different from that of the Balkan Christians.¹⁰⁶

This was a factor that affected state policy towards tribes. Except for factors explained in the next chapter –Abdülhamid’s general notable politics as well as the tribes’ practical strength- the need to maintain the Kurdish majority contributed to the tolerant treatment of the local chiefs by the state. There are several archival documents explicitly stating this concern.

A document demonstrates that the state had the apprehension of losing ground in Eastern Anatolia in case the Kurdish chiefs were exiled, for in that case the

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Duguid, “The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 9/2, 1973.

¹⁰⁵ This fact was much discussed by contemporaries, for the Armenian community was interested in showing the community’s size as greater than reality. For this aspect of the discussions, as well as discussions of reliable estimates of the population, see Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 209-211.

¹⁰⁶ The Earl of Dufferin to Earl of Granville, 20.08.1881, FO 424/123, No 75, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 271-72.

ascendancy would shift in favor of the Armenian population. This document is written by the governor of Bitlis, Şerif Mehmed Rauf :

In the imperial telegram dated 22 September 1888 regarding the attacks of Kurdish bands on villages, it was ordered that rigorous and repressive acts, such as exiles, shall not be applied to the Kurdish chiefs. They shall rather be treated with leniency, and only if they are persistent in their crimes, legal procedure shall be applied. [The reason for this policy is] because the ideas of Armenians are known, it is imperative by servitude and dignity (*lazime-yi ubudiyet ve hamiyet*) to avoid any act that would result in the loss of Muslim ascendancy in Kürdistan.¹⁰⁷

Starting with mentioning this decree issued by the center, the document goes on to reveal that this apprehension was reflected in real administrative politics. Starting in the quoted manner, the governor continues to write in order to justify the exile of two local figures by the governor. These people, as the governor tells, are of the most inferior (*esafil-i nas*). To illustrate this, he explains their occupations and social positions: one of them is a tailor, the other one is the son of the headman of a quarter (*mahalle muhtarının oğlu*) who “appreciates some 20 or 40 *pare* earned by doing the simplest works of the common folk”. These people have built relations with the high state officials as well as local notables of Bitlis in order to get a post at the government for the sake of salaries. They abused their position in the worst way and engaged in corruption, which is the reason why the inhabitants issued several petitions against them. As a result, the governor sent them to exile after getting the approval of the Ministry of Interior. The document does not make direct reference to an objection to the exiles by the center, but it is written in such a way as an actual or potential objection arose. The main argument of the governor is that these two corrupt people were from the common folk (*ehad-ı nas evladı, esafil-i nas*) and were not among the notables and pillars of the society (*buranın ileri gelenlerinden ve eshab-ı nüfuz ve haysiyetden olmayub*). This is underlined strongly to establish that

¹⁰⁷ BOA. Y. MTV. 44/55.

the action was not against the orders of the state, which proclaimed that the influential figures were to be treated with lenient policies (*rıfk ile*) and that exiling them was to be considered only in the most severe cases.

Hence, the rise of Armenian national claims added a new dimension to state-Kurdish relations. Accompanying this concern was the policy of the state, on the broader scale, known as ‘Islamism’. A brief treatment of this aspect is in order, for it is essential to understand the Ottoman attitudes towards Eastern Anatolia in the Hamidian era.

The Politics of Islamic Union

The aftermath of the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman war is known for the creation of a new position whereby the Ottoman Empire turned into a dominantly Muslim state. The loss of most of the Balkan lands rendered the population with a clearly Muslim majority. This practical reality was reflected in the state ideology, where the ‘Ottomanism’ of Tanzimat statesmen was outweighed by ‘Islamism’, associated with the name of Abdulhamid II. In application, the priority position attached to the Muslim populations was apparent in the sultan’s attitude towards different parts of the empire. Bayram Kodaman emphasizes the contrast between his conciliatory and lenient policies regarding Cyprus, Tunisia, Egypt and his obstinate and resolute stance regarding the affairs of Eastern Anatolia.¹⁰⁸

The increase of the importance attached to all Muslim populations was not only stemming from a demographic concern. More importantly, this emphasis was made necessary by “an underlying current of doubt about the loyalty of [the sultan’s]

¹⁰⁸ Bayram Kodaman, “II. Abdülhamid Hakkında Bazı Düşünceler”, in *Osmanlı*, vol II. Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999.

Muslim subjects, and in particular, non Turkish Muslims”.¹⁰⁹ Such a doubt must have been present in Eastern Anatolia, where the Kurds were in a state of continuous tumult and rebellion. The emphasis on the Sunni identity of the state, as well as the central role of the caliph were deemed to have the potential to achieve ‘unity’, accompanied by direct dealings with Muslim notables, such as by receiving them in İstanbul.¹¹⁰

The politics of Islamism, as well as the rise of Kurds as a strategically important community were the bases of what was called “the politics of unity” by Stephen Duguid.¹¹¹ According to Duguid, the most prominent aspect of the Ottoman politics under Abdülhamid II was that any other concern (such as the application of reforms) was subordinate to the need to unite the Muslims and guarantee their loyalty to the state.

3.3.2. Balancing Unity and ‘Image’

The Ottoman concern for the empire’s image vis-à-vis the Europeans is a well known facet of the westernization process. This concern for image became particularly prominent in the reign of Abdülhamid, as shown by Selim Deringil.¹¹² After the Treaty of Berlin, a new dimension to this “observant-observed” relation was added in terms of Eastern Anatolian affairs. This was the position of ‘reform gendarmeries’ that the British agents held. The comments and communications of these agents would now determine the quality of the Ottoman government as a whole, and how well the state governed its Christian subjects. Hence, the already existing perception

¹⁰⁹ Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890-1908* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

¹¹⁰ Engin Deniz Akarlı, “The Tangled Ends of an Empire: Ottoman Encounters with the West and Problems of Westernization—an Overview”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26.3 (2006).

¹¹¹ Duguid, “The Politics of Unity”.

¹¹² Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimization of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 1998).

of being under surveillance was reinforced. This concern for potential European comments is reflected in internal communications of the state.

For instance, in 1878, 15 Kurdish *beys* in Diyarbakır were arrested and the local authorities decided to send them into exile to Suriye. When written to the state, local governors were ordered to reconsider the decision, on the grounds that the chiefs' revolt (about which there is, unfortunately, no detailed information) was instigated by another notable family, and if they were sent to Syria, they would join the instigators who were already dominant there. The document, however, acknowledges the impossibility of keeping the chiefs where they were, for this would create reaction among the foreigners (*ecnebler mazarrat çıkarır*). As a result, they were sent to İstanbul to express their loyalty, after which they were sent back to Diyarbakır. The document adds that their exile could be considered only if they persisted in their acts after this measure.¹¹³

This is a case where the tolerant treatment of the notables by the state was counterbalanced by the need to consider potential European reaction, and this concern is explicitly stated. In a similar manner, the discussions given earlier in this chapter on the appointment of Armenian officers were also established along the same lines. The state was against appointing Armenians to high administrative positions, for this would be the way to an autonomous Armenia, as in the case of Crete or the Balkans. However, pursuing a strict policy on this could damage the 'image' of the empire. A letter by the Grand Vizier Arifi Paşa, dated 4 May 1880,¹¹⁴ reflects on this issue:

It is obvious that the region mentioned is extremely important. The point to be observed with utmost care about the region is that Armenians constantly lay right or wrong complaints (*haklı haksız la-yenkati şikayet ettikleri*) to the foreigners to create uproars. In the petitions they relay to the Porte, they state

¹¹³ BOA. Y.A.RES. 2/19.

¹¹⁴ BOA. Y. A. HUS. 162/20.

that they are loyal subjects and demand to be appointed to posts such as *mutasarrıflık*, *kaymakamlık*. On the other hand, the foreigners sharpen their criticisms on the misgovernment of the region. In this context, the appointment of one of the commissioners sent to the region from İstanbul from among the Armenian *millet* will be a wise undertaking that would be a defense against both [the Armenians'] own complaints and demands, and the objections and interferences of the foreigners. In this way, the obligation to accept the appointment of Armenians to higher posts, which is demanded by the Europeans under the pretext of reforms, will be removed.

The document also suggests the appointment of Armenians to positions such as *kaymakam* and *mutasarrıf* deputyships in Malatya, Siirt, Mardin and Zeytun: Europeans could use press for their appointment to higher posts, if the Porte did not make a show of good will. In deed, this kind of appointments is exceptional. Although Armenians are by regulation employed at a certain number in local assemblies, their appointment to the higher administrative positions in the districts, namely: *kaymakam/mutasarrıf*, *naib*, *mal müdürü*, *sandık emini* appears rather restricted. As a general occasion, if a non-Muslim is appointed to one of these posts, it is the *sandık eminliği*; *kaymakam* and *naib* being certainly Muslims.¹¹⁵ Except for positions of *erkan-ı kaza* (*kaymakam*, *muavin*, *naib*, *mal müdürü*, *sandık emini*) in districts and *erkan-ı vilayet* (*defterdar*, *mektubi*, *naib*, *müftü*) in provinces, the rest of the judicial and administrative offices do not suggest any restriction to Muslim appointment. Especially for the posts related to judicial organizations, the employment of non-Muslims is a frequent occurrence.¹¹⁶

Hence, the need to counterbalance Armenian ascendancy was accompanied by the need to achieve tranquility within Eastern Anatolia, without which the diplomatic position of the Empire was to remain weak.

¹¹⁵ This observation is based on the following yearbooks: *Salname-i Vilayet-i Erzurum* (1293, 1294, 1299, 1304, 1310).

¹¹⁶ İlber Ortaylı, "II. Abdülhamid Devrinde Taşra Bürokrasisinde Gayrı Müslimler" (*Sultan II. Abdülhamid ve Devri Semineri*, 27-29 Mayıs 1992, İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Araştırma Merkezi, 1994) notes the occurrence of the same phenomena in Balkan provinces, and underlines that the employment of non Muslims is a phenomenon that has its roots in the eighteenth century, and hence cannot be related with European intervention alone.

3.4. Conclusion

Following the Treaty of Berlin, a process of ongoing negotiations emerged, the center of which were the British authorities. The leaders of the Armenian community conveyed their community's demands to the British embassy, and the reforms concerning the Ottoman administration were again to be settled with the British.

The most pronounced demand on the Armenian side was the appointment of a Christian governor to "the province of Armenia". Moreover, there was a strong opposition to the participation of the Kurds in any administrative process, even in population census. Hence, a discussion started on population: who were the majority, Armenians or the Kurds? Similarly, another discussion appeared on nomination: was the proper name of the area Armenia or Kurdistan?

The rise of these discussions led to the rise of Kurdish populations as an important base of power, for they were the only ones who had the potential to balance Armenian ascendancy. Consequently, decrees ordering the lenient treatment of the Kurds, to the extent possible, were issued and put into practice. In short, the rise of Armenian claims was one of the key factors defining the relations between the state and the Kurdish tribes. The existence of Armenian revolutionary movement "kept the Ottomans periodically off balance" vis-à-vis the Kurdish tribal system.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, the surveillance of European powers in the region as reform gendarmeries appeared as a counterbalancing factor, working in the opposite direction: the tolerant treatment of notables was at times deemed impossible, considering a potential European reaction or interference.

In sum, the rise of Armenian demands as well as the closer European surveillance related to this development were new factors added to the dynamics of

¹¹⁷ Duguid, "The Policies of Unity".

state-tribe relations in Eastern Anatolia. The Ottoman state paid attention to balance these sometimes conflicting concerns in handling the issues in Eastern Anatolia.

CHAPTER IV

THE REFORMS IN PRACTICE:

PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION IN EASTERN ANATOLIA, 1878-1890

This chapter intends to elaborate on the issue of reforming the administration of Eastern Anatolia, emerging after the Treaty of Berlin. The approach of the present section is to take the issue in a broader perspective rather than confining it within the framework of a diplomatic discussion. In order to do this, the administrative practices are placed within the context of the local conditions in the region and the problems and policies of the Ottoman state are evaluated without disregarding these conditions.

4.1. Main Problems

4.1.1. Financial Obstacles

The financial situation of the Ottoman Empire was problematic throughout the nineteenth century. The situation was further worsened after the war of 1877-78. Among many other things, this financial insolvency of the state had a considerable negative effect on the regulations to be made in provincial organization, for poor or

delayed payment was an occasional case for provincial officials, which caused certain disorders.¹¹⁸

Among the mostly effected from the monetary inadequacy was the gendarmerie organization. From the earliest diplomatic meetings between the British and the Ottomans, the statesmen of the latter declared that the constitution of the police force was impossible, since the government would not be able to pay for this.¹¹⁹ This notice in advance proved a consistent problem for the period.

The *zabtiyes* were poorly paid and equipped with obsolete guns. These two together rendered the police insecure in the face of a probable confrontation, and hence unwilling to follow violators. In the words of the British consul in Erzurum:

Most of the aforementioned *zabtiyes* have families, children and livestock. They receive 140 *guruş* as salaries, which has been in arrears for a while (*tedahilde*) and they know the government will not take care of their families if they pass away. Hence, these *zabtiyes*, being armed with *karabina* and *revolvers*, do not want to pursue culprits. If they are ordered to arrest a thief, they go to a village for a few days, and on their return claim they were unable to find the culprit, which is natural.¹²⁰

Due to poor payment, the number of *zabtiyes* at most places was less than what the regulations specified. Reform commissions noted this as a cause of insecurity, noting that the number of police at most places was disproportionate with its “*ehemmiyet*”-importance, most probably referring to the potential of crisis.¹²¹

The payments were not only poor, but occasionally delayed. This created two major problems: when the armed organizations-the army and the gendarmerie were left without payment, they resorted to forced extraction of money from residents. In this context, a commissioner notes that when payment was not made, the police

¹¹⁸ Trotter to Salisbury, 16.08.1879, Turkey No.4 (1880), No.24, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 533.

¹¹⁹ Layard to Salisbury, 21.08.1878, Turkey No.4 (1878), No.2, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 197.

¹²⁰ BOA. HR. TO. 253/21.

¹²¹ BOA. HR. TO. 253/21, BOA. Y. EE. 35/56.

would even resort to extracting ransoms from villages.¹²² In another note, the British authorities draw attention to the delay of payment to the imperial battalion around Muş, which may cause insecurity, for the soldiers might resort to force the local population to pay for their living costs.¹²³

On another level, among the officials, the situation created encouragement and even justification for bribery.¹²⁴ Bribery was a consistent source of complaint throughout the period. The complaints from the provinces told that the officers let violators in return for bribery, which encouraged them to continue their misdeeds.¹²⁵

4.1.2. Lack of Qualified Officers

A noteworthy feature about Ottoman documents, which define the criteria for the officials to be employed, is that these are mostly defined in normative terms. More concretely, they are moral criteria, rather than professional ones. For example, directions given to the investigation and reform committees order that the police shall be selected “from among the decent and competent, and when necessary, by communicating *Zabtiye Nezareti*, those of bad morals and incompetence from among the existing police shall be dismissed”.¹²⁶

Not only specific reform orders, but also general codes about the organization of police lack professional criteria and are based on moral criteria.¹²⁷ This lack of professionalization appears to stem from the practical impossibility of doing so.¹²⁸ This impossibility stemmed from the low level of general education. For example,

¹²² BOA. Y. EE. 35/56.

¹²³ BOA. HR. SYS. 78/5.

¹²⁴ Akarlı, “The Tangled Ends of an Empire”.

¹²⁵ BOA. HR. SYS. 78/5, BOA. HR. TO. 253/21,

¹²⁶ BOA. Y. A. HUS. 160/111.

¹²⁷ Ferdan Ergut, *Modern Devlet ve Polis* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 147.

¹²⁸ Ergut, *Modern Devlet ve Polis*, 146. Ergut makes this point to make a connection between the impossibility of professionalization and the local networking between criminals and police. The argument here, rather focuses on the level of education as an obstacle, and indeed differs from Ergut’s point.

Taner Akçam documents that in the 1880s, most of the police could not read and write. Those who could read and write were illiterate about the criminal law in force. In 1890, the *Zabtiye Nezareti* of the time aims to educate 30 or 40 literate police about Ottoman criminal law.¹²⁹

Illiteracy is shown as a reason of misgovernment in various other British documents. For example, a report dated 1881 makes the following point:

“As an example of the class of persons to whom the welfare of the people is intrusted, it is only necessary to say that out of the 17 mudirs appointed to the nahiehs into which Passin has recently been divided, one only can read or write Turkish.”¹³⁰

It may be argued that literacy was not a requirement for all the posts, and that the dissemination of information about regulations and laws can be realized through top-down communication. In this case, it follows that there must have been few people eligible for higher appointments, which we learn is a reality from a remark made by Abdülhamid II.

In a conversation with the British ambassador about reforms, the sultan reflects that much time was needed for the reforms, and gives the example of the situation of judicial reforms:

The Code Napoleon had been adopted almost in its entirety. Everybody admitted that the Code Napoleon in the abstract, was an excellent system, and was working well in France, but in Turkey it had almost completely broken down, through the inefficiency of the persons who administered it. Sometimes complaints came to him of a certain Procureur-General, who, having failed to give satisfaction to the people within his jurisdiction, was dismissed. Soon after, however, he would hear of his reappointment to a similar post elsewhere, and when he asked his Minister of Justice the reason of such an undesirable arrangement, he was told that the choice of persons at all fitted for the office was so limited, that no other course was open.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ Taner Akçam, *Siyasi Kültürümüzde Zulüm ve İşkence* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992), 229.

¹³⁰ Foreign Secretary to British Ambassador at Constantinople, 09.02.1881, FO 424/122, No 29, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 193.

¹³¹ British Ambassador to British Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 17.01.1882, FO 424/132, No 22, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 390.

4.2. Policies

4.2.1. Military Solutions

After the quelling of the Bedirhan revolt in 1846, the headquarters of the Fourth Army have been moved to Ahlat from Harput. The phraseology in which the grand vizierate orders this change is worth quotation: “Since [Ahlat] is at the center of Kurdistan and in this way, the fist of the Anatolian army will always be on the heads of the Kurds who must constantly be kept under vigilance... Ahlat is declared as the army headquarters.”¹³²

This kind of military solutions to provincial conflicts in order to incorporate tribal zones is deemed more peculiar to the Tanzimat statesmen. These actions were initially successful, producing tranquility for a while. However, they were at the same time destructive for the locality, and the local populations “had little interest in cooperating with a state that used coercion instead of creating a system of incentives to gain adherence”.¹³³ Hence, military solutions of the Tanzimat centralizers inadvertently embittered the populace towards the center.¹³⁴

In contrast with the Tanzimat governors, who were “vigorous reforming agent, reforming in spite of opposition and obstacles”¹³⁵, Abdülhamid II is known for seeking alliance with the notables to attain tranquility in the provinces.¹³⁶ According to him, forceful acts to break the local influence of notables earlier in the century, had backfired.¹³⁷ His alternative was to try to win the cooperation of the notables, which would help “to restore the respectability of the Ottoman rule in the eyes of the common folk, to strengthen the latter's attachment to the government, and to keep

¹³² BOA. Mesail-i Mühimme, 1310 (6 May 1846). Quoted in Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 81.

¹³³ Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*, 11.

¹³⁴ Salzmann, “Citizens in Search of a State”.

¹³⁵ Duguid, “The Politics of Unity”.

¹³⁶ See, as examples, Karpat, *Politicization of Islam* and Akarlı, “Tangled Ends of an Empire”.

¹³⁷ Akarlı, “Tangled Ends of an Empire”.

them from "inexpedient behavior."¹³⁸ Hence, political conciliation was preferred over military quelling in the Hamidian era.

As an example of this approach in practice, the governor of the ever-problematic (from the perspective of the state) region of Dersim wrote in 1885 that up to his time military solutions were tried, and they had not worked. He, instead, tried to propitiate the chiefs of the community by giving them garbs of honor (*hilat*) and promising them future benefits. He writes that his policy resulted in "attaining tranquility as if in the most civilized state".¹³⁹

However, it is hard to suggest that this policy was capable of producing immediate and long-term harmony. The region, on the other hand, was too critical to leave room for discord. The Porte was in need of immediate solutions to the problems of insecurity, since it was under constant diplomatic pressure from the Powers and was condemned by European public opinion for not being able to provide security for its Christian subjects. Besides many short allusions in various documents, this concern is expressed in an excerpt from a memorandum by the grand vizierate dated 15 August 1890:

Since the Armenians know that they cannot succeed on their own power, they use the depredations of the Kurds and the like in order to manipulate European public opinion. It is necessary to disqualify the effects of this strategy, as well as to remove the internal situations that generate complaint.¹⁴⁰

For providing immediate security, the measure adopted was the use of military power, namely, to make "the fist of the army" felt. In reform orders, "the utilization of military forces where gendarmerie proved inadequate" was

¹³⁸ Akarlı, "Tangled Ends of an Empire".

¹³⁹ BOA. ŞD. 1876/38.

¹⁴⁰ BOA. Y. A. RES. 51/25

stipulated.¹⁴¹ This was by sending troops to quell unrests on the spot, or by placing permanent military barracks to areas where conflicts frequently occurred.

Hence, a choice between employing imperial soldiers or seeking political conciliation was made when a disobedient tribe was concerned. For example, in 14 Temmuz 1890, the *Meclis-i Mahsus* orders the commissioners to Dersim to communicate to the Porte “which of the tribal chiefs were to be persuaded by warning or promise of *mükafat*, and which were to be subjugated by force, and how much force is needed for this.”¹⁴² Apparently, there was a distinction between tribes to subdue by persuasion and by force. What was this distinction based on? It is a general interpretation in the historiography of the Kurdish tribes that “the state was unwilling to interfere unless tribal chiefs openly revolted.”¹⁴³ Part of the reason, therefore, based on the tribe’s own intention to conciliate.

Part of the distinction, on the other hand, was based on a differentiation between forms of Kurdish groups that is veiled by the common denomination of them under the title “tribe”, “*aşair*” or *ekrad* in Ottoman documents. This term made no distinction between the politically influential groups like the descendants of great emirates on one hand, and small brigand groups on the other. However, although referred to under one and the same title, Ottoman documents make distinctions when circumstances necessitate. In August 1890, the *vali* of Muş asks the grand vizier and the general commander if imperial soldiers may be employed to fight plunderers of large groups, who launch sudden attacks on settlement areas and run back to the mountains after pillaging villages. These groups are of the Belikanlı tribes (*aşiret*), and were too fast and crowded for the police to fight. The Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa

¹⁴¹ BOA. Y. A. RES. 52/6.

¹⁴² BOA. Y. A. RES. 51/25.

¹⁴³ Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, *passim*.

writes in response that battalions can be employed for the specific case, however, he notes:

The current imperial permission is to be used for bandits and rebels; it shall not be used, by any abuse, for the displacement and exile of the Kurdish chiefs and of the obedient Muslim populations. These acts, which would result in the undermining of the influence of the Muslims (*nüfuz-ı islamiye*), shall be evaded to the extent possible.¹⁴⁴

This document gives the permission to employ military act against a Kurdish tribal group, the Belikanlı tribe. However, it specifically underlines that the permission is for the specific case, and cannot be extended to “Kurdish chiefs”, which is interesting for Belikanlı is also *ekrad*. It is highly probable, then, military action against tribes was restricted, subject to permission from the center, and the decision was based most probably on the extent of the power and the form of the organization of the particular tribe concerned.

Except for actions on the spot, military action involved placing troops along the seasonal migration routes of the tribes, and to spot where inter-tribal conflict occurs frequently.¹⁴⁵

4.2.2. Local Notables and Provincial Administration

Besides economic and organizational problems, the most complaint-generating feature of the local governments was the local networking relations, which were largely definitive in appointments. The persistence of local power foci is a combination of a certain tradition of provincial government on one hand, and peculiar circumstances of the era on the other. In order to clarify this point, a general discussion of the Ottoman political tradition of provincial government is included,

¹⁴⁴ BOA. Y. A. HUS. 237/64.

¹⁴⁵ Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms, passim*, notes the establishment of barracks with such concerns based on British reports.

followed by a discussion of to what extent the Hamidian regime maintained –or changed- the patterns.

Ottoman Political Tradition of Provincial Government

The prominent political figures of an Ottoman province are not only state governors, but also the local notables. This latter group has been the subject of a considerable literature in Ottoman historiography, especially with respect to the eighteenth century which is named after local chiefs: “The Age of *Ayans*”. However, the general tendency has been to portray this group as an ultimately discrete one, in constant conflict with both the representatives of the state and the common folk. This assumption has recently been under challenge. The most exceptional and explanatory analysis in this respect is produced by Michael Meeker, who utilizes the conception of “the state society” in referring to the Ottoman political tradition.

Meeker explains that much before the decentralization in the eighteenth century, the notables had a key role in local politics. This was an inherent feature of the classical imperial system as it was designed. In this system, in a chain roughly composed of governors-sub-governors-subordinate officers-ordinary townsmen, each ring was both ruler and ruled. This dissemination of authority created a state society, functioning on the basis of interpersonal associations. In Meeker’s words, “The state machine, a tiered hierarchy of bureaucratic centralism, was then conjoined with a state society, a tiered hierarchy of interpersonal associations. And moreover, the associational dimension of the regime always exceeded its official dimension. And by this fact, the associational dimension of the regime always exerted a constant pressure on its official dimension.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Michael E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: the Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2002), 144-146.

The relation between the associational and the official dimensions of the regime varied, including cooperation as well as rivalry. The stronger party sought to widen their sphere of authority at the expense of the others, as is a general occurrence in politics. On the other hand, “In most of the core Ottoman provinces, both higher and lower state officials were unable to carry out the most elementary government functions without the assistance of the provincial elites.”¹⁴⁷

The reasons for the intermingling of local governors and notables were not only the dependence of the former on the latter. Another important factor was the traditional Ottoman policy of granting official titles to discordant parties in order to appease and incorporate the latter. This was continued throughout the nineteenth century, even at times when centralist tendencies were at the peak. For instance, throughout the Tanzimat period the gendarmerie were recruited from among *aghas* and *beys*, to attain two aims at a time: to form a gendarmerie organization and to incorporate the local military excesses into the system while doing so.¹⁴⁸ For the start of the nineteenth century, Meeker has discovered, in the province of Trabzon, instances in which a man described as a chief, agha, or valley lord is appointed to the following offices or ranks: chief notable, *mübaşir*, *kaymakam*, *mütesellim*, *muhafaza*, *kapıcıbaşı*, *paşa*, *miri miran*.¹⁴⁹ Hence, even when the centralization efforts at the peak, the local government was commonly recruited from the local notables.

The provincial elites and appointed governors together formed the political entity, rather than representing two distinct forms of authority. Meeker indicates how the consuls and other Europeans visiting the Black Sea region perceived and reflected the situation as if there were two alternative forms of authority. He relates that their misperception was due to preoccupation, for they were from a country

¹⁴⁷ Meeker, *A Nation of Empire*, 147.

¹⁴⁸ Ergut, *Modern Devlet ve Polis*, 111-112.

¹⁴⁹ Meeker, *A Nation of Empire*, 197.

“where the state system had been used as a weapon to defeat inherited privilege and wealth, even if the Jacobinic revolution had recently come to an end. They would have naturally assumed that state officials of Trabzon were distinct from and opposed to its local elites.”¹⁵⁰ It is highly probable that the modern researchers fall into the same trap, for the modern mind is shaped in a world in which the Weberian model of bureaucracy, where interpersonal relations are reduced to zero, is triumphant – at least theoretically. Hence, it is important to underline that the representatives of the state and the provincial notables were in the same category; even way after the “Ottoman centralization” dominated the scene from the reign of Mahmud II on.

A careful investigation reveals that this feature of the “state society” is reflected in Ottoman political thought, as well as practice. Deena Sadat shows that an ambivalent perception of the *ayans* existed at the beginning of the 18th century.¹⁵¹ By reference to eighteenth century political writing, she notes that besides condemnations of *ayans*, there are suggestions that the disorders in provinces were due to the disobedience of the public to the notables. This viewpoint is a hint that except for problematic times probably, a favorable view was present among the upper hierarchy. In a similar vein, Andrew Gould notes in his work that the notables were, whatever their origin - tribal or urban, seen as part of the nobler class and were respected in this.¹⁵² Even the actors of the greatest rebellions have not been absolutely dishonored. Bedirhan Bey of Cizre, the disobedient Kurdish chief, was sent to Crete after the rebellion ended. Here, he acted as an influential agent of the

¹⁵⁰ Meeker, *A Nation of Empire*, 229.

¹⁵¹ Deena R. Sadat, “Rumeli Ayanlari: The Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 44 (1972).

¹⁵² Andrew Gould, “Lords or Bandits? The Derebeys of Cilicia”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7/4 (October 1976).

central government for ten years, and when he left Crete to come to İstanbul in 1858, he was given the honorary title ‘Paşa’.¹⁵³

An obvious example of this case is found in the statements of Abidin Paşa. Abidin Paşa was sent as the head of the reform commission to Diyarbakır, right after the end of the war, in 1879. He is well known by his contemporaries, for imposing the strictest policies ever regarding the Kurdish chiefs in his region; he is known to send a significant number of local notables to exile, which was at first allowed but then opposed by Abdülhamid II. In a conversation with the British ambassador, the sultan referred to him as ‘[one of] some commissioners, who have done too much’.¹⁵⁴ His actions of exiling numerous chiefs was apprehensive even for the British at times:

I have some misgivings lest this wholesale deportation of chiefs from the Diyarbekir Vilayet may cause such feelings of alarm amongst the more powerful and more inaccessible chiefs of the Van and Musul vilayets as to drive them into open rebellion.¹⁵⁵

The following is an excerpt from one of Abidin Paşa’s communications to the Porte, dated 2 July 1879¹⁵⁶:

The foremost reason of all [the problems] going on is the Kurdish *bey*s and *ağas*, who prosper by robbing the poor, and some dishonourable persons who revere them for their power. The favorable effects of the exile of the most famous chiefs thanks to your highness, and the grievance of Filibos – the Armenian *marhasa* of Diyarbakır – and his companions, who do not want decent policies are undefinable. However, the banditry will not cease unless the most seditious of the Kurdish chiefs **are exiled to distant places together**

¹⁵³ Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 95.

¹⁵⁴ British Ambassador at Constantinople to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 09.02.1882, FO 424/132, No 22, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 391.

¹⁵⁵ Trotter to Salisbury, 15.08.1879, FO 424.787, No 167, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 527.

¹⁵⁶ BOA. İ. MMS. 62/2938. “Bu işlerin birinci sebebi mazlumu soyarak zenginleşen kürd beyleri, ağaları ve onların etvarına itibar iden bazı erazildir. Sayenizde en meşhurlarından bir-kaçının tevkifinin olumlu tesirleri ve icraat-ı haseneden haz etmeyen d.bakır ermeni murahhası filibos ve hem-eşkarlarının esefti kabil-i tarif değildir. Fakat kürd beylerinin en ziyade müfsid olanları familyalarıyla beraber uzak yerlere sürülmeyince şekaveti kesmeyecekler. Tahlis-i giriban ile nahiyelerine dönseler intikam için ahalinin giriftar olacağı zulm varest-i izahtır. Halen mevkuuf olanlar ve ileride olacaklar familyalarıyla beraber bir daha Kürdistan’a dönmek üzere İskenderun Körfezi veya Sasun yoluyla tebid edilsinler. Mezkur beyler şakiler ise de Kürdistan’ın ilerü gelen takımı olduklarından erkeklerine daimi maaş bağlanması devletin şanındandır.”

with their families. It goes without stating that if they are acquitted and sent back to their *nahiyes*, they will oppress the people for revenge. [Hence,] those who are currently under arrest and who will be arrested in the future should be sent to exile together with their families, via İskenderun or Sason. Although the aforementioned *beys* are bandits, they are the notables of Kürdistan. Thus, *it is a matter of honour for the state to put the male members of these families on salary*.

Hence, even a figure like Abidin Paşa, who thought that the Kurdish chiefs were the main problematic element of the region and their deportation was indispensable for solutions in the region, added after elaborating on all these points that it was ‘a matter of honour for the state to put them on salary’. This was a sign that the notables were perceived as belonging to the upper class, no matter how they actually behave. Their deportation could be conceived, but their degradation in terms of status was unconsidered by even the strictest opponents of the notable group.

Provincial Government in the Hamidian Era

Despite the “re-conquest of Kurdistan”, as worded by the Tanzimat officials¹⁵⁷, it is hard to claim that government authority could be established in Eastern Anatolia during the nineteenth century. Bruinessen defines the situation in the following manner:

By the middle of the century there were no emirates left in Kurdistan. Officially, Kurdistan was from then on ruled directly by Ottoman governors - in practice, however, direct Ottoman rule was to prove very ineffective indeed. Near the cities, the governors had some power; nowhere did they have authority.¹⁵⁸

The reasons why the governmental officers could not have authority were several. Among these was the fact that a number of greater tribes still had great military power. For example, a certain Musto Katu, a tribal leader, beats the forces of the descendants of Bedirhan Paşa in 1878-1879. The struggle, although eventually

¹⁵⁷ Sevgen, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Türk Beylikleri*, 106. A letter dated 1846, right after quelling Bedirhan revolt, reads: “eşkiya elinden kurtarılan ve belki de böylece yeniden fethedilen Kürdistan bölgesi”.

¹⁵⁸ Bruinessen, *Agha*, 176.

beneficial for the center, was at the same time worrying: The forces of Bedirhan Bey were around 5000 tribesmen, and that of Musto Katu must have been greater than this, which implies he might be dangerous in case of a conflict.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, as mentioned previously, Şeyh Ubeydullah was able to gather ten to twelve thousand armed men in a short time, which meant he was more powerful than the government at his region, as an Ottoman officer reported to the center.¹⁶⁰

The failure to disarm the tribes was a main determinant of the relations between tribes and the state as well as relations between tribes and non-tribal populations. Many cases reflected as “Kurdish-Armenian conflicts”, as will be elaborated in the next chapter, were tribes’ retaliations on Armenians who complained about them to the government authorities.¹⁶¹ In this context, when complaints about tribal assaults reached the local governors, in many cases they were unable to enforce punishment even if they were willing to, for even the slightest punishment to a chief would be ensued by greater assaults. For example, a certain Şakir of Van, a tribal leader, was arrested by the governor, after which he was released on bail. The decision is published in British newspapers and even discussed in the House of Commons, as a case of injustice.¹⁶² The British consul Lloyd, to explain the case, notes that the Armenian bishop mediated for the present decision, which would be safer for the locality -especially for the Armenian villages around. In a later conversation with the governor of Van on the same decision, the vice consul

¹⁵⁹ BOA. Y. A. HUS. 162/42.

¹⁶⁰ Sabri Ateş, “Empires at the Margin: Towards a History of the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland and the Borderland Peoples, 1843-1881” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, New York University, 2006).

¹⁶¹ Lloyd to White, 16.05.1890, *Turkey No 1*, No 47 in Melda Hamdioğlu, “Musa Bey Olayı: Transkripsiyon ve Değerlendirilmesi” (Unpublished MA diss, Marmara Üniversitesi Türkiyat Enstitüsü, 1996), 103. This thesis is a transcription of the Ottoman translation of the British Blue Book covering years 1890-1891, entitled as *Correspondence Respecting the Populations of Asiatic Turkey and the Trial of Moussa Bey*. From this point on, the material will be referred to as *The Trial of Moussa Bey* for convenience.

¹⁶² Lloyd to White, 13.07.1890, *Turkey No 1*, No 88 in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 136.

receives the following very blunt answer: “His family is very influential around Van, the government is unable and unwilling to enforce any punishment”.¹⁶³

Besides military reasons to tribes’ strong position was the existence of a certain socio-political tradition. The populations would only rely on local authorities and were distrustful to government, because of a long tradition of local politics alienated from a distant authority, as well as the extremely harsh actions of the early centralizers.¹⁶⁴ In this respect, the reform commissioner to Diyarbakır in 1878 reflected that the populations were subject to the powerful chief mentioned above- Musto Katu, and considered him to be the government (*hükümet yerine anı hükümet bilüb*), and they would never subject to any other force unless they would face ‘thousands of oppressions’.¹⁶⁵ In the words of the British consul Everett: “the good old times of the Kurdish Beks are not only spoken of, but are fresh in the memory of every middle-aged man, and though the form of government has disappeared, the customs, habits and associations remain.”¹⁶⁶

The social and military power of the tribal chiefs was two main components of their political indispensability, which was well recognized by the center. The state held it as a presumption that control over the populations could only be through their leaders, as explicitly worded in one case. This document is an instruction given to imperial commissioners traveling to Dersim to persuade the population into paying their taxes and contributing to military service. The method is to persuade their leaders, for “the common folk are only subject to their chiefs as anywhere else.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Dewey to Lloyd, 28.07.1890, *Turkey No 1*, No 88 in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 138.

¹⁶⁴ Salzmänn, “Citizens in Search of a State”.

¹⁶⁵ BOA. Y. A. HUS. 162/42. (“*O kadar nüfuz kesb itmişdir ki ahali hükümet yerine anı hükümet bilüb kendüsüne tabi olduklarından binlerce zulm ve kahr görmeyince beylerinden gayrı kimseye tabi olmaz.*”)

¹⁶⁶ Duguid, “The Politics of Unity”.

¹⁶⁷ BOA. Y. A. RES. 51/25.

Hence, the state had to use the intermediation of local chief for basic dealings with the public: for collection of taxes, conscription, building schools and even for punishing culprits. The last point is emphasized in a document by a local governor, probably the *vali* of Diyarbakır. He mentions that culprits took refuge in the mansions of begs and *aghas*, who protect them from being delivered to the court for trial.¹⁶⁸ The dependency of the local governors on the local chiefs about such points is mentioned as a general characteristic of the Eastern Anatolian society by von Bruinessen, who comments that state officials are forced to delegate some power to *aghas*, if they wish to govern at all.¹⁶⁹

As for the Hamidian era, it is difficult to state that local governors and tribal chiefs were different groups; documentary evidence reveals that the local governments had a highly indigenous character during this period. The main reason behind this was the weakness of actual governmental influence in the region. The governmental control, when attained, was the result of a mutual tacit agreement between the local forces and the state. The relation of these two was:

The state's officials relied upon the notables' influence over the population at large to assist them in such essential tasks as the collection of taxes and the maintenance of law and order, while the notables relied upon their connection with the state officials to bolster their local influence and their incomes, particularly in such matters as the leasing of state lands and the award of tax farming contracts.¹⁷⁰

This nature of the relations is explicitly phrased in a report of the *Meclis-i Mahsus* on the measures to be taken for the eastern provinces. The document reads as follows:

“...The issue of the settlement of the nomadic populations [is to be settled by] conversations with their leaders and notables, and *by letting them know that if they have reasonable petitions, they are to be accepted*...and in order to

¹⁶⁸ BOA. Y. PRK. AZJ. 2/84.

¹⁶⁹ Martin von Bruinessen, “The Christians of Eastern Turkey”, in *Ibid, Mullas, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society* (İstanbul: Isis Press, 2000).

¹⁷⁰ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 14.

benefit from the well-known influence and prestige of Şeyh Ubeydullah and his son, they are to be revered and the issue of the settlement of tribes is to be negotiated with them.”¹⁷¹

The tolerant treatment of the local notables to gain their alliance was through honoring them, negotiating with them with the promise of help in response, and by appointment at governmental posts. Following are examples where governmental appointment is based on, or influenced by, local balances of power.

An investigation committee sent to the district of the Fourth Army - Trabzon, Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir, Mamüretülaziz, Sivas- in 1884 depicts the situation of the gendarmerie in the most detailed form available.¹⁷² This document explains that in regions where the population of Circassian and Georgian immigrants is high, these are conscripted as *zabtiyes*. Most *alaybeyis* are *zabtiyes* in these regions, who do not impose punishment when immigrants commit banditry. These forces resort to banditry at times, mainly because of the inadequacy of the payment,. The document underlines that some *zabtiyes* are still dressed in “*başıbozuk*” clothes, and continue their former occupations by utilizing their new positions. Besides assaults on person, it is reported that they even resort to extracting ransoms from villages.¹⁷³

The same investigation also revealed that some brigand chiefs had themselves conscripted as *zabtiyes* to escape punishment. Similar complaints arise from provinces. For instance, the governor of Bitlis writing to the governor of Erzurum states that although he fights against bandits, he cannot contain the most notorious of them, a certain Derviş Tanos, for he is appointed to such critical positions as

¹⁷¹ BOA. Y. A. RES. 5/17: “göçebelik halde bulunanların suret-i iskanları hususunun rüesa ve muteberanıyla söyleşilerek ve mümkünü’l- is’af bazı istidaları olduğu halde anların dahi kabul idileceği tefhim idilerek... Şeyh Ubeydullah ve mahdumunun oralarca olan nüfuz ve haysiyetlerinden istifade olunmak üzere haklarında hümet ve riayet ibrazıyla bade’t-temin iskan-ı aşair hususunun kendisiyle müzakere idilmesi lüzumu...”

¹⁷² BOA. Y. EE. 35/56.

¹⁷³ BOA. Y. EE. 35/56.

commandership and gendarmerie by virtue of connections with some patrons in Erzurum-the identity of whom is unfortunately not given.¹⁷⁴

In the abovementioned report, the following suggestions are made to reform the gendarmerie: the vagrants (*serseriler*) should not be employed under government and the gendarmerie should not be selected from the natives of a settlement- at least at *sancaks*, the gendarmerie should be employed from outsiders. In light of this, it is apparent that the greatest problems with police organization stems from the nativity of the gendarmerie. In this case, traditional connections dominate the scene. This leaves little room to the separation ought to be created by law: the “police” and the “criminal”.

Local councils are of the places where tradition is seen most untouched. Complaints about local councils in districts connote *ayans* as portrayed in the pre-nineteenth century historiography, getting extra taxes and duties, as well as using forced labor for their dealings.¹⁷⁵

An interesting document shows that government employment was thought of as an alternative to cash payment, when this was necessary to be delivered. In 1885, the chiefs of the Zilan and Cemadinlü tribes around Beyazıd petition to the state that the tribes lost all their flocks because of the famine around Beyazıd, and in the state of poverty they find themselves in, they expect government help. They specify the “help” to be either a salary of 1000 *guruş* for each chief or appointment to a post of *kaymakamlık*, which they demand in return for their service at the “past affair”, which is not clarified. The vizierate explains that they really deserve imperial help,

¹⁷⁴ BOA. DH. MKT. 1376/130.

¹⁷⁵ BOA. DH. MKT. 1337/101.

but given the present state of the treasury, the salary choice is impossible. Hence, the province is ordered to give them a post as *kaymakam*.¹⁷⁶

Another explanatory feature was “finding a job for a man, rather than finding a man for a job”¹⁷⁷ in the words of Abdülhamid II, which he denotes as the dominant style of governmental appointments. The information available on primary sources on the nature of provincial governments, partially included here, indicates that governmental appointment was the priority of a certain pool of notable figures in a district. In line with this characteristic, when a certain officer was inadequate for a post, he was not removed for good, but was employed at another post:

The gendarmerie officers, who are unable to manage their own affairs and to accomplish their own tasks properly, are appointed as deputy prosecutors or revenue collectors to other districts. As a result, all three occupations are filled with incapable people.¹⁷⁸

Similarly, when the removal of the public procurer of Sivas rose as an issue, Cevdet Paşa stated that he would accept this only if the procurer was first provided another post, “from a feeling of deference for his [the procurer’s] brother, Hasan Fehmi Efendi, the minister of public works”.¹⁷⁹ As a result, the procurer is removed from his post, only to be appointed as *mektubcu* (the chief secretary of the governor general) of Sivas.¹⁸⁰

Valis

The position of the *valis* was in regulation different, since as a general occurrence of the provincial policy, this senior post was reserved for career officials sent out from

¹⁷⁶ BOA. DH. MKT. 1356/77.

¹⁷⁷ BOA. Y. EE. 4/31.

¹⁷⁸ BOA.Y. EE. 35/56.

¹⁷⁹ British Ambassador at Constantinople to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 25.09.1881, FO 424/123, No 136, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 320.

¹⁸⁰ British Ambassador at Constantinople to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 26.11.1881, FO 424/132, No 4, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 378.

the center.¹⁸¹ However, the state, at some points, seems to have a concern that a nonnative might not be suitable. In 1878, the British consul insists on the change of the *vali* of a certain unmentioned province since he is a Kurd. Abdülhamid replies that the *vali* is capable of exerting greater influence on Kurds than any other non-Kurdish governor, and correspondingly fitter.¹⁸²

Moreover, in cases when an outsider is appointed, which makes the rule rather than the exception, it is highly probable that he will fall prey to the local intrigues. The local councils at provinces are dominated by the most influential notables,¹⁸³ who exert their influence on the governor as well. In a consular report, the British consul relates that the new *vali* to Diyarbakır is “honest and energetic and just, but his hands are tied by the *meclisses*, the members of which are mostly corrupt.”¹⁸⁴ Meeker underlines the same occurrence in Trabzon: “local power holders unite to fight out the Vali, whom they consider an intruder”.¹⁸⁵ The most striking example of the case is the following excerpt from a consular report upon the appointment of a new, well-educated governor to Van in 1878:

Alive to the past intrigues of two Mussulman factions in Van, he keeps aloof from both, and has chosen his residence in the Christian quarter, near to this Vice-consulate. In former times, whenever the *vali* of Van refused his countenance to the Temir-oglon family, their policy was to discredit his administration by fomenting disturbances among the tribal Koords. This fact will render the new administration an interesting study.¹⁸⁶

This passage uncovers that it is a general tendency on the part of the powerful local chiefs to use their influence amongst the population to dominate/repress the

¹⁸¹ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 14.

¹⁸² Layard to Salisbury, 14.10.1878, FO 424/74, No 281, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 206.

¹⁸³ Frederick Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Kurds* (London: Hurst And Blackett, 1870), 193 relates that the provincial council is dominated by the struggles between two leading families of the town: Demiroğlu and Camuşoğlu. Stanford and Ezel Shaw (Shaw and Shaw, *History of The Ottoman Empire*, 86) state that as a general occurrence, advisory councils represented their own and group interest rather than the government.

¹⁸⁴ British Ambassador to Foreign Secretary, 10.10.1881, FO 424/123 No 113, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 309.

¹⁸⁵ Meeker, *A Nation of Empire*, 260.

¹⁸⁶ British Council at Van to British Ambassador at Constantinople, 26.04.1887, FO 424/144 No 18/1, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 525.

representatives of the center. Similar observations about the domination of centrally appointed officials by local forces were frequent, extending to the reform commissioners as well as governors.¹⁸⁷

4.3. Conclusion

In approaching the reasons of the persistence of the traditional foci of power, I find the following argument explanatory:

The conscious adaptation of new or borrowed political forms or techniques into existing political cultures and institutions represents what I call **conservative renovation**. The leaders of these regimes operated within indigenous political cultures and institutional frameworks even while attempting to transform them. The common goal of conservative renovators was to permit necessary innovations in political, economic and social life without inviting destruction of the regime by internal revolution (led by middle classes, workers, peasants, or nationalities) or by foreign conquest. This common wave of politics and administration during the second half of the nineteenth century represented a search for conservative synthesis that would permit maintenance of or dramatic increases in national power. The Tory democracy of Disraeli, the “liberal empire” of Napoleon III, Bismarck’s Prussia, and later Germany, Austria during the years leading to the Compromise (*Ausgleich*) of 1867, the Ottoman Empire of the Tanzimat era, China during the T’ung Chih restoration, and Meiji Japan offer a unity of experience that transcends wide cultural diversity and differences in levels of economic development.¹⁸⁸

Although referring specifically to Tanzimat reforms, the same approach is helpful in understanding Hamidian provincial government. The same dilemma was persistent: the need for social and economic innovation on one hand, and the apprehension of destruction by a nationalist revolution or by foreign intervention on the other. Abdülhamid’s policy in this case was to attempt at creating tranquility, without losing the support of the native power holders.

¹⁸⁷ Layard to Salisbury, 02.12.1878, FO 424/77 No 249, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 269. Meeker demonstrates that this is a common occurrence in the Black Sea Region in 1880’s: Meeker, *A Nation of Empire*, 260-262.

¹⁸⁸ Daniel Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform: The Ministry of Internal Affairs in Imperial Russia, 1801-1881* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 202. I owe my awareness of this study to the following work: Abdülhamit Kırmızı, *Abdülhamit’in Valileri* (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2005).

In this sense, when Abdülhamid told the British ambassador on some occasions that he was well aware of the problems about provincial government, but necessary changes needed time¹⁸⁹, he was not only trying to linger the foreign powers, but he had a point. Layard confesses he was persuaded when the sultan gave him the following speech:

The reforms referred to in the 61st article of the Berlin Treaty really implied the administrative reorganization of a very considerable area of his Asiatic Dominions. Now, the determination of what were the principles of government best adapted to a country was a matter of infinite moment. European states were themselves divided upon the point. Some countries adopted the system of decentralization, others of centralization. In fact, there were several paths to be followed, but, unfortunately, in a matter of the kind, if you took a wrong turning the consequences were disastrous and irretrievable. Consequently, he must not be blamed if he desired to deliberate long and carefully on the steps he was about to take.¹⁹⁰

The state had to find a way to transform the traditional social and political organizations without losing them. This meant the need to guarantee the very precarious loyalty of its Kurdish subjects to gain a stronger position in Eastern Anatolia. Honoring the chiefs by giving them offices was one option. This is indicated as the general application of Abdülhamid. However, the reality was more complex, as few clues imply. The need to integrate notables was accompanied by the need to prove that the state was capable of providing security, a need severed by foreign pressure and Armenian nationalist demands. In this sense, the state had a peculiar, and not explicitly stated, differentiation line between different kinds of tribes: some were persuaded, while others were compelled to comply. More concretely, some were politically absorbed, while others were militarily suppressed.

The policy of incorporating the local elites into the system by giving them official titles gave the provincial administration a dominantly native character,

¹⁸⁹ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and Ottoman Armenians*, 67.

¹⁹⁰ British Ambassador at Constantinople to Foreign Secretary, 17.01.1882, FO 424/132 No 22, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 390.

working largely on local patronage relations. However, there was an attempt to balance this policy by military action, when politically possible. As a result, an increased level of security is attained by the end of the 1880's.¹⁹¹ This might be largely achieved by military measures preventing seasonal attacks of tribes or inter-tribal armed conflicts, rather than a disintegration of great tribes with high political power.

¹⁹¹ White to Salisbury, 14.09.1889, FO 424/162, No 80, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 658-659; Duguid, "The Politics of Unity".

CHAPTER V

KURDISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE TREATY OF BERLIN, 1878-1890

5.1. Conventional Sources of Conflicts

The Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin implied that the Armenians were threatened by the actions of the Kurds and Circassians. In the aftermath of the treaty, communications entitled as “Kurdish depredations on Armenians” poured into the Porte from the embassies, especially the British embassy.¹⁹² The process of petitioning was as follows: the local Christians would petition the consuls. They, in turn, communicated the complaints to the embassies, to be reported to the Porte. These documents usually covered conflicts within small localities, but complaints from these small localities showed very similar patterns. Towards the end of the period defined, however, the nature of the complaints changed due to the rise of the Armenian political parties to be named below. In this phase, Armenian groups were determined to organize better and make their voices heard. This chapter starts with

¹⁹² Some of these documents are: DH. MKT. 1539/118, BOA. HR. SYS. 78/2, BOA. HR. SYS 78/5, BOA. HR. SYS 78/22, BOA. HR. SYS 78/65, BOA. HR. SYS 78/39, BOA. HR. SYS 82/67, BOA. HR. SYS 216/8, BOA. HR. SYS 82/67, BOA. HR. SYS 257/57 BOA. HR. TO. 252/39, BOA. HR. TO. 253/21.

analyzing documents of the first type, where complaints of small groups were related by the embassies to the Porte. Following a discussion of the general characteristics of these, a case study is included whereby the same type of problems cause a Kurdish chief, Musa Bey, to be taken to court in İstanbul in 1889. In explaining all these, the nature of the problems reflected as ‘Kurdish excesses on Armenians’ will be analyzed. Meanwhile, the changing nature of the Armenian nationalist struggle towards 1890 is also discussed.

5.1.1. Traditional Tribal Relations as a Framework of Analysis

Although Eastern Anatolia was brought under *de jure* governmental authority by the second half of the nineteenth century, the *de facto* rulers were in most places – especially the inaccessible parts- the tribal chiefs. In deed, there are various documents –some sent to the Porte- which openly state that the actual rulers, especially in mountainous regions, were no one but the Kurdish *beys*.¹⁹³ Most social conflicts throughout the nineteenth century stemmed from the insistence of local power holders on keeping their traditional rights over the subjected people. These traditional rights were, mainly, taxation and forced labor. It is interesting to note that even cases that are seemingly simple offenses fit well into the tribal conflict structures.

It is known for the tribal milieu that inter-tribal struggles were generally not carried in the form of direct confrontations. Rather, a tribe attacked the territories and the subjects of the rival tribe to challenge the latter. In the same vein, if a tribe had certain demands over a settlement, and the inhabitants refused to meet these demands, then the method the tribes used to enforce their demands was simply

¹⁹³Sevgen, *Kürt Türkleri*, 79-80 (Letter from the Nestorian leader to the Porte).

attacking the settlements. Hence, the raiding of a village by a tribe did not simply mean that this was done for booty; it was highly probable that the principal cause was some form of tribal power imposition.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, when a tribe undertook destructive action against another tribe or a settlement, it would be too premature to say this is “because of their tribal [read ‘wild’] nature”¹⁹⁵. This was the revelation of a political strife. This viewpoint must be applied to the narration of the cases labeled as “Kurdish-Armenian conflict” found in the archives, which is the task of the following section.

There are numerous cases of “Kurds burning Christian villages”, which are at first sight confusing: some of these narrations especially underline the destruction of the churches. The common wording is “Kurds” and “Christians”, which makes it probable to get an impression of a sectarian outrage. The following passage, however, draws a clearer picture of such cases and hence gives an opportunity to re-interpret the cases:

The Kurds, upon instigation by certain governmental dignitaries, have burnt and pillaged the Nestorian village of Marbieboob on the Turco-Persian border. The names of those who have committed this new delict are: Pişangir, Ömer, Hafsan, Abdullah and Derviş Aghas. Last year, these delinquents demanded from the inhabitants of this village the sum of 3000 Tumans as a gift and at that time the Nestorians were able to satisfy this demand and thus could save their village from pillaging. This year, the same demand was formulated and the sum always asked as a gift was not paid; hence the village has been pillaged and all the houses burnt and destroyed. These unfortunates now find themselves in a deplorable situation, without a home and their church, an ancient edifice, 15 centuries old has completely been destroyed. This village previously was one of the richest of the Nestorians. These Kurds form part of a nomadic tribe on the border. If one complains about them to the Turkish authorities, they pass to Persia and if on the contrary one commences a legal procedure with the Persian authorities, they re-enter the Ottoman territory.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Bruinessen, *Mullas, Sufis and Heretics*, 62.

¹⁹⁵ The idea that the Kurds were ‘wild and savage’ was a patternized discourse regarding tribal communities in this period. For a detailed discussion of this discourse about all the tribal populations, see Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate”. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45 (2003).

¹⁹⁶ BOA. HR. SYS. 78/5.

This account, more detailed than many others, clearly demonstrates that burning villages was a way to enforce tribal requirements on communities; it was a threat to those who did not make their tributary payments. It is logical, then, to think that other destructive acts on communities could mean political coercion than sectarian hatred, especially so because we have no clue for the latter at this point.

A description communicated to the Porte by the British embassy conveying the complaints of the Christian villagers of Onya is very detailed on the relations between the peasantry and the *beys*. According to this report, dated July 1879¹⁹⁷, the Kurdish *beys* of the village demanded 300 men to work for building the mansions of the *beys*; they took yearly 200-250 *kises* of barley, 300 *çeki* of wood, and sheep amounting to one-fifth of the number of population. Moreover, the peasants were compelled to bring meat to the *beys*' mansions. They had to work for free at the mills, and to feed the sheep and cattle of the *beys* during the winter. The amount of 800 guruş that these *begs* had to pay to the state as the yearly taxation was again extracted from the population. There were other taxes enforced, for instance: the people had to bring gifts when one of the *begs* married (and in their petition the people complained that the *begs* did not do the same when the peasants got married).

This record lists in detail the impositions of local chiefs: various taxes in kind and forced labor. The passage also reveals that the 'persecutions' are the traditional relations between the upper and lower class in a feudal setting, parallel to the descriptions in the second chapter. There was an additional cash-tax component, which was basically the amount the *beys* owed to the government.

¹⁹⁷ BOA. HR. TO. 256/18.

The majority of the cases that we find in consular reports as “Kurdish depredations against Armenians” were no more than tribal violence on non-tribal people. Hence, these had the characteristics of a socio-economical conflict (a ‘class’ conflict, with the common sense of the word) rather than a sectarian one. A logical implication of this must be that the Muslim non-tribal populations suffered in the same manner as did the Christian peasantry. There is an abundance of evidence that such was the case, in both the secondary and primary sources.

As an example, in 1885, the Porte received a very parallel description of the relations in the district of Malatya, this time from Muslim inhabitants. Writing on the state of affairs in a certain Emir village, they complained about the following acts of the notables of the village (*karye-i mezkur müteneffizani*)¹⁹⁸: subjecting people to torture, extracting the taxes they are obliged to pay to the state from the population (with a few times the amount added), levying various taxes to be received by themselves (such as “*ayakbasdı*”-taken on leaving and entering the village-, *ebniye ruhsatiyesi*-tax for building new houses, etc), saving their family from conscription.

The British consular officer Clayton reports “the ravages of the Kurds (...) have no connections with political grievances of any kind, and (...) are equally onerous to the Christian and the Moslem”.¹⁹⁹ Kieser notes that a certain amount of Kurds was *reayas* and suffered from double taxation.²⁰⁰ Stephen Duguid notes that the oppressions of the Kurds harmed both the Christian and Muslim peasantry.²⁰¹

However, these remarks are rare and remain as side notes to the main story. The nomination of the socio-political crisis remained as “Kurdish-Armenian”

¹⁹⁸ BOA. DH. MKT. 1358/24.

¹⁹⁹ Clayton to Trotter, 29.12.1880, FO 424/122, No 35/3, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 192.

²⁰⁰ Hans Lukas Kieser, *İskalanmış Barış: Doğu Vilayetlerinde Misyonerlik, Etnik Kimlik ve Devlet, 1839-1938* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), 170.

²⁰¹ Stephen Duguid, “The Politics of Unity”.

conflicts²⁰². In contrast, for this thesis, these clues suggest that relations between the local populations of Eastern Anatolia must be re-evaluated, and suggests at this earlier stage, class issues dominated the scene in socio-political relations.

It is supportive of the above hypothesis that Armenians and Kurds belonging to the same social stratum were seen to act together. The uprising in Van in 1862, where Kurdish and Armenian peasants rose together against taxes, is reported by its modern narrator²⁰³ as “an exception rather than the rule”. However, this kind of movements was seen as late as the last decade of the century. The British reports include cases where Armenian and Kurdish peasants rose together against the central authority.²⁰⁴

In this respect, the following report by Henry Trotter, director of the consulate of Kurdistan, is a narration of the Kurdish-Armenian peasant relations from the Armenian perspective:

In Timur or Halil Ağa I have found the same situation. The majority of the inhabitants is formed by Armenians. The villagers surrounded me and complained a great deal about the revolting Kurds, while saying at the same time that they lived in peace with those in their village. It is however not only about the Kurds that the Armenians are complaining; their own Beys and their Agas, the old masters of the soil, treat them badly.²⁰⁵

It is important to note that Trotter had this conversation right after the Russo-Ottoman war, which was expected to be a real stroke to relations. This passage implies that tribal belongings were the determinants of the relations rather than

²⁰² In addition to the archival documents quoted up to now, secondary sources use the same phrase. See Kieser, *İskalanmış Barış*, 171-175; Bruinessen, *Ağa*, 285.

²⁰³ Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 78.

²⁰⁴ Lloyd to White, 09.09.1890., in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 54; Devey to Lloyd, 29.11.1889, in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 55.

²⁰⁵ BOA HR. SYS. 78/5. January 1879. (It is necessary to point to a common problem of historians with respect to the study of this period. Even in cases where alternative narrations to European narratives are attempted to be developed, the researcher has to use texts written by the very same narrators. To exemplify from the present text, the thesis that the” Kurdish-Armenian conflict” discourse was wrongly put, since these were tribal problems, is supported by ‘information’ relayed by the very same generators of the discourse. It is thus necessary to underline the differentiation between micro bits of information and macro political discourses. Moreover, as reiterated elsewhere, the better informed consuls were an exception to the general public and political opinion made up of conventional patterns.)

ethnic or religious differentiations in the rural setting, even in the most critical periods. Armenian peasants complained about masters-Kurdish or Armenian, regardless of ethnicity. Moreover, they reflected positively about “those [Kurds] in their village”-namely, about non-tribal Kurds.

5.1.2. The Case of Musa Bey

From the start of the 1877-78 war onwards, there would be few European visitors to Muş who did not mention, even in few sentences, a certain family: Mirza Bey and/or his son Musa Bey. This family was known for their harsh treatment of the residents of the area, over whom they practically ruled.

For instance, the British lieutenant Charles Norman reported in his memoirs of the 1877-78 war Mirza Bey as ravaging villages around Muş with a small cavalry, forcefully extracting money and destroying settlements.²⁰⁶ About a year later, Mirza Bey is reported to beat the headman of an Armenian village to death because he had been recently elected without his sanction²⁰⁷.

In an archival document dated 1879, the British consul complains that Samih Paşa, who is sent to achieve tranquility, bribes Kurdish chiefs by giving them official positions, which will “not induce them to be good and peaceful subjects of his imperial majesty and refrain from deeds of violence and cruelty towards Christians”²⁰⁸. As an example to this ‘bribing by office’ he writes about Musa Ağa. He is well known for his crimes and for his ill treatment of the Christians as *müdür* of Aliğa, a district between Van, Bayezid and the Persian frontier. This *ağa* was now recognized as head of the tribes inhabiting that district with the rank of *müdür*. According to the same report, both Moselms and Christians protested against the

²⁰⁶ Charles Norman, *Armenia and the Campaign* (Elibron Classics, 2005), 295.

²⁰⁷ Clayton to Trotter, 02.08.1879, FO 424/87, No 1/2, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 540.

²⁰⁸ BOA. HR. SYS. 78/5.

appointment. The commander to whom the consul communicated about the appointment justified it on the ground that, although Musa Ağa had committed robberies and burnt villages, he had never committed murder. Interestingly, the consul reports that this appointment was made although he “openly defied, and insulted his Sovereign only a short time ago”, an information not encountered in other sources.

Musa Bey became internationally notorious after attacking two American missionaries around Bitlis in 1883. According to the reports written by the attacked missionaries, Knapp and Reynolds,²⁰⁹ the latter attracted the anger of the chief by not showing reverence to the chief upon his entrance to the room the missionaries were residing (it was conventional to rise up and greet if a notable enters a place). This attack happened as Knapp and Reynolds were traveling from Bitlis to Muş, where they would attend the meeting of the Domestic Missionary Society. Since there were many villages on the way, they did not feel the need to take *zabtiyes* with them. They arrived at Muş safely. On their way back, they resided at a village called Ghuorie-Gurye, where Mirza Bey –“a noted Kurd” resided. They put up at the *oda* of one of the four Armenians who lived there. As they were having their meal, “a few villagers came in, to whom [Reynolds] noticed villagers paid some honour”²¹⁰. However, since the missionaries did not know who they were, they kept on with their meal. Their servant later told them that one of them was Musa Bey, the son of Mirza. The missionaries sent him some tea, but Musa Bey declined. He probably considered that he was not paid sufficient honor, as the missionaries commented. The next morning, they were attacked and robbed by three Kurds on the road. This event led to diplomatic tension between the American ambassador and the Ottoman foreign

²⁰⁹ The letters by Knapp and Reynolds are published in Musa Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2004), 424-431.

²¹⁰ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı*, 424.

ministry. As a result, claims and demands were answered by the payment of a certain indemnity, and the removal of some local governors deemed connected with Musa Bey. First among these was his father Mirza Bey who was by then *kaymakam* of Mutki.²¹¹

However, this notoriety did not cause Mirza and Musa Beys to lose power, most probably because of the connections they had. Musa Bey came from an influential family in the district of Muş. His father was Mirza Bey, who acted as the *kaymakam* of Mutki and Ahlat. Musa Bey was further known for his connections: one of his wives was the sister of Bahri Paşa, the *mutasarrıf* of Pera and later of Üsküdar. He had further connections in his vicinity, owing to his familial ties. He himself was the *mudir* of some *nahiyes* around Muş for a long time²¹² Moreover, his personal connections with regional sheikhs are also reported.²¹³ His political power was accompanied and reinforced by his economic power. He had 1100 men, 110 of which were horsemen. To compare, in the same vicinity, the *zabtiyes* were a total of 520 men, 200 being horsemen²¹⁴. He is recorded to lend money to the *mutasarrıflık* of Muş, namely to the government itself.²¹⁵

His name came to be discussed in the international area for the second time in 1889.²¹⁶ The start of the incidents was his ill treatment of villagers. He burnt, for some reason unknown, the straw house of Ohannes of Arkovanık, after which Ohannes complained to the local government. Consequently, Musa Bey was arrested by the *mutasarrıf* of Muş and sent to prison. He escaped from the prison within 15 days, and the first thing he did was to seek revenge: he beat some male relatives of

²¹¹ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 40.

²¹² Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 26.

²¹³ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 52.

²¹⁴ Devey to Chermside, 27.04.1889, FO 195/1652, Quoted in Şaşmaz, *Musa Bey Olayı*, 52.

²¹⁵ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 51.

²¹⁶ As will be re-stated within the text, minutes of the trials of Musa Bey have been published in Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Beyi*, 279-424. The statements made about cases in this text rely on these minutes.

Ohannes severely, as well as violating some female relatives, and finally he burnt Ohannes to death.²¹⁷ After these new crimes, the government decided to send him to Kastamonu, where no Kurds resided, in March 1889.²¹⁸ However, he escaped again during arrest, by bribing some gendarmerie.²¹⁹ During all these punishments and escapes, the story started to echo in the foreign press, by the late April. In the end, he was persuaded to come to İstanbul by the intermediacy of other local governors in his vicinity²²⁰ and Bahri Paşa - his relative who was the *mutasarrıf* of Üsküdar.²²¹

It was the will of Abdülhamid II himself to bring Musa to İstanbul and make a public trial, after his case turned into an international issue.²²² Witnesses and claimants were summoned to İstanbul, and the investigations started in November 1889. The texts of all these inquiries were published in *Ceride-i Mahakim* within the same year.²²³ There were a total of ten litigations involved. A list of the claims of procurers, and the verdicts is included in the appendix of this study. This section will discuss general characteristics and interesting points about the inquiries.

First of all, in some instances the chief is mentioned together with a band of 50-60 Kurds. Moreover, some claimants refer to him as “eşkiya”²²⁴. It is apparent, from these documents as well as some Ottoman documents that he resorted to banditry after losing his position at the government. In one of these documents, Musa Bey is described as “the head of a band of brigands composed of the Hoyt and Bilki

²¹⁷ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 400-412 (Published texts of the minutes of inquiry at the later trial of Musa Bey).

²¹⁸ BOA. Y. PRK. DH. 3/31. This document contains the summaries of correspondences about Musa Bey from 4 March 1889 to 20 May 1889. So, this study makes several references to this document.

²¹⁹ BOA. Y. PRK. DH. 3/31.

²²⁰ BOA. Y. PRK. UM. 14/79.

²²¹ BOA. Y. PRK. DH. 3/31.

²²² Inclosure in White to Salisbury, 20.05.1889, FO 424/162, No 35, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 612-613.

²²³ The transcription of these texts is published in Musa Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı*, 277-424.

²²⁴ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey Olayı*, 405. (“Eşkiya değil mi, böyle gelip yapıyor.”)

tribes”. Although in secondary sources his former governorship is emphasized²²⁵, the Ottoman state describes him in terms similar to brigandry: “head of brigands”, “gathering many Kurds to do brigandage”.²²⁶ This is, actually, how he was acquitted in most cases: the head of the band is Musa Bey, and the claimants do not distinguish between the individual culprit and Musa Bey. This reflects to the court records as “contradictory statements”.

In each case, the public procurer asks to the claimant what the problem between them and the chief was. In one case²²⁷, the claimant said: “Musa Bey was a *mudir*, then dismissed from the office. He ordered us to write to the state about his good-governorship. We refused to do so, after which he harmed our house, burnt our straw house and stole money.”²²⁸

In many cases, like the case of Ohannes summarized above, violence was used when the claimant complained the chief to any authority. An example is the case of Gülzar of Tapavnik²²⁹. According to her statement, Musa Bey took away 200 sheep from her family. When she took the issue to the court, Musa appeared with 60 men to break into their house, kill her husband and father in law, wound Gülzar, and seize her belongings. She goes on to make the following interesting remark: “We know that any crime in the village is by Musa Bey, for nobody can do anything without him knowing. Nobody would steal [our sheep] if he did not know about it.”²³⁰

Another interesting discussion involves the only Muslim claimant of the case, Mekkareci Ali. In the trial, Musa Bey makes the following statement to defend

²²⁵ Fatih Ünal, “Ermeni Olaylarında Bir Safha: Kürt Musa Bey Olayı”, *Kafkas Araştırmaları*, 2 (1996).

²²⁶ BOA. Y. PRK. DH. 3/31.

²²⁷ See Appendix, number 6 in the table.

²²⁸ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 288-293.

²²⁹ See Appendix, number 9 in the table.

²³⁰ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 368, 381.

himself: “Mekkareci Ali and I have been together at the *meclis* of Şeyh Abdullah Feyzi Efendi, the sheikh of the Hacı Beşir Ağa lodge²³¹. Ali confessed on that occasion, on the insistence of the sheikh to take an oath, that he did not personally see me among the robbers. He only made the claim because he thought if he blamed me, I would find and bring the real culprits to exculpate myself”.²³² Musa Bey brought in two witnesses for this argument, along with the sheikh himself. Later, when Ali was asked about this, he told that the sheikh tried to persuade Ali to abandon his claim, in the presence of Musa Bey, for “they were both Muslims”.²³³ In addition, at the same gathering Musa Bey offered money in return for him abandoning the case. The claimant also asserts that the two witnesses were false witnesses.

It would be interesting to be able to know why the sheikh actually involved in the conflict. It is not clear that the sheikh interfered for the sake of Islam, or the good of Muslim community at large. Because, Musa Bey states that the sheikh was originally from Muş and came to İstanbul ten years ago.²³⁴ Hence, this alliance seems like a simple patronage relation; or a mixture of the two explanations is plausible, though without any certainty. It is probable, however, in the light of this example that Muslim populations could be under a certain pressure for not making their grievances known to any authority.

Far more interesting than the subjects of the trial was the way they were organized and discussed, which marks a new phase in the Armenian nationalist movement. First of all, there was a unique concern for publicity. Not only were the trials of murder (*Cinayet Mahkemesi*) were open to anyone, but also inquiries made

²³¹ This lodge, very close to Babıali, was known as a Naqshbandi lodge.

²³² Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 360.

²³³ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 364.

²³⁴ Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 360.

prior to these at the court of inquiry (*İstintak Mahkemesi*) were published in *Ceride-i Mehakim*. These measures were adopted to make a show of concern for Christian populations in the face of the European public opinion.²³⁵ Cevdet Paşa decided to proclaim the publication of the inquiries with the same concerns, upon formal and informal discussions with the British officers where the latter stated their doubts about the impartiality of the trials.²³⁶

Although all parties repeatedly claimed that they took the case as a legal, not a political one, none of them believed it was just a legal trial of murders and thefts. The newspapers *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* and *Tarik* commented that the events were of local importance, but being invested by a political character²³⁷. In the same manner, Cevdet Paşa states in a memorandum written to the British embassy that these trials of murder were being used by the foreign press to make ill-willed accusations against the Ottoman state.²³⁸

Actually, the trial was held with a high degree of organization among the Armenians and close supervision by the foreign press, because this was a period of increased activity for the Armenian national movement. The increase of activity was on two grounds. First, the influential Armenian parties were in a period of formation. In 1885, the Armanekan Party was founded in Van. The main aim of this party was to create national consciousness by literature, education, and propaganda. Moreover, the organization of guerillas for defensive action was also a part of the program. Although some instances, where the party went beyond defense to take terrorist action are recorded, the party is on the whole known as a pacifist organization.²³⁹ On

²³⁵ *The Times* (12.09.1889), Excerpt published in Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 432.

²³⁶ White to Salisbury, 03.02.1890, in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 62.

²³⁷ White to Salisbury, 23.12.1889, FO 424/162, No 111, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 673-674.

²³⁸ White to Salisbury, 12.02.1890, in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 66.

²³⁹ Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 101. For general information concerning Armenakan, see Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 90-103.

the contrary, the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party established in 1887, was an active and revolutionist organization. The party had a socialist-revolutionist programme, and was established by Russian Armenians in Geneva. Their main goal was to change “the existing social organization in Turkish Armenia, by violence against the Turkish government and [by] the following methods: propaganda, agitation, terror, organization, and peasant and worker activities”.²⁴⁰ The Hunchaks are connected with organizing Armenians for the trial, and mobilizing Armenians from different parts of empire for the case.²⁴¹ The second sign of increased activity was an increasing appeal to the foreign press, which was a default component of the party programs as well as a concern pursued by the patriarchate:

Hagopian submitted frequent appeals to the British press for support of his cause. Through his efforts, plus those of his liberal allies in Parliament, coverage by *The Times* of the Armenian Question rose from a mere 14 articles throughout 1886 to 61 during the next year, and finally to 122 in 1890. Whereas these statistics might suggest greatly increased activity among Armenian agents in Turkey, or among the Armenian minorities and their Kurdish oppressors, repeated, on the scene investigations in Kurdistan-Armenia, in response to queries from Salisbury, revealed, until mid-1890, that Eastern Anatolia was, if anything, more tranquil than usual.²⁴²

The high rate of participation in the case was discussed within the Ottoman circles.²⁴³ In one case, the Grand Vizier -Kamil Paşa- commented to the British ambassador:

[I cannot] see how assaults in Muş affected the Armenians of Van, İzmid, and Constantinople, who had joined the deputation to the patriarch, the real object of which, in [my] view, [is] to create a sensation, and afford subject matter for the foreign press.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Nalbandian, *Revolutionary Movement*, 110.

²⁴¹ Zeidner, “Britain and the Launching of the Armenian Question”.

²⁴² Zeidner, “Britain and the Launching of the Armenian Question”.

²⁴³ BOA. Y. PRK. AZJ. 16/20. This document uses the following phrase: “organizations are gathering in the patriarchate (*cemiyetler inikad etmede*)”. It is not very clear, but plausible that the document referred to organized parties as referred to in this study.

²⁴⁴ White to Salisbury, 25.05.1889, FO 424/162, No 37, in Şimşir, *British Documents II*, 615.

The high concern for political meanings attached to the case was fed by the foreign publications, which were closely watched by the Porte. The question was put as one of the legitimacy of the Ottomans ruling over the Armenians:

The Porte is much embarrassed, because if the tribunal condemns the prisoner the complaints of misrule in Armenia will be justified. If, on the other hand, the Kurd is acquitted the acquisition is certain to be made that he was screened because he is a Mussulman and the victims were Armenians.²⁴⁵

The Ottoman state made many maneuvers to keep European public opinion under control, to the extent possible –as is characteristic of the Hamidian regime²⁴⁶. Many newspapers were warned or forbidden for making ‘purposive’ (*maksatlı*) publications. The distribution of “The Daily News” was forbidden because of publishing a letter by an Armenian community on the issue.²⁴⁷ In the same manner, demands were made to the director of the newspaper Cologne to stop the purposive publications about the case.²⁴⁸

Although no detailed memorandum by the sultan or the higher statesmen on the issue are found up to now, an excerpt from the *Tezakir* of Cevdet Paşa mentions the case. Cevdet Paşa was the Minister of Justice at the time, thus he was closely involved:

Upon the complaint of the Armenian patriarchate about Kurdish Musa Bey of Muş, British government appeared in favor of his punishment. However, it was not permissible by the sultan to aggravate his own subjects for the sake of serving the objects of the foreigners. Hence, Musa Bey was summoned to İstanbul for trial. The Patriarchate and the [British] Embassy attempted many maneuvers for getting him punished in whatever way. The Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa, who has always been a servant of the British policies and more British than the British ambassadors, wanted us to conform to their way.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ *The Times* (27.11.1889). Excerpt published in Şaşmaz, *Kürt Musa Bey*, 434-435.

²⁴⁶ For Hamidian concern of public image, see Selim Deringil, “The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No 1 (January 1993).

²⁴⁷ BOA. A. MKT. MHM. 749/21.

²⁴⁸ BOA. HR. SYS. 2733/3, BOA. HR. SYS. 2733/4.

²⁴⁹ Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Tezakir-i Cevdet 40* (ed. Cavit Baysun, Ankara: TTK, 1967), 274. He goes on to narrate how he and Kamil Paşa disagreed on this subject, and how the latter used a trial concerning a German citizen to blame Cevdet Paşa and cause his dismissal.

Thus, a discussion was made on the preferability of conforming with British opinion to punish the *bey*, or to show the state's will power by not moving in the demanded direction. The verdict was going to be a choice between the two.

When the trial was concluded, the chief was exculpated from all the accusations made against him, but was sent into exile to Medine and forced to live there till his death. This looks as a solution combining both concerns: the state showed they did not yield to the pressure upon them; but also sent the *bey* to lifetime exile, hence showing a certain concern for sufferings.

Still, the exile could not make up the disappointment by the *bey*'s exculpation on the part of the Armenians. A reaction to the process was observed in the *Kumkapı Vakası*, one of the two earliest events where nationalist parties "got loud".

The incident happened on 27 June 1890, when the Armenian community gathered at the church for public worship. An Armenian of Van, named Artin Gülgülyan, attempted to make a speech. When the patriarch told him he could not make the speech, discussions and disturbance followed. At one point, Artin drew his gun to shoot the patriarch. He was saved, but the community-many of whom were from the provinces- destroyed the patriarchate building. Their claim was that the patriarchate was indifferent to the sufferings of them and was negligent on pursuing national interests, and they did not have any patience left.²⁵⁰

The claims of indifference and negligence were statements of disappointment caused by the acquittal of Musa Bey. The reaction against the patriarchate was particularly high for the relatively conciliatory attitude they pursued relating the case. The base for this argument was an agreement between the patriarch and the first secretary of the sultan (*Mabeyn-i Hümayun Baş Katibi*), Süreyya Paşa. The latter

²⁵⁰ This account is the summary of a memorandum in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 130-131.

persuaded the patriarch to remove an article from a declaration made about the acquittal of Musa Bey²⁵¹. The British ambassador William White, who gives this information, does not give details on the contents of the article. However, from the context, it is plausible that an explanation condemning the verdicts was removed.

Hence, the deeds of Musa Bey were, in a sense, the sum of all the types of repressions shortly summarized before: forced extraction of goods and money, forced labor, violence in case of disobedience, brigandry, and allying with local authorities to make his position safe. However, his case points to a difference in Armenian reaction. In contrast with the previous individual complaints made at different times, and dependent on British support to be heard; this case was held with great publicity and pressure upon the Ottoman government due to the rise of activist organizations. This was a new phase, where the activists sought greater awareness for the Armenian cause, and were intolerant of the conciliatory voices within their own community –as shown by the Kumkapı incidents. This is the date when this study stops, for the aftermath of the 1890s represent different characteristics than the rather tranquil 1878-1890.

The events summarized above refer to cases where Armenians suffer from the malfunctioning of the administrative system: the persistence of the traditional class system, whose continuance was facilitated by a network of local governors coming from tribal origins or being interlinked with tribes. It has also been underlined, however, that the Armenians in these instances suffered together with other ethnic groups in the same social class with them. The interpretations of the turbulences have been worded in a sectarian language, however neither the British documents nor quotations from Armenians complaining do quote any language of discrimination

²⁵¹ William White to Salisbury, 01.08.1890, in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 129-130.

based on ethnicity at this point. Hence, neither the secondary nor the primary sources do have any historical evidence to sectarian political language in the conflicts referred to above. This remark is important to establish the argument of the period on the right bases: it is a question of practical administration, whereby the efficiency of governance is the axis around which the problems evolved. The political meanings of the administrative problems were not inherent to them, but they were attached; the question of to what extent the state could maintain security in Eastern Anatolia was, at the same time, the question of how fit Ottomans were for governing the region.

This analysis does not exclude the possibility that the rise of the Armenian nationalism did not create any form of counter-politicization among the Muslims. On the contrary, it is in order to show that the rise of Armenian claims was the main reason for a new Kurdish political consciousness at this point.

5.2. Political Reactions to Armenian Politics

It was inevitable for the discussion “Kurdistan or Armenia?”, discussed from the state’s point of view in the thir chapter, to be influential among the peoples of Eastern Anatolia as well. This was a collision of territory, where both Kurds and Armenians claimed the same area to be their traditional domains. Hence, the rise of voices for the recognition of the area as Armenia created reactions and apprehensions among the Kurds. An example is an archival document whereby the Muslim notables of Van write to the Porte to demand information about ‘the designs of Europe on Kurdistan’²⁵². This document speaks in an apprehensive manner about the ‘designs’, which they learnt from the press and are probably related to the Armenian issue.

²⁵² BOA. DH. MKT. 1334/49. (01.05.1881) (Unfortunately, details cannot be provided since the actual letter is missing from the file, and only a summary remains).

The best-known example where a Kurdish reaction to a potential ‘Armenia’ appears is the well-known rebellion of Şeyh Ubeydullah, narrated below.

5.2.1. The Rebellion of Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri, 1880-81

Şeyh Ubeydullah came from a highly influential family: the Naqshbandi Şemdinan family established around Hakkari. The family was from the Halidi branch of Naqshbandiya²⁵³, and was related to be the descendants of Abdülkadir Geylani- the founder of the other influential sufi order, Qadiriyya. Added to this spiritual authority was the economical power the family held. The family is known to have considerable land under their possession, the exact amount of which is yet unknown.²⁵⁴ In addition to land ownership, the family prospered on donations from the sheikhs’ adherents, as well as on commerce: they are known to be tobacco- traders.²⁵⁵

This family first came into the attention of İstanbul in 1850s, when the military commander of Hakkari region wrote to the center that Seyyid Taha Nehri protected local people against conscription. The commander brought into attention the great spiritual authority Seyyid Taha held, which made the Ottoman government fear that he could rebel.²⁵⁶ However, this did not happen and the sheikh held good relations with the Ottoman government, as well as with Iran, within which he was even rewarded revenue rights to some villages in return for his good relations.²⁵⁷

Seyyid Taha was succeeded by Şeyh Salih, who also kept good relations with the state. For instance, in one case, “he quelled unrest prompted by the Ottoman

²⁵³ Halidiye was a powerful and activist branch of Nakşibendiye. See Abdurrahman Memiş, *Halidi Bağdadi ve Anadolu’da Halidilik* (İstanbul:Kitabevi, 2000).

²⁵⁴ Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 95-96.

²⁵⁵ Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 96.

²⁵⁶ Ateş, “Empires at the Margin”, 326.

²⁵⁷ Ateş, “Empires at the Margin”, 327.

monopolization of salt and tobacco in Shemdinan, 1863.”²⁵⁸ Seyyid Salih was succeeded in 1873 by Şeyh Ubeydullah.

Şeyh Ubeydullah was active in politics, seeking to reinforce his regional authority. He underlined his role as a mediator between the state and the society, which was well recognized by the state. The state wanted to use the sheikh’s influence to achieve tranquility and to extend state power in the area. For example, the Ottoman commissioner reported to the center:

While teaching Islam and *zikr* he also advises people that obeying the orders of government is in accordance with the shariah. He works to include Kurds, who are inclined toward idolatry, into the straight path of Islam. The nahiya of Shamdinan where the shaikh lives is on the way of tribal migration routes at the border. The order and security of this neighbourhood would have required three and four. However, because of the sheikh’s presence and help (himmetiyle), only a *mudir* and eight *zabtiyes* are enough to govern and collect all *tekalif-i miriye*, *aşar* and other taxes on time.²⁵⁹

This legitimization fed the sheikh’s power further. As a result, he “started direct correspondences with the center, also he drew adherents from those who sought justice or intervention in both the realms of the sultan and those of the shah.”²⁶⁰

However, the sheikh was unwilling to limit the use of his power for the satisfaction of the Ottomans. In 1880, he rebelled against the Qajar and Ottoman states. He occupied northwest of the Qajar state. However, his forces were eventually beaten by the Qajars, after which he surrendered to Ottoman authorities.

His rebellion was the result of various apprehensions and aspirations, and it is a discussion in literature of whether he was ‘the first nationalist leader’²⁶¹, or if he only aimed at reviving old Kurdistan²⁶². There are several factors he reacted to: the

²⁵⁸ Ateş, “Empires at the Margin”, 327.

²⁵⁹ “Necib Ali’s report”, translated and quoted in Ateş, “Empires at the Margin”, 332.

²⁶⁰ Ateş, “Empires at the Margin”, 331.

²⁶¹ Martin van Bruinessen, Robert Olson and Wadie Jwaideh argue in this direction.

²⁶² Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 95-101.

boundary making process that the Ottoman and Qajar states involved in²⁶³, the loss of the Kurdish leaders' autonomy, and a reaction to the favorable position that the Christian part of the population started to gain. For the purpose of this study, the last factor will be elaborated.

Şeyh Ubeydullah is known for reacting to the probability of Armenian autonomy in the region. He is reported to make the following speech with Cochran, an American missionary:

What is this I hear; that the Armenians are going to have an independent sate in Van, and the Nestorians are going to hoist the British flag and declare themselves British subjects. I will never permit it, even if I have to arm the women.²⁶⁴

In the same manner, in a letter written by Ubeydullah to the sultan, he rejects Van to be annexed to Armenia, adding that such a decision would be unacceptable to Van's Muslim population, except for 10-15 ruinous people called Timuroğlu, who were notorious of their mischief.²⁶⁵

However, he did not aim to exclude the Christians if he gained autonomy. He sought to control them, as it was in the traditional system in Eastern Anatolia. After all, the support of the Christian populations was indispensable for gaining European support, which the sheikh sought in order to gain his autonomy or independence from the Ottomans. Dr Cochran reported that the sheikh demanded from he missionaries to put him in such a way of getting help from the British government.²⁶⁶

The following is an excerpt from the interview of the sheikh with the British consul at Tebriz, to whom he had been referred to by Cochran:

²⁶³ Emphasized by Ateş, "Empires at the Margin".

²⁶⁴ Vice consul Clayton's report dated 11 July 1880 (Turkey, no 5, 1881), Quoted in Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Shaikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, 5.

²⁶⁵ BOA. Y. A. HUS 162/36, Y. PRK. BŞK. 4/18 Quoted in Mehmet Fırat Kılıç, "Şeyh Ubeydullah's Movement" (Unpublished MA Thesis, Bilkent University), 60.

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Ateş, "Empires at the Margin", 412.

If he carried out the large plans, which he was supposed to entertain, Armenia would be erased from the map. What was to become of these people? They were Christians. (...) He immediately replied that he would not overlook their welfare if he become responsible head of Kurds, he would give ample guarantees for the good treatment of Armenians. There would be nothing to prevent those who wished it, emigrating elsewhere.²⁶⁷

Hence, with the revolt of Ubeydullah, we have a sign of the disturbance that the Armenian national claims created among the Kurdish ruling class. There is no historical record of this movement turning against the Armenians per se, for; first of all, they were necessary to get European support.

5.2.2. Other Forms of Reaction

Ubeydullah's reaction was exceptional for it was a reaction of large scale and military character. The question of whether other reactions of smaller scale existed is harder to tackle, for it is hard to trace documents in the archives where local people speak for themselves. In this respect, a letter written by the tribes of Van to the state in is a rare sample, and because of its content worth quoting extensively.²⁶⁸

The petition was sent by the tribes of Van, whose specific names are unfortunately not included, in April 1880. It starts with lamenting that the considerable tribal populations around "Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Diyarbakır, namely Kürdistan" could not benefit from education and modern industries (*sanayi-i cedide*). They also lament that such a high number of tribes (*bu kadar kabail-i vafire*) could not be aware of the western sciences, especially politics. They add "It is because of this ignorance (*vukufsuzluk*) that accusations made by the malicious on the whole of us remain unanswered."

They go on to complain bitterly about these accusations:

²⁶⁷ PRO FO 60/441, Abbot to Earl Granville Tabriz, 1 October 1881, Quoted in Ateş, "Empires at the Margin", 415-416.

²⁶⁸ The original document is: BOA. Y. PRK. MYD. 1/51.

Because of the notoriety of nomadism, the articles, which are thousand times far from reality, do not have to be proved or their intellectual essences are not explained (*mahiyet-i fikriyeleri meydana koyulmuyor*). We are shown as oppressors while we are oppressed; although we are virtuous we are shown as sinners. Our misdemeanors are presented like crimes, our crimes like terrible murders. Owing to the great endeavors to blame us in any case, we are belittled but we still cannot think of denying the rumours. The inappropriate behaviour of one single person is ascribed to the wilderness of a whole tribe.

The next section delineates the incidence that led to the drafting of this petition:

Few days before the drafting of this petition (*layiha*), during the discussions on the deliverance of donations to people in need in Van²⁶⁹, in front of a state commission, a member of the patriarchate said in anger: “Do not help the Kurds, they are wild and disobedient. Let them perish because of hunger and at least in this way they will have the punishment they deserve”. This insult, not only a betrayal on all of us, but an insult on humanity and necessitates separation, was only taken for granted. For the sake of fairness, does the whole of a community that pays millions of *akçes* to the treasury of the state, and provides the livelihood of not only its own members but also other nations via trade and sustenance deserve to be discarded from humanity and from the divine law of civilization?

The letter goes on to connect the negative view against the Kurds, to the ill wills of those who apply to the great powers:

Those who are ill willed for the country apply to the great powers that we are subject to [*devlet-i muazzama-i metbuamız*] for our so-called deeds. Discussions are made in European political circles on our depredations and oppressions that are “unknown but certain” (*mechul-i mutlak*) and the foreign press publishes untrustable news on us. As all this happens, our intellectuals (*erbab-ı fikr ü kalem*) of whom our country is proud, write many articles and take up polemics on issues unknown to us. But why don't they channel thoughts on believing the unjust and untruthful claims of few intriguers who do taint the name of Kurdistan, the land of pure people (*sabiha*), [and taint the name of] humanity and Islam?

The document never uses the name “Armenians”, but apparently some passages refer to them. In the above passage, for example, those who apply to the great powers could only be Armenians. In a similar manner, the following passage makes indirect accusations to Armenians in defense of the narratives on Kurds:

²⁶⁹ The year 1880 is marked by a famine in Van, where many people died. The state assigned commissions to deliver donations to the region.

The high commission of inspection has been around Kürdistan for almost a year. In this period, have they heard of any mass murders (*cinayat-ı azime*), oppressing the sons of the country or plunderings on the part of the Kurds? Moreover, in which civilized country do troubles, murders, thefts not take place? Are crime and murder peculiar to Kürdistan? Are their perpetrators only Kurds? Who are those committing the worst acts like murder in X,Y,Z villages in the past three or four months?²⁷⁰ Who speak against the union of Ottomans (*ittihad-ı Osmani*) and confuse minds with many malign and false rumours?

Following this section of complaints and reactions to the Kurdish image generated by the recourse of Armenians to Europe, is a section that describes the solution to the problem. This long section is an interesting piece; for it is apparent that the common belief of the period that education is a panacea is reflected in this part. The tribes suggest the imposition of an extra tax on Kurds, which is to be spent fully on education: the building of schools and the appointment of learned teachers:

The amount mentioned will be spent on our education, industry and our progress. In that case, by the courtesy of His Excellence, the Kurds who are looked down on as savages will produce many elegant intellectuals (*mükemmel fikir sahibleri*) and many valuable protectors of the motherland (*giran-ı kıymet vatan hamileri*) within 10-15 years.

The reaction to the Armenian nationalist politics and to the discussions over the jargon of this movement in this case is different than the case of Şeyh Ubeydullah. The sheikh's reaction appeared in the form of seeking the traditional autonomy of the Kurdish chiefs, and rebelling against the Ottoman State for this cause. The attitude of the tribal communities in this case is in the opposite direction: the tribes seek closer involvement with the policies of the state.

This letter is important not only for the history of the Kurdish society, but also for a perspective of modernization from below in the broader sense. In the field of late Ottoman studies, this perspective is yet not well developed, since it has been a

²⁷⁰ This is an interesting remark, but unfortunately not detailed. It is probable that the reference here is to the acts of the secret society around Van, the Black Cross Society (established in 1878) that was a minor nationalist society (Nalbandian, 84).

general trend to view Ottoman westernization as a top down approach, where the elite led and the folk followed. An important exception to this general observance is *The Politicization of Islam* by Kemal Karpat. In his work, he emphasizes how middle classes allied with the state against the notables. This alignment was in the form of contributing to educational campaigns by building schools. Schooling was important for the middle class, since through this way they could enter into the elite group and gain mobility in terms of status.²⁷¹ Since Karpat gives no primary sources to support his argument, one cannot be sure, but assume this as a plausible logical proposition. However, even if his statement is true, it is incomplete, and not valid for every part of the empire.

In a frontier region like Eastern Anatolia, which comes from a tribal tradition, taking initiative outside the tribal structure is hardly observable. In the case of this petition to the state, the initiative is taken by the tribes, which does not suggest any degree of independency from the notables. More importantly, the inclination to the educational policies of the state seems not only from purely economical concerns, but also from a perception of civilization as a self-valued concept. The rise of the reverence for ‘civilization’ is considered to be elite phenomena, but it might appear among the common populations for very similar reasons. To explain, we should recall that Said’s ‘orientalism’ was a cultural pattern produced and reproduced to accompany and veil political-economical interests. In a parallel manner, the political-economical superiority of the great powers and the natives associating somehow with them, could lead to an appreciation of ‘civilization’, which actually stemmed from, and was a form of, the appreciation of power.

²⁷¹ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 98-103.

5.3. In Lieu of Conclusion: A Critical Evaluation on the Nature of the Communal Conflicts

One of the most revisionist works on Ottoman modernization is certainly *The Culture of Sectarianism* by Ussama Makdisi.²⁷² His main criticism is towards seeing religious strife as a characteristic of the traditional politics, in opposition to which he asserts that on the contrary, sectarianism is a creation of modernity.

In doing this, he defines how religion was only one among many other markers of identity in the traditional political thought and practice. Moreover, it was not the dominant discourse. As the ‘imperial’ system implies, the true determiner of identity was political standing²⁷³. He does not deny the existence of a language of religious discrimination. Rather, he underlines that the main maker of political balances was status - belonging to the elite or to the commoner class- and political status was so dominant as to transcend religious boundaries.

He comments on how ‘sectarianism’ evolves into an accepted culture, and in this analysis non-local interpreters are the key subjects. These interpreters, consisting of European travelers, missionaries, and Ottoman reformers, defined the state of relations with their own conceptual luggage, which was heavily loaded with sectarian conceptions.

In short, the denial of sectarian politics as an inherent part of the traditional society rises up the question of how sectarian alliances developed. This perspective is absent from studies on Ottoman modernization. The studies on Eastern Anatolia are no exceptions.

²⁷² Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000. Full text available at <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2r29n8jr/>. Since an online text is used, pagination will not be provided for references to this book.

²⁷³ For his discussion of ‘imperial’, see Ussama Makdisi, ‘Corrupting the Sublime Sultanate: The Revolt of Tanyus Shahin in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon’. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 2000).

In referring to the state of communities in Eastern Anatolia, the Kurds and Armenians are depicted to be in a state of conflict. These conflicts are, however, implicitly assumed to be so ‘natural’ that they do not need to be analyzed in terms of origins, causes and variations. One reason could be related to the following aspect of modernity: in an attempt to underline the ‘rational’ characteristics of modernity, the traditional (pre-modern, non-modern) societies are depicted to be in an irrational state of religious strife.²⁷⁴ The modern interpreter of today is prone to make the same assumption inadvertently.

Another aspect should be the nature of sources that researchers rely on for studying nineteenth century provinces. These are: consular reports, travelogues and, to a lesser degree, newspapers. However, both the channels of information, and the conceptual and ideological limits of the narrators necessitate the questioning of these sources. Below is a short discussion of these factors to be considered in discussing the ‘historical data’.

Politics of Armenian Nationalism

The Armenian political demands, namely the establishment of an autonomous Armenia, were to be realized through diplomatic ways. In other words, this was to be achieved by getting foreign support, which would best be attained by influencing the representatives of the Europeans in Eastern Anatolia as well as by the mobilization of European public opinion, which was a rising political force²⁷⁵.

Related to this is a document found in the Ottoman archives, which is the text of a sermon by the Armenian Bishop in Van, delivered in 1880.²⁷⁶ This letter, emphasizing the need for national union, lists the four main pillars for this cause.

²⁷⁴ Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*.

²⁷⁵ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 413.

²⁷⁶ BOA. A. MKT. 748/28, The letter is found in 1888, but indicated to be written 8 years earlier.

These are: union within different Armenian sects, education²⁷⁷, and reverence to consuls and reverence to travelogues. With respect to the last two, he calls for establishing close relations with these, so that “their ears will be filled with Armenian outcries”. Moreover, another archival document is an excerpt from “New York Herald”, where a prominent member of the Armenian diaspora states that the Muslims repressed the Christians, and the only hope for Armenians was in “the patriarchate, the patriotic organizations, and the press.”²⁷⁸

These remarks are to underline that the Armenian struggle started as a mainly political and diplomatic movement, the main tool of which was influencing European attitudes and to persuade them to side with them. In this respect, even conflicts of a non-sectarian, personal character could be dressed in sectarian vocabulary-as stressed by the British consuls themselves.²⁷⁹

To illustrate, on one occasion, the Armenian patriarch Nerses complained to Layard that the state intended to send Circassian immigrants to Muş. When Layard asked the patriarch how he learned this and what harm this would do, the latter was unable to answer him. Layard narrates this and comments: “His Beatitude is in the habit of sending complaints of this kind to the foreign Embassies, with the object, I have every reason to believe, of getting up an ‘Armenian question’. They frequently

²⁷⁷ The patriarch, in explaining the necessity of education, refers to how Armenians would find favor in the Europeans’ eyes if they were well educated. Hence, education meant better contacts with Europeans, like the ensuing two matters.

²⁷⁸ BOA. HR. SYS. 2735/8.

²⁷⁹ At this point, I want to make a comparison with the literature on Balkan nationalism. In studying the Balkan uprisings of 1875, the historians of the region put into discussion the relative weights of two factors: the actual misgovernment of Turkish officials on the one hand, and the discourse of Balkan nationalism that would deny *any* form of Turkish government on the other. Hence, discourse and reality intersect, but the weight of factor each is openly discussed. (For a brief summary of the discussion, see Richard Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-1878* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979)). I argue for opening a similar avenue for the literature of Armenian nationalism. My aim in writing this section is not to deny the presence of serious turbulence, which I have narrated in some detail, but to try to name this problem correctly, by clearing reality from the meanings attached to it by contemporaries.

contain very exaggerated, if not unfounded, statements.”²⁸⁰ In a similar manner, Layard attracts the Porte’s attention that the same intrigues as those in Bulgaria are “now being carried on in Asia Minor to establish an Armenian nationality, and to bring about a state of things which may give rise to *a Christian outcry and European interference*.”²⁸¹ With this idea in mind, the British embassies and consuls were skeptical as to the authenticity of complaints from Armenian sources.²⁸²

However, the perspective of the diplomats and travelers who had first-hand knowledge about the Muslim societies was very much different from the general public opinion in Europe.²⁸³ The media was prone to publish Armenian complaints without much questioning. Information produced in this way was an important factor that exacerbated the already negative public opinion.

In February 1890, *Daily News* published news that a number of Kurds gathered together to kill the son of an Armenian bishop in Van, and the governor did not take the bishop’s complaint into consideration since the case was a political one. The vice-consul, after reporting this news, notes that what actually happened were quite different: one Kurd, on his own, killed the bishop’s son for personal reasons, after which he was arrested.²⁸⁴

These kind of exaggerated news claimed the killing or torturing of Armenians by groups of Kurds, and, moreover, that they were supported by the local government. In January 1890, news in *Daily News* echoed that an Armenian village was raided by a Kurdish band, which were armed with government arms. The same news adds that in another village, an Armenian was roasted to death. The vice consul

¶ Layard to Salisbury, 21.06.1879, FO 424/84, No 483, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 450.

²⁸¹ Layard to Salisbury, 12.06.1879, FO 424/84, No 287, in Şimşir, *British Documents I*, 448.

²⁸² Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians*, 61.

²⁸³ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians*, 16-17, 20.

²⁸⁴ Dewey to Lloyd, 03.03.1890, in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 83.

Dewey states that both news were fictions.²⁸⁵ It is even possible to see that this kind of news was discussed at the British parliament. In August 1890, the consul Lloyd disproves arguments discussed at the House of Commons, among which were claims that Armenian women were raped, or the governor of Van armed the Kurdish chiefs.²⁸⁶

Oriental Image of “the Turk”

It is indispensable to keep in mind the existence of ideologically concerned narrations when nineteenth century Ottoman empire is concerned, especially since most of the available sources are European consular reports and travelogues that inevitably are produced from within this perspective. This discourse, by now widely unveiled thanks to *Orientalism* of Edward Said and numerous works following his interpretation, has certainly affected accounts of Eastern Anatolian relations. Hence, a brief touch upon the orientalist look at ‘Turks’ is relevant here.

First of all, the general public opinion about Muslims was shaped by the medieval Christian canon, which defined Islam, among other things, as a religion of coercion and violence.²⁸⁷ This form of Christian consciousness was the base of public opinion in the late nineteenth century as well.²⁸⁸ Moreover, ‘Turks’ were not only by religion, but also by nation barbaric. This view gained more and more prominence especially during the Balkan uprisings of 1875 and 1876.²⁸⁹ The following description by Gladstone encapsulates the general view on Turks during this period:

²⁸⁵ Devey to Lloyd, 02.10.1890, in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 52-53.

²⁸⁶ Lloyd to White, 16.08.1890, in *The Trial of Moussa Bey*, 140-141.

²⁸⁷ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians*, 15.

²⁸⁸ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 413.

²⁸⁹ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 178.

It is not a question of Mahometanism simply but of Mahometanism compounded with the peculiar character of a race. (...) They [Turks] were, upon the whole, from the first black day they entered Europe, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. Wherever they went, a broad line of blood marked the track behind them; and as far as their dominion reached, civilization disappeared from view. They represented everywhere government by force, as opposed to government by law.²⁹⁰

Under such a 'nation', the Christians could only suffer: "Common opinion was that the "Turks" swung on a pendulum between sloth and fanaticism and that the Ottoman Christians lived perpetually at the point of a sword."²⁹¹ The Armenian complaints were presented to such a public, which was typically known for a "growing Christian consciousness":²⁹²

The effect of public opinion on the Armenian question is an example of orientalism in action because of the power of religious propaganda over rational analysis. There was a predisposition to think the worst of the Turks, which public debate on the Armenian question again brought to the surface.²⁹³

The orientalist discourse is analyzed in modern social sciences as a political tool accompanying European colonialism.²⁹⁴ In light of this information, it is necessary to underline that not all 'orientalists' were consciously 'orientalizing'. More concretely, the orientalist framework summarized above was not only a tool consciously utilized by policy makers. It was a frame of thought that placed limits on the ideas and concepts of the foreign interpreters of the Ottoman society, or in fact, the frame that inadvertently shaped the interpretative basis.

Having a certain set of ideas and concepts, and inadvertently utilizing them in dealing with facts of a society that was unaware of them, is more concrete in the analysis of the vocabulary. The missionaries and travelogues easily utilized words

²⁹⁰ Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London, 1876), 9. Quoted in Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians*, 45.

²⁹¹ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians*, 21.

²⁹² Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 413.

²⁹³ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians*, 5.

²⁹⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, *passim*.

such as ‘nation of Kurds’, ‘race of Turks’ to define these people, even though these modern conceptions were not integral parts of the relevant societies, and in some cases these concepts were probably not even in circulation.²⁹⁵ This is a widely known aspect of the western sources, especially travelogues. For example, Makdisi shows that “[travelers’ accounts] were conceptualized in certain terms that did not correspond to the way the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon perceived themselves”.²⁹⁶ This was because the narrators defined local people “in reference to their own cultural luggage, in ways that Durzis would never think of for themselves”²⁹⁷

In sum, the denomination “Kurdish-Armenian conflict” stems more from the existence of a certain mindset and conceptual vocabulary among the narrators, than from such a perception on the part of the related parties themselves.

Underlining that not all the cases nominated as “Kurdish-Armenian conflict” refer to sectarian concerns among the communities involved leads to new frameworks of study. Throughout the analysis of this chapter, two patterns of conflict have been defined: the problems caused by the conventional tribal organization, in which the Armenians formed the subjected class together with the non-tribal Kurds, and reactions caused by the Armenian nationalist claims as well as the Armenian-British convergence that put the former in an advantaged position vis-à-vis the Muslim tribal populations. For the second type of reactions, the few clues that are present for now do not point to violence turned against the Armenians per se. Rather,

²⁹⁵ See, as an example, Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Kurds*, where he uses phrases like ‘the nation of Kurds’, as well as calls local notables as ‘prince’s. A better known example is the narrations of the American missionary Cochran on the case of Ubeydullah. He related that the shaikh talked about “the Kurdish nation”, however ‘nation’ in its modern meaning was doubtly in circulation in the Kurdish society by the time. (For details of this discussion, see Özoğlu, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği*, 99.)

²⁹⁶ Makdisi, “Inventing Tribes” in *The Culture of Sectarianism*.

²⁹⁷ Makdisi, “Inventing Tribes” in *The Culture of Sectarianism*.

response is by seeking an autonomous Kurdistan in one case, and by seeking closer relations with the state, and its modernity project, in another.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Treaty of Berlin, signed in July 1878, opened a new phase for the Eastern Anatolian affairs. After the inclusion of the Article 61, which stipulated administrative reforms under the supervision of the Great Powers, the region came to assume a critical status. The problems of insecurity gained a dominantly political character, through which the legitimacy of the Ottoman Empire over the Christian populations was questioned.

However, the Ottoman State's legitimacy was doubtful not only for the Christian populations, especially Armenians who were increasingly organized along nationalist lines. Moreover, the state's control over the Kurdish population was also considerably unsettled. The region, being an autonomous area up to the first quarter of the nineteenth century, was still resistant towards centralization policies by the time. Moreover, the 'military' dealings of Mahmud II and the Tanzimat reformers were not only far from establishing real control, but had also alienated the common opinion against the government. The reign of Abdülhamid II was characterized by a different approach to these 'de-centralizing' actors. Rather than directly attacking the power of local notables, the state recognized their potency as a real political factor that could not be transformed overnight. This transformation was to be materialized

in such a way that the state would not lose the support of the socio-politically powerful groups.

The conciliatory policies adopted in this period were necessitated by this need to transform, without losing the support of the local notables, around whom the political culture and practice evolved. The solid stance these groups held was due to several factors. A certain tradition of political practice, where the notables were the *de facto* rulers in especially frontier regions was one reason. The common population was unaware of a practice of direct dealings with the state. Thus, the state had to seek alliance with the notables if state policies, such as taxation and conscription, were to be imposed. Moreover, the rising Armenian claims on the region was another factor that determined the position of the Kurdish tribal populations. Their already increasing importance was reinforced further by the critical position they held with respect to the politics of Armenian nationalism which was recently surfacing. The stronghold of the Kurds, in terms of political and military power as well as population, was the main obstacle against the claims to 'Armenia'. This was recognized not only by the Ottoman state, but also by the British authorities. It was crucial for the state that the Kurdish supremacy was not lost due to unnecessary exiles, migrations or other forms of punishments. This was another concern why the state proclaimed conciliatory acts rather than taking harsh measures against the notables.

However, the dynamics of state-tribe relations was more complex than the proclamation of lenient treatment. The insecurity resulting mainly from the tribal disorders had to be controlled, if the Ottoman state was to prove that it was fit to govern Eastern Anatolia, and this was the position that the empire was put into by the aforementioned article of the Treaty of Berlin. Hence, there were to be sometimes

conflicting concerns, all being essentially critical, to be balanced. In the words of Stephen Duguid:

It was in the actual balancing of the obvious need for reform with the prevailing mood against reform, the interests of Muslim tribal minorities such as the Kurds, the aspirations of the Christian minorities, and the general antipathy towards centralization that Abdülhamid's skill was to be really tested.²⁹⁸

An important point on how the state handled these conflicting concerns is that the state seemingly had a certain differentiation between different sorts of notable power: those who could be harshly treated, by military action, and those who were to be spared from such kind of actions. This study has included one document implying the existence of such a differentiation²⁹⁹, however no detailed analysis was possible by this one document. It is important, however, to note the study of different attitudes against notables that the Hamidian governance developed as a prospect for future studies, for this would break the uni-dimensional view that Abdülhamid was constantly on the side of the local notables.

The Hamidian provincial government was a 'native' form of governmental organization, where the state posts, except for the highest ones such as governorship, were filled by local power holders to an important extent. This was one reason why provincial reforms were carried out in a very slow pace. However, providing security was an immediate need. The use of military force steps in at this point. The imperial soldiers were used not only as a substitute for gendarmes where the latter were insufficient, but also controlled the violence caused by the seasonal migration of the tribal populations. As a result of these measures, besides the changes in provincial government, the state succeeded in attaining a higher degree of security by 1890.

²⁹⁸ Duguid, "The Politics of Unity".

²⁹⁹ BOA. Y. A. HUS. 237/64.

The points summarized above do not only delineate the concerns and policies of the Ottoman state in Eastern Anatolia, but also clarify the context in which the ‘Kurdish depredations on Armenians’, stated so by the Treaty of Berlin, took place. The contextualization of the communal conflicts deserves special attention. The uniform and simplistic languages of the primary documents should be analyzed character in an effort to question the character of these conflicts, for otherwise the sectarian naming used (“Kurdish-Armenian conflicts”) would suggest the assumption of a sectarian characteristic to all the conflicts. This study has differentiated between socio-political tensions and sectarian oppositions.

In this way, two main patterns of communal conflicts have been defined. The first form is the conventional tribal conflicts. The structure in which the ruling class is formed by the tribal Kurds and the subjected class by the Armenians and non-tribal Kurds appears as the main generator of insecurity, especially after the removal of the great *emirs* who used to maintain stability with their harsh rule. The bulk of documentation on the communal conflicts relates on the problems created by the tribal form of socio-political organization.

The second pattern involves political oppositions. One reason for this opposition is the collision of the territory claimed to be the ‘traditional motherland’ by the Kurds and Armenians. The best-known example for this reaction was the revolt of Şeyh Ubeydullah, who openly stated his protests against the Armenian claims to Eastern Anatolia. On the other hand, it has been documented that a disturbance created by the Armenian convergence with the European public opinion also exists. This disturbance is apparently caused by the stereotypic image of Kurds in the European press, as well as parallel reflections by the local Armenians, especially notables, on the other. The discussions phrased in ‘savagery versus

civilization' patterns elicit an appreciation of the modernization project of the state by the Muslim tribal groups, for this is the only channel through which the tribes can shift between the aforementioned categories. As a result, the discourses over the character of the tribal Kurds generated mainly by Armenian and European politics, and more importantly the political pressure exerted on the Kurds by this tool, produced a side effect among some Kurdish tribal groups. This was an attitude of seeking closer relations with the Ottoman state and its modernization project with particularly strong expectations on education, which would provide a more estimable status for the tribal groups.

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İ. ŞD. 121/7231; 1506/27.

İ. MMS. 62/2938.

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APPENDIX:

SUMMARY OF THE INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE TRIAL OF MUSA

BEY

Accuser	Accusation	Verdict
1. Serrol of the Vartenis Village	Wounding Serrol of the Vartenis village and stealing his cattle	The claimant and witnesses did not appear, the case was abated
2. Miro of the Haris Village	Killing the father of Miro (of the Haris village), breaking his wife's arm, kidnapping the daughter of Miro's brother, Gülzar, and stealing cash and other staff valued 3000 liras	The claimant and witnesses did not appear, the case was abated
3. Hurşid, Siropa and Kivork sons of Isadur, of Tatvan	Stealing ten oxen from them (in 1888), Beating Siropa to death	No witnesses, and No proofs since the claimant did not apply to the local governors after the incidents.
4. Hazar son of İranus, of İzut	Housebreaking, raping his daughter Ano, wife of Hamo (in 1887). Forcing villagers to work for free	No witnesses, and No proofs since the claimant did not apply to the local governors after the incidents. About forced labor: Hazar is not the deputy of the people, it is for

		those who were forced to work to come and suit.
5.* Ohannes son of İranus, of Tatvan	Stealing 12 sheep and 2 cows of the farmer Ohannes (in 1885).	No witnesses, and No proofs since the claimant did not apply to the local governors after the incidents.
6. *Ohannes son of Mıgırđıç, of Ardanuk	Arsoning his store which contained agricultural instruments, clothes and other effects, as well as wood and straw (in summer 1887) Robbing his house by breaking in the wall Usurping 20 lira from his father and brother by force	Contradictory and Inaccurate Depositions
7. Kumaş daughter of Uruh, of Ardonuk	Wounding his husband, the miller Arslan and causing death (1887).	Contradictory and Inaccurate Depositions
8. Kervancı Ali bin Mehmed, of Diyarbakır	Robbing his caravan, May 1889 (with a band of 60 Kurds).	Contradictory and Inaccurate Depositions
9. Gülzar of Tapavanik	Housebreaking, killing her husband and father in law, wounding Gülzar, usurping her belongings (with a band of 60 Kurds). (1887).	Contradictory and Inaccurate Depositions
10. Gülzar of Arkovanık	Stealing three horses from her husband Ohan, burning their straw, breaking the arm of a boy of her family (in 1887).	Contradictory and Inaccurate Depositions