

**The Anti-Armenian Riots of 1895–1897:
The “Climate of Violence” and Intercommunal Conflict in
Istanbul and the Eastern Anatolian Provinces
of the Ottoman Empire**

by
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Abstract

In the autumn of 1895, the Ottoman Empire's capital and eastern Anatolian provinces witnessed major outbreaks of anti-Armenian violence, which continued sporadically until early 1897. These extensive events resulted in the death of thousands of Ottoman Armenians, while a large number of Armenians had to convert to Islam in order to escape certain death. This dissertation is the first comprehensive investigation of the origins, dynamics, scope, and nature of the massive anti-Armenian riots that spanned a broad imperial geography stretching all the way from the imperial capital to the empire's eastern borders between September 1895 and March 1897. This study does not only present original and extensive research drawing on a wealth of previously unused archival materials, but it also challenges the ways in which these events are currently imagined, understood, and conceptualized. First of all, by refraining from teleological narratives that find in the events of the 1890s a precursor of the Armenian genocide, it addresses the peculiar dynamics and sociopolitical factors that created a "climate of violence" in the eastern provinces. Instead of oversimplifying the complex causes and dynamics of violence, it highlights the underlying causal factors that generated intercommunal conflict and lays out the conditions, circumstances, and mechanisms that motivated and enabled popular violence. Second, aiming to dispel myths and misconceptions about these events, it addresses the fundamental problems in conceiving of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 as a premeditated government policy engineered by state actors. A central finding of this dissertation is that, contrary to widely held beliefs, the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 were not organized, sanctioned, or even welcomed by the Sultan or his government. Nor did the central and local officials simply sit in their chairs and let the massacres unfold. At the same time, however, it also demonstrates that the policy makers in Istanbul and imperial administrators at all levels played a significant role in creating the *immediate conditions* and *mechanisms* that *enabled, facilitated, and sustained* collective acts of mass violence. This study argues that the government's anti-Armenian policies prepared the necessary foundations of the violent conflict by contributing to the creation of a *climate of violence* in the Armenian-populated provinces and a *culture of impunity* towards Armenians in general. And third, without underestimating the major role that government policies and agents played in the making of violence, this study underlines the importance of the popular and collective nature of anti-Armenian violence. By refraining from the idea that the perpetrators were simply criminal figures manipulated by external agents such as the central and provincial governments, as well as the assumption that their act of mass killing was entirely predetermined, the dissertation also explores the identity, agency, and background motivations of those involved in the violence.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire; Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909); collective violence; intercommunal conflict; ethnic riots; anti-Armenian violence

To ıgdem

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List of Acronyms

BOA	<i>Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi</i> (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives)
FO	Foreign Office
TNA	The National Archives

List of *Hicrî* and Ottoman *Rumî* Calendar Abbreviations in Archival References

M.	<i>Muharrem</i> (first month of the <i>Hicrî</i> [Ottoman Turkish equivalent of the Arabic word “ <i>hijri</i> ”] calendar, a lunar Islamic calendar)
S.	<i>Safer</i> (second month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
Ra.	<i>Rebiü'l-evvel</i> (third month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
R.	<i>Rebiü'l-âhir</i> (fourth month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
Ca.	<i>Cemâziye'l-evvel</i> (fifth month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
C.	<i>Cemâziye'l-âhir</i> (sixth month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
B.	<i>Receb</i> (seventh month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
Ş.	<i>Şaban</i> (eighth month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
N.	<i>Ramazan</i> (ninth month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
L.	<i>Şevval</i> (tenth month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
Za.	<i>Zi'l-hicce</i> (eleventh month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
Z.	<i>Zi'l-ka'de</i> (twelfth month of the <i>Hicrî</i> calendar)
TE	<i>Teşrin-i evvel</i> (eighth month of the Ottoman <i>Rumî</i> or <i>Mâlî</i> [fiscal] calendar, a solar calendar based on the Julian system, adopted in 1840)
TS	<i>Teşrin-i sâni</i> (ninth month of the Ottoman <i>Rumî</i> calendar)
KE	<i>Kânun-ı evvel</i> (tenth month of the Ottoman <i>Rumî</i> calendar)
KS	<i>Kânun-ı sâni</i> (eleventh month of the Ottoman <i>Rumî</i> calendar)

Note on Archival References

Second and subsequent references to a particular archival source are given in abbreviated form throughout the text. For instance: BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 536/33, 23 L. 1313 (7 April 1896) and A.MKT.MHM. 536/33 (7 April 1896), or TNA: FO 424/184, No. 466. Inclosure 2 in No. 466 and FO 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 466.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction: Subject, Scope, and Purpose

In the autumn of 1895, the Ottoman Empire's capital and eastern Anatolian provinces witnessed major outbreaks of anti-Armenian violence, which continued to occur sporadically until March 1897. The first episode of anti-Armenian violence during this period occurred in the imperial capital Istanbul in late September 1895, which was followed by the riots that broke out in the port city of Trabzon. By the end of late October, violence had become epidemic, ushering in a giant wave of riots that swept through dozens of towns in Eastern Anatolia until the early days of January 1896. In most cases, massive acts of violence were carried out collectively by a large number of local mobs and/or outside attackers within a quite short period of time, ranging from a few hours to a couple of days. Quite deliberately, mobs targeted predominantly Apostolic Armenians males in most instances. These extensive events resulted in the death of thousands of Ottoman Armenians, while a large number of Armenians had to convert to Islam in order to escape certain death. Outright murders were accompanied by substantial damage on private and communal property as countless houses, shops, and churches owned by Armenians were looted, destroyed, or set on fire during the incidents. Moreover, hundreds of Armenian women and girls were abducted and forced into marriage to Muslim men. Mass violence, widespread plunder, and usurpation of lands and livestock also forced many survivors to abandon their lands and flee to Russia. Importantly, the vast majority of the anti-Armenian riots broke out in the weeks following Sultan Abdülhamid II's (r. 1876–1909) decree that introduced, under the diplomatic pressures of the British and Russian governments, a program of domestic reforms designed to improve the sociopolitical conditions and status of the Christian Armenian population inhabiting the empire's eastern provinces. The virulent mix of an increasingly anti-Armenian political atmosphere, the strong resentment of these "Armenian reforms" among the local Muslim population in this part of the empire, agitating rumors, and an imminent fear of massive Armenian uprisings that disseminated through bureaucratic channels plunged the empire's Armenian-populated regions into a spate of mass murder, wanton destruction of property, pillage, arson, and forced

conversion, particularly in the autumn and winter of 1895-96. Archival study shows in an unambiguous fashion that the perpetrators of the violence belonged to a curious mix of Muslim townspeople, local power-holders, Kurdish tribal populations, Caucasian immigrants, local peasant groups, and, partly, Ottoman bureaucrats and security forces. This dissertation attempts to explain this violence.

To date, these momentous episodes of mass violence and destruction have seriously remained understudied in spite of their immense historico-political significance. Indeed, despite recent scholarly interventions, our knowledge of even the most basic facts concerning the extent and nature of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-1897 is still strictly limited at best.¹ Considering the central place these events occupy in the public imagination of both the Turkish and Armenian populations, it is incredible to be operating on the basis of facts and narratives that are not grounded in a thorough examination of the available sources on anti-Armenian riots. Since most historical accounts on the events shun from undertaking a critical reading and examination of primary Ottoman and foreign sources, we currently have access to several case studies focusing on a specific episode of anti-Armenian violence. These one-off accounts raise more questions than they answer. Notwithstanding their scholarly quality and importance, these recent interventions cannot

¹ For studies exploring these outbreaks of anti-Armenian violence, whether in general or in a particular case, see J. K. Hassiotis, "The Greeks and the Armenian Massacres, 1890–1896," *Neo-Hellenika* 4 (1981): 69-109; Robert Melson, "A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24, no. 3 (1982): 481-509; Jelle Verheij, "'Les Frères de Terre et d'Eau.' Sur le Rôle des Kurdes dans les Massacres Arméniens de 1894-1896," in *Islam des Kurdes*, eds. Martin van Bruinessen and Joyce Blau (Paris: special issue of *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam*, 1998), 225-276; idem, "Diyarbakir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895," in *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbakir, 1870-1915*, eds. Jelle Verheij and Joost Jongerden (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 85-145; idem, "'The Year of the Firman.' The 1895 Massacres in Hizan and Şirvan (Bitlis Vilayet)," *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 10 (2018): 125-159; Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Iskalanmış Barış: Doğu Vilayetleri'nde Misyonerlik, Etnik Kimlik ve Devlet, 1839-1938*, trans. Atilla Dirim (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), 210-220, 332-338, 354-357, 761-766; Edhem Eldem, "'26 Ağustos 1896 'Banka Vakası' ve 1896 'Ermeni Olayları,'" *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 5 (Spring 2007): 113-146; Selim Deringil, "'The Armenian Question is Finally Closed'": Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 2 (2009): 344–371; Sinan Dinçer, "The Armenian Massacre in Istanbul (1896)" *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geschiedenis (TSEG)* 10, no. 4 (2013): 20-45; Florian Riedler, "The City as a Stage for a Violent Spectacle: The Massacres of Armenians in Istanbul in 1895–96," in *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition from Empire to Nation State*, eds. Ulrike Freitag, et al. (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2015), 164-78; Ümit Kurt, "The Making of the Aintab Elite: Social Support, Local Incentives and Provincial Motives Behind the Armenian Genocide (1890s–1920s)" (PhD diss., Clark University, 2016), chapter 1; Ali Sipahi, "Narrative Construction in the 1895 Massacres in Harput: The Coming and Disappearance of the Kurds," *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 10 (2018): 63-95.

provide answers to many of the critical questions that lie at the core of these events. Indeed, the strikingly poor state of research on these violent events is clearly the primary reason behind the widely accepted and long-standing myth that it was mainly the *Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments*—the irregular militia forces assembled from within mostly Kurdish tribes by the Hamidian administration in the early 1890s—which committed the massacres of 1895-97 or played a chief role in the incidents.² Although it is certainly accurate that certain *Hamidiye* forces participated in the killings and looting in a very few specific geographies, even a cursory glance at Ottoman and British archival sources reveals that their impact was very limited at best, and that these quasi-mercenaries never assumed a leading or significant role in the violence perpetrated against Armenians in the provincial centers and towns where the vast majority of deaths and property destruction took place during the years 1895-1897. There is even ample evidence that some *Hamidiye* forces well protected Armenian towns and villages in a number of locations as part of the measures instituted by the government for the suppression and prevention of conflict.³ Chapter 7 provides an account of instances of anti-Armenian violence involving *Hamidiye*

² This myth, like many other myths and legendary claims surrounding the anti-Armenian riots of the 1890s, is so prevalent that it would not be fair to mention any particular studies. For, one of the very rare studies questioning widespread but completely unfounded assumptions about the *Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments* in the case of Diyarbekir, including their share in the events of 1895 in this province, see Joost Jongerden, “Elite Encounters of a Violent Kind: Milli İbrahim Paşa, Ziya Gökalp and Political Struggle in Diyarbekir at the Turn of the 20th Century,” in *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir, 1870-1915*, eds. Jelle Verheij and Joost Jongerden (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 55-84. Jelle Verheij, as well, has called the mythical claims about widespread *Hamidiye* involvement in these events into question in an important article on the episodes of anti-Armenian violence across the province of Diyarbekir in November 1895: “Diyarbekir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895.” Although Donald Bloxham previously argued that these regiments “contributed so much to the 1894-96 massacres,” he revised his argument in his remarkable study of the Armenian genocide, noting “the *Hamidiye* did not play anywhere near as significant a role in this phase as is often attributed to them.” Cf. Donald Bloxham, “Determinants of the Armenian Genocide” in *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003), 31 and 40, and idem, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55.

³ See, for instance, BOA. Y.PRK.MYD. 17/27, 19 Ca. 1313 (7 November 1895). Telegram from Şakir Pasha, Aide-de-camp to the Sultan, in Hıms to the palace dated 29 TE 1311/7 November 1895 (it appears the date on the copy of the telegram was mistyped; it should be 26 TE 1311); BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 610/7, 30 N. 1313 (15 March 1896). Letter (*tezkiye*) from the *Serasker* (or Commander-in-chief of the Ottoman armies, a position equivalent to a Minister of War) to the office of the Grand Vizier dated 14 L. 1313/17 Mart 1312/29 March 1896, and cipher telegram from the Grand Vizier to the office of the Governor-General of Erzurum dated 20 Mart 1312/1 April 1896.

commanders, officers, and soldiers within the context of the violent events under study here.

This dissertation is the first comprehensive investigation of the origins, dynamics, scope, and nature of the massive anti-Armenian riots that occurred in the imperial capital Istanbul, several provincial centers, and more than 30 district towns in the empire's Anatolian provinces from September 1895 through March 1897. Although the main geographical setting of this study comprises the territorially contiguous provinces of Sivas, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, Diyarbekir, Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van, which roughly correspond to the eastern Anatolian portion of contemporary Turkey, it also explores the events that took place in Istanbul and across the provinces of Trabzon (Black Sea), Aleppo (northern Syria), and Ankara (central Anatolia). It should be noted that the extended clashes between Ottoman military forces and armed Armenian groups in and around the district of Zeytun (Haleb/Aleppo, October 1895-February 1896) and the town of Van (Van, June 1896) are out of the scope of this study due to their distinct nature and character although the conflicts in these two regions involved so many civilian deaths. These bloody events merit further research and thorough examination for a separate study.

The empire's six major Armenian-populated provinces—namely, the provinces of Sivas, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, Diyarbekir, Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van, which came to be collectively referred to as the “Six Provinces” (*Vilayât-ı Sitte* in Ottoman Turkish)—were inhabited by diverse ethno-religious groups, primarily settled and nomadic Kurdish populations, Turkish-speaking Muslims, Armenians, Caucasian immigrants, and several relatively minor Christian communities such as Greeks, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. The wave of anti-Armenian riots occurred in the broader context of what became known as the “Armenian Question” (*Ermeni Meselesi* in Ottoman Turkish) in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Here, the term “Armenian Question” refers to the protracted controversy over the degree of self-government for the Armenian-populated provinces of the Ottoman Empire. This controversy involved Ottoman Armenian community leaders and political activists, Ottoman policy makers, and European imperial powers, most notably Britain and Russia. As a subject of international politics, it originated in the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-78 and continued till the genocide of Ottoman Armenians

during the First World War. The mid-1890s constituted a critical juncture in the history of the “Armenian Question,” as the period witnessed a dramatic intensification of the debates and diplomatic negotiations regarding the reform of the Six Provinces following serious pressure from European powers, while at the same time Armenian revolutionary initiatives and activities became increasingly visible. In the eyes of Ottoman officials and many influential Muslims in the Armenian-populated provinces, the Armenians, as a subordinate group, had attempted to disrupt the status quo and established patterns of power relations by demanding fundamental change, reform, and improved status with the support of foreign imperial powers hostile to the empire.

Through a deep investigation of a wide range of primary sources, the present study explores the understudied history of anti-Armenian violence and seeks to refine our understanding of intercommunal conflict in the late Ottoman Empire by addressing a series of overarching themes and issues. Some of the central questions that it seeks to answer are as follows: What were the underlying causes of the outbreak and spread of anti-Armenian riots? What motivated, preceded, triggered, and sustained violence? Did the riots feature a spontaneous display of widespread popular anti-Armenian feelings, or were they deliberately planned, organized, and coordinated by state actors? Did the government instead encourage, instigate, or permit the popular violence? How did the central government and local civilian and military authorities (that is, governors-general, *mutasarrıfs*, *kaim-makams*, or *kaymakams*, gendarmerie commanders, and officers commanding units of the Ottoman military forces stationed in provincial centers and districts) respond to the mass conflict—both discursively and in practice? What explains the magnitude, severity, and ferocity of violence? Who were the masterminds, instigators, and actual perpetrators of collective violence? What did they stand to gain—both in political and socioeconomic terms—from the mass killing of Armenians? What conditions and factors made many Muslims assume that violence against Armenians was necessary, appropriate, and justified? What changed in a space of a few decades so that ordinary Muslims morphed into perpetrators in pursuit of their Armenian neighbors or fellow countrymen? Engaging these questions as well as many others, the present study attempts to shed light on many dark spots in the elusive history of the anti-Armenian riots, ranging from the features of the sociopolitical environment that made collective violence possible

to the naked narrative of the riots themselves, from the conduct and actions of both central and local authorities during the mass conflict to the subsequent justifications of violence, from the role local Muslim elites played in the spreading of violence to the investigation and prosecution phases in the aftermath of violence.

1.2. Dispelling Myths and Misconceptions

However, this study does not only present original and extensive research drawing on a wealth of previously unused archival materials, but it also challenges the ways in which the anti-Armenian violence in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century is currently imagined, understood, and conceptualized. Indeed, reams of myths, legendary claims, and misconceptions that have emerged about these events still continue to dominate scholarly and popular imaginations, particularly with regard to official conspiracy, responsibility, complicity, and involvement in the violence. In the absence of original research, as well as due to the politically sensitive nature of the issue, highly problematic yet persistent claims and assumptions are still widely accepted. It is quite curious that despite the obvious lack of research and advance knowledge on such an important topic, many outstanding scholars of Ottoman and Armenian history have felt so comfortable speaking about the mass killings of the 1890s in definitive terms and making confident claims regarding many aspects of these events ranging from the identity of perpetrators to the role of Ottoman state actors in the violence.

The following quotations well illustrate prominent views on the anti-Armenian riots of the mid-1890s among scholars of Armenian history as well as in mainstream accounts of these events. While some of these studies focus particularly on the outbreaks of violence in question, others deal with a variety of topics such as Armenian history, the “Armenian Question,” and the Armenian genocide. Most of these quotations are from recent studies published by internationally well-known, widely-respected scholars. Studies published in Armenia and narratives circulating on the Internet feature much more fantastic claims. It should also be noted that the overall scholarship and expertise of these scholars cannot be judged on the sole basis of the following arguments:

The massacres of Armenians that took place in the Ottoman Empire from September 1895 to January 1896 were planned in advance. Government agents had been sent to all the provinces with instructions to whip up the fanaticism of the Muslim mob. Government agents would meet with the Muslims gathering to pray at mosques and tell them that the sultan [*sic*] believed all Armenians to be scheming to assault Islam and would call on the faithful to defend Islam and the sultan [*sic*] from the seditious Armenians. The agents played to the greed of the mob by saying that the rules of the holy jihad allowed the property of the rebels to be taken by the faithful; any resistance from the Christians was punishable by death. Single shots would be fired or trumpets would be sounded as a signal to launch the pogroms. [...] The massacres of the Armenian population were well organized; regular troops and gendarmerie forces took part in killing and looting. The action would end as suddenly as it started; another signal would be sounded to call it off.⁴

The geographical scope of these events, the similar pattern of the killings, the supervision of the army or its participation in the massacres, and the subsequent attitude of the Ottoman government all suggest that these events were planned and ordered by the Sultan. [...] Not only did they [the massacres] occur in a context of religious intolerance promoted by the sultan [*sic*] himself, whose paranoid personality was acutely attuned to the pent-up hatred of the Muslim masses for the Armenians, they were ordered by him.⁵

One should also bear in mind that during 1894-96, on the orders of Sultan Abdul Hamid, 'no fewer than' 200,000 Armenians had been massacred. In addition to this, the 1909 massacres in Cilicia had taken the lives of about 30,000 Armenians. Ottoman misgovernment, repression and massacres had inevitably contributed to the Ottoman government's desire for Armenian dispersion.⁶

Sultan Abdülhamid's response to these [Armenian revolutionary] movements was to massacre nearly 200,000 Armenians in the years 1894–6. These crimes, of which we still have no comprehensive study, had an organized character; it is beyond doubt that the Sublime Porte was directly implicated in them. Although they cannot be called genocidal, they seem to have been intended to reduce the Armenian population at large and weaken it at the socioeconomic level.⁷

Government-sanctioned, organized and unorganized wholesale massacres began in the region of Sasun in 1894. The notorious Hamidiyé regiments, Kurdish troops

⁴ Arman J. Kirakossian, "Introduction," in *The Armenian Massacres, 1894-1896: British Media Testimony*, ed. Arman J. Kirakossian (Dearborn, MI: The Armenian Research Center, University of Michigan, 2008), 48-49.

⁵ Stephan Astourian, "On the Genealogy of the Armenian-Turkish Conflict: Sultan Abdülhamid, and the Armenian Massacres," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 21 (2012), 199; 203.

⁶ Manoug Joseph Somakian, *Empires in Conflict: Armenia and the Great Powers, 1895-1920* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 3-4.

⁷ Raymond H. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 11.

armed and organized by Sultan Abdul Hamid, attacked Armenian towns, massacred thousands of inhabitants, and destroyed homes and lands. Some of the major massacres occurred at Sasun in August-September 1894; Trebizond, Urfa, and Erzerum in October 1895; and Diarbekir, Arabkir, Kharpert, and Kayseri in November 1895. Additional massacres took place during the second half of 1896. The massacres claimed more than 100,000 (and by some estimates about 300,000) Armenian lives before they ended in late 1896. Sultan Abdul Hamid became known as the ‘Red Sultan.’⁸

However, during the Armenian pogroms of 1894-96, which were inspired and led by the government, the Hamidiye [Regiments] were an even more brutal weapon of terrorism and annihilation of the Armenian population.⁹

Four main assumptions characterize mainstream narratives of these events, with some nuances and differences in emphasis: Deliberate, planned mass killings of Armenians began in the district of Sasun in 1894; they were organized or encouraged by the Sultan; the violence was perpetrated mainly by the Hamidiye Regiments, regular Ottoman troops, and ordinary Muslims incited and/or controlled by government agents; and, for many, the massacres marked the beginning of a process that culminated in the genocide of Ottoman Armenians during the First World War. All these major arguments or assumptions are either factually wrong or analytically misleading. In what follows, I briefly discuss central problems in the dominant paradigms guiding current views of the events under study.

For over a century, it has been widely believed that the mass violence directed against Armenians in the mid-1890s was a state-sponsored act receiving official order, instigation, or sanction from the Hamidian administration. Indeed, as the quotations above indicate, mainstream Armenian and western historical scholarship takes it for granted that the anti-Armenian riots (mostly referred to as the “Hamidian massacres of 1894-1896”) were masterminded, orchestrated, instigated, or at least sanctioned by the Ottoman government at the behest of the Sultan, who sought to solve the “Armenian Question” once and for all by ordering, initiating, or inspiring the killing of his own Armenian subjects. Indeed, casting the Sultan as the solitary figure responsible for the mass killings,

⁸ Simon Payaslian, *The History of Armenia: From the Origins to the Present* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 120.

⁹ Tessa Hofmann and Gerayer Koutcharian, “The History of Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Ottoman Empire,” *Armenian Review* 39, no. 4 (1986), 17.

contemporary European press in the West referred to Abdülhamid II as *le Sultan Rouge*, or the Red Sultan.¹⁰ Just like scores of European and American contemporaries, many modern historians even claim that the massacres were completely organized centrally in Istanbul, planned in advance down to the smallest detail, and carried out carefully and systematically to achieve the desired goal of exterminating or reducing the Ottoman Armenian population. Even if the massacres were not orchestrated by the central government in such a careful and thorough fashion, they were of such scales and dimensions that they could not have been carried out without official collusion or previous government cognizance at best. As a result, most agree in conceptualizing the riots as a deliberate official policy as well as in holding the Sultan personally responsible for the violence without deep, reliable research. I will call this “the state-sponsored massacres paradigm” or “the state-sponsored massacres narrative” throughout this study.

To date, the state-sponsored massacres paradigm has enjoyed longevity and has not yet been challenged substantially. Why was the Sultan—or the highest echelons of imperial authorities in Istanbul—so keen to plunge the empire into such extreme violence and chaos? Two fundamental assumptions underlie simplistic, unfounded narratives of state-led, or government-authorized, mass killings against the Ottoman Armenian population. The first assumption is that the Hamidian regime planned to “solve” the “Armenian Question” for once and for all by massacring its own Armenian subjects. Here, the logic is quite straightforward: The best way to eliminate the question was to eliminate the Armenians themselves. Arman J. Kirakossian, for instance, has argued, “To remove the threat of potential European intervention that the Armenian Question posed, Abdulhamid [*sic*] II’s government in 1894-96 took the radical step of carrying out persecution and large-scale massacres of the Armenian population.”¹¹ Also, it was assumed that the Ottoman state was capable of realizing this plan despite facing the very real possibility of dire political, economic, and diplomatic sanctions. First of all, to suggest that the Hamidian administration orchestrated the anti-Armenian massacres from top to bottom is to attribute

¹⁰ For a biography of Sultan Abdülhamid II as well as for the label “Red Sultan,” see François Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II: Le Sultan Calife (1876-1909)* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003).

¹¹ Arman J. Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question: From the 1830s to 1914*, trans. Haik Gugarats (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Insitute Books, 2003), xii.

to the Ottoman Empire a power that it never had. Instigating popular violence as a state policy at such a scale is a risky endeavor for any government, but especially so for a 19th century empire obsessed with self-survival. Not only does such a policy require appropriate means, but also long-term planning, administrative capacity, and thorough control. There also needs to be a follow-up plan: given the inevitability of European intervention, one would expect the state to prepare the necessary justifications to repel any form of unwanted intrusions into its governance. Indeed, the Ottoman authorities could simply not anticipate how far things would go once their Muslim subjects took the streets even if they were seen as “loyal forces” acting supposedly in defense of the state and the religion. As a result, popular violence is not like a tap that could easily be turned on and off at will.¹²

In fact, the anti-Armenian riots brought about profound political, economic, financial, and diplomatic crises that the officials in Istanbul and the provinces had to combat. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the state officials expressed genuine concern and anxiety about the unfolding events, evidenced by hundreds of ciphered messages sent back and forth between the capital and the provinces during the wave of violence. Just like a vast number of official documents that identify government policies and measures designed to contain, anticipate, and prevent the riots, these official communications have not been explored by those who claim that the government orchestrated, sponsored, or welcomed the mass killings and destruction. As in many previously unexplored topics and aspects that this study carefully addresses, a thorough examination of how state officials responded to the riots reveals the limited nature of our current knowledge regarding the anti-Armenian violence.

Even at a time when the central officials of the empire unambiguously voiced their opposition to anti-Armenian riots, the prevailing sentiment in diplomatic circles and European public was that the license for the perpetration of violence was issued by the

¹² I have borrowed the tap analogy from I. Michael Aronson, who has written a well-researched history of the anti-Jewish pogroms of the early 1880s in Tsarist Russia. Aronson argues “The [Tsarist] government was not free to turn the tap of violence on and off at will. It simply was not sufficiently powerful or competent to exercise such control over the population at large or even over its own officials.” See “The Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia in 1881,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56.

Sultan. Among many examples, one can be singled out. As we shall see in Chapter 5, in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of riots in the town of Tokad (spelled as Tokat in contemporary Turkish), a central-northern Anatolian city within the province of Sivas, the government dismissed and arrested the *Mutasarrif* (or the sub-province governor), the chief commissioner of police, and the commander of the gendarmerie of Tokad for failing to prevent the incident. Moreover, among other prompt and positive actions, an Extraordinary Tribunal (*Mahkeme-i Fevkalade*) sent from Istanbul immediately began to investigate the events and conducted criminal prosecutions in a vigorous and rigorous manner, an attitude that had not been shown in the fall of 1895. At the end of quick trials, nineteen Muslims were given the death sentence and forty-eight others received prison terms of various lengths. According to a British consular report penned after the riots in this town, the general belief in the embassy circles in Istanbul was that the killing and looting in Tokad would not have been possible without the place sanctioning.¹³ It is possible that this was the case partly because at one level the Hamidian regime projected an image focused on tight control and surveillance of all real and perceived opposition, with draconian censorship practices and thousands of agents and informers on the government's pay roll. Given this emphasis on state security measures and control, the question of how this violence could have possibly taken place without the Sultan's authorization may not be so far-fetched. However, at the same time, the expression of such biases had also very much to do with the specific power relations and competing interests between the Ottoman Empire and other European imperial powers.

Although the British consular officials were much more careful than most of their European colleagues when framing their stance vis-a-vis the responsibility of the central Ottoman government in the massacres, "anecdotal evidence" and representation of the events in diplomatic papers, contemporary western media reports, and personal narratives are open to misinterpretation and misrepresentation without selective and critical analysis. Additionally, exaggerations and propaganda in the contemporary western media and personal narratives have also led to established (perhaps irreversible) convictions regarding

¹³ For sources, refer to the last section of Chapter 5.

a wide range of aspects of anti-Armenian riots, from the number of victims to the nature of violence.

Many contemporaneous press reports and personal accounts have also identified the Sultan as the chief culprit who ordered or caused the mass killings of Armenians. European and American newspapers and magazines were filled with articles and images depicting the Sultan as a brutal, bloodthirsty, and hypocritical tyrant.¹⁴ Both the Ottoman Empire's position in the constellation of European powers and the Sultan's anti-Armenian outlook easily made him the center of a conspiracy to exterminate his Armenian subjects. In fact, narratives on Abdülhamid II tend to attribute excessive power and responsibility to the Sultan, in addition to casting him as a mad figure suffering from intense bouts of anxiety, paranoia, and delusion. As recently as in 2012, a well-known scholar in Armenian studies wrote the following passages in an article focusing on the very events investigated in this study:

Yet, to understand the Armenian massacres, one must look at Ottoman policies through Abdülhamid's perspective, for he alone took major decisions.

Abdülhamid, those who knew him were convinced, was a leader of great intelligence. Yet he was also, contemporaries whispered, a man suffering from fears of such magnitude that they took him to the very borders of sanity. He was suspicious of everyone, often without reason. He doubted the loyalty of even his closest associates and friends. He perceived derogatory or even threatening meanings in the most innocuous comments, writings, or events.

[...]

Uniting all of these outbreaks of violence, however, was the unmistakable hand of Abdülhamid. It is this that distinguishes these "Armenian massacres" from the earlier forms of collective conflict, for the State decided and channeled the violence.

[...]

The human factor, all too often neglected in modern historiography, also needs to be emphasized. Sultan Abdülhamid II was the State. His policies, stemming from his deep resentment toward Europe, his pathological fears and delusions, and

¹⁴ Examples are too many to cite here. For a few figures, see Eugene L. Taylor and Abraham D. Krikorian, "Sultan Abdul Hamid II: What did he really look like? Caricatures versus photographs," <http://www.groong.org/orig/ak-20140921.html>, accessed October 15, 2018.

perhaps the sycophantic, exaggerated reports and “intelligence” that some of his officials and spies were feeding him, set a particular path to the solution of the Armenian Question. That path was, *mutatis mutandis* of course, conducive to the Armenian genocide, but it was not sufficient for its commission.¹⁵

Putting the spotlight on the Sultan is a gross oversimplification of the conditions and circumstances at work in the 1890s.

The mass killings of 1895-97 have also been viewed as a dress rehearsal for and prelude to the Armenian genocide of 1915 in a retrospective and teleological fashion, with little or no consideration for the specific historical context of each event.¹⁶ For those who consider the Armenian genocide as the latest and final episode of a policy of extermination devised in the late nineteenth century, the events of 1895-97 are nothing but a chapter leading up to 1915. In other words, from a retrospective point of view, these events represent only a *stage* in the “long history” of the Armenian genocide, a process that supposedly began in the 1890s (for some even in the late 1870s when the “Armenian Question” became internationalized). Studying a series of complex events and developments that took place prior to 1915 through the prism of the Armenian genocide suggests that earlier instances of mass violence can only be understood as part of a chain of events that culminated in a catastrophe. Although genocides and other forms of mass violence committed against particular population categories are often contingent events

¹⁵ Astourian, “On the Genealogy of the Armenian-Turkish Conflict,” 188-89, 191, 206.

¹⁶ For teleological interpretations of the events of 1895-97 and the Armenian genocide, see, for instance, Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, 4th, revised ed. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2003); Ruben Safrastyan, *Ottoman Empire: The Genesis of the Program of Genocide, 1876-1920*, trans. Svetlana Mardanyan (Yerevan: Zangak 97, 2011). Likewise, Richard G. Hovannisian argues that the 1895-96 massacres “set in rapid motion the processes that would culminate in the death or exile of almost all Ottoman Armenians.” See Richard G. Hovannisian, “Introduction,” in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 13. For similar opinions, see Vincent Duclert, “La Dimension Génocidaire des Grands Massacres Hamidiens (1894-1896): Penser L’Extermination des Arméniens,” in *Le Génocide des Arméniens: Cent Ans de Recherche 1915-2015*, ed. Conseil Scientifique International pour L’Étude du Génocide des Arméniens (Paris: Armand Colin, 2015), 116-129. Ronald Grigor Suny and Fatma Müge Göçek briefly mention different positions on the question of whether the genocide was a contingent event or otherwise in “Introduction: Leaving It to the Historians,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6. A recent study remarkably challenges teleological narratives and offers a new interpretation of the Armenian genocide informed by an anthropological perspective: Yektan Turkyılmaz, “Rethinking Genocide: Violence and Victimhood in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1915” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2011).

that require strong contextualization and rigorous analysis, such teleological and deterministic narratives assume some form of linearity between the events of the 1890s and 1915 without paying any sustained attention to issues of context, causation, and agency. Most significantly, such teleological and retrospective frameworks not only portray the massacres as an instantiation of the Ottoman government's desire to eliminate the Armenian population *en masse*, but also intimate that 1915 was a foregone conclusion. Contrary to the strange consensus on the issue, the approach of Ottoman policy-makers to the political crisis known as the "Armenian Question" between the 1870s and 1915 was never uniform, unidirectional, and consistent.

Third, the dominant narratives that identify the central state as the fundamental perpetrator of violence also ignore the agency of local actors who instigated violence as well as the large numbers of people that participated in it. In fact, although those who were involved in the conflict were predominantly civilians, their identity, background, and motivations have not yet been investigated sufficiently. As will be mentioned in Chapter 7, scholars of Perpetrator Studies—an emerging field of enquiry in the study of mass violence and genocide—critically consider the behaviors and motivations of individual perpetrators and perpetrating groups even in state-authored and carefully-planned mass murders and genocidal campaigns carried out by state actors and/or civilians acting under the direction of a central state or an umbrella organization.¹⁷ Conventional narratives treat the actual perpetrators of anti-Armenian violence as mere puppets acting on behalf of the state at worst, as accomplices and accessories to the crime at best. According to these accounts, there was a mastermind behind the curtains who set everything in motion in a methodical manner. What this convenient narrative accomplishes, however, is to relieve the responsibility from the shoulders of the empire's Muslim subjects, who were able to resort to violence without any official premeditation, directive, or instigation.

Lastly, although there is no serious academic literature in Turkish on these events that requires substantial discussion, this survey of current—and highly problematic—views of these events should also briefly address the conventional narratives that Turkish

¹⁷ For references, refer to the introductory section of Chapter 7.

nationalist historians have promoted. In Turkish historiography, the events here under study are widely characterized as “Armenian uprisings/insurrections” (*Ermeni isyanları*), drawing on selective and distorted documentation.¹⁸ As will be mentioned in Chapter 4, many Turkish historians have also simply reproduced the rhetoric of Ottoman bureaucrats in that they represent intercommunal conflict and anti-Armenian violence simply as a natural and legitimate response of Muslims to Armenian revolutionaries’ attempt to launch uprisings against the imperial government or to the provocative conduct by Armenians. Like Ottoman authorities, they have consistently claimed that in every instance, the Armenians were the aggressors who forced Muslims to act in self-defense and fomented an outburst of popular anger all over the Armenian-populated regions of the empire. At the same time, claims of the Hamidian regime that Ottoman Armenians were in their vast majority disloyal and a serious risk to the empire’s security and therefore had mainly themselves to blame for the violence meted out by loyal Muslims was also taken up eagerly by Turkish nationalist historians after the end of the empire. As a result, Turkish nationalist scholarship on the “Armenian Question” in general and on these events in particular have tended to argue that Ottoman Armenians brought this violence upon themselves because they sought separation from the Ottoman Empire through revolutionary struggle and terrorist violence and who were supported by European imperial powers (especially Britain and Russia) eager to bring about the demise of the Ottoman Empire. By the same token, one can find a broad range of extremely problematic claims about the “Armenian Question” in Turkish nationalist media, including in popular television dramas, such as “Payitaht Abdülhamid.”¹⁹ Leaving aside the methodological and historiographical problems inherent in this literature, such a view of the matter is a major obstacle to understanding the origins, dynamics, and complex nature of intercommunal conflict and violence in the late Ottoman Empire.

¹⁸ For a few works representative of nationalist, mainstream Turkish scholarship on these events, see Mehmed Hocaoğlu, *Arşiv Vesikalarıyla Tarihte Ermeni Mezâlimi ve Ermeniler* (Istanbul: ANDA Dağıtım, 1976); Ahmet Halaçoğlu, *1895 Trabzon Olayları ve Ermenilerin Yargılanması* (Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2005); Yunus Özger, *1895 Bayburt Ermeni Ayaklanmaları* (Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2007).

¹⁹ I would like to thank Dr. Thomas Kuehn for bringing this point to my attention.

The present study seeks to elucidate the roots and nature of intercommunal strife and anti-Armenian violence in the late Ottoman Empire in a number of ways. First of all, by refraining from retrospective and teleological narratives that find in the events of the 1890s a precursor of the Armenian genocide or, by contrast, try to present these events as the understandable self-defense of local Muslims against Armenian secessionists or terrorist revolutionaries, this study addresses the peculiar dynamics and sociopolitical factors that created what I term a “climate of violence” in the empire’s eastern provinces. Unlike the existing narratives that tend to oversimplify the complex causes and dynamics of violence, it highlights the underlying causal factors that generated intercommunal conflict in the 1890s and lays out the conditions, circumstances, and mechanisms that motivated, precipitated, enabled, and promoted popular violence. As such, it suggests that the resulting climate of violence reached a climax in the autumn of 1895, when popular fear and resentment coincided with convenient political atmosphere and manifested an unprecedented degree of violence between two communities that had coexisted in mutual dependence for centuries.

Second, aiming to dispel the myths and legendary claims that have dominated the interpretation of these violent events, this study addresses the fundamental problems in conceiving of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 as a premeditated government policy engineered by state actors in an attempt to annihilate or reduce the Ottoman Armenian population. It directly challenges the state-sponsored massacres paradigm on the basis of abundant evidence drawn from an extensive analysis of a vast body of unpublished—and largely untapped—archival material. A central finding of this dissertation is that, contrary to widely held beliefs, the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 were not planned, organized, instigated, sanctioned, or even welcomed by the Sultan or his government. Nor did the central and local officials simply sit in their chairs and let the massacres unfold.

At the same time, however, this is not to argue that the Hamidian administration and its local agencies had no role in the outbreak and escalation of popular violence—it is rather to suggest that the role and responsibility of state actors in the violence go beyond the simple question of whether the mass killings and destruction grew out of a central plan for the extermination of Armenians. Indeed, the question of official role, responsibility,

and culpability in these incidents is more complex than the existing narratives have customarily understood. Chapter 6 of this study will address the primary reasons why the ultimate responsibility for the killing of a great number of civilians and other excesses must principally rest with the Ottoman government and its agents. Above all, it will argue that the policy makers in Istanbul and imperial administrators at all levels played a significant role in creating the *immediate conditions* and *mechanisms* that *enabled, encouraged, facilitated, and sustained* collective acts of mass violence directed against Ottoman Armenians. I suggest that the Hamidian administration's anti-Armenian policies prepared the necessary foundations of the violent conflict by contributing to the creation of *a climate of violence* in the Armenian-populated provinces and *a culture of impunity* towards Armenians in general. Also, as we will see, government policy-makers in Istanbul and at the provincial level were ultimately unwilling to use military force in a determined, systematic, and predictable fashion against those who attacked Ottoman Armenians. This unwillingness, I argue, reflected the regime's belief that such measures would alienate the Sultan's Sunni Muslim subjects in the Anatolian provinces at a time when the loyalty of these segments of the local population was increasingly regarded as the backbone of the regime and by extension of the empire as a whole.

And third, without underestimating the major role that the government policies and agents played in turning collective violence into a possibility, my analysis underlines the importance of the popular and anonymous/collective nature of the violence perpetrated against Armenians by their Muslim fellow citizens. By refraining from the idea that the perpetrators were simply criminal figures, mindless followers, or "killing squads" directed or manipulated by external agents such as the central and provincial governments, as well as the assumption that their act of mass killing was entirely predetermined, this study also explores the identity, agency, and background motivations of those who took active part in the violence. Through a careful analysis of the social milieu where events took place, it centers on local processes such as mass mobilization, local decision-making, and everyday transmission of knowledge (e.g. dissemination of anti-Armenian conspiracies, rumor-mongering, secret meetings) to reveal the role of local notables, religious sheikhs, and tribal chieftains as masterminds, instigators, and promoters of violence. Examination of participants' social identity, perceptions, and motivations also enables us to probe deeper

into, and draw conclusions about, the sources, nature, and significance of intercommunal conflict and anti-Armenian violence in the late nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire.

1.3. Conceptualizing the Violence: Riots, Pogroms, Massacres

In mainstream academic writings and popular narratives, the events investigated in this study are mostly referred to as “the Armenian massacres of 1894-1896” or “the Hamidian massacres.” One problem is that the riots that occurred in the town of Tokad (Sivas) in March 1897 mostly remain unnoticed. More importantly, it is widely believed that the indiscriminate killing of Armenian villagers in Talori (or Taluri) and its vicinity (a mountainous area in the district of Sasun, Bitlis) by Ottoman troops backed by the Hamidiye forces in 1894 marked the beginning of a series of predetermined and premeditated actions against the Ottoman Armenian population in the mid-1890s. Although the events in this mountainous region, widely known as the Sasun massacre of 1894, took place in the same context as the anti-Armenian riots, it is important to note that the occurrence, nature, and perpetrators of the violence committed against Armenian villagers in and around Talori in the summer/autumn of 1894 were completely different than those of the events of 1895-97, which is the primary reason that this study does not deal with Sasun 1894. Although the scope of this chapter does not permit a through discussion of this incident, it is important to note that the violence in Sasun in 1894 was neither *premeditated* nor *predetermined*.²⁰

The terminology we employ to describe the massive outbreaks of violence studied here reflects the discursive ways in which we understand, imagine, and interpret these events. Throughout this work, I refer to these episodes of collective mass violence as riots,

²⁰ During my research in the Ottoman and British archives for this study, I have also probed into the mass killing of Armenian villagers in the mountainous areas of the district of Sasun in 1894 and its domestic and international effects. Crucial archival records on this incident are so voluminous that it is impossible to cite in a footnote. For new research on Sasun 1894 and the events preceding it, see Justin McCarthy, Ömer Turan, and Cemalettin Taşkıran, *Sasun: The History of an 1890s Armenian Revolt* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2014); Owen Miller, “Sasun 1894: Mountains, Missionaries and Massacres at the End of the Ottoman Empire” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015); Varak Ketsemanian, “Communities in Dispute: The Hunchakian Revolutionary Party 1890-1894” (MA thesis, The University of Chicago, 2016); Mehmet Polatel, “The Complete Ruin of a District: The Sasun Massacre of 1894,” in *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics*, eds. Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, and Ali Sipahi (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 179-198.

massacres, and pogroms. That the definitions of “ethnic riot,” “massacre,” and “pogrom” vary widely across disciplines and researchers complicates the use of these terms to label largescale events of a complex and multilayered nature like the ones here under study. Especially the terms “riot” and “massacre” have too many meanings and too many connotations to be specific and unambiguous without clarification. Obviously, each term has its own specific historico-political resonances. Yet they are also imbued with similar properties and, depending on definition and context, they may be utilized to describe different aspects of a given episode of collective violence directed against a particular population category. Importantly, many scholars see anti-Jewish pogroms that took place in central Europe and Russia, specifically in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a form of ethnic rioting and therefore use the terms “riot” and “pogrom” interchangeably to denote anti-Jewish violence. In other words, they refer to pogroms clearly as anti-Jewish riots.²¹

Although the word “pogrom” has historically been used to denote anti-Jewish riots in Russia, various forms of collective violence against Jewish populations across other parts of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to be referred to as pogroms as well. Furthermore, a wide range of episodes of lethal attacks directed against particular population categories in different parts of the world, particularly in contemporary India, have also been identified by researchers as pogroms. Over the past century, scholars and sources have ascribed significantly different meanings to the term “pogrom”²² as a form of

²¹ See, for instance, I. Michael Aronson, *Troubled Waters: Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990); John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, eds., *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Jonathan L. Dekel-Chen et al. eds., *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011); John D. Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Christhard Hoffmann, et al., eds., *Exclusionary Violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Sonja Weinberg, *Pogroms and Riots: German Press Responses to Anti-Jewish Violence in Germany and Russia (1881-1882)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), particularly p. 19.

²² According to dictionaries and other sources, the Russian word “pogrom” is a noun derived from the verb *pogromit*, which means variously “to destroy,” “to sack,” “to demolish violently,” “to smash” etc. In contemporary Russian, the word simply means destruction or devastation. Yet it seems that the word has had a wide range of connotations and usages in the past century. For the etymology, varying meanings, connotations, and changing usages of the word, both in general and within the context of anti-Jewish violence in central Europe and Russia, see, for instance, John D. Klier, “The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13-38; Werner Bergmann, “Pogroms,” in *International*

collective violence (not necessarily against Jews), ranging from mob attacks against a certain segment of the population regardless of official involvement to spontaneous ethnic riots, from an organized massacre to specifically anti-Semitic disturbances. What scholars ascribe to the term “pogrom” from their perspectives varies so widely that it is impossible to cite fully here. Likewise, researchers hold markedly different views on the question of official conspiracy, collusion, or instigation in pogroms.

It is noteworthy that several scholars of what are often referred to as communal riots in India tend to make a clear-cut distinction between riots and pogroms on the basis of the level of organization and official complicity in violence. They suggest that using the term “riot” to describe various episodes of largescale collective violence in India (Hindu-Muslim violence, for instance) is misleading and that they should instead be termed as pogroms because they are of an organized character and state elites, party leaders, and/or law enforcement agencies are directly complicit in the violence. Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, for instance, has unequivocally argued that a pogrom “requires logistical planning and preparation, and its successful execution relies on support from the state apparatus, including the police and criminal actors, but also on spontaneous and vicarious forms of participation by groups or sets of ordinary citizens in active and passive capacities.” Therefore, he suggests, “a pogrom is easy to distinguish from a riot. It is not a serendipitous event but a planned one, characterized by a specific kind of collective consciousness that makes forms of complicity possible.”²³ Notably, while some regard pogroms as “archaic” and spontaneous acts of violence, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, like several other

Handbook of Violence Research, eds. Wilhelm Heitmeyer and John Hagan (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 351–67; David Engel, “What’s in a Pogrom? European Jews in the Age of Violence,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Jonathan L. Dekel-Chen et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 19-37; “Pogroms | Encyclopedia.Com,” accessed October 17, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/modern-europe/russian-soviet-and-cis-history/pogroms>.

²³ Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 35. Although Paul R. Brass, who has written extensively about Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India, aptly proposes to problematize efforts to make fast, precise classifications among different forms of collective violence, he nevertheless tends to make a distinction between riots and pogroms, viewing the latter as a more organized and more extensive form of violence in which state elites and/or police forces are directly or indirectly complicated. See Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); idem, *Forms of Collective Violence: Riots, Pogroms, and Genocide in Modern India* (Gurgaon, Haryana: Three Essays Collective, 2006).

dictionaries, defines it as “An organized massacre of a particular ethnic group, in particular that of Jews in Russia or eastern Europe.”²⁴

However, extensive and sophisticated research conducted by distinguished scholars of Russian and Jewish history have shown that, contrary to widespread belief, the anti-Jewish pogroms of the early 1880s and of 1903-06 in Russia were not ordered, incited, or welcomed by the Tsarist government or its local agents.²⁵ Pogroms earlier in the nineteenth century and many subsequent pogroms in the twentieth century were not state-sponsored and well-organized episodes of collective violence either, while some of the anti-Jewish riots that broke out later in the twentieth century were instigated or sanctioned by officials. Like many extremely lethal riots that took place across other parts of the world, some of those pogroms in Russia or elsewhere were massive and took the lives of a large number of people. Therefore, my point is that there is no reason to think that pogroms are necessarily premeditated, highly-organized, and state-sanctioned acts of violence directed against members and property of a specific ethno-religious group. Nor are they necessarily entirely spontaneous outbursts of anger and hatred.

What constitutes a massacre? Does it simply refer to an act that causes an unspecified or critical number of deaths? How critical should it be? Are massacres necessarily premeditated and organized acts of violence committed against a significant number of defenseless civilians by forces directed, coordinated, and controlled by state elites or political actors? Like “riot,” the term “massacre” is used to label a wide range of individual and collective acts of violence and it has certain political connotations. Those who carry out an act of mass killing can be civilians, military, or members of a militia organization. A bomb attack targeting a large number of civilians in a specific public place may result in a massacre. A counterinsurgency operation may turn into an indiscriminate killing of an untold number of people supposed to be supporting the “insurgent” group.

²⁴ “Pogrom, n.1,” OED Online (Oxford University Press), accessed October 17, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pogrom>.

²⁵ See, for instance, Aronson, *Troubled Waters*; Klier and Lambroza, eds., *Pogroms*, especially chapters 3, 7, 8, and 9; Edward H. Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1992); Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882*; Dekel-Chen et al., eds., *Anti-Jewish Violence*.

Armed forces may commit deliberate acts of killing against non-combatants during a military campaign. What is often referred to as ethnic violence may involve mass killing and atrocity carried out by civilians. Likewise, especially within the context of American colonial history, the term has particular resonances and often lead to political disputes. Indeed, characterizing an event a massacre or not becomes a sensitive issue in some contexts. While some scholars suggest that massacres are carried out not by individuals but by groups, American school shootings, for instance, are widely described as massacres. For some, the term refers to any individual acts of deliberate mass murder while others use it to describe indiscriminate killings of a political nature with particular intergroup connotations. Furthermore, some researchers and journalists tend to think that massacres are conducted by highly-organized armed forces—military, police units, or militia. Dividing different types of events labeled as massacre into categories may not guarantee analytical soundness.²⁶

Given the multiple meanings, connotations, and usages of terms like “riot” and “massacre,” it is difficult to develop a perfect typology or classification for different forms of collective violence. More importantly, I suggest that it is misleading to establish a hierarchy among the phenomena widely labeled as ethnic riots, pogroms, and massacres based on the scale and intensity of violence, the level of orchestration and preparation, and the degree of official instigation and involvement. These terms should rather describe the nature, characteristics, and conditional dynamics of a given episode of collective violence. It is undeniably justifiable and appropriate to label the events of 1895-97 as massacres since they share central characteristics of acts of mass violence widely designated as massacres across the ages and cultures. In the context of anti-Armenian violence, the analytical value of the term “massacre” is, however, limited since it does not capture the specific conditions, circumstances, and nature of the violence adequately. Furthermore, when used without adequate specificity and elaboration, the term both reflects and

²⁶ For a few studies examining the phenomena of massacre, mass killing, and atrocity as a subject of inquiry and as specific forms of violence, see Mark Levene and Penny Roberts, eds., *The Massacre in History* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 1999); Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide*, trans. Cynthia Shoch (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007); Philip G. Dwyer and Lyndall Ryan, eds., *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity Throughout History* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2012).

reinforces the conventional understanding of these events as centrally-organized (or inspired) and entirely premeditated acts of mass killing carried out in a highly methodical and coordinated fashion by the Sultan’s special agents, imperial troops, Hamidiye Regiments, and ordinary citizens instigated by officials within a specified period of time. Our analysis should address the specific dynamics, circumstances, and elements of the violence that distinguish it from other forms of mass violence—for instance, highly-organized, state-led, carefully executed massacres that usually (but not always) require strategy, advance planning, administration, mobilization, and control.

The term “riot” is equally vague when used without specification and context since it is utilized to conceptualize a variety of public acts of violence. It also has legal definitions and is widely employed by law enforcement agencies and press in reference to violent protests, civil unrest, or any acts considered to a disturbance of the order and peace by a crowd. All these terms are, of course, contested. Riots are usually considered to be spontaneous, uncoordinated violent occasions, which may be directed at public authorities or a specific group of people. Across history and the world, deadly attacks on people on the basis of their perceived ethnic, national, racial, or religious identity have widely been referred to as riots—violent events not necessarily spontaneous and small-scale. Throughout this study, I utilize the term “riot,” among other reasons, to emphasize the collective and civilian character of anti-Armenian violence, following Donald L. Horowitz’s treatment of the subject: “A deadly ethnic riot is an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership.”²⁷ Anti-Armenian violence took place in a dynamic social environment in which a wide array of forces and actors were in play. Certain developments and events precipitated it. Rumors, fictitious tales, and false reports widely circulated prior to the events. Large crowds participated in violence. However asymmetrical the massacres were, the underlying conflict involved two sides in an oppositional relationship to each other. Significantly, Armenians were not killed by firing squads or chemical weapons. In many cases, violence broke out in the market place of a particular town and rapidly escalated to

²⁷ Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 1.

massive scales. In some important locations, initial fighting or attempted attacks were promptly suppressed by the local authorities, who were usually assisted by Muslim notables and other influential local figures. In many others, ineffective, negligent, or tolerant officials and law enforcement forces played a significant role in the outbreak and escalation of violence. As will be mentioned below, certain variables determined the intensity and duration of conflict. Overall, each episode had its own timing, rhythms, and pace. Evidence shows some strong signs of careful organization and preparation in certain places while other episodes were more spontaneous. Consequently, in the absence of more appropriate terminology and an adequate critical vocabulary, the term “riot” better reflects the characteristics and complexities of the events in question although this conceptual and terminological discussion merits further discussion. It is extremely important to note that labeling the events of 1895-97 as riots should not be taken as indicative of them being spontaneous outbursts of violence. Nor does it seek to downplay the magnitude of violence or to mitigate official responsibility.

At the same time, however, in several important towns such as Harput (Mamuretü'l-Aziz) and Gürün (Sivas), killing and looting were committed exclusively by outside attackers, mostly armed Kurdish tribal groups from the neighboring areas. At times, the attackers obviously had local contacts and were joined by some local townspeople. At other times, however, they carried out excesses in the teeth of local opposition. Indeed, as I reflected upon my findings, I realized that the attacks carried out by outsiders were more widespread than I imagined at the beginning of my research in 2013. Therefore, the term riot is not appropriate to describe the incidents in those locations. It is nevertheless clear that these attacks took place in the context of a climate of violence that came to a tipping point towards the end of October 1895 when massive riots began to sweep across several provincial centers and major towns.

1.4. Explaining the Underlying Causes, Conditions, and Circumstances of Violence

Given the absence of any governmental conspiracy or sponsorship behind the emergence of violence, we must address the factors that contributed to a growing

resentment between the Muslim and Armenian Ottoman communities. What were the origins of violence? Before we attempt to answer this question, we should address perhaps a more specific one: Was hostility embedded in the deep fabric of ethno-religious relations between the empire's Armenian and Kurdish- and Turkish-speaking Muslim subjects inhabiting central Anatolia and the eastern borderlands? In other words, were relations between Muslim and Armenian communities in these regions historically conflict-ridden, hostile, and violent? Were the Kurdish- or Turkish-speaking Muslims violence-prone in a way other communities were not?

As far as regions like the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus are concerned, violence has often been regarded as somehow external to modernity, the presence of which often signifies the lurking of “pre-modern” and “primitive” practices in an otherwise modern era. The categorization of violence as a sign of the “non-modern” in the Ottoman Empire as well as in post-Ottoman spaces feeds into narratives that are too ready to associate East Anatolia with some primordial violence, transforming the region into “a geography of violence” not only in media and public perspectives, but also in academic circles notwithstanding recent scholarly critical interventions. That the eastern Anatolian portion of the Ottoman Empire, and later Republican Turkey, has been the setting for intense intertribal warfare and competition, intracommunity violence, blood feuds, the Armenian genocide, the Dersim massacre of 1938, and lately conflict between Kurdish guerillas and Turkish armed forces may easily give the impression that violence was embedded in the culture of the region. Indeed, essentialist narratives of intercommunal and intracommunal violence in Eastern Anatolia, just like in the Balkans, other parts of the Middle East, and the Caucasus, reinforces the belief that violence is a cultural trait of the region, which casts it as an alien space couched within otherwise modern forms of political and social organization.²⁸

²⁸ Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000) has inspiringly challenged essentialist and culturalist expositions of intercommunal violence in Ottoman Lebanon. Recent scholarship has also advanced our knowledge and understanding of local violence and conflict in the late Ottoman Empire. See, for instance, Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009); Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Intercommunal relations between different ethno-religious groups in this part of the empire were not inherently hostile or violent. Nor were intercommunal conflicts motivated by centuries-long resentment and “primordial hatreds.” Also, there was no periodic occurrence and routinization of ethno-religious riots in the eastern provinces. Indeed, the outbreaks of mass violence that took place in the 1890s were certainly extraordinary events of an unprecedented nature and scale. These types of violent episodes were not a typical and recurrent feature of East Anatolia. Without romanticizing the past, we should note that by the second half of the nineteenth century, interactions between Muslim and Armenian communities had never been characterized by mutual animosity and contempt despite the latter’s accepted inferior political status as a Christian population living under an Islamic rule. Indeed, the conflict itself and the narratives about it should not eclipse other dimensions of intercommunal interaction, both historically and at the quotidian level, even on the eve of the riots and afterwards. Also, perhaps needless to say, neither in the imperial capital nor in the empire’s Anatolian provinces did Armenian communities live as a separate minority isolated and alienated from the surrounding Muslim populations. It is also important to note that despite the derogatory terminology utilized by Muslims to define non-Muslims (particularly Christians) in Ottoman lands or elsewhere, which manifested itself best in the term *gavur* (infidel), and despite the fact that non-Muslims had faced various forms of legal and political discrimination under the Ottoman system, there was no such phenomenon as historical anti-Christian animus or demonology that rested deep in the minds of Ottoman Muslim communities to surface and translate into violence during periods of political crises. Violence against Armenians in the 1890s was not an expression of deep-rooted covert or overt anti-Armenian sentiments and prejudices among Ottoman Muslims. Nor can we understand the causes and nature of the violence by relying on essentializing sectarian and national categories of Christian versus Muslim and Armenian versus Turk and Kurd, respectively, without paying attention to the changing dynamics of interactions among different ethno-religious groups within the context of sociopolitical and

economic transformations that the Ottoman Empire underwent throughout the nineteenth century.²⁹

Indeed, in the case of intercommunal conflict in Ottoman Syria and Lebanon during the 1850s and the early 1860s, for instance, scholarship has shown that socioeconomic changes in the periphery of the empire brought about by the introduction of modern administrative practices, European political and economic expansion, and integration into the world economy were prone to creating conditions for intergroup polarization, the ethnicization of politics and resource competition, and the expression of sociopolitical grievances through ethnic/sectarian terms in various parts of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire.³⁰ These earlier instances of mass violence and widespread episodes of intercommunal conflict in the empire's Balkan provinces in the second half of the nineteenth century took place in the wider context of the profound, and often dramatic, transformation of Ottoman governmental practices, economy, and society from the *Tanzimat* onward. Therefore, the intercommunal tensions between the Armenian and Muslim populations of the empire were played out in a rapidly shifting political background that was informed simultaneously by a global sociopolitical transformation, the modernization of governmental institutions, and the fears of survival on the part of the Ottoman governing, which shook the empire's social fabric and traditional modes of governance from their foundations. It might even be argued that it was precisely the

²⁹ Among many other scholars in Ottoman and Armenian studies, Vahakn N. Dadrian's work is a good example of essentialist tendencies and of narratives based on fixed religious and national identities. For a critique of Dadrian's essentialist views, see Ronald Grigor Suny, "Writing Genocide: The Fate of the Ottoman Armenians," in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28-31.

³⁰ For the events of the 1850s and of 1860 in Ottoman Syria and Lebanon, see, for instance, Moshe Ma'oz, "Communal Conflict in Ottoman Syria During the Reform Era: The Role of Political and Economic Factors," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, Vol. II: *The Arabic-Speaking Lands*, eds. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, 91-105 (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982); Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*; Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 130-168; Eugene L. Rogan, "Sectarianism and Social Conflict in Damascus: The 1860 Events Reconsidered," *Arabica* 51, no. 4 (2004): 493-511.

dynamics of modernization – its technology, agents, and forms – that was itself a factor in the formation of this climate of violence.

As will be mentioned in Chapter 2, the “Armenian Question” cannot be conceived simply as a question of identity or a “minority issue” raised by Armenian nationalist leaders and intellectuals. It was embedded in a series of sociopolitical phenomena that occurred in the nineteenth century such as: state centralization, the intensification of rivalries among the Ottoman, Russian, and British empires, changes in Ottoman taxation regimes, immigration, and the emergence of centrifugal/nationalist movements. Key issues surrounding this question were shaped by interstate, state, and non-state actors within specific temporal and spatial coordinates. In view of the multiplicity of forces at the international, imperial, and local levels, it is essential to emphasize the interplay between global politics, central administrative practices, and local agendas to fully understand the complex dynamics of the “Armenian Question” and intercommunal strife at the turn of the century.

One central issue that led to increasing Armenian complaints, which were voiced through various channels including the Armenian Patriarch and foreign consular officials based in the Armenian-populated regions, had to do with a growing sense of insecurity due to the intensifying tensions between certain Kurdish tribal groups and Armenian villagers throughout the Six Provinces, especially in Bitlis, Van, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, and northeastern part of Diyarbekir. Continuous village raids, plunder, and robbery committed by nomadic or seminomadic Kurdish populations affiliated with clans and tribal federations such as the Haydaranlı (or Hayderanlı), Sipkanlı (or Sıpkanlı) Hasenanlı, Cibranlı, Zirkanlı, Miranlı and others created a power vacuum and acute instability across the region. Such practices committed by tribal forces against settled communities (Christian or Muslim) did not begin in the nineteenth century. They were not, however, of arbitrary and chaotic nature. On the contrary, they had their own customs, norms, and logic embedded in the regional politics of a geography where tribal structures and loyalties came before anything else. Yet what is certain is that they considerably increased and became anarchic in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mainstream scholarship has traditionally characterized this as the “Kurdish-Armenian conflict.” Indeed, “Kurdish-Armenian relations” has been a key

phrase in Armenian and Kurdish historiographies for a long time. However, a younger generation of historians have recently challenged such overgeneralizations, arguing that neither Kurds nor Armenians were monolithic entities and that other historical experiences should not be overshadowed by narratives of conflict or cooperation.³¹

Village raids, pillage, and the capture of livestock were subsequently accompanied by various other forms of extra-legal acts, such as the “land-grabbing” and occupation by Kurdish *aghas* (*ağa* in Ottoman Turkish, meaning chief, master, landlord, or head of a village or tribe) and chieftains across the eastern provinces, which stripped a significant number of Armenian and Muslim villagers of the very resources they depended on for continuing their lives. The usurpation and occupation of Armenian lands by Kurdish *aghas* was later termed as the “agrarian question” by the Armenian Patriarchate and Armenian intellectuals. At the turn of the century, the “agrarian question” became an integral aspect of the negotiations and struggle between the Ottoman officials, Armenian villagers, and Kurdish tribes.³² Practices of land usurpation and occupation considerably increased in the last decade of the nineteenth century, more specifically on the eve of, during, and after the anti-Armenian massacres of the mid-1890s. The increasing vulnerability of Armenians in this climate of fear during and after the wave of massacres created a favorable—but not certainly unique—context for powerful chieftains, such as the Haydaranlı and Hasenanlı

³¹ See Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Yaşar Tolga Cora, “Doğu’da Kürt-Ermeni Çatışmasının Sosyoekonomik Arkapları,” in *1915: Siyaset, Tehcir ve Soykırım*, eds. Oktay Özel and Fikret Adanır (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015), 126-139; Dzovinar Derderian, “Shaping Subjectivities and Contesting Power through the Image of Kurds, 1860s,” in *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics*, eds. Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, and Ali Sipahi (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 91-108.

³² For the issue of usurped Armenian lands and the practices of land-grabbing in the case of certain Hamidiye chieftains, see, first of all, Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, especially pp. 128-69. For the significance of the issue of land, also see Stephan H. Astourian, “Silence of the Land: Agrarian Relations, Ethnicity, and Power,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55-81; Cora, “Doğu’da Kürt-Ermeni Çatışmasının Sosyoekonomik Arkapları.” For negotiations between the Armenian political leadership and the Ottoman government concerning the so-called Armenian “agrarian question” during the Young Turk period, see Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule, 1908-1914*, revised edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011). A recent study investigates this underexamined issue drawing on a variety of primary sources, but unfortunately, I have not been able to consult it for the present study: Mehmet Polatel, “Armenians and the Land Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1870-1914” (PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2017).

Kurds, to appropriate the Armenians' lands in a variety of ways.³³ Indeed, for many of those involved in the violence, specifically tribal populations and peasant groups, material incentives were absolutely a powerful motivation for participation in the anti-Armenian violence in the mid-1890s although it can hardly be said to have precipitated the riots. Official accounts clearly demonstrate the extent of looting and pillage during the riots everywhere. As a result, evidence shows that many segments of the local population, including urban elites and influential Kurdish chieftains, sought to make the most of the economic/material opportunities created by the chaotic situation and the further marginalization of the Armenian population during these events.

Why did the Kurdish tribes acquire a new sense of freedom in pursuing extortionate practices towards the Armenian population in the region in the second part of the 19th century? Scholars of Kurdish and Armenian history have been emphasizing until quite recently how the Ottoman centralization efforts in Kurdistan in the 1830s created a chaotic political situation in the region. The scholarly consensus is that before the collapse of the Kurdish emirates in the 1830s and 1840s when the central Ottoman government launched

³³ For a number of cases from the many that I have investigated during my research in the Ottoman archives, see BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 620/15, 16 L. 1313 (31 March 1896). Correspondence among various offices dated variously; BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 45/75, 16 L. 1313 (31 March 1896). Correspondence between the office of the Governor-General of Erzurum and the place; BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 637/38, 7 N. 1314 (9 February 1897). Correspondence among various offices dated variously; BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 637/41, 3 C. 1315 (30 October 1897). Various correspondence; BOA. Y.PRK.AZN. 20/41, 1316 (1898/1899). *Takrir*, or official communication/letter of petition, from the Armenian Patriarchate, n.d.; BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 673/34, 5 Ca. 1325 (16 June 1907). Correspondence among various offices dated variously. Following the revolution of 1908, the Armenian Patriarchate undertook substantial efforts to bring the issue of usurped Armenian properties to the attention of the Ottoman government and secure the restitution of these properties to their rightful owners. In the early 1910s, a special commission established by the patriarchate drew up detailed reports on the Armenian private and communal properties seized or occupied during the Hamidian period, specifically after the events of the mid-1890s. Portions of these reports were translated into Ottoman Turkish. In 1911, the Armenian Patriarchate also submitted a detailed *takrir* to the office of the Grand Vizier, the Interior Ministry, and the Ministry of Justice and Religious Sects concerning the occupied/seized properties owned by a large number of Ottoman Armenians who had left the empire during the Hamidian period. These crucial documents reveal the extent of land-grabbing, land occupation, seizure of property, and various forms of illegal property acquisition committed mostly by Kurdish *aghas* and chieftains during and after the mass killings of the 1890s. For the translated report and the *takrir* of the patriarchate, see *Anadolu'nun Mahall-i Muhtelifesinde Emlak ve Arazi-i Mağsube Hakkında Ermeni Patrikhanesi'nce Teşekkül Eden Komisyon-ı Mahsus Tarafından Tanzim Olunan Raporların Suret-i Mütercemesi* (Dersaadet [Istanbul]: D. Doğramacıyan Matbaası, 1327 [1911/1912]); *Anadolu Vilayât-ı Osmaniyesi'ndeki Arazi Meselesine dair Ermeni Patrikhanesi'nden 7 Temmuz Sene 327 Tarihiyle Makam-ı Sami-i Sadaret-uzma ile Dahiliye ve Adliye ve Mezâhib Nezaret-i Celilelerine Arz ve Takdim Kılınan Takririn Suretidir* (Dersaadet [Istanbul]: Dikran Doğramacıyan Matbaası, 1328 [1912/1913]).

a massive military campaign against powerful Kurdish *Beys* in an attempt to establish central authority in the region, these semi-independent powerful emirates had managed to control local power relations and regulate local conflicts and intertribal disputes. Indeed, the classical Ottoman policy of minimal interference in local politics and economy in the areas dominated by Kurdish emirates seems to have provided a considerable degree of local autonomy to these local forces. Apparently, they had sufficient power and legitimacy to create and maintain a more or less stable sociopolitical order in a region inhabited by diverse ethno-religious groups including nomadic Kurds and Armenian peasants. These emirates succeeded in subordinating tribal chieftains and other local forces to their domination. With the disappearance of these traditional authorities in the region, it is argued, a myriad of tribal groups led by chieftains began to act independently and compete among themselves for primacy and for the control of economic resources while the central government failed to create effective mechanisms of security, administration, and justice in the region after the fall of the emirates. Accordingly, these scholars suggest, tribal warfare and the power of Kurdish sheikhs increased.³⁴ Although we need more detailed studies on this issue, these arguments seem quite convincing. Therefore, it is safe to say that Kurdish tribal organizations and chieftains, feeling more powerful than before, escalated their raids towards Muslim and Christian villages. Particularly during the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78, Kurdish nomads went on a rampage and pillaged numerous Armenian villages across the Russian-Ottoman borderlands. After the war, the image of Armenians seeking autonomy from Ottoman rule by mobilizing European powers cast the Armenians as an even more legitimate target for looting. The intensification of this competition for local resources contributed significantly to rising tensions in the region and constituted a central aspect of what came to be known as the “Armenian Question” in the late 1870s.

³⁴ See, primarily, Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 54-74; Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London, UK: Zed Books, 1992), 69; 161-182; 229; Michael Eppel, “The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates: The Impact of Ottoman Reforms and International Relations on Kurdistan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (March 2008): 237-258.

On the other hand, it would be misleading to think that Ottoman state-building and centralization directly provided preconditions for intercommunal conflict and anti-Armenian riots at the turn of the century. Otherwise, these practices would arguably be expected to produce similar outcomes in other regions of the empire. Neither did socioeconomic factors and material considerations directly lead to the violence of such scale and nature in the 1890s although they were deeply embedded in this conflict. Rather, I suggest that the immediate roots of intercommunal conflict and anti-Armenian violence lie in four interrelated factors: (1) foreign involvement and intervention in the “Armenian Question” (2) fear of a loss of Muslim ascendancy and power in East Anatolia; (3) the resentment of Muslim notables and tribal chieftains toward the prospective “Armenian reforms;” and (4) the Hamidian administration’s internal security concerns and policies branding the Armenians as a menace to imperial unity and Muslim dominance at the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The question of reform for the six Armenian-populated provinces perfectly highlights major issues and concerns evolving around the “Armenian Question”: Armenian demands for greater security, political rights, and freedom; foreign powers’ pressures for reform; government inaction and unwillingness; and local Muslim opposition. Indeed, reform debates, which were always at the heart of the controversy, surfaced before the outbreaks of violence as the British and Russian government imposed a new scheme of internal reforms on the Sublime Porte in May 1895. As we shall see in Chapter 7, local Muslim notables and Kurdish chieftains expressed their categorical opposition to “Armenian reforms” prior to, during, and after the events in a variety of ways. The strong popular opposition to reform stemmed primarily from the fear that the implementation of prospective reforms would bring political concessions, equal rights, and a special status to the Armenians under the patronage of the Great Powers, which was believed to be a step in a transitional process that might eventually lead first to an autonomous Armenian entity and then outright independence. Fears that Armenians were prepared to use what many local Muslims regarded as the concessions of the projected reform as a springboard for the subjugation of Muslim majority or for a future Armenian principality created a situation fraught with fearful prospects. Anti-reform backlash and initiatives were fueled by a

combination of fear and rage, aggravated by the promulgation of reforms in October 1895, and fostered by Muslim elites who played upon popular sentiments.

Likewise, the Ottoman governing elite was concerned that granting reforms to its Armenian subjects sponsored by foreign powers could open the door to greater concessions and autonomy under European tutelage and protection, which in turn would make outright independence more viable and easier to achieve at any future point. Here, it is important to note that the examples of Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Eastern Rumelia, and Egypt were most likely at the back of the minds of Ottoman policy makers. The governing elite in Istanbul also feared that reform and similar “concessions” might reinforce autonomist or secessionist tendencies and movements among Armenian communities, as well as other Christian populations within the empire such as Macedonians, Bulgarians, and Cretans. However, this does not mean that the Hamidian administration completely ignored Armenian and foreign demands and simply did nothing in the direction of implementing reform for the Six Provinces. As noted above, in mid-October 1895, the government in Istanbul introduced a reform package (a considerably revised version of the reform scheme imposed in May 1895) under renewed diplomatic pressures. When the government introduced the reform program and began to implement part of it as of late 1895, the Sultan, his advisers, and officials in the provinces were well aware of anti-reform sentiments among the local Muslim populations in the region. While implementing reform, the central and local government officials faced various dilemmas and challenges and, generally speaking, they had strong reservations to taking radical steps in the face of Muslim discontent as well as at the expense of Ottoman sovereignty. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the Hamidian regime viewed the loyalty of Sunni Muslims as the crucial backbone of the empire and was therefore extremely reluctant to adopt any measures that might alienate them. Indeed, this reluctance on the part of Ottoman policy-makers and government officials is extremely crucial to understand the most critical aspects of the “Armenian Question” and anti-Armenian violence in the late Ottoman Empire.

The opposition of many Muslims to reform was also a reaction to the Great Power diplomacy and European hegemony and encroachment in the nineteenth century. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, imperial competitions and

interstate disagreements always had a bearing on domestic communal relations in the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, local actors found it useful to cultivate good relations with resident foreign diplomats because these could help put pressure on the Ottoman provincial and central governments and thus further their own political agendas.³⁵ In the case of the “Armenian Question,” foreign pressures and overt intervention in Ottoman domestic politics by European imperial powers that endeavored to exercise political and economic domination over the empire contributed to antagonism between Armenians and Muslims, which expanded into widespread violent conflict at the turn of the century. Foreign involvement and the increasing reliance of representatives of the Armenian community on European intervention led to certain segments of the local Muslim populations’ deep resentment and mistrust of Armenians who were perceived as an unreliable population sponsored by foreign powers.

In fact, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman governing elite began to view the Armenians as a subversive population and a potential “fifth column” of European imperial powers—therefore an immediate threat to internal security and imperial unity warranting strict control. The political fears arising out of this “existential threat” manifested themselves in distinct anti-Armenian policies and violent practices, which left their imprint on the relations among officials, local Muslim populations, and the empire’s Armenian subjects in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Indeed, popular anti-Armenian sentiments cannot be attributed simply to spontaneous impulses of the local Muslim population. The government’s anti-Armenian discourses, policies, and practices fostered intergroup tensions and shaped official and popular attitudes toward Armenians. I suggest that the overwhelming security concerns and anti-Armenian policies of the government prepared the ground for the marginalization of the Armenians and the empowerment of Muslim notables and Kurdish chieftains at their expense, creating the asymmetrical power relations necessary for the emergence of a “climate of violence.” Consequently, official discourses, policies, and attitudes that marginalized the Armenian

³⁵ This is very much a consequence of a momentous shift in imperial politics that Christine Philliou locates in the reign of Mahmud II: Now the representatives of foreign imperial powers became crucial players in Ottoman domestic politics. See Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011). I would like to thank Dr. Thomas Kuehn for bringing this point to my attention.

population as “enemies of the state” in the first place left it increasingly vulnerable at the hands of those who masterminded, instigated, and perpetrated collective violence against Armenians in the 1890s.

Furthermore, the anti-Armenian outlook of the Hamidian regime not only contributed to the genesis of a violent sociopolitical climate in the empire’s eastern Anatolian provinces, but it also laid the foundations of a permissive context for collective violence by helping to create a culture of impunity and a powerful sense of justification for violence against Ottoman Armenians. Without understanding this permissive environment in which anti-Armenian violence was perceived by large segments of the local Muslim population as a legitimate and appropriate action, it is impossible to fully understand the making of the collective mass violence directed against Armenian civilians in the 1890s. As we shall discuss in Chapter 6, historical and contemporary episodes of collective violence of this nature and scale indicate that perpetrators commit such excessive crimes mostly with a sense of impunity and official approbation for their acts of violence. Indeed, according to Horowitz, most ethnic riots occur when, among other conditions and factors, the potential rioters feel that they can act free of punishment or retaliation and that what they are doing is right and proper. “The felt legitimacy of the action,” he argues, “is a powerful motivator of violence.”³⁶ On the eve of the riots, an increasingly anti-Armenian atmosphere made certain segments of the local Muslim population conclude that Armenians were no longer fully under the protection of the law and the authorities, therefore a vulnerable and convenient target. I argue that the Hamidian administration’s anti-Armenian discourses, policies, and measures, which contributed much to the formation of this atmosphere in the mid-1890s, gave the would-be perpetrators an underlying sense of impunity for and legitimacy of violence that enabled them to carry out the killing and looting free from fear of retribution and moral restraints.

Indeed, evidence drawn from Ottoman and foreign archival records clearly indicate that many of those who participated in anti-Armenian violence, believed, or pretended to believe, that killings and other crimes committed against Armenians were organized,

³⁶ See Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 326-31; 360.

ordered, or approved by the Sultan and his government. They supposed that they were doing what the government desired and therefore would not be punished by the Ottoman authorities for their acts. Throughout the fall of 1895, for instance, the legendary claims, or rather tales, to the effect that the Sultan issued a *ferman* (decree) permitting the killing and looting of his Armenian subjects easily found willing ears among Muslim masses, especially among many Kurdish tribes. In such an atmosphere, the central and local government authorities' handling of the riots during their initial stages reinforced the widespread popular conviction that the government itself encouraged and permitted anti-Armenian violence. Consequently, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, the wave of anti-Armenian massacres occurred when those who participated in these events concluded that violence against Armenians was *necessary, legitimate, appropriate, and fair game*.

Therefore, when describing the environment in which anti-Armenian riots occurred, it is important to address not only the immediate context and origins of these events but also a set of conditions and mechanisms that enabled and facilitated the collective violence against Armenians because it is less likely for intergroup hostility to transform into outright, widespread conflict without a set of powerful motivators, facilitators, and promoters of violent behavior. Consequently, this study places a great deal of emphasis on a number of aspects to explain the immediate causes, underlying factors, background conditions, and facilitating circumstances of anti-Armenian violence:³⁷

- A sense of loss of ascendancy, collective threat, and uncertainty (one of the most important underlying causes, which usually goes hand in hand with the exaggeration of the perceived threat).
- A sense of moral and “legal” distance towards Armenians (or the dehumanization of the victim as a necessary condition).
- A sense of the necessity, or even urgency, of violence (both a necessary condition and a powerful motivator).
- A sense of the righteousness, legitimacy, and appropriateness of violence (a fundamental stimulus, which usually varies with the degree of support or

³⁷ These aspects of the popular violence directed against Armenians in the 1890s relate to many elements, processes, and patterns characteristic of largescale ethnic riots as a historical and modern global phenomenon. In conceptualizing these aspects, my analysis has largely been informed by Horowitz's seminal work *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*.

approbation from the wider society for the action. As will be mentioned in the concluding chapter of this study, the reason for the lack of contrition on the part of Muslim perpetrators afterwards lies in the conviction that the violence was necessary and justified).

- A sense of impunity and official support or approval for violence (a significant factor encouraging participation in the collective action).
- Supportive, tolerant, negligent, indolent, or ineffective authorities and forces of law and order (a powerful motivator and facilitator). Whether or not the authorities are effective in handling the situation is also a key factor determining the incidence, scope, and intensity of violence.
- Absence of systematic use of maximum force against Muslim assailants.
- Lack of effective prosecution and severe punishment, which perpetuated an atmosphere that promoted violence against Armenians.

Within this context, a number of crucial variables determined the course of events as well as the duration, intensity, and severity of violence in each case. It is therefore imperative to adopt a sustained local perspective to account for these crucial aspects of anti-Armenian riots. As widely seen in historical and contemporary episodes of collective violence lumped together under the category of ethnic riots or ethno-religious violence, these variables in the case of anti-Armenian violence included: (1) the attitude of officials and socially powerful/authoritative figures such as Muslim notables and community leaders; (2) the level of organization and preparation for violence; (3) the dynamics and methods of mobilization; (4) the character of precipitating events; and, (5) various local contingencies.

1.5. Chapter Organization

This study is structured into an introduction, six main chapters, and a concluding discussion. In order to stage the immediate historical background of the violence, Chapter 2 addresses preconditions for intercommunal conflict and the factors that created a favorable context for violence. The first main part of Chapter 3 explains the developments that preceded and precipitated the wave of anti-Armenian riots and addresses the dynamics of escalation. The other main body of the chapter provides abundant documentation about the extent, geographic distribution, and nature of the violence, including a detailed analysis on the number of victims. Chapter 4 examines the official terminology, representations,

and narratives regarding the origins and nature of the riots to reveal how the government elites—both at central and local levels—justified, rationalized, and trivialized collective violence against Armenians. Chapter 5 makes an extensive investigation of government responses to the outbreak and spread of violence and provides substantial evidence against the narratives of official conspiracy and state-sponsorship. Centering on the question of official responsibility for the mass killings and vandalism, Chapter 6 reveals a set of government policies, attitudes, and actions that enabled collective violence to occur and spread. The chapter will also demonstrate how violence was incited, abetted, or facilitated by local officials, military commanders, and former members of the provincial administrative councils in a number of locations. Chapter 7 focuses on the authors, instigators, and actual perpetrators of anti-Armenian violence and analyzes their expressed or tacit concerns, motives, and behavior prior to and during the events to reflect better upon the foundations, dynamics, and rationales violence. While exploring these crucial aspects of the violence, each main chapter will provide detailed accounts of, or significant information, about the events that unfolded in a number of locations, including the imperial capital Istanbul (both in 1895 and 1896), Trabzon (Trabzon), Sivas (Sivas), Muş (Bitlis), Ankara (Ankara), Urfa (Aleppo), Tokad (Sivas), Amasya (Sivas), Bitlis (Bitlis), Malatya (Mamuretü'l-Aziz), and Diyarbakir (Diyarbakir). The main chapters do not contain a conclusion. Instead, each chapter's main findings and concluding remarks are woven into a general discussion presented in Chapter 8.

Chapter 2. Contextualizing the Violence: The Securitization of the Armenian Population and the “Climate of Violence” in the Ottoman Eastern Provinces, 1878-1894

2.1. Introduction

This chapter sketches the complex background against which intergroup tensions arose between Muslim and Armenian communities in the eastern provinces of Ottoman Anatolia and ultimately escalated into widespread episodes of mass killing and vandalism against a great number of civilian Armenians in the mid-1890s. It places intercommunal strife into the context of two fundamental factors that led to the emergence of a violent sociopolitical climate in the empire’s eastern Anatolian provinces: the internationalization of the “Armenian Question” and the state’s domestic security concerns and policies vis-à-vis the Ottoman Armenian population.

On the eve of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97, the majority of the Ottoman Armenian population lived in the provinces of Erzurum, Sivas, Mamuretü’l-Aziz (also known as Harput), Bitlis, Van, and Diyarbekir, a region referred to as the “Six Provinces.” Apart from these six provinces, known as the heartland of historical Armenia, and from the empire’s capital city Istanbul, the provinces of Trabzon, Ankara, Konya, Adana, and Aleppo retained substantial Armenian populations until the First World War. Also, smaller Armenian communities existed in various provincial centers and district towns in other parts of Anatolia, particularly in the provinces of Kastamonu, Hüdavendigâr, and Aydın. What became known as the “Armenian Question” emerged as a diplomatic term in the late 1870s, especially in the context of the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-78. The question had to do primarily with the presence in the empire’s eastern Anatolian provinces of a Christian Ottoman Armenian population whose representatives—namely, the Patriarchate, the Armenian National Assembly in Istanbul, and, later in the 1890s, the Armenian revolutionary parties—made a series of demands to the central government concerning local governance, security, and the administration of justice in this part of the empire. These demands included protection from the government against the depredations of

nomadic/semi-nomadic Kurds and Circassian communities (such as the seizure of livestock, plunder, and robbery) that targeted Armenian villagers, fairness in taxation, proportionate representation in local administration, and the introduction of Christian police and gendarmerie units into the provincial security forces. At the heart of the issue was the question of how the Armenian-populated provinces of East Anatolia ought to be governed, rather than the question of who ought to govern them. From the beginning, the fundamental assumption was that these sociopolitical and economic problems could be resolved through a program of internal reforms to be implemented by the Ottoman government under the oversight of European powers. From 1878 to 1914, the leading European powers, primarily Great Britain and Russia, pressed the Ottoman government at varying degrees for applying domestic reforms in order to improve the sociopolitical condition of the Christian Armenian population inhabiting the eastern provinces of the empire.³⁸

The emergence of the “Armenian Question” as a subject of international politics had far-reaching effects on political life, subject-formation, and intergroup relations in the eastern provinces amid the already existing tensions that arose from local socioeconomic conditions. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, one factor that contributed to a deteriorating security situation in the eastern provinces in the second half of the nineteenth century was the engagement of certain nomadic/semi-nomadic Kurdish tribal groups and Armenian peasants in an increasing struggle for the control of economic resources such as land and water. The Ottoman government’s relative weakness to regulate local conflicts in the region and its reluctance to protect Armenian peasant communities at the expense of

³⁸ For the historical background and development of the “Armenian Question” to 1915, with a particular focus on its international political aspects, see, among others, A. O. Sarkissian, *History of the Armenian Question to 1885* (Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 1938); Nancy Judges, “The British Attitude Towards the Armenian Question, 1878-1908” (MA thesis, McGill University, 1955); Vartan Suren Kasparian, “The Historical Roots of the Armenian Question, 1878–97,” (PhD diss., The University of Utah, 1977); Joseph Heller, “Britain and the Armenian Question, 1912-1914: A Study in Realpolitik,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (January 1980): 3-26; Salahi Ramsdan Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians: Victims of Great Power Diplomacy* (London, UK: K. Rustem & Brother, 1987), 27-108; Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism, and the Ottoman Armenians, 1878-1896* (London, UK: Frank Cass, 1993); Somakian, *Empires in Conflict*; Richard G. Hovannisian, “The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1876 to 1914,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. II: *Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, 203-238 (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Macmillan Press, 1997); Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*.

powerful Kurdish tribes provided preconditions for the continuation and escalation of conflict.

From the very beginning, foreign agency in the “Armenian Question” was a major source of irritation and apprehension not only for Ottoman officials but also for the Muslims outside the state apparatus, especially the elite and socially powerful segments of the local Muslim population such as landowners, merchants, ulema (Muslim scholars), tribal chieftains, and sheikhs, who deeply resented at the prospect of radical reform, autonomy, or independence for the Armenians backed by foreign powers. It is crucial to note that Ottoman Muslims also viewed these developments in light of events earlier that century, such as Serbian, Greek, or Bulgarian (nationalist) separatism that had at critical junctures been supported by several European imperial powers. Indeed, rather than historical animosities, anxieties about a possible loss of political control and dominance in East Anatolia governed popular Muslim reactions to the “Armenian Question.” Anti-foreign and anti-Armenian sentiments among Muslims heightened especially during periods of uncertainty, crisis, and change. Besides international pressure for “Armenian reforms,” various radicalized groups within and outside the empire began to form revolutionary organizations agitating for reform, autonomy, or outright independence for the Ottoman Armenians. With the formation of the Armenian revolutionary parties during the period from the mid-1880s to early 1890s, revolutionaries entered the political landscape as new agents who would transform the Armenian political thinking and the traditional mechanisms of negotiation between the government and the representatives of the Armenian community. Although the Armenian revolutionary committees operating in various parts of the empire did not amass widespread sympathy and support from local Armenians in the 1890s, the language and activities of the revolutionary-nationalist parties further complicated the relations among local Muslim populations, the empire’s Armenian subjects, and state actors in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The internationalization of the “Armenian Question” with the Berlin Congress of 1878 and the emergence of Armenian radicalism went hand in hand with the categorization of the empire’s Armenian subjects by the Ottoman political elite as an inherently suspect population and eventually as an existential threat to the security and unity of the empire.

In a nutshell, as numerous government documents indicate, the policy-makers at the Yıldız Palace and the Sublime Porte feared that demanded reforms might be a step in the direction of new “privileges,” autonomy, and eventually the loss of Ottoman/Muslim sovereignty in East Anatolia or in a certain portion of this region. The Hamidian administration and many Muslims also naturally regarded the intervention of foreign powers in the “Armenian affair” as an infringement upon Ottoman sovereignty. Anxious not to suffer territorial losses or concessions in Anatolia, a region that had become the empire’s heartland as a result primarily of the territorial losses caused by the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-78, the central government grew especially intolerant of Armenian national claims and political activism. Consequently, rising political concerns and fears surrounding the “Armenian Question” led to what I call “the securitization of the Armenian population.”³⁹ By “the securitization of Armenians,” I refer to the process by which almost the entire Armenian population was marked as a politically dangerous element and, therefore, became an object of the security concerns and practices of the Ottoman central government. This process had a significant impact on intercommunal relations at the local level as well as on the interactions between Armenians and Ottoman state actors.

Growing anti-Armenian discourse and representations on the part of Ottoman officials not only informed the government’s anti-Armenian policies but also dramatically shaped official and popular attitudes and behavior toward the empire’s Armenian subjects

³⁹ A growing literature attests to the fact that the concept of securitization has recently attracted considerable academic interest in security studies and the study of international relations. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver have first introduced the notion of securitization into international security studies, a sub-field of the study of international relations. For the concept, primarily see Ole Wæver, “Securitization and Desecuritization,” in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), 46-86; Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998). Within the context of the “Armenian Question,” Hakan Yavuz has first made use of the concept of securitization to explain the Hamidian administration’s reaction to Armenian revolutionary activities, arguing “the Armenian insurgency, which aimed to bring about European intervention, resulted in the securitization of the community during the reign of Abdülhamid II.” See M. Hakan Yavuz, “The Transformation of ‘Empire’ through Wars and Reforms: Integration vs. Oppression,” in *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, eds. M. Hakan Yavuz, with Peter Sluglett (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2011), 36. Earlier, I have mentioned the securitization of the Armenian population during the Hamidian period in a chapter in an edited volume in Turkish devoted to the Armenian genocide and its historical context (see Edip Gölbaşı, “1895–1896 Katliamları: Doğu Vilayetlerinde Cemaatler Arası ‘Şiddet İklimi’ ve Ermeni Karşıtı Ayaklanmalar,” in *1915: Siyaset, Tehcir ve Soykırım*, eds. Oktay Özel and Fikret Adanır (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015), 145). Unfortunately, by the time I completed that chapter, I had not yet read Yavuz’s this significant contribution to an important collection of articles on the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 and the Berlin Congress of 1878.

during the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. The security concerns, policies, and practices of the government helped to nurture an already growing dichotomous mindset—us versus them, Muslims versus Armenians/Christians—among the local populations, thereby enhancing intergroup polarization. Indeed, throughout the period here under study, particularly toward the mid-1890s, intercommunal relations in the Armenian-populated provinces became thoroughly politicized and fraught with friction. Furthermore, the Hamidian administration’s policy of empowering local Muslim powerholders such as members of notable families and Kurdish tribal chieftains vis-à-vis the “Armenian threat” largely shaped the dynamics of interactions between Muslim and Armenian communities during the period under scrutiny. The ways in which the Ottoman government sought to contain the “Armenian Question” not only bred the anti-Armenian feelings already existing among the local Muslim population but also rendered Armenians increasingly marginalized and vulnerable.

As a result, external and internal dimensions of the “Armenian Question” and the responses of state and non-state actors to the crises surrounding this question created fault lines between Armenian and Muslim Ottoman communities by intensifying competition for dominance and resources as well as by reinforcing communal boundaries. This chapter argues that a complex interplay of factors at different levels—namely, interstate competition, local socioeconomic complexities, popular apprehensions, and government policies—powerfully structured the context for the intergroup antagonism and conflict that transformed into widespread violence in the mid-1890s.

2.2. The Genesis of the “Armenian Question”

Singular attention to issues of ethnic/sectarian identity, schism, and conflict may overlook the underlying sociopolitical and economic origins of the “Armenian Question” (or anti-Armenian violence as well). Rather than being merely an “identity question,” or a “minority issue,” the “Armenian Question” was closely connected to the political and economic displacements caused by the nineteenth-century Ottoman state-building, fierce local struggles over economic resources, tax collection regimes, Muslim immigration to

Anatolia, and imperial rivalries.⁴⁰ To be brief, a number of factors combined to characterize the “Armenian Question” from 1878 to 1914 to varying degrees: (1) The conditions of socioeconomic life in the empire’s eastern provinces; (2) a reform agenda based on Armenian demands; (3) constant European involvement and intervention; (4) government incompetence and unwillingness; (5) emerging ideas of national self-awareness; and (6) Muslim backlash against the prospect of reforms for Armenians guaranteed by foreign powers.

As an integral part of the “Eastern Question,”⁴¹ the “Armenian Question” entered the realm of international diplomacy in the wake of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78. Following the armistice that ended the fighting in January 1878, the Russian and Ottoman empires signed the San Stefano Peace Treaty (*Ayastefanos Muahedesi*) on March 3, 1878. During the peace negotiations, Tsarist Russia dictated its own terms and, as the defeated party, the Ottoman Empire had to accept the harsh provisions of the treaty. The San Stefano Treaty established the independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Rumania (Romania) and created a large autonomous Bulgarian principality. According to the treaty, Bessarabia, Kars, Batum, Ardahan, Bayezid, and Eleşkird would be ceded to the Russian Empire. As the defeated party, the Ottoman government was also obliged to pay a significant war indemnity to Russia. It was the San Stefano Treaty that first brought the “Armenian Question” within the domain of interstate diplomacy as Article 16 of this treaty established:

“As the evacuation by the Russian troops of the territory which they occupy in Armenia, and which is to be restored to Turkey, might give rise to conflicts and complications detrimental to the maintenance of good relations between the two countries, the Sublime Porte engages to carry into effect, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces

⁴⁰ Several recent studies successfully document or discuss socioeconomic aspects of the “Armenian Question.” See, for instance, Arsen Yarman, *Palu-Harpüt 1878: Çarsancak, Çemişgezek, Çapakçur, Erzincan, Hizan ve Civar Bölgeler*, vol. 1: *Adalet Arayışı* (Istanbul: Derlem Yayınları, 2010); Klein, *The Margins of Empire*; Astourian, “Silence of the Land,”; Nadir Özbek, “The Politics of Taxation and the “Armenian Question” during the Late Ottoman Empire, 1876–1908,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 770–797; Cora, “Doğu’da Kürt-Ermeni Çatışmasının Sosyoekonomik Arka planı.”

⁴¹ The classical work on the so-called “Eastern Question” is M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1966).

inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security from Kurds and Circassians.”⁴²

This article of the treaty implied that the withdrawal of Russian troops from the occupied Ottoman territories was conditional on the introduction of Armenian reforms by the Ottoman government. Indeed, the representatives of other European powers were possibly concerned that the Russian forces would not leave the region until the execution of “improvements and reforms” by the government in Istanbul. The presence of Tsarist military forces might also open the doors for future Russian control over the region. No other European power was willing to assent to Russia being the guarantor of reforms to be executed in Ottoman East Anatolia.

It seems that after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, representatives of the Ottoman Armenian community sought to take advantages of the post-war political and diplomatic situation. Drawing on British Foreign Office reports, Arman J. Kirakossian writes that during the peace negotiations between the Russian and Ottoman empires, representatives of the Ottoman Armenian population in Istanbul held meetings with British and Russian embassy officials to demand autonomy for the Armenians. According to Kirakossian, Patriarch Nerses Varjabedian (1874-1884) told the British Ambassador at Istanbul, Sir Austen Henry Layard, that if the Great Powers failed to address the demands of Armenians, “they would appeal to Russia and fight until the whole of Armenia was annexed by Russia.” The patriarch had also expressed hope that the matter would be discussed in the peace conference and the Great Powers would support the creation of an autonomous Armenia.⁴³ The British government would, however, never support the idea of Armenian autonomy, which they regarded would contradict British interests in the Near East. Nor did the San Stefano Treaty give a satisfying answer to Armenian demands for change.

The objections of other European powers, particularly Britain and Austria-Hungary, to the provisions of the San Stefano Treaty, which would immensely increase

⁴² See “Preliminary Treaty of Peace between Russia and Turkey: Signed at San Stefano, February 9/ March 3, 1878,” *The American Journal of International Law* 2, no. 4, Supplement: Official Documents (October 1908), 396; Sir Edwin Pears, *Life of Abdul Hamid* (London, UK: Constable & Company Ltd., 1917), 218; Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, 67.

⁴³ Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, 67-68.

Russian power and influence in the Balkans and East Anatolia, led to the Congress of Berlin (June 13–July 13, 1878), where the representatives of Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany (Prussia), Italy, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire assembled to settle the post-war situation under the auspices of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.⁴⁴ Delegates from Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, and Greece also attended those congress sessions that concerned their own states or regions. The Ottoman First Plenipotentiary at the Berlin Congress was Aleksandır Karatodori (Alexander Karatheodori) Pasha, a member of the distinguished Greek Phanariot Karatodori (Karatheodori) family. The Russian Empire was represented by a delegation led by Pyotr Andreyevich Shuvalov although Foreign Minister Alexander Gorchakov nominally held the post of first plenipotentiary at Berlin. By the end of the congress, Russia consented to major revisions of the terms of the San Stefano Treaty. The Berlin Treaty of 1878 confirmed the independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Rumania, while creating a much smaller Bulgarian principality under nominal Ottoman sovereignty. The Russian government also accepted to return Bayezid and Eleşkird districts to the Ottoman Empire, while other territorial gains made by Russia were confirmed.

As many authors have already pointed out, the “Armenian Question” became a subject of international politics with the Congress of Berlin. Before the congress was convened, an Armenian delegation led by Archbishop Mıgırdıç Kırımıyan (Mkrtich Khrimian), the former Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, who would be the Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin from 1893 until his death in 1907, had already visited the capitals of Britain, France, and Italy in order to obtain support from these European powers for Armenian demands. The Armenian delegation was not, however, allowed to participate in the sessions of the Berlin Congress. Instead, the delegates presented to the Congress a memorandum concerning the implementation of reforms in the Armenian-populated provinces and the safeguard of Armenian peasants from depredations of neighboring Kurdish communities. The Berlin Congress, however, created a real disappointment for the

⁴⁴ For a diplomatic history of the Berlin Congress of 1878, see William N. Medlicott’s classical work: *The Congress of Berlin and After: A Diplomatic History of the Near Eastern Settlement, 1878–1880*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Frank Cass & Co., 1963). A recent edited volume sheds light on the congress’s impacts on the Ottoman Empire: M. Hakan Yavuz, with Peter Sluglett, eds., *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2011).

Armenian delegation and the representatives of the community in Istanbul. After the Russo-Ottoman war, Armenian community leaders and the members of the National Assembly in Istanbul had hoped for some form of administrative autonomy and increased security for the Ottoman Armenians guaranteed by the Great Powers. The Berlin Congress, on the other hand, only modified Article 16 of the San Stefano Treaty, leaving the supervision of the implementation of reforms for the Armenian-populated provinces to the Powers. Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin reads:

“The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by 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.”⁴⁵

The Berlin Treaty also obliged the Russian government to withdraw its troops from the occupied territories in the Ottoman eastern provinces targeted for Armenian reforms. As a result of the Congress, the Great Powers assumed collective responsibility for the supervision of the implementation of reforms. The necessary reforms were to be implemented by the Hamidian administration itself, while the European powers reserved the right to supervise them. The Ottoman government was required to regularly report to the representatives of the Great Powers on achieved progress in the implementation of reforms.

Before the meeting of European politicians/diplomats in Berlin, the British and Ottoman governments also signed a secret agreement known as the Cyprus Convention on June 4, 1878, several days after Britain and Russia agreed on the final boundary settlement regarding the Russian and Ottoman border in the east. With the convention, the British Empire acquired the strategically important island of Cyprus and, in return, undertook to defend the Ottoman Empire by force of arms if Russia refused to withdraw from the eastern

⁴⁵ See, among many other sources quoting this article of the treaty, Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation*, revised 2nd ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 1990), 115; Hovannisian, “The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire,” 210; Yavuz, “The Transformation of ‘Empire’ through Wars and Reforms,” 43.

Anatolian provinces or in the face of further Russian aggression or incursion against this region. In exchange for British guarantees against Russia, the Sultan also promised to introduce reforms necessary for a better administration and improved security in the empire's eastern provinces.⁴⁶ The agreement, which was made public towards the end of the Berlin Congress, allowed the British not only to occupy Cyprus as a military base but also to have further influence over the Ottoman Empire. As many observers have noted, throughout the long nineteenth century, overall British policy in the Near East was to maintain the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, where possible, and to prevent other European powers, above all Russia and France, from gaining substantial influence over and privileges from it. After the crisis in the Balkans and the ensuing Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78, the British government was especially concerned about Russia's further encroachment into Anatolia since the expansion of Russian influence in the Balkans and Asia Minor was regarded as detrimental to British interests in the region stretching from the Mediterranean to India, the backbone of Britain's imperial edifice. British policymakers and Foreign Office officials were sincere in their pressures on the Ottoman government for internal reforms designed to remedy the conditions of its Christian populations as well as to modernize the governance of the empire because they believed a militarily strong and internally cohesive Ottoman Empire would better serve their interests in the Near East. At one level, Britain's political leaders may also have sympathized with their Armenian co-religionists and may have also considered these policies as an important way to secure the support of large sections of the British electorate who tended to do the same.

It was in this context that the British government addressed the "Armenian Question" and negotiated with the Hamidian administration over the socioeconomic conditions of the provinces inhabited by the empire's Armenian subjects. From 1878 to the early 1890s, Britain was almost the sole power that conducted negotiations with the Ottoman government over the content, scope, and execution of reforms to be introduced in the six major Armenian-populated provinces of the empire. British officials insisted that the enforcement of the provisions of the treaty by the Sublime Porte was an obligation. The

⁴⁶ Walker, *Armenia*, 114-15.

British government also opened consulates in several parts of the eastern provinces and requested the consuls to regularly report about the condition of their districts, government policies, and relations among Christian communities, Muslims, and local officials. Despite negotiations between the Ottoman and British governments, the former took no serious steps to enforce the provisions of Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty until the mid-1890s. The implementation of internal reforms was regularly deflected and delayed, if not entirely ignored, by the Hamidian administration. As a result, from 1878 to 1895, almost nothing was carried out and, therefore, no serious improvement took place in the condition of Ottoman Armenian communities.

Interstate rivalries and competing imperial interests were always at the heart of the “Armenian Question.” In an age of aggressive imperialism and emerging national movements, the grievances and discontents of the empire’s non-Muslim communities quickly became a subject of international politics. Indeed, from the early nineteenth century to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, European powers, particularly Britain, France, and Russia, systematically used “minority problems” as a pretext for interference in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman Empire. However, it is equally important to note that the Ottoman ruling elite itself provided the conditions favorable for the increasing foreign influence and intervention by failing to properly address the problems of Christian populations that gained a momentum in the mid-nineteenth century, as well as by appealing to one European power against another in order to survive, as was the case during the Crimean War and its aftermath. Indeed, following the Treaty of Paris (1856), the principles of the Concert of Europe gave Britain and France the right to secure and oversee reforms for the Ottoman Empire’s Christian subject populations.

The Berlin Treaty played a significant role in shaping government policies in the Russian-Ottoman borderlands and fundamentally changed the relations between the Hamidian administration and its Armenian subjects in the subsequent years. As we shall see below, the government became more suspicious of the loyalty of its Armenian subjects and started to regard the “Armenian Question” as one of the thorny issues destabilizing the empire. Yet the Sultan and his government carried on negotiating with foreign powers over

reform throughout the 1880s and early 1890s. After the Berlin Congress, representatives of the Armenian community continued to appeal to the European powers for the solution of their problems. Moreover, although they kept directing their pleas regularly to the Sublime Porte and the palace through established bureaucratic channels, Armenian community leaders in Istanbul and the provinces relied much more on the representatives of foreign states than their own government. It is possible to say that along this process, Armenians became alienated from the Ottoman system to a certain extent.

The involvement of the Great Powers, particularly Britain and Russia, in the “Armenian Question” and their interference on behalf of the Christian Armenian population also aroused much resentment and increasing jealousy among the Muslim populations. Indeed, the unprecedented degree of intervention by foreign powers in Ottoman domestic political affairs, on the one hand, and the indifference of the Great Powers to the fate and condition of Muslim populations, on the other, had a great impact on the reconfiguration of intercommunal relations, particularly the relations between Muslim and Christian communities, in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Many Muslims, elites as well as non-elites, perhaps felt that the Europeans were conspiring to undermine the empire and the rights of its Muslim subjects. Also, as scholars of Ottoman history often note, conservative segments of the Muslim population (above all the Islamic clergy) had already resented the *Tanzimat* notion of legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims and the *Tanzimat* state’s promise to abolish the symbolic distinction between these communities and to consider Muslims and non-Muslims equal before the law, which found official expression in the Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermanı*) of 1856.⁴⁷ Although the vast majority of the empire’s Muslim populations never enjoyed a superior and privileged status in their daily lives and shared similar socioeconomic problems with their non-Muslim neighbors, the ideals of Muslim-non-Muslim equality before the law held by the *Tanzimat* state under perceived European influence were certainly unpopular among Muslim elements. There is reason to suggest that Muslim elites and the ulema feared that they were losing their perceived dominant and privileged political position vis-à-vis non-

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 100.

Muslims. Perhaps, they also felt that the new political order in the empire and continuous foreign intervention laid the groundwork for granting Christian communities special protection, rights, and privileges that Muslims were never endowed with.

The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, the Berlin Congress, and the disintegration of large Christian communities from the empire following that war reinforced these negative perceptions and contributed to the growing asymmetry between the empire's Muslim and Christian communities although this asymmetry did not directly produce violent conflict on quotidian experiences. Separatist manifestations on the part of Christian communities and the increasing deployment of ethnicity as a mode of classification by European powers, particularly during and after the Berlin Congress, created broader communal or ethnic consciousness and closer attention to communal boundaries in the empire. Challenges to the imperial Ottoman rule based on diverse socioeconomic problems became increasingly ethnicized and entangled with the national idea or the ethnic principle, that is, the idea that the borders of the state should correspond to ethnographic categories. The Berlin Congress, in particular, played a significant role in the dissemination of novel population categories and emergent ideas of self-determination and self-government among the empire's non-Muslim communities.⁴⁸ Consequently, it is safe to suggest that all these developments hardened intercommunal relations and contributed to the flaring up of ethnic and sectarian tensions in the second half of the nineteenth century.

2.3. The Elaboration of Ideas of National Belonging and the Formation of Armenian Revolutionary Parties

Several weeks after he returned to Istanbul from the Berlin Congress, Archbishop Kırımian delivered a series of sermons in which he complained about what he perceived as the abandonment of Armenians by representatives of the Great Powers who only offered platitudinous advices and promises. According to historians of Armenia and Armenian political organizations, in his speeches, the archbishop contrasted the methods of Serbs,

⁴⁸ See Yavuz and Sluglett, eds., *War and Diplomacy*, especially chapters 1 (by M. Hakan Yavuz), 8 (by Aydın Babuna), 9 (by İsa Blumi), 11 (by Brad Dennis), and 15 (Justin McCarthy), which make crucial points and present convincing arguments on the far-reaching effects of the Berlin Treaty of 1878.

Montenegrins, and Bulgarians to gain independence or autonomy from Ottoman rule with those of Armenians. He implied that the “liberation” of several Christian communities in the Balkans was owing to their resort to armed struggle and resistance against Ottoman rule, while Armenians only had useless petitions and papers submitted to representatives of the European powers at the Berlin Congress. In other words, despite misadministration, violence, and abuse at the hand of neighboring tribes and officials, Armenians had remained nonviolent, applying to European Great Powers for some form of administrative autonomy without using force. In Kırımyan’s metaphorical description, as opposed to the Armenian “paper spoon,” Balkan revolutionaries had used their “iron spoons” to eat from the “Dish of Liberty” placed at the table in Berlin.⁴⁹

Emphasizing Kırımyan’s role in the “radicalization of Armenian thinking” following the Berlin Congress, Panossian argues that the message of his speeches “reoriented Armenian nationalism toward a new and revolutionary direction, and pervaded the very essence of Armenianness, imbuing collective identity with an unprecedented sense of national purpose.”⁵⁰ It would, however, be misleading to establish a direct link between Kırımyan’s ideas and the launching of armed struggle by Armenian revolutionary organizations in the early 1890s—a link that the mainstream Turkish historiography has readily claimed. Yet historians of Armenia emphasize that Kırımyan certainly represented a mental shift among the Ottoman Armenian leadership and helped the development of a sense of collective belongingness and destiny. His close attention to the conditions of the local Armenian population in the provinces, particularly those of the Armenian peasantry, and his struggle for the improvement of these conditions attest to change both in Armenian political thought and in elite attitudes toward provincial Armenian communities.

Indeed, from the 1860s on, the Patriarch and Armenian elites at the Ottoman capital began to devote a particular attention to the conditions of the Armenian peasantry. The

⁴⁹ See Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1963), 28-29; Walker, *Armenia*, 117-118; Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London, UK: Hurst & Company, 2006), 172.

⁵⁰ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 172. On Kırımyan and his role in the formation of a collective consciousness and a sense of national identity, see *ibid.*, 167-175.

Armenian National Assembly, which was stipulated by the granting of the Armenian National Constitution/Regulations (*Nizamname-i Millet-i Ermeniyân* in Ottoman Turkish; *Azkayin Sahmanatrutyun Hayots* in Armenian)⁵¹ by the Sublime Porte in 1863, focused its attention on provincial Armenian communities, particularly from the 1870s onward. The Patriarchate of Istanbul and the Armenian National Assembly sent representatives to the eastern provinces to investigate and report on the socioeconomic conditions and grievances of the Armenian peasantry inhabiting the region.⁵²

Throughout the nineteenth century, growing Armenian capital derived from trade and industry in key sectors, increasing contacts with Europe, administrative and legal reform efforts within the Ottoman bureaucracy, and the influence of modern political ideas such as nationalism and constitutionalism led to a gradual political, cultural, and intellectual transformation of the urban and educated segments of the Armenian community within and outside the empire.⁵³ Although the “Armenian Question” did not emerge as a pure “nationality problem” raised by organizations or intellectuals with a strong nationalist drive, it was nevertheless closely connected to, and shaped by, such intracommunity developments as (1) the establishment of the Armenian National Assembly in Istanbul; (2) the expansion of lay authority as a result of gradual secularization; (3) the burgeoning of nationalistic/patriotic sentiments; and (4) the birth of a renewed interest in the Armenian language (particularly the vernacular Armenian language [*ashkharabar*]), history, and folklore among the educated classes of the Armenian population such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, merchants, and bureaucrats, who began to

⁵¹ Although the Sublime Porte officials did not designate it as a constitution (there was no “constitutional vocabulary” at the time) but as a “*nizamname*” (regulations), Armenian community leaders and intellectuals who drafted this legal text called it *sahmanatrutyun*, a word used as an equivalent of the term “constitution” in its modern sense. Indeed, it functioned as a community constitution. See Aylin Koçunyan, “Long Live Sultan Abdülaziz, Long Live the Nation, Long Live the Constitution...” in *Constitutionalism, Legitimacy, and Power: Nineteenth-Century Experiences*, eds. Kelly L. Grotke and Markus J. Prutsch (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 189-210. For the Armenian National Constitution and the National Assembly, also see Vartan Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1863: A Study of Its Historical Development* (Istanbul: V. Artinian?, 1988).

⁵² For reports drawn up by Armenian priests Vahan Bardizaktsi, Boğos Natanyan, and Karekin Sirvantsdyants, who were sent by the patriarchate to several regions in East Anatolia, for instance, see Arsen Yarman, ed., *Palu-Harput 1878: Çarsancak, Çemişgezek, Çapakçur, Erzincan, Hizan ve Civar Bölgeler*, vol. 2: *Raporlar*, trans. Arsen Yarman and Sirvart Malhasyan (Istanbul: Derlem Yayınları, 2010). On these reports, see Yarman, *Palu-Harput 1878*.

⁵³ For a general account of these transformations, see Panossian, *The Armenians*, 128–187.

develop a collective sense of identity, community, and national purpose from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Although the vast majority of the Armenian population inhabiting the empire's eastern provinces kept their traditional way of living as peasant families and town dwellers of modest substance, such as artisans, craftspeople, and small traders, Armenian communities in larger urban centers, both in the Ottoman Empire and Russia became more exposed to notions of nationhood, secularism, political liberty, and citizenship in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As a result, the modernization of politics and society in the empire, the relative democratization of intracommunity relations, the spread of the "national idea" throughout Europe as the prominent political force, and a cultural revival movement laid the groundwork for the growth of national consciousness and patriotic imaginations among Armenian intellectuals, urban middle classes, and even some clergymen. For a long time, however, these educated urbanites saw no contradiction between their pride in what they perceived as a revived Armenian nation and loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and its ruling dynasty.

As was the case with other nationalist constructions, the conscious efforts made by Armenian intellectuals, teachers, and literati played a significant role in the gradual spread of the idea of an Armenian nation (as an ethnic community dispersed within the Ottoman, Russian, and Persian empires) and discourses of "national liberation" at a time demands for self-governance, autonomy, and independence on the part of various Christian communities within the empire, especially in the Balkans, were on rise.⁵⁴ It should, however, be noted that nationalist narratives, aspirations, and programs spread very slowly among the empire's provincial Armenian communities. Also, emerging ideas of nationhood and national liberation among various classes of the Ottoman Armenian community did not develop into a separatist Armenian nationalism until the late 1880s. Nor did they gain universal acceptance among Ottoman Armenians. The Patriarch and the National Assembly still hoped for reforms to be guaranteed by foreign support rather than an independent Armenian state. Indeed, it was not until the early 1890s that young,

⁵⁴ On the development of the idea of an Armenian nation and of the language of nationalism among Armenian intellectuals, see, among others, Panossian, *The Armenians*, 147-200; Ronald Grigor Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 64-83.

radicalized Armenians became involved in revolutionary activities within organizational frameworks similar to those of the Russian revolutionary populist movement and secret revolutionary-nationalist parties in the Balkans.

Scholars of Armenian history have often argued that the failure of the Armenian Patriarch, “reformist” Armenian community leaders, and of European governments to urge the Hamidian administration to implement reforms designed to remedy the conditions of the empire’s Armenian subjects facilitated appeal to revolution and resistance among young Armenians influenced by revolutionary-nationalist and socialist ideas. Especially in the 1890s, radicalized segments of the population felt that the Armenian people had been abandoned by the Great Powers, who they believed failed to put enough pressure on the Ottoman government to meet the demands of Armenians, although even more radical revolutionaries would continue to look to foreign governments and evoke their intervention on behalf of Ottoman Armenians until the First World War. Small groups of young revolutionary activists also accused the Patriarch of inaction, incompetence, or even cowardice. Indeed, the formation of Armenian revolutionary parties in the late 1880s was a challenge not only to the government but also to the traditional power of the Armenian church and the established Armenian elites in Istanbul and the provinces.

Several clandestine Armenian groups had been formed in such localities as Erzurum and Van since the early 1870s. They were not, however, large, well-organized revolutionary organizations and most of these local groups tended to die out soon after they were uncovered by the Ottoman police authorities. Also, none of these grouplets had clear ideological orientations, political programs, or action plans beyond the mobilization for self-defense against Kurdish assailants and the call for the “salvation” of Armenians. They seem to have had a little sense of direction as to how liberation and salvation could be achieved. Nor did these local Armenian organizations aim to establish an independent Armenian state.⁵⁵

From the mid-1880s to the early 1890s, various small Armenian groups within the empire and abroad began to formulate or adopt clearer, more mature, and more ambitious

⁵⁵ For these early Armenian secret societies, see Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 81-89.

revolutionary ideas, forms of organization, and political programs that included demands for internal reform, autonomy, or outright independence from the empire. Three main Armenian revolutionary organizations came into existence during this period: the Armenakan Society formed directly by a group of Ottoman Armenians in Van in 1885, the Hunchakian movement (later to be called Hunchakian Revolutionary Party) established by a group of young Russian Armenians in Geneva in 1887, and the Dashnaksutyun (later the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF) founded in Tiflis in 1890. These three parties represented the radicalization of Armenian politics and the gradual spread of revolutionary ideas among Armenian youths in Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and, to some extent, Persia. Yet in terms of ideological premises, ultimate political objectives, and revolutionary tactics, the programs of these parties varied widely.⁵⁶ It is also important to note that the party programs changed over time and they were fraught with a wide range of ambiguities, paradoxes, and contradictions. Naturally, actual political practices were not always derived from the party programs or the ideological premises of the founding leaders.

As a secret revolutionary organization that advocated self-government for Armenia to be achieved through violent action, the Armenakan Society remained mainly as a local movement operating in the province of Van until the early 1900s. With the formation of the two other parties, the number of its members and sympathizers had already begun to drop as of the mid-1890s. The Armenakans were the most active revolutionary group during the armed uprising and clashes in the city of Van in June 1896. Of the three, only

⁵⁶ It would not be an exaggeration to note that a full history of Armenian revolutionary movements and their activists as agents of Ottoman and Armenian history drawing on both Ottoman and Armenian sources has not yet been written. It is also important to note that part of the existing literature on the Armenian revolutionary parties in the Ottoman and Russian empires has been written by party members or sympathizers themselves. Like Ottoman government documents and police reports, such accounts tend to depict the Armenian revolutionary movements as more coherent, more organized, and more powerful than they might have been in the 1890s. For the ideology, program, strategies, and organizational structures of the Armenian revolutionary parties in the nineteenth century, see, primarily, Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*; Anahide Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement, 1887-1912*, trans. A. M. Berrett (Cambridge, MA: Zoryan Institute, 1984); Hratch Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation: Dashnaksutiun, 1890-1924* (Milan: Oemme Edizioni, 1990); Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), especially chapter 4, 5, and 6; idem, "What Was Revolutionary about Armenian Revolutionary Parties in the Ottoman Empire?" in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 82–112; Panossian, *The Armenians*, 200–228.

the Hunchaks claimed to be a political party with an explicit socialist agenda and initially pursued outright independence through revolutionary action and armed struggle. The party aimed to establish a federal socialist republican state in the long run. The founders of the Hunchakian Party, several Caucasian Armenian students who moved to Europe to study and began to publish the newspaper *Hunchak* (Bell) in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1887, were influenced both by Russian populism (specifically the ideas of the nineteenth-century Russian thinker Alexander Herzen) and an adapted version of Marxism. The other two parties adopted class-based political discourses and advocated social democratic principles as well since, as already mentioned above, the “Armenian Question” was directly related to the sufferings of Armenian peasants (the so-called “agrarian question”) as well as because the leaders of these parties were influenced by and large by radical, populist movements in Russia. What later became the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (also referred to as the Dashnak Party and the Dashnaks) emerged originally as an umbrella organization composed of various Armenian revolutionary groups and societies of different political orientations in Tiflis, the then cultural, intellectual, and political center of Russian Armenians. The Hunchaks initially agreed to join this broad coalition of Armenian revolutionary groups, but ideological and political disagreements led to the dissolution of the coalition. By 1892, the Dashnak organization had transformed into a distinct party with bureaus, committees, and local branches operating in Russia, the Ottoman Empire, various European capitals and major cities, and the United States. Rather than pursuing outright independence, the ARF leadership prioritized what they regarded as the emancipation/liberation of Ottoman Armenia through insurgency and rebellion. The Dashnak leadership and activists claimed to be the representatives and defenders of the entire Armenian nation, whose freedom, security, and welfare must be achieved through a systemic change. As many observers have noted, the ARF leadership adopted more pragmatic programs, stances, and tactics that enabled them to have a wider appeal from different segments of the Armenian communities within the three empires and abroad. Although the party was nominally a socialist one, the Dashnak leadership nevertheless subordinated socialism to the issue of national liberation. From the mid-1890s onward, the Dashnaks became the most influential Armenian political party in the Ottoman Empire and Russia, a status that they would continue to assume throughout the next several decades.

Following a split in the party in 1896, the Hunchaks, which had succeeded in recruiting a considerable membership within a few years, became a smaller and less effective revolutionary organization resorting to individual acts of violence within Ottoman territories. Both the Hunchaks and Dashnaks openly advocated the use of violence, armed struggle, and acts of “terror” (a word employed by the revolutionaries themselves) for attaining political ends. They also aimed to bring about European diplomatic and military intervention that they believed would facilitate Armenians’ struggle for change and freedom. Acts of violence were often meant to provoke violent measures of the Ottoman government and its supporters, which the revolutionaries hoped would then prompt the intervention of one or several of the European imperial powers. As already implied above, reliance on foreign intervention constituted an important aspect of the Ottoman Armenian revolutionary parties’ strategic considerations.⁵⁷

As a matter of fact, these revolutionary groups agitating for reform, freedom, autonomy, or independence for the Ottoman Armenians organized committees, established local branches, and formed small armed bands, initially composed of young Armenians from Caucasus, to advance revolutionary work within the empire. Beyond issues of ideology, program, and strategy, we still know little about the nature and extent of their organizational work and revolutionary activities on the ground. Yet it is clear that coordinated revolutionary initiatives undertaken by members of the Hunchak and Dashnak parties included distributing party literature and newspapers published outside the empire, stockpiling arms (specifically in the Van region), spreading revolutionary propaganda, forming self-defense detachments and training people for self-defense, arming peasants, and threatening or assassinating individuals who they considered government informants, traitors, corrupt officials, usurers, and oppressors. Armed revolutionary action against

⁵⁷ The discussion above on the Armenakan, Hunchak, and Dashnak movements is largely based on the following studies on the history, activities, and tactics of these organizations: Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*; Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation*; Panossian, *The Armenians*, 200-228; Libaridian, “What Was Revolutionary about Armenian Revolutionary Parties.”

individuals targeted traditional Armenian elites, wealthier segments of the Armenian community, and informants more than government officials and Kurdish chiefs.⁵⁸

Although all the founding leaders of the Hunchakian Party were born outside of the Ottoman Empire, shortly after the formation of the party, the Hunchaks concentrated their efforts exclusively on Ottoman Armenia and formed their first branches in Trabzon and Istanbul. The Hunchakian Party was particularly active and well-organized in recruiting and mobilizing members in the Ottoman Empire from 1890 to 1896, organizing demonstrations in urban centers, disseminating revolutionary literature, and seeking to train Armenian village communities for self-defense in several regions like Sasun and Zeytun. In the early 1890s, the Hunchaks began to increase their activity in central Anatolian cities such as Merzifon, Amasya, Çorum, Sivas, Kayseri, and Yozgat, where their party committees sought to create revolutionary networks and the means for institutionalization that was intended to enable the party members to assume some local government responsibilities in the long run. In early 1893, the Hunchakists undertook a bold, coordinated action in a few cities by placing placards on public walls and buildings addressed directly to Muslims. In line with the party's socialistic discourse, the Hunchaks' anti-regime placards claimed that the government oppressed Muslims and Christians alike and called for Muslims everywhere to rebel against their oppressors. The Hunchakist networking and propaganda activity and the "placard affair" resulted in widespread arrests and trials that same year. In 1892, an Istanbul-born Hunchak member, Mihran Damadyan, went to the Muş plains in the province of Bitlis and then to the district of Sasun (Bitlis) to organize Armenian peasants and mountaineers for armed collective action against Kurdish *aghas* and government officials. In Sasun's mountainous villages, Damadyan sought to stockpile weapons and form peasant self-defense units. The central and local government authorities considered the arrival of revolutionary agents, notwithstanding their small number, in a region like Sasun's mountain villages to be especially dangerous because, despite their best efforts to increase government control and administrative capacity in the provinces from the 1830s onward, the extent of governmental authority over this

⁵⁸ For these initiatives, see Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*; Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation*; Panossian, *The Armenians*, 200-228; Libaridian, "What Was Revolutionary about Armenian Revolutionary Parties."

mountainous area, difficult to access and almost untouched by regular government supervision for many years, was strictly limited and its Armenian and Kurdish inhabitants had a history of challenging government officials and engaging in local conflicts.⁵⁹

Notwithstanding the coherence, strength, and menacing power attributed to the Armenian revolutionary parties in official Ottoman accounts, the revolutionaries' popular appeal was quite limited. Even a cursory glance at detailed foreign consular reports and American missionary accounts from the eastern provinces reveals that the vast majority of the Armenian population in the empire's eastern Anatolian borderlands remained cold or indifferent toward revolutionary agitation and that the committees did not find a supportive environment among local Armenian communities across Anatolia. There was also considerable fear of and opposition to revolutionary politics from various segments of the local Armenian population. However, as will be mentioned in the following section of this chapter, the Hamidian administration and Muslim elites considered revolutionary committees a serious challenge to the imperial order and grew increasingly suspicious of Armenian links to subversion. The presence of revolutionary groups stockpiling arms and ready to use violence in order to achieve their political goals not only further agitated many Muslims but also increased the willingness to use violence by encouraging many local Muslims to think that violence was necessary and acceptable because, among other reasons, they were facing opponents who were themselves willing and able to use violence.

2.4. The Securitization of the Armenian Population

Sultan Abdülhamid II ascended to the throne at the deposition of his mentally unstable brother, Murad V, shortly after the outbreak of a series of popular anti-government

⁵⁹ An emergent, promising literature is shedding more light on local Armenian revolutionary activities. On the Hunchak networking and propaganda activity in Central Anatolia and on the so-called "placard affair," see Toygun Altıntaş, "The Placard Affair and the Ankara Trial: The Hunchak Party and the Hamidian Regime in Central Anatolia, 1892–93," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4, no. 2 (November 2017): 309-337. For typical examples of Turkish historiography on the "placard affair" and the resultant prosecutions, see Ahmet Kolbaşı, *1892–1893 Ermeni Yafta Olayları (Merzifon-Yozgat-Kayseri)* (Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2011); Zeynep İskefiyeli, "Ermeni Meselesi Çerçevesinde 1893 Ankara Mahkemelerinin Yeri ve Önemi," (PhD diss., Sakarya University, 2008). For a recent study of the Hunchaks in Istanbul and Sasun, see Ketsemanian, "Communities in Dispute." On Hunchakist activity in the Muş and Sasun regions, also see McCarthy, Turan, and Taşkiran, *Sasun*; Miller, "Sasun 1894."

uprisings in various parts of the empire's Balkan provinces, which produced a severe political crisis and culminated in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78. The new Sultan's armies suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Russian military forces. During the war, many contemporary observers even believed that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of breakdown. As a result, the Ottoman Empire lost much of its territories in the Balkans and was forced to accept the Russian occupation of parts of northeastern Anatolia after the war, while being also required to pay a huge war indemnity. The catastrophic experience of the Russian-backed revolts in the Balkans and the ensuing disastrous war with Russia—the traditional enemy of the empire since the early 1700s—would remain fresh in the minds of Ottoman policy-makers at the palace and the Sublime Porte during subsequent decades. Specifically, the rise of nationalistic, centrifugal movements demanding self-rule or independence and the significant territorial losses in the Balkans made the Hamidian administration more suspicious of the loyalty of the remaining Christian populations—primarily Bulgarians, Macedonians, Greeks, and Armenians—to the empire and its Muslim majority. Generally speaking, throughout his reign, Sultan Abdülhamid II and his government's primary objective was to maintain the empire's independence and territorial integrity in the face of (1) growing European economic and military encroachments; (2) nationalist/centrifugal claims and movements within the empire; and (3) the activities of Christian, most notably American protestant, missionary organizations stationed in various parts of the empire.⁶⁰

Importantly, the policy-makers at the palace and the Sublime Porte considered the “Armenian Question” to be more challenging and more dangerous than the aspirations of Serbian or Bulgarian separatist nationalists earlier during the nineteenth century because it was related to Anatolia, the very heart of the empire that had become even more crucial as a result of the vast territorial losses in the so-called Ottoman Europe since the early nineteenth century. Indeed, a letter (*tezkiye*) from the office of the Grand Vizier to the Palace, dated 2 September 1893, highlighted the danger posed by the “Armenian Question” by suggesting that, unlike the Bulgarian and Serbian questions, “the Armenian affair is a

⁶⁰ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 1999) and Kieser, *Iskalanmış Barış* well explain why the Hamidian administration considered missionaries as a threat.

major problem that might lead, God forbid!, to foreign intervention in [a matter involving] Anatolia, which is the cradle of the Eternal Sublime State” (i.e., the place of origin of the Ottoman Empire).⁶¹ At times, the imperial administrators and military commanders referred to the “Armenian Question” as the “Anatolian question.” In fact, given that Ottoman Armenian communities were dispersed all over central and eastern Anatolia without constituting a population majority in any of the Six Provinces, the establishment of an autonomous or independent Armenia, as Benjamin Fortna points out, would have caused “a major demographic upheaval.”⁶² In other words, the uneven distribution of Armenian communities throughout the eastern provinces—one of the most important and challenging aspects of the “Armenian Question”—made the Ottoman government more concerned and anxious about Armenian demands and their struggle for greater freedom and rights. It is safe to suggest that this official concern had a significant impact on the attitude and policies of the government toward the Armenians at the end of the nineteenth century.

While the Ottoman central government acknowledged that there were serious problems in the administration and security of the Six Provinces, they were nevertheless convinced that the grievances of Armenian communities were exaggerated and misrepresented by foreigners. For the Sultan and his senior policy makers, the “Armenian Question” was a political issue inflated, manipulated, and exploited by the European powers, first and foremost Britain and Russia, and by the seditious segments of the Armenian population who were in active collaboration with malicious foreigners in undermining the empire’s security and unity. Virtually hundreds of official reports and memoranda also demonstrate that the Hamidian administration believed that American Protestant missionaries and their educational institutions in the eastern provinces gave rise

⁶¹ See BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 32/94, 21 S. 1311 (3 September 1893). Summary/substance of a special letter (*tezkiye-i hususiye*) by the office of the Grand Vizier addressed to the Palace Secretariat, dated 20 Safer 1311/20 Ağustos 309/2 September 1893. Within the context of the “Armenian Question,” this document has been first used by Selim Deringil, in his article “Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897,” 349. For another document describing Anatolia in this way with reference to the danger posed by the “Armenian Question”, see BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 50/95, 18 L. 1314 (22 March 1897). Copy of a letter from the Palace Secretariat to the *Serasker* dated 18 L. 1314/10 Mart 1313/22 March 1897.

⁶² Benjamin C. Fortna, “The Reign of Abdülhamid II,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, Volume 4: *Turkey in the Modern World*, ed. Reşat Kasaba (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 54.

to the path of sedition and insurrection by seeding and nurturing nationalist-revolutionary ideas among young Armenians. Education in Protestant missionary schools and overall interactions with missionaries might indeed have contributed to the growth of ethnic/national consciousness among young Armenian generations. Yet, it is safe to say, the policy-makers in Istanbul and local government officials tended to disregard the fact that not only American Protestant missionaries in the Ottoman lands but also British consular officials had no sympathy with Armenian revolutionary movements and their methods from the outset to the end.

Even though most Ottoman Armenians did not identify themselves with the revolutionary-nationalist scheme of the Armenian political organizations, the Ottoman political elites, just like Armenian nationalists themselves, regarded Armenian nationalism as a natural reflection of the collective emotions, opinions, and aspirations of an entire population. From the very beginning, the Hamidian administration perceived the political controversy over the conditions and treatment of the Armenian population in East Anatolia strictly as a question of security and order, thereby framing the issue in a special kind of politics. As already noted, with the internationalization of the “Armenian Question,” and especially with the appearance of the Armenian revolutionary parties on the political scene, the policy-makers around the Sultan became increasingly suspicious of the loyalty and reliability of the Armenian population as a whole.

Consequently, Sultan Abdülhamid II and his government began to view the Armenian population as an immediate, principal threat to the empire’s security interests and territorial integrity. Armenian revolutionaries, in particular, were perceived as traitors to the very existence of the empire and its “primary” elements, i.e. the Muslims. The categories of “loyalty” and “disloyalty” and such terms or phrases as “Armenian sedition/intrigue” (*Ermeni fesadı*) and “serving the purposes of Armenians” (*Ermenilerin maksadına hizmet etmek*) dominated official discourse; thereby verbalizing anxiety about the Armenian population. The extent to which the wider Muslim population in the eastern provinces absorbed this anti-Armenian vocabulary is difficult to establish. Yet, as we shall see in the following chapters, archival evidence suggests that local administrators and Muslims outside the state apparatus increasingly followed the lead of high-level Ottoman

bureaucrats in that they widely used anti-Armenian rhetoric and systematically accused Armenians of insubordination, insolence, and contempt of Muslims especially when the events related to the “Armenian Question” amounted to a severe political crisis in the mid-1890s. It should be underscored that this widely shared hostility against the Armenians on the part of Ottoman administrators and ordinary Muslims shaped interactions among Armenians, Muslims, and government officials during periods of crises arising out the “Armenian Question” that intensified in the 1890s.

Hand in hand with anti-Armenian discourse and sentiments went the Hamidian administration’s anti-Armenian policies. The Sultan’s officials sought to contain Armenian dissent with oppressive countermeasures, which were justified on grounds of the security and unity of the empire. As a large number of police reports, court records, and other types of government documents indicate, the Ottoman government criminalized the possession or expression of traditional Armenian “national” symbols, songs, song scores, maps, and literature in order to hinder the consolidation of Armenian national ideas and sentiments. Even Armenian history textbooks were regarded as harmful publications. Search of “seditious” documents and literature in Armenian houses, workplaces, and churches based on the slightest suspicion became a routine policing practice. The Hamidian administration also established firmer control over Armenian schools and their curricula, textbooks, teachers, students, staff, activities etc. Unsurprisingly, Armenian periodicals and books published abroad were banned to be imported. Especially from the mid-1880s onward, numerous Ottoman Armenian citizens, including clergymen and merchants, were charged with possession of unauthorized, “seditious” literature. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, the searching of houses and the arrest of Armenians accused of carrying “harmful” publications and/or suspected for supporting or conducting revolutionary activities considerably increased. Almost in every case of revolutionary agitation, organization, and action, the local authorities tended to believe that the work had the full support and cooperation of local Armenians. Thus, wholesale arrests were frequently made by the Ottoman police and military. Also, torture seems to have been practiced widely by the Ottoman security authorities as a “legitimate” method of information-acquiring and evidence-gathering during the interrogation of Armenian suspects, especially “high-profile” ones.

The government marshaled several coercive security measures and agencies in order to contain nationalist-revolutionary aspirations and activities on the part of Armenian revolutionary committees, as well as to consolidate state authority over local populations in the late nineteenth century eastern provinces. In the very fragile state of the police and gendarmerie forces, the Fourth Imperial Army—one of the seven major field armies of the empire—appeared as the main internal security agency in the region. In the Hamidian administration’s struggle against real and perceived Armenian revolutionary activism, the Fourth Army, with the support of other security agencies including tribal militias (namely, the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments), undertook large domestic missions such as: carrying out counterinsurgency operations against Armenian revolutionary partisans and armed bands; monitoring of suspicious Armenian citizens; arresting suspected individuals and occasional supervision of interrogations; immigration control across the Ottoman-Russian border; conducting trials in martial courts of civilian suspects of such major offenses as “sedition” “banditry,” and “terrorism”; and undertaking intelligence operations in the region, with the intention of producing knowledge on the local Armenian population. The Hamidian administration defended their security actions as reasonable and justified responses to rebellious and seditious segments of the Armenian population.

Among other sociopolitical factors, the destructive effects of the Russo-Ottoman War, the centrifugal tendencies of tribal populations (which had already been disturbed by the centralizing efforts of the *Tanzimat* state), and the aspirations of Armenian revolutionary groups created a fragile and unstable political order in the eastern provinces in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The central government was concerned about the loyalty of various local populations in East Anatolia, including not only the Armenians but also the powerful Kurdish tribes that had tended to be fiercely independent from central authority for centuries and were difficult to be brought under firm control. Turkish-speaking peasants and urban Muslim notables might have seemed more reliable but the central government’s efforts at constructing a new regime of power in the region, the economic and political effects of the war, and the resentment at the *Tanzimat* notion of Muslim-non-Muslim equality before the law, which Sultan Abdülhamid found detrimental to the empire’s Islamic foundation, possibly produced negative effects on the relations between the central authority and local Muslim elites. Therefore, as Stephen Duguid

pointed out in as early as the 1970s within the context of Hamidian policy in East Anatolia, the Hamidian administration aimed to assure the loyalty of the local Muslim population in the region and sought to prevent a further alienation of Muslim notables and powerful Kurdish tribes from the central government.⁶³ The scope of this study does not permit us to discuss problems in our understanding of the instrumentalization of Islam as a strategy of rule during the Hamidian period. Nevertheless, this policy toward the local Muslim populations in eastern Anatolia can be understood within the broader context of the Hamidian desire to base the empire on Muslim unity and solidarity and to establish an empire-wide supremacy of Muslim identity—a policy generally known as “Muslim unity.”⁶⁴

Although the cooptation of provincial elites and their integration into the structures of the Ottoman state was a vital strategy in every single part of the empire, the “Armenian factor” played a special role in the Ottoman policy-makers’ approach to local Muslim notables and Kurdish chieftains in the eastern provinces. Indeed, in search of firmer loyalty from the local Muslim population while struggling against the “Armenian threat,” the Sultan and his government pursued a policy of empowering local Muslim power-holders in the eastern provinces, including urban notables, ulema, sheikhs, Sufi leaders, and Kurdish tribal chiefs. In line with this policy, the central government authorities systematically avoided the measures, practices, and choices that might alienate local Muslim elites and chieftains from the regime or that might diminish their power and

⁶³Stephen Duguid, “The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 2 (1973): 139-155. Also see, idem, “Centralization and Localism: Aspects of Ottoman Policy in Eastern Anatolia, 1878–1908,” (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1970); S. Aslihan Gürbüz, “Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia (1878-1890) (MA thesis, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2008); Klein, *The Margins of the Empire*.

⁶⁴ On the politics of Muslim unity, the instrumentalization of Islam during the reign of Abdülhamid, and the Hamidian attempts at integrating Muslim populations more firmly into the imperial order, see, among others, Duguid, “The Politics of Unity,”; idem, “Aspects of Ottoman Policy in Eastern Anatolia”; Engin D. Akarlı, “Abdülhamid II’s Attempt to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System,” in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, ed. David Kushner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 74-89; Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*; Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001); Fortna, “The Reign of Abdülhamid II,” 47-52.

position in the region vis-à-vis the Armenians.⁶⁵ On several occasions, especially from the late-1880s onward, the Yıldız Palace issued repeated directives clearly advising the local authorities in the eastern provinces to abstain from taking coercive and violent measures against “influential Muslims” (*müteneffizân-ı İslam*)⁶⁶ as well as from any kind of conduct and action that would lead to a diminution of their dominance and power in the region since, as one such order implied, the Armenians held seditious thoughts/designs.⁶⁷ Once, in response to a reiterated decree of this effect apparently upon the banishment of two local Muslim figures from Bitlis, the Governor-General of this province had to explain that he had always acted in accordance with this “main principle” (*kaide-i esasiyeye*)—i.e., avoiding the use of violence and coercion against influential Muslims unless it was absolutely necessary—, knowing that a decrease in or loss of Muslims’ dominance/influence in the region would certainly further encourage Armenians to carry out their “seditious” designs.⁶⁸ Indeed, as will be demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, because of the same official concerns and considerations, the central government authorities avoided taking firm action against certain local Muslim powerholders such as members of

⁶⁵ Here, it should be noted that Hans-Lukas Kieser has aptly argued that Sultan Abdülhamid II was neither willing nor able “to take measures that would weaken Sunni Muslims’ position in the eastern provinces.” See *Iskalanmış Barış*, 169.

⁶⁶ In the Ottoman context, the word “*müteneffiz*,” which can be said to be syntactically an adjective, means influential person or person of influence. The plural form of the word, *müteneffizân*, refers to people of influence and power, socially authoritative figures. See Ş. Sâmî, *Kamûs-i Türkî* (Dersaadet [Istanbul]: İkdâm Matbaası, 1317 [1899/1900]), 1285. Specifically, with respect to local politics and society in the Ottoman context, it can also be translated simply as local/regional powerholders and notables.

⁶⁷ See BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 18/76, 11 Z. 1307 (28 July 1890). Cipher telegram from the Palace to the office of the Governor-General of Bitlis dated 16 Temmuz 1306/28 July 1890. To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “*Ermenilerin efkar-ı malumesi iktizasınca Kürdistan’da nüfuz-ı İslam’ın tenakusunu müeddi olacak her dürlü muamelat ve icraatdan tevakkî ve mücânebet bi’l-cümle asdika-yı devlet için mütehattim-i uhde-i ubudîyyet ve hamîyyet olduğundan müteneffizân-ı İslamın oralardan def’ ve teb’id ve haklarında irae-i cebr ve şiddetle bazı uygunsuz hal ve hareketde bulunmağa mecbur edilmeleri gibi haller vukua getirilmeyerek ve kendilerinden sadır olacak en küçük uygunsuzluğun pek büyük fenalıkları mucib olacağı lisan-ı münasible kendülerine ba-tefhim ale’d-devam icra-yı nesayih-i müessireden gerü durulmayarak bunların iktizasına göre bazen rıfk u mülayemet ve bazen istimal-i lisan-ı şedid ile men’-i hareket-ı na-merziyyelerine sa’y ü gayret ve bunlardan taltif ile hükümetce hizmetlerinden istifade olunabilecek olanların mükâfat-ı seniyyeye mazhariyetlerine delalet olunması ve bununla beraber nesayih-i vâkıayı isga etmeyerek hükûmete adem-i itaat ve ihlal-i asayiş ve emniyet ve hukuk-ı ahere tecavüze cür’et gibi halleri i’tiyad edenler olur ise haklarında usulü dairesinde te’dibat-ı kanuniye icra kılınması[.]” And BOA. Y.MTV. 44/55, 14 Z. 1307 (31 July 1890). Letter from the Governor-General of Bitlis to the *Başkitabet* (the First Secretariat at the palace) dated 14 Z. 1307/17 Temmuz 1306 (either of the dates on the document should be wrong). Aslıhan Gürbüz, as well, has analyzed the latter document in “Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia,” 36-38.*

⁶⁸ Y.MTV. 44/55 (31 July 1890).

notable families, sheikhs, and Kurdish chieftains who were reported by the provincial government officials to have masterminded or instigated anti-Armenian violence in many locations such as Bitlis, Diyarbekir, and Urfa. In several cases, the government only approved their temporary banishment from their places of residence, knowing that their presence might cause a fresh round of violence because of their provocative statements and actions reported by the local authorities, but refrained from ordering measures against them, including prosecution and punishment for their alleged involvement in the mass killings of local Ottoman Armenians.

Such a policy also reveals the limits of state power and authority in the eastern provinces, as the Hamidian administration had to take into consideration the concerns, fears, and possible reactions of influential local actors before implementing any important policy in the region. The policy-makers in the capital favored Muslim notables and Kurdish chieftains not only because they needed cooperation and collaboration with local Muslim powerholders in the face of the “Armenian threat,” but also because the central government feared their sociopolitical influence and sought to utilize it to the state’s advantage.

Indeed, the central government’s ability to enforce order and security against the threats posed by powerful Kurdish tribes inhabiting the eastern Anatolian provinces was quite limited. However, the Ottoman authorities were at the same time unwilling to intervene in local conflicts at the expense of Kurds for fear of antagonizing powerful Kurdish tribes. Although the situation was certainly more complex than Duguid’s following argument allows, it has a certain merit: “The Kurds were a potentially dangerous element in the region which needed to be either totally suppressed—an unreasonable policy given the character of the times and the government—or pampered and appeased while kept under loose supervision.”⁶⁹ As a result, both the impotence and unwillingness of the authorities to take drastic measures against the Kurdish tribal forces not only characterized the official government position vis-à-vis the Kurds in the Hamidian era but also constituted an important aspect of the “Armenian Question.” The Hamidian administration endeavored to ally itself with certain powerful Kurdish tribes, as semi-autonomous political

⁶⁹ Duguid, “The Politics of Unity,” 146.

and military forces, and incorporate them into the imperial order through a variety of official and semi-official mechanisms.

The most prominent and institutionally substantial aspect of the Hamidian regime's policy of allying with the Kurds and of integrating them into its strategies of power in the region was the creation of the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments (later to be named the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments) in early 1890. Widely known as the Hamidiye Regiments, these tribal militias were recruited mostly among from powerful Sunni Kurdish tribes or tribal confederations in the empire's eastern borderland such as the Haydaranlı, Hasananlı, Cibranlı, Miranlı, and many others.⁷⁰ Although a number of non-Kurdish tribal groups (Arab and Karapapak, a Turkic-speaking Caucasian population) were involved in the regiments, the Hamidiye enterprise was predominantly Kurdish. By forming these cavalry regiments, the Ottoman government co-opted powerful Kurdish tribes into the empire's security apparatus as irregular forces charged with a series of missions. Through this organized militia forces, the government aimed to make use of the military and political power of these tribal forces against several threats. As research on the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments has shown, there were multiple motives behind the creation of these semi-mercenaries: to reinforce the regular armies against the Russian threat in the eastern borderland; to mobilize tribal militias as reserve forces in suppression of internal disorders, insurgencies, and insurrections; to contain Armenian revolutionary activities; to ensure Kurdish chieftains' loyalty to the Sultan; and, to bring semi-autonomous tribal populations under firmer control and government supervision in an area where strong tribal structures and commitments prevailed.

The Hamidiye commanders, officers, and cavalries were granted a number of legal and economic exemptions and privileges. They enjoyed a significant amount of autonomy

⁷⁰ Primary studies on the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments include Bayram Kodaman, "Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları (II. Abdülhamid ve Doğu Anadolu Aşiretleri)," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, no. 32 (1979): 427-480 (for an English version of this article, see idem, "The Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments: Abdülhamid II and the Eastern Anatolian Tribes" in *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, eds. M. Hakan Yavuz, with Peter Sluglett [Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2011], 382-426); Sakıp Selçuk Günay, "Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları (1890-1918)" (PhD diss., Atatürk University, 1983); Cevdet Ergül, *II. Abdülhamid'in Doğu Politikası ve Hamidiye Alayları* (İzmir: Çağlayan Yayınları, 1997); Cengiz Çakaloğlu, "Müşir Mehmet Zeki Paşa (1835-1929)" (PhD diss., Atatürk University, 1999), s. 32-150; Klein, *The Margins of Empire*.

and freedom—both legal and *de facto*—from civilian control and oversight. The militias were not only legally exempted from civilian jurisdiction but also almost practically immune from the law and justice. The Hamidiye organization also provided the tribes incorporated into the regiments with an opportunity to expand their power and influence over non-Hamidiye tribes and non-tribal populations in the region. From the beginning, these irregular forces abused their power and legal/practical autonomy by committing a host of criminal acts against non-tribal and non-Hamidiye populations (mostly both Muslim and non-Muslim villagers) including murder, plunder, robbery, land usurpation and occupation, and abduction. Criminal cases that the Hamidiye militias were involved in are too many to cite here.⁷¹

The deployment of Kurdish militias as irregular security forces was a risky and controversial step taken by the Hamidian administration. As I have discussed elsewhere, conventional Armenian narratives tend to portray the Hamidiye Regiments almost as a semi-official criminal organization that was created by the Sultan in order to get rid of his Armenian subjects. On the one hand, it is certainly safe to say that the Hamidiye project was an instrument of the Hamidian administration's anti-Armenian policies. But, on the other hand, it is problematic to think that the Hamidiye Regiments were created exclusively to oppress and eventually destroy the Armenian population, and that the Hamidiye chiefs were given complete freedom to kill and loot Armenians. The Hamidiye organization was created in response to a number of real or perceived security threats; the government had no hidden agenda or ulterior motives in establishing it. Also, the practical immunity from justice enjoyed by the chiefs of the regiments was guaranteed not by a coalition within the military and civilian administration but by certain actors, first and foremost the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Imperial Army Corps Zeki Pasha, who was also the Commander-in-chief of the Hamidiye Regiments. From the beginning, the Hamidiye enterprise created significant disagreements and tensions between civilian and military officials in the

⁷¹ Ottoman archival records provide very detailed accounts of the numerous criminal activities allegedly committed by the commanders, officers, and rank-and-file of the regiments. Surprisingly, most of these records have not been yet thoroughly investigated by researchers although the establishment of the Hamidiye Regiments was one of the most controversial enterprises in late Ottoman history.

region.⁷² Ottoman archival records clearly indicate that many provincial administrators attempted to bring Hamidiye chiefs and officers to justice but, in most cases, Zeki Pasha sought to exonerate them and opposed their prosecution, thereby rendering them practically immune from the law. The victims of the crimes committed by the tribal chieftains included not only Armenians but a variety of other populations inhabiting the region, including the Kurds. Yet, the securitization of the Armenians by the Hamidian regime made this particular group an easier target for the violence and abuse perpetrated by powerful Kurdish tribes.

It is evident that the use of militia forces was an indication of the central Ottoman government's inability to maintain a coercive monopoly in the eastern provinces. In addition to central concerns over the loyalty of Kurdish tribes as well as over their political and military capacity, the "Armenian factor" powerfully transformed the Hamidian administration's relations with Kurdish tribal populations in the region. In other words, I suggest that the identification of the entire Armenian population as an existential threat redefined the interactions between state actors and Kurdish chieftains at the end of the nineteenth century. The government's toleration of Kurdish chieftains' crimes for the sake of imperial security, integration, and unity paradoxically contributed much to the chaotic political situation in the eastern Anatolian provinces.

Indeed, the Ottoman state's efforts to establish political control and stability in the eastern provinces led instead to the production of a violent and coercive regime obsessed singularly with security concerns, which radically shaped the political order and dynamics of intercommunal relations in the eastern provinces of the empire. Consequently, the internal security concerns, policies, and practices of the Hamidian administration—that translated into the securitization of the Ottoman Armenian population—led to the marginalization of Armenians and exposed them to abuse and violence at the hands of

⁷² Janet Klein, the author of the hitherto most comprehensive study of the Hamidiye Regiments, has already made a critical assessment of a variety of problematic and ahistorical views on the Hamidiye organization in her well-argued book, *The Margins of Empire*. For a further discussion of the problems in the historiography of the regiments and for a critique of the "Armenian perspective," see Edip Gölbaşı, "Hamidiye Alayları: Bir Değerlendirme," in *1915: Siyaset, Tehcir ve Soykırım*, eds. Oktay Özel and Fikret Adanır (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015), 164-175.

officials and local Muslim communities, specifically urban notables, local religious leaders, and tribal chiefs, in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 3. Timing, Extent, and Victims of the anti-Armenian Riots of 1895-97

3.1. Introduction

Intergroup hatred and tensions do not automatically translate into open hostilities. Neither does intercommunal hostility necessarily culminate in mass conflict and violence, whether large-scale or small-scale. As scholarship on ethnic riots suggests, this final stage requires time, accumulation, fertile socioeconomic conditions, opportune political circumstances, moments of crisis, effective mobilization, and precipitating events.⁷³ Neither contemporary observers, nor even the actors involved in the violence may easily foresee the escalation of a simmering conflict into massive riots. We should therefore address the following interrelated questions: How can we explain the specific timing of anti-Armenian riots? What were the more immediate factors and events triggering such wide-scale violence? Following a brief account of the riots that broke out in the imperial capital Istanbul (September 1895) and in the town of Trabzon (Trabzon, October 1895), the second part of this chapter will seek to answer these questions. The subsequent parts of the chapter will focus on the extent, nature, and victims of the violence.

A close examination of the circumstances and the general course of political events that took place in the spring and summer of 1895 reveals that a number of intertwined factors and events contributed to an already existing anti-Armenian outlook among Muslim Ottoman elites and non-elites, exacerbating a climate of hostility, fear, and suspicion that pitted many Muslims against their Armenian neighbors and progressively eroded relations between Muslim and Armenian communities on the eve of the riots. The crucial factors and primary events that preceded the wave of riots were: (1) the diplomatic effects of the mass violence that occurred in the mountainous areas of the district of Sasun (Bitlis) in the summer/autumn of 1894; (2) the intensification of Armenian reform debates in early 1895, which was accompanied by rumors of foreign intervention on behalf of Armenians; (3) the considerable increase in Armenian political activism and armed revolutionary actions; and

⁷³ See, for instance, Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 71-123.

(4) the heightened security alerts on the part of the central government for possible Armenian uprisings, which did not only feed already rampant fear and distrust but also served to increase hostile appraisals. This tinderbox exploded when a public demonstration organized by the Hunchaks turned into a clash between Armenian revolutionaries and the security forces in the imperial capital Istanbul in late 1895. The anti-Armenian riots in Istanbul were followed by a massive outbreak of violence in Trabzon on October 8. The declaration of the introduction of Armenian reforms in mid-October by the Sultan did not only feed into the climate of fear and suspicion that prevailed in the Armenian populated provinces following the events in Istanbul and Trabzon, but also served as a signal for the resentful Muslim population. Towards the end of October, anti-Armenian riots reached epidemic proportions, sweeping across the empire's eastern Anatolian provinces. An atmosphere of violence, chaos, and destruction quickly consumed tens of towns across the region.

3.2. The Beginning: Istanbul and Trabzon 1895

On 30 September 1895, the Hunchakian Revolutionary Committee in Istanbul organized a mass demonstration in the imperial capital to deliver to the Sublime Porte a collective petition protesting the abuses to which Ottoman Armenians had been subjected and demanding that the government immediately begin to carry out a series of administrative reforms in the empire's Armenian-populated provinces. Two days before the demonstration, the committee, speaking on behalf of the Armenians of Istanbul, informed the foreign embassies at the Ottoman capital of their intention to make a demonstration of "a strictly peaceful character" in order to express their wishes regarding the reforms to be introduced. The revolutionary committee also warned that the intervention of Ottoman security forces to prevent the planned demonstration "might have regrettable consequences," for which they disclaimed responsibility beforehand.⁷⁴ Nalbandian writes that the party's Executive Committee of Istanbul discussed whether they would use violence during the planned demonstration. While Karo Sahakian (Sahakyan),

⁷⁴ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 50. Inclosure 1 in No. 50, French and English copies of the communication addressing the British Ambassador Currie sent by "the Armenian Revolutionary Committee," dated September 28, 1895. Also see Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 123-4.

the head of the organizing committee, wished the demonstration to be a peaceful one, some of his fellow committee members did not agree. Finally, the Board of Directors, one of the two Hunchak committees in Istanbul, decided that they would hold a nonviolent demonstration.⁷⁵ Yet, according to British sources, some of the demonstrators were apparently armed with pistols and knives of uniform nature, which were probably provided by the organizers. Ambassador Currie also noted that there was good reason to suppose that the revolutionaries aimed to cause disorder and bloodshed in the empire's capital in order to prompt the Great Powers to intervene on behalf of the Armenians.⁷⁶

The Hunchaks also distributed copies of the petition, or the so-called "Protest-Demand," in French to the embassies beforehand. The grievances addressed in the petition and the principal demands of the revolutionary committee perfectly highlight crucial aspects of what is referred to as the "Armenian Question." The petition prepared by the committee for presentation to the Sublime Porte primarily protested: (1) "the systematic persecution" to which they believed Armenians were subjected especially during the last few years; (2) "the state of siege" in the Armenian-populated provinces as the reason of what they regarded as all arbitrary features of the administration, and as the principal cause of the poverty of Armenia; (3) the untold political arrests and the cruel treatment of Armenian political prisoners; (4) the Kurdish depredations against Armenians; and (5) the recent massacre in Sasun. In line with these grievances, the Hunchakians demanded on behalf of the Armenians of Istanbul and the Six Provinces, not only from the Sultan but also from the European imperial powers: legal rights guaranteeing the safety of Armenian people and their property; freedom of conscience, press, and assembly; a general amnesty for Armenian political convicts and prisoners; tax reform including the adoption of a uniform system of taxation and the abolition of illegal taxes levied by the Kurds; reform in the organization of the police and gendarmerie; the diminution of the number of administrative divisions in the Six Provinces on an ethnographic basis; and, the

⁷⁵ Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 123.

⁷⁶ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 50. Currie to Salisbury, Therapia, October 3, 1895.

appointment of a European governor-general in these provinces, a post which was to be delegated by the Powers in agreement with the Sublime Porte.⁷⁷

Two days later, about two thousand Armenians gathered near the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate in Kumkapı and started to march towards the Sublime Porte. Groups of Armenians had also gathered in various parts of the old city. Meanwhile, the government had maintained tight security around Kumkapı and reinforced the guards at the gates of Government offices. Within a few hundred meters of the *Babiâli*, the gendarmes and soldiers commanded by a gendarmerie major, Server Bey, stopped the rallying demonstrators and ordered them to disperse. When they refused, the major ordered the gendarmes to push the crowd back and seize the leaders of the march, one of whom was carrying the petition to be presented to the Sublime Porte. Following the intervention of the security forces, a clash between gendarmes and Armenian protesters broke out, which resulted in the killing of Server Bey and several Armenians and the left many demonstrators and gendarmes injured. Conflicting claims have been made about the beginning of the clash, but it seems that Armenian revolutionaries did open fire and that both sides exchanged shots during the initial confrontation. According to the U.S. Minister Terrell, “the prevailing belief is that it was the Armenians” who did the first killing.⁷⁸ The British Ambassador Currie, too, reported “It appears that the police charged the Armenians and struck them with the butts of their muskets and flat of their swords, and seized upon their leaders; but there seems no doubt that it was the Armenians who fired the first shot.”⁷⁹

Following the initial affray, the gendarmes and soldiers hunted and beat many of the dispersing demonstrators who fled into alleys in all directions. Notwithstanding official statements, foreign sources and eye-witness accounts indicate that Muslim civilians, mostly *softas*, or medrese students, joined the gendarmes and soldiers in the hunting of fleeing Armenians and beat many of them to death with clubs under the very eyes of the

⁷⁷ For a full copy of the petition written in French and its English translation, see Turkey no. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 50, “Petition,” transmitted by Currie to Salisbury in a dispatch dated Therapia, October 3, 1895.

⁷⁸ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism, and the Ottoman Armenians*, 92-93.

⁷⁹ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 32. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 1, 1895. Also see Turkey no. 2 (1896), No. 50.

authorities, if not upon their directions. Also, in various parts of the city such as Galata, Kasımpaşa, Çukurçeşme, and Dolmabahçe, Armenians became the targets of severe and indiscriminate attacks by civilians, especially from among Istanbul's lower classes living in the khans, or inns. Kurdish porters and workers as well as *softas* again were reported to be in the front ranks of the attackers. Many of the Armenians who were killed and wounded during the riot had nothing to do with the demonstrations. Moreover, the victims of the killings in the raided khans were predominantly poor Armenian seasonal workers from the provinces. It should be noted that, as Florian Riedler and Sinan Dinçer's studies have already indicated, the anti-Armenian riots in Istanbul both in 1895 and 1896 had some class overtones as violent episodes in some parts of the city were occasioned by the socio-economic conditions of the participants.⁸⁰

The mob violence against Ottoman Armenians in Istanbul continued in the streets of the capital the following day. Unsurprisingly, the police authorities denied that the indiscriminate slaughters were committed throughout the capital, presenting all the Armenians who were killed and injured during the incidents, numbered by the officials at 80 and 241 respectively, as "revolutionaries." Over the subsequent days, very few Armenians appeared on the streets, and their shops remained closed, as insecurity and fear reigned in Istanbul. Meanwhile, hundreds of Armenians were arrested by the police—according to British consular reports, they committed brutal acts against those in custody. At the same time, over 2,000 Armenians who fled from the police and the Muslim mob took refuge in the Armenian churches in Kumkapı, Pera, and Galata. Filled with fugitives, these churches remained besieged by the police for about ten days.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Florian Riedler, "Armenian Labour Migration to Istanbul and the Migration Crisis of the 1890s," in *The City in the Ottoman Empire: Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity*, eds. Ulrike Freitag et al. (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 160-176; Idem, "The City as a Stage for a Violent Spectacle"; Dinçer, "The Armenian Massacre in Istanbul (1896)."

⁸¹ For details on the demonstration and the ensuing incidents in Istanbul (1895), see BOA. Y.MTV. 129/98, 15 R. 1313 (5 October 1895). Letter (*maruzat*) from the Minister of Police to the palace dated 15 R. 1313/23 Eylül 1311/5 October 1895; BOA. Y.MTV. 129/80, 13 R. 1313 (3 October 1895). Letter (*maruzat*) from the Minister of Police to the palace dated 13 R. 1313/21 Eylül 1311/3 October 1895; BOA. Y.PRK. ZB. 16/51 in *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni İsyancıları (1878-1895) I* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 2008), 130-139; Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 30. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 1, 1895; Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 33. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 2, 1895; Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 50 and enclosures in this

If the protest march to the *Babiâli* had not turned into a violent clash between the security forces and the demonstrators, which in turn escalated into indiscriminate attacks on Armenian civilians throughout the capital, it would probably have been recalled as an instance of emergent modern urban protest movements and popular political actions in the late Ottoman Empire. Most scholars today consider the riots that broke out on September 30 in Istanbul the starting point of a wave of premeditated massacres against the Armenians that unfolded in a vast region in eastern Anatolia from the autumn of 1895 to the spring of 1897.

The Istanbul riots were followed by the mass killing of Armenians in the Black Sea city of Trabzon on October 8, 1895. The anti-Armenian disturbances in this town took place several days after an assassination attempt, apparently made by Armenian revolutionaries, on Bahri Pasha, a former Governor-General of Van, and on Hamdi Pasha, the military commander of Trabzon, survived with only minor injuries.⁸² The following day, the Trabzon authorities reported that the target had been Bahri Pasha, who was on his way to Istanbul, and that two of the suspects had been seized and arrested. The Governor-General of Trabzon also noted that they were searching the third culprit even though earlier official accounts claimed that only two Armenians were involved in the attempted assassination.⁸³ Not only the assassination affair but also the official accusations that the Armenians were deliberately hiding the culprits produced a great deal of anxiety among both Muslims and Armenians in Trabzon. The false reports about the disturbances in Istanbul seem to have further exacerbated the tense atmosphere and mutual suspicion in the town.

correspondence; Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 64. Inclosure in No. 64, "Collective Note" communicated by the six embassies to the Porte, dated October 6, 1895, transmitted in a dispatch by Currie to Salisbury, Therapia, October 7, 1895; Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 84. Currie to Salisbury, Therapia, October 14, 1895; Walker, *Armenia*, 152-6; Riedler, "Armenian Labour Migration to Istanbul"; idem, "The City as a Stage for a Violent Spectacle"; Dinçer, "The Armenian Massacre in Istanbul (1896)," 21-5.

⁸² Among many other reports of the attempted assassination, see BOA. Y.MTV. 129/69, 12 R. 1313 (2 October 1895). Letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 12 R. 1313/20 Eylül 1311/2 October 1895.

⁸³ BOA. HR.SYS. 2812/4, 12-10-1895 (12 October 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Trabzon dated 21 Eylül 1311/3 October 1895.

A minor disturbance (i.e., an attempt to attack local Armenians) that took place on October 5 in this increasingly tense atmosphere was quickly suppressed because of the prompt action taken by the authorities, who detained a number of Muslims and restored order in the town shortly. The Governor-General of Trabzon initially reported that the disturbance was triggered by the gunshots exchanged between “a number of mindless Muslims and Armenians in an intoxicated state” (*İslam-Ermeni üç-beş idraksizin serhoşluk haliyle*) for trivial reasons, which were heard by the people and consequently caused an excitement.⁸⁴ Later, the provincial government authorities in Trabzon claimed that during the night of October 5, a number of Muslim shopkeepers had come across one Haçık, who was wanted by the police for his alleged involvement in the assassination attempt, and warned him saying “The government is looking for you because you are accused of injuring [Bahri and Hamdi Pashas]! Where are you running away to?” In response, Haçık reportedly had fired his gun at the shopkeepers and killed a soldier who had heard the gunshot and wanted to see what was happening. Upon hearing the gunshots, many people in the neighboring quarters had poured into the streets—some armed and some unarmed—, while, at the same time, Muslim villagers from the surrounding areas had begun to flock to the town prompted by rumors that Armenians were raiding government house and had murdered the governor. In response, the civilian authorities, police officers, soldiers, and gendarmes, assisted by the notables of the town, blocked the entrance to every street, and succeeded, with great difficulty, in containing the crowd and making them disperse, announcing that the gunshots they had heard were not connected to any serious incident and that Armenians had done nothing harmful or wrongful.⁸⁵

On the other hand, it seems that groups of Muslim villagers had already come to Trabzon after the news of the attempted assassination reached the surrounding rural areas, as it was unlikely that the news of disorder in the town and the false reports of Armenian attacks on the government seat could spread to them in such a short period of time. Indeed,

⁸⁴ Ibid., telegram from the Governor-General of Trabzon dated 23 Eylül 1311/5 October 1895.

⁸⁵ BOA. Y.MTV. 130/10, 1 Ca. 1313 (19 October 1895). Report addressed to the office of the Grand Vizier signed by the local civilian and military authorities, the ulema, and the notables of Muslim, Catholic, and Greek Orthodox communities in Trabzon dated 2 TE 1311/14 October 1895. The Governor-General of Trabzon presented this report to the palace with a letter dated 1 Ca. 1313/7 TE 1311/19 October 1895.

according to British sources, it was a number of Muslim ringleaders who mustered armed Muslim villagers from the neighboring areas and attempted to create a disturbance at the night of October 5, attacking Armenian houses and firing volleys in the streets. The British Consul at Trabzon, Henry Z. Longworth, reported that a large number of “rowdies with knives, pistols, guns, and revolvers” frantically went about the streets while Christians rushed into the consulates and public buildings to flee the mob in panic. The authorities could, however, disperse the crowd within two hours, arresting three Muslim instigators and mercilessly beating many of them.⁸⁶ The next morning, foreign consuls at Trabzon held a meeting to discuss the situation in the town and decided to make a joint representation to the local government in person. Having visited the governor-general in his office, they expressed their gratitude to the civilian and military authorities and Muslim notables for their efforts to prevent what they termed a massacre of Christians in the town last night. In return, Governor-General Kadri Bey promised to reinforce the local garrison, increase the number of gendarmes, and ensure the protection of the consulates, missions, and churches where people had taken refuge.⁸⁷

Yet three days later, the dreaded carnage broke out in the town of Trabzon after all. Although the scope of this chapter does not permit us to delve into all aspects of the violent episodes in each place, it might be useful to give a brief account of the outbreak in this port city with a particular focus on the ways in which the Ottoman authorities and foreign observers explained the origins and development of the riot. According to the official version of the incident, after the disturbances were completely quelled, “a detailed inquiry” was conducted into the identity of those who triggered the riot by firing the first shots. The inquiry revealed that an Armenian, named Şavarş (or Şivarş) of Erzincan, who resided in a khan across from City Hall, had lost control and fired shots at passersby from the window of his room when he learned about his brother’s death during the disturbances in Istanbul. Immediately afterwards, several shots from guns and revolvers had been fired from a shop opposite the khan, while Armenians gathering near the landing-stage fired several more shots thereafter. The harder soldiers, police officers, and gendarmes tried to quell the riot,

⁸⁶ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 83. Inclosure in No. 83, Longworth to Currie, Trebizond, October 5, 1895.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

the bolder Armenians had become, firing unceasingly at the security forces and the people from wherever they happened to be. Consequently, the turmoil had turned into a mutual slaughter as the Muslims in the streets and around Şarki Square were forced to respond the Armenians.⁸⁸

The riot in the town broke out before noon and lasted until sunset, resulting in the death of 182 Armenians, 11 Muslims, 1 Greek, and 1 soldier, officials reported.⁸⁹ Notwithstanding the official claim that the disturbances were a spontaneous outrage fomented by the Armenian revolutionaries, it seems that some Muslims, especially those from the neighboring villages, were ready for violence,⁹⁰ and that perhaps both sides feared for their security in such a climate of hostility and suspicion. Longworth reported that although he was not sure what precipitated the riot, almost at once hundreds of Muslims had filled the streets, “rushing madly about, and slaughtering every Armenian they could meet.” Few Armenians had tried to defend themselves, the consul noted, while thousands of them had escaped into the consulates and public buildings guarded by the authorities.⁹¹ Foreign consuls and eyewitness accounts uniformly claimed that soldiers of the regular troops aided the mob by firing on Armenians and took a part in looting.⁹² The number of deaths by communal identity, eyewitness accounts, and the reports of foreign consular

⁸⁸ Y.MTV. 130/10 (19 October 1895). For typical accounts of the Trabzon incident in Turkish historiography repeating official versions and for a compilation of Ottoman archival records, see Halaçoğlu, *1895 Trabzon Olayları*; Ahmet Karaçavuş, “1895 Trabzon Ermeni İsyanı ve İsyancıların Sosyo-Ekonomik Siyasi Kültürel Kökenleri,” *Karadeniz İncelemeleri Dergisi*, no. 19 (2015): 75-118; Süleyman Bilgin, et al., eds., *Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Trabzon'da Ermeni Faaliyetleri, 1850-1923*, 2 vols. (Trabzon: Trabzon Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2007).

⁸⁹ While the Trabzon authorities reported several times that the number of Muslim killed during the disturbances in the town was 11, a final report placed the number at 21. For further information, see Table 3 and the related footnote.

⁹⁰ The British Consul Longworth claimed that there was evidence indicating “the premeditated character of the massacre,” and that bands of Muslims “were evidently armed and organized for a disturbance.” See Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 183. Inclosure 1 in No. 183, Consul Longworth to Currie, Trebizond, October 12, 1895.

⁹¹ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 194. Inclosure 1 in No. 194, Consul Longworth to Currie, Trebizond, October 9, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 1 in No. 122.

⁹² “The Massacre at Trebizond,” *The Times* (London, UK), October 30, 1895, a piece written by the newspaper’s Odessa correspondent; FO 424/184, Inclosure 1 in No. 194 (another copy of which is in Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 1 in No. 122); Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 185. Currie to Salisbury, Therapia, October 26, 1895; Alphonse Cillière, *1895, Massacres d'Arméniens*, eds. Gérard Dédéyan, Claire Mouradian, and Yves Ternon (Toulouse: Privat, 2010), a compilation of French documents on the events of 1895, which contains the reports of the French consul at Trabzon, Alphonse Cillière.

bodies indicate that the Muslim perpetrators acted in a deliberate and discriminate manner, carefully targeting only Apostolic (Gregorian) Armenian males. As would be the case with the riots in other places, women, children, and members of other Christian groups were spared, and no serious harm was done to foreign subjects and residences.

In a telegram, Consul Longworth informed his superiors about the origins of the riot. He stated that although an Armenian Revolutionary Committee, which advocated violence, undoubtedly existed in Trabzon, and the attempt on Bahri Pasha's life was probably carried out by Armenians, there was no reason "to believe that the Armenians in that town contemplated an attack on the Mussulmans."⁹³ On the contrary, there were serious reasons, the British consul claimed, to suspect that the riot "was encouraged, if not planned and ordered, by some officials." It appeared that, he wrote, the civilian and military authorities in the town, except for the governor-general and the president of the Criminal Court, had behaved "disgracefully" during the initial phases of the disturbances. The carnage had come to an end only on the arrival of Governor-General Kadri Bey.⁹⁴

Put aside these conflicting claims made by the Ottoman authorities and foreign observers on the origins and instigation of collective violence, it is significant to note that the subsequent events in most places followed the lead of the riot of Trabzon in many respects: the selective targeting of Apostolic Armenian adult males; extremely disproportionate casualty rates; widespread plunder accompanying the violence; discrepancies between initial and final official reports; and, the production/fabrication of an official narrative concealing the agency of Muslim rioters and putting the entire blame upon Armenians, which was usually supported by the so-called testimony of other non-Muslim community leaders and notables who were apparently urged by the authorities to do so.

Towards the middle of October, crowds of armed Muslim villagers, chiefly composed of Lazes from the districts of Rize, Sürmene, and Of, joined by local inhabitants, started to raid tens of Armenian villages around Bayburd (Bayburt), located on the much-

⁹³ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 113. Telegram from Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 28, 1895.

⁹⁴ Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 1 in No. 183.

frequented road between Trabzon and Erzurum. These wholesale village raids occurred across the northwestern parts of Erzurum Province and marked the first incidents of violence within the boundaries of the Six Provinces that would soon spiral into the massive wave of anti-Armenian disturbances here under study. In the meantime, under renewed diplomatic pressures, on October 17, 1895, the Sultan approved the recommendation of the Council of Ministers regarding the introduction of a program of internal reform for the empire's six Armenian-populated provinces—a radically modified version of a scheme of reform that had been imposed on the Sublime Porte by the British and Russian governments in May 1895. The decree that approved the introduction of reforms, like several subsequent orders originating from the palace and the Sublime Porte on the reform scheme, only mentioned the application of a series of new articles and enactments in harmony with the existing laws and regulations in order to improve local administration and security and ensure the welfare and happiness of the empire's subjects in Anatolian provinces.⁹⁵

In his capacity as the Inspector-General of Anatolian Reforms (*Anadolu Islahatı Umumi Müfettişi*), Şakir Pasha had already arrived in Erzurum in early September to begin his survey.⁹⁶ With the Sultan's decree sanctioning the introduction of reforms, practically for the Six Provinces, the Grand Vizier sent a letter to Şakir Pasha, authorizing him to supervise the execution of these reforms in collaboration with provincial officials.⁹⁷ Three days later, the government sent copies of the agreed reform scheme to the governors-general of Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Sivas, Diyarbakir, and Mamuretü'l-Aziz, with a circular declaring the imperial government's intention to carry out reforms gradually throughout the empire, starting with the Six Provinces, in accordance with local requirements and the nature of the inhabitants in each locality.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ For the *mazbata*, or resolution/protocol, of the Council of Ministers, the Grand Vizier's letter presenting the *mazbata* to the Sultan, and the approval by the palace of the proposal regarding the introduction of reform, see, BOA İ.DUİT. 146/83, 26 R. 1313 (16 October 1895).

⁹⁶ For Şakir Pasha's appointment as Inspector-General, see Ali Karaca, *Anadolu Islahatı ve Ahmed Şakir Paşa, 1838-1899* (Istanbul: Eren, 1993), 56-59.

⁹⁷ See BOA. Y.EE. 81/6, 1 Ca. 1313 (20 October 1895). Letter from the Grand Vizier to the Inspector of Anatolian Provinces, Şakir Paşa, dated 1 Ca. 1313/8 TS 1311/20 October 1895.

⁹⁸ See BOA. BEO. 695/52057, 1 Ca. 1313 (20 October 1895); BOA. BEO. 695/52061, 1 Ca. 1313 (20 October 1895). For a copy of the approved reform scheme, see BOA. Y.EE. 97/55, 1 Ca. 1313 (20 October 1895).

The reason behind the cautious language of the decree approving the acceptance of a reform scheme and of subsequent orders concerning the introduction of reforms, which do not refer to the Armenian population or any other particular group, is undoubtedly that the palace sought to avoid creating an image of the Sultan as carrying out reforms in favor of Christians, which, the Sultan and his advisers feared, might alienate his Muslim subjects and thus undermine the loyalty of the principal group of his subjects on which his legitimacy rested. In other words, the authorities at the Yıldız Palace were well aware of the possible detrimental effects of the acceptance of Armenian reforms on the minds of many Muslims in the Six Provinces. For the same reason, it was not until late November that the Sultan finally and with much delay announced the introduction of the reforms and their content in the Ottoman press—despite the persistent demands from the representatives of the Great Powers. Yet no sooner had he agreed to implement the reforms that the dreaded repercussions of his decision began to unfold.

In the weeks following the introduction of reforms for the Six Provinces, a massive wave of riots directed at Armenians broke out in tens of towns and villages across the empire's Anatolian provinces. These riots killed or injured tens of thousands of people and caused great damage to Armenian communal and private property. In this connection, the first case of urban violence in the Six Provinces occurred in the town of Erzincan (October 21), to be followed by massive eruptions of violence in the towns of Bayburd, Gümüşhane, Erzurum, and Bitlis. By the end of October, the wave of anti-Armenian riots was well underway. Like a domino effect, disturbances spread to other provincial centers such as Diyarbakir, Sivas, Harput and several major towns as of early November.

In the meantime, many Armenian villages in the Erzurum plain and the districts along the border of the provinces of Erzurum and Sivas were plundered by Kurds, Lazes, and Circassian immigrants, or local Muslim villagers. The same havoc was wreaked all over the provinces of Bitlis, Van, Diyarbakir, and Mamuretü'l-Aziz in late October and throughout November. Zeytun and its environs were the only places where the Armenians clearly took the offensive as of mid-October carrying out systematic attacks on several Muslim villages under the leadership of several Hunchak fighters who had arrived in the region in summer to incite the so-called mountainous, warlike Armenians of Zeytun to

wage a rebellion against the government. Consequently, reports of mass killings, plunder, rapine, property destruction, arson, village raids, abduction, and mass conversions reached Istanbul from all over the eastern provinces. Bloodshed, chaos, misery, dispossession, and fear spread across a vast region at a staggering pace and remained pre-dominant for months.

3.3. Timing of the Riots or Preceding Events: Fear, Distrust, and Rumors

The impact of the introduction of reforms by the Sultan in mid-October 1895 on the escalation of violence will be discussed in Chapter 7. It, therefore, suffices to note that, although it is difficult to establish a direct causal relationship between the promulgation of the reform program and the first outbreaks of violence in the provinces of Trabzon and Erzurum in the first half of October, the later events had very much to do with the resentment and anger that the reform project generated among elites and broad sections of the non-elite Muslim population in the eastern provinces. It is also important to note that because of the reform disputes and negotiations between the Ottoman government and the representatives of the European Great Powers, which were accompanied by rumors that Armenians would be granted privileges and autonomy, tensions between members of the Muslim and Armenian communities already ran high over the course of the spring and summer of 1895.

At the same time, Armenian revolutionary agitation and activities became more visible over the period in question, even though they were not as threatening as Ottoman officials came to imagine and portray them. Armenian political parties, specifically the Hunchaks, were seeking to gain popular support in urban settings to demonstrate Armenians' disaffection with the government over internal reforms. For instance, Armenian revolutionary agents, mostly young Russian Armenians, were growing more active and more disturbing in the Erzurum-Trabzon region over August and September 1895. Although these revolutionaries never enjoyed substantial popular support among the local Armenian population, revolutionary agitation contributed to the excited state of mind of many Muslims. The revolutionary committees were also increasingly resorting to violence and intimidation although their targets were mostly Armenian community leaders

who did not support the “revolutionary cause.” Yet recent armed actions also included the assassination of the Deputy Prosecutor (*Müdde-i Umumi*) of Karahisar-ı Şarkî near the town of Zara (Sivas) in September 1895 and an attack on a medium-level official and his escort between Kemah and Erzincan in August 1895. More important, perhaps, was that several Hunchak fighters under the leadership of Garabed Toursarkissian (known as Baron Aghassi) centered their revolutionary activities on Cilicia and Zeytun as of early 1894. Aghassi and his comrades sought to utilize the traditional anti-government attitude of the Armenians of mountainous Zeytun, who were able to mount a successful resistance to central government authority especially in the second half of the nineteenth century owing to the geographical features of the region. The expansion of revolutionary activities to a region like Zeytun was especially alarming for the Hamidian administration. As a matter of fact, a combination of political events in connection with the “Armenian Question”—particularly the Sasun incident and the ensuing political crisis, an increase in Armenian political action, and reports of revolutionary activity in Zeytun and Van—fueled the already-heightened internal security anxieties of the government.

At this point, we must turn our attention to an important background factor that, I argue, contributed significantly to the creation of a polarized political climate in the affected areas and amplified the considerable tensions that had been simmering between Armenian and Muslim populations. Particularly during the spring and summer of 1895, that is, following the Sasun incident of 1894, the Sublime Porte sent numerous orders and circulars to the Armenian-populated provinces, warning the civilian and military authorities to be on high alert against a major Armenian insurrection in the Six Provinces. Typically, these circulars informed the authorities of the possibility of a widespread uprising, particularly in the provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van, and of armed attacks on military and civilian targets by Armenian revolutionary bands. The Sublime Porte officials strictly cautioned the provincial government authorities, the Fourth Army Commandership, and local military commanders to keep an eye, day and night, on revolutionary committee activities; to take preventive measures to ensure public safety against possible attacks; and, to suppress any “seditious” attempts on the part of Armenians with every possible method without allowing them to assume a general character.

These official warnings were also accompanied by routine intelligence reports of armed Armenian bands crossing the Ottoman-Russian border to attack Muslim villages and towns.⁹⁹ This increasing anti-Armenian atmosphere was open to many false reports, ranging from rumors of impending “Armenian disorders” and foreign intervention on behalf of Armenians to fictitious tales of American Protestant missionaries producing weapons for Armenian “mischief-makers.” Several other developments seem to have contributed to this anti-Armenian atmosphere in the summer of 1895. To take one dramatic example, the police authorities in Istanbul and Van revealed that some students of the School for Tribes (*Aşiret Mektebi*), which was attended by the sons of a considerable number of Kurdish tribal leaders, had sent provocative, anti-Armenian letters to the tribal chiefs in the provinces of Erzurum and Van a couple of months before the riots broke out. The content of these letters is unknown; yet the main reason behind this investigation was that the policy-makers at the palace were concerned that there might be a direct connection between such provocative letters and the incidents unfolding in these provinces.¹⁰⁰

I argue that these official orders and widespread rumors further exacerbated a climate of growing suspicion, mistrust, and fear. Such anxiety-triggering official warnings not only reinforced hostile perceptions in the region but also seem to have prompted the Muslims to act against the Armenians when they felt the latter deserved punishment. It is likely that many influential Muslims in urban centers and tribal chiefs drew specific conclusions from these orders, assuming roles as local power-holders who had the right to act on behalf of the state in the suppression and punishment of Armenian political ambitions, while at the same time they were also pursuing their own agendas—specifically their socioeconomic interests. Put differently, these orders and measures were likely to be perceived as a green light for violence against the Armenians. As will be shown in Chapter 6, in a number of cases, certain officials and former members of the provincial administrative councils played a significant role in inciting violence by spreading anti-

⁹⁹ It should be noted that the vast majority of these reports were confirmed to be false by the military authorities. Yet they were enough to alert officials and to excite the minds of local Muslim inhabitants.

¹⁰⁰ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 338/91, 14 Ca. 1313 (2 November 1895). Letter from the Minister of Police to the Grand Vizier dated 14 Ca. 1313/2 November 1895. Also see BOA. Y.PRK.ZB. 16/66, 13 Ca. 1313 (1 November 1895).

Armenian conspiracies on the most virulent ways. It is probable that at the local level, these officials and influential Muslims, who also often took part in the provincial administration at various levels, collaborated to exploit widespread anti-Armenian sentiments and made some proactive “action plans” for certain scenarios on the eve of riots.

Security alerts, combined with the news of previous disturbances, perhaps also led to some practical measures on the part of government officials and influential Muslims. For instance, according to British sources, the local authorities in the town of Muş had distributed arms to Muslim civilians who could deposit 7 liras to be used in case of an Armenian band attack or in a similar situation.¹⁰¹ Although it is difficult to verify this claim, it is evident that security anxieties not only helped to justify the violence perpetrated against the Armenians, but also played a significant role in promoting an atmosphere conducive to intercommunal conflict and prompted Muslims into hostile preparations throughout the period in question.

The existence of a preconceived plan on the part of Muslims in each and every case is an issue open to speculation and interpretation. Yet, as shall be indicated in the next chapters, there is evidence to suggest that the behavior of Muslims was not always spontaneous and reactive at all. In many cases, the exact nature of precipitating events is difficult to determine. Since the rioting in Istanbul, it became a clearly recognizable pattern that whenever Armenians took to the streets, even for peaceful protests, or whenever any confrontation arose between Armenians and the Ottoman authorities, Muslim populations in the Armenian-populated provinces intervened in the events very violently, and mostly without encountering any effective countermeasures from officials. The incidents in Istanbul (both in 1895 and 1896), Trabzon, and, to a certain degree, in some parts of the province of Erzurum were precipitated by the events closely associated with Armenian revolutionary actions. Also, in some localities, notably in the town of Diyarbekir, growing Armenian protest activity on the eve of riots was perhaps interpreted by many Muslims as evidence of sinister revolutionary plots or a secret Armenian plan to attack Muslims. This situation seems to have galvanized Muslims into action with enough agitation. Indeed,

¹⁰¹ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 466. Inclosure 2 in No. 466. Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, Mush, October 22, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 282.

anxiety and fear, when combined with other motives and incentives, may instigate one part to take the quick action against the opposing group. However, notwithstanding contradictory and unsubstantial official claims, the disturbances in other localities were either largely unprovoked events or triggered by false rumors readily propagated and believed.

After the outbreak of riots in Istanbul and Trabzon, perhaps many Muslims in the Armenian-populated provinces were prepared for violence, thinking that Armenian “mischief-makers” would create troubles in their towns as well. Indeed, in a general account of the recent events that took place in the eastern provinces during October and November 1895, the British Consul at Erzurum, Henry Arnold Cumberbatch, pointed out that on the eve of the conflicts, the news of disturbances in Istanbul and Trabzon produced great uneasiness everywhere, with the Armenians viewing the massive riots in these places as warnings of what might happen to themselves anytime, and the Muslims, who were “furnished with the misleading official versions of those disturbances, preparing to emulate their co-religionists.”¹⁰² In this regard, Cumberbatch’s observation on the riots in Erzurum is quite significant as well. According to the British consul, the civilian and military authorities in this city were awaiting an attack by a small band of revolutionary agitators, whose number was greatly exaggerated, on officials or civilian Muslims in light of the recent events in Istanbul and Trabzon, and probably of official instructions from the Sublime Porte. They therefore prepared to suppress any attempt “with all the vindictiveness and ferocity accompanying Turkish [*sic*] modes of suppressing so-called rebellions.”¹⁰³

It is reasonable to assume that in such an environment, mutual suspicion and fear increase the probability that violence will be used to eliminate the other, thereby motivating collective action. And the majority group is usually in a favorable position to take the first action. Such a polarized environment is also usually open to abuse and provides a fertile

¹⁰² TNA: FO 424/184, No. 734. Inclosure in No. 734. Consul Cumberbatch to Herbert, Erzeroum, November 21, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 413.

¹⁰³ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 541. Inclosure in No. 541. Consul Cumberbatch to Herbert, Erzeroum, November 4, 1895

Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 311.

ground for mobilization. Anyone powerful enough—a Muslim notable, a tribal chief, or an official—wishing to mobilize Muslims against Armenians, could exploit this atmosphere disseminating false reports or declaring that violence against them was permissible. Likewise, only a minor quarrel, a gunshot, a simple assault, or a false rumor could instigate crowds and escalate the conflict into a widespread riot. Indeed, many such events precipitated anti-Armenian riots from September 1895 to March 1897.

The history of ethnic riots, lynching, and pogroms in the past two centuries shows the exceptional power of rumor as a mobilizing agent in collective violence. As Horowitz aptly observes, rumors of assault by the target group justifies violence and helps to increase social support for it, convincing the would-be rioters and the wider society that counteraction is necessary and appropriate.¹⁰⁴ On eve of and throughout the anti-Armenian riots, rumors and fictitious tales found a fertile context in the Eastern Anatolian climate of fear. In Ayntab (Haleb/Aleppo), for instance, it was rumored that Armenians had poisoned the city's water supply.¹⁰⁵ The violence in town of Gümüşhane (Trabzon) seems to have been precipitated by a rumor that a gendarme had died of a pharmaceutical agent he had purchased from an Armenian chemist.¹⁰⁶ Although rumors of Armenian bands slaughtering Muslim families and mutilating women in several other towns proved to be false in closer examination, they were nevertheless effective in pushing local populations further and further into mass violence. The modern urban environment, which facilitated the faster movement of news and rumors, offered a fertile soil for the spark and escalation of violence. The dynamics of urban life made hitherto unavailable tactics available for mobilizing the population, including the posting of anti-Armenian leaflets and placards on walls, organization of secret meetings, and issuance of provocative sermons by religious personnel in public spaces.

¹⁰⁴ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 367. On the role of rumor, also see Ravi Bhavnani, Michael G. Findley, and James H. Kuklinski, "Rumor Dynamics in Ethnic Violence," *The Journal of Politics* 71, no. 3 (2009): 876-92.

¹⁰⁵ BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 1/11, 5 C. 1313 (22 November 1895). Telegram from the former Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo to the Interior Ministry dated 10 TS 1311/22 November 1895.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 620. Inclosure in No. 620. Longworth to Herbert, Trebizond, November 15, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 363.

Importantly, throughout the autumn and winter of 1895, there were abundant rumors to the effect that the Sultan issued a decree ordering or authorizing massacres against Armenians. It is safe to suggest that the myth of an anti-Armenian decree played a significant role in mobilizing especially Kurdish tribal populations. They were often reported to have claimed that they had received orders from “high quarters” to kill Armenians.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, many ordinary Ottoman citizens, whether sympathetic to these excesses or not, believed anti-Armenian violence was ordered or allowed by the government. For instance, on 23 October 1895, just before the spread of riots to the Six Provinces, the Governor-General of Erzurum reported to his superiors in Istanbul that according to the news they had received, “Muslim seasonal migrant workers returning home (*sılacı Müslümanlar*) from Istanbul and Trabzon were spreading rumors that the [recent] outbreaks [in these places] occurred with the order and permission of the government.” The governor-general had warned the local authorities in the districts of his province of the possible adversary effects of the dissemination of such fabricated news on the [minds of] the local Muslim people, and therefore instructed them to advise required people that the government had not given any order consent to this effect. On the contrary, the imperial orders and decrees had categorically prohibited such acts, which were contrary to the wishes of the Sovereign and might entail harmful consequences for the government and the Muslim people.¹⁰⁸

Obviously, the introduction of the reform program made many Muslims angry and passionate enough to be increasingly bent on violence. Once riots turned into a wave in late October, the killing of members of a vulnerable minority group labeled as “troublemakers” was no longer regarded as a crime but a clear necessity and the use of extreme violence became a norm engulfing a vast region over a considerable period of time. Those who were searching for economic opportunities also took advantage of this

¹⁰⁷ In his letter to the British Consul at Trabzon, Longworth, the U.S. Consul at Sivas, Milo A. Jewett, for instance, wrote “The Kurds, it is said from several sources, claim that they are acting under orders from ‘high quarters.’” See TNA: FO 424/184, No. 551. Inclosure 2 in No. 551. Letter from “Dr. Jewett to Consul Longworth” dated Sivas, November 5, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 319. British consular sources contain many such reports.

¹⁰⁸ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/6, 4 Ca. 1313 (23 October 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Erzurum dated 11 TE 1311/23 October 1895.

chaotic situation. As noted in Chapter 1, intercommunal violence provided many Kurdish chieftains with further opportunities and justification to seize the land of their Ottoman Armenians neighbors. Economic/material incentives were a powerful motivation not only for Kurdish tribal populations and chieftains but also for urban notables or influential Muslims in urban centers. To give an example, the provincial government authorities in Sivas had heard from “reliable sources” that more valuable looted Armenian properties were kept in the houses of “notables” (*mu'teberân*) and others.¹⁰⁹ Many other examples demonstrate the importance of material expropriation as a motivating factor behind violence against Armenians during the period under scrutiny. Furthermore, as Horowitz perfectly observes, a deadly ethnic riot, as a highly intense display of collective violent behavior, is essentially an amalgam of passion and calculation.¹¹⁰ In such situations, strong emotions and a willingness to imitate the prevalent behavior play a role as important as political motives, material incentives, and calculated interests. There are also individuals and groups who tend to go with the flow; who want to take advantage of chaos for individual or group interests and for weakening their business competitors; and, lastly who join the ranks of rioters only for personal gains such as theft and robbery.

3.4. Geographies of Violence or Where Riots and Killings Occurred

As the Table 1 shows, over the autumn and winter of 1895-96, virtually every provincial capital in the Six Provinces, with the sole exception of the town of Van, as well as a number of major cities lying outside the Six Provinces witnessed large-scale killings and utter devastation. Almost every district in the region with an Armenian population, considerable or not, experienced disturbances, minor or exclusively lethal and widespread, the vast majority of which took place in October and November 1895. Apart from the Six Provinces and the imperial capital, various places (including one provincial center and several major towns) in the provinces of Trabzon, Aleppo, and Ankara witnessed massive eruptions of anti-Armenian violence during the period in question. In the province of

¹⁰⁹ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 661/12, 28 C. 1313 (16 December 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 11 TS 1311/23 November 1895.

¹¹⁰ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 32 and 522-565.

Adana—another province with sizeable Armenian communities living outside of the Six Provinces—, events were comparatively insignificant. The town of Çokmerzimen and rural areas of the district of Haçin were troubled but violence did not grow into full-scale conflicts. Lastly, minor disorders that took place in a number of important towns such as Muş, Ankara, and Aleppo were quickly suppressed by the local authorities without escalating into large-scale riots. For this reason, the names of these towns do not show up in the following table.

Likewise, attacks by Kurdish tribes on Mardin, Kiğı, Silvan, Savur and several other medium- and small-size towns in the districts of the Diyarbekir province were repelled owing to the efforts of local authorities and Muslim notables. On the other hand, a great many villages around these towns were raided and sacked by Kurdish tribal forces. Incidents in the town of Van (June 1896) and the Maraş-Zeytun region (from October 1895 to February 1896) had different dynamics and they essentially were a combination of rioting, mass killing, and armed rebellion led by Armenian revolutionaries. Although civilian populations from both sides were both involved in the clashes and subject to atrocities, the long-lasting incidents in these areas were mainly characterized by intense, bloody combats between the Ottoman military and armed Armenian groups.

Table 1 **Riot centers and attacked towns**

Town/city and province	Date of outbreak¹¹¹
Istanbul (Imperial capital)	30 September-2 October 1895; 26-29 August 1896
Trabzon (Trabzon)	8 October 1895
Akhisar (<i>Mutasarrıflık</i> of İzmid [İzmit])	9 October 1895
Erzincan (Erzurum)	21 October 1895
Refahiye (Erzurum)	23 October 1895
Gümüşhane (Trabzon)	25 October 1895
Bitlis (Bitlis)	25 October 1895
Bayburd [Bayburt] (Erzurum)	26 October 1895

¹¹¹ Unless otherwise specified, the table only shows the dates of outbreak while disorders in several places lasted for a couple of days or more. It is usually difficult to determine when a riot or an episode of such violence exactly comes to an end.

Town/city and province	Date of outbreak ¹¹¹
Maraş [Kahramanmaraş](Haleb/Aleppo)	23-27 October 1895; 18 November 1895
Urfa [Şanlıurfa] (Haleb/Aleppo)	27-28 October 1895; 28-29 December 1895
Karahisar-ı Şarkî (Sivas)	28 October 1895
Erzurum (Erzurum)	30 October 1895
Diyarbakır [Diyarbakır] (Diyarbakır)	1-3 November 1895
Siverek (Diyarbakır)	2 November 1895
Malatya (Mamuretü'l-Aziz)	4 November 1895
Peri (Çarsancak [Akpazar], Mamuretü'l-Aziz)	6 November 1895
Arabgir [Arapkir] (Mamuretü'l-Aziz)	6-15 November 1895 ¹¹²
Palu (Diyarbakır)	6 November 1895
Hısn-ı Mansur [Hısnımansur, Adıyaman] (Mamuretü'l-Aziz)	7 November 1895
Siird [Siirt] (Bitlis)	11 November 1895 ¹¹³
Harput (Mamuretü'l-Aziz)	11-12 November 1895
Sivas (Sivas)	12 November 1895
Gürün (Sivas)	12 November 1895
Merzifon (Sivas)	15 November 1895
Amasya (Sivas)	15 November 1895
Havza (Sivas)	16 November 1895
Ayntab [Gaziantep] (Haleb/Aleppo)	16 November 1895
Zile (Sivas)	28 November 1895
Kayseri (Ankara)	30 November 1895
Birecik (Haleb/Aleppo)	1 January 1896
Çapakçur [Bingöl] (Bitlis)	13 February 1896
Kilis (Haleb/Aleppo)	20 March 1896
Van (Van)	June 1896
Niksar (Sivas)	20 June 1896
Eğir [Kemaliye] (Mamuretü'l-Aziz)	15 September 1896
Everek [Develi] (Ankara)	30 October 1896
Tokat [Tokat] (Sivas)	19 March 1897

¹¹² From archival records, it seems that the riots in the town of Arabgir lasted until November 15 with a varying degree of intensity. Arabgir witnessed one of the most severe conflicts during the wave of riots that occurred in the autumn of 1895.

¹¹³ According to a telegram sent by the Governor-General of Bitlis to the Interior Ministry the day after the incident in Siird, the violent events in this town occurred on November 11, while the Commander of Siird Division refers to Sunday, November 10. Cf. BOA. DH.ŞFR. 183/135, 31 TE 1311 (12 November 1895) and BOA. Y.MTV. 132/1, 1 C. 1313 (18 November 1895). It seems that the correct date is November 11.

In the strict sense of the word, there were no larger riot “epicenters” from which incidents spread to smaller places in the affected region. In some provinces, incidents began in smaller towns and spread to the provincial capital while the opposite situation was the case with other provinces. Here it is important to note that the riots did not spread spontaneously. In addition to the significant role that the promulgation of reforms played in inciting and escalating violence, the disorder in Erzincan was a momentous in that it meant for the authorities and civilian populations inhabiting the region that the riots of Istanbul and Trabzon would not remain localized events. Within a matter of ten days following the Erzincan riot of October 21, two provincial centers and four medium- and small-size towns were engulfed in enormous violence, not to mention the raids unleashed by Muslim crowds on Armenian villages throughout the districts of Tercan, Pasinler, and Hınıs, as well as rural settlements along the border of the provinces of Erzurum and Sivas. After the incident in the town of Erzincan, the Sublime Porte and the Fourth Army authorities sent urgent telegrams to the other provinces informing the local civilian and military authorities of the earlier disorders and warning them to be on alert. Putting the entire blame categorically upon the Armenians, these official alerts must have contributed to the anxiety and excitement that prevailed among the local populations across other regions. Indeed, the anonymous author of a private letter of October 25, which was received from Harput by the British Consul at Erzurum, Henry Arnold Cumberbatch, noted that the telegrams and letters sent from Erzincan had prepared the minds of local people in Harput to expect such news.¹¹⁴

Indeed, especially at the beginning of the wave of riots, news and rumors arriving from neighboring towns and provinces played a formative role in a context of intercommunal antagonism, distrust, and conflict. News/rumors of social disorder and killings—false or true—in one part of a province or region quickly traveled to another, where fatal attacks on Armenians occurred in turn. It was not uncommon that violence in a town was triggered by rumors of Armenians attacking Muslims in a neighboring place. Besides, it is likely that news of the complacent attitude of the authorities, who failed to

¹¹⁴ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 627. Inclosure 2 in No. 627, “Extracts from Private Letter from Kharpout,” transmitted by Consul Cumberbatch to Herbert in a dispatch dated Erzeroum, November 11, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 370.

take effective measures in suppressing the disorders and did not impose deterrent punishment on the assailants in previous places, made potential perpetrators in other locations more inclined toward violent action. Indeed, the attitude of officials and law enforcement forces during the incidents in Istanbul and Trabzon perhaps gave many Muslims the sense that anti-Armenian violence was permissible and that therefore any actions against Armenians would not be severely punished. At this point, Hoffmann et al.'s observation in the case of anti-Jewish violence in Germany is instructive: "When a pogrom is raging, it changes the cost/benefit relationship to the advantage of the participants. If the exclusionary riot is large and the state reacts sluggishly, this lessens the risk of sanctions and makes the diffuse willingness to use violence concrete."¹¹⁵

Modern means of communication and transport such as the telegraph, newspapers, and the roads connecting neighboring provinces facilitated and expedited the diffusion of news, information/misinformation, rumors, and tales from a city to another. Likewise, merchants travelling between cities, seasonal workers, and local peasants returning home after conducting business in towns were instrumental in spreading the rumors and myths that prevailed over the period in question. As a matter of fact, besides the declaration of the introduction of Armenian reforms, a number of other factors—the arrival of the news of disturbances in a neighboring town, widespread rumors, and official warnings and pronouncements—intentionally or unintentionally played a significant role in triggering new violent episodes and producing a domino effect in an atmosphere conducive to violent conflict.

With the exception of certain individual cases, most notably in the provinces of Sivas and Diyarbekir, violence in rural areas was less extreme than in urban areas even though rural Armenians were potentially the most vulnerable to violence since law enforcements agencies were more distant. To put it another way, although rural areas across the Six Provinces were overtaken by severe village raids, murderous attacks, and widespread pillaging, the majority of casualties and vandalization took place during the

¹¹⁵ Christhard Hoffmann, Werner Bergmann, and Helmut Walser Smith, "Introduction," in *Exclusionary Violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History*, eds. Christhard Hoffmann et al. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 16.

urban riots in provincial capitals and district towns. Moreover, anti-Armenian riots almost invariably originated in urban spaces, from which they spread to rural areas. In this sense, it is essential that we come to consider the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 as a predominantly urban phenomenon. Indeed, as I have reflected on my findings, it has also become clearer that the urban environment provided a fertile soil for the intensification of intercommunal antagonisms, the mobilization of people for action, and the transformation of political contestation into violent manifestations. The novel modes of communication that transferred news and rumors faster between towns and the countryside, the proliferation of public places fit for political discussion, increasing mobility, and the concurrent genesis of urban forms of protest contributed to the rapid politicization of most segments of society, including both the Armenians and the Muslims.

Rural settlements all over the Six Provinces and a number of other Armenian-populated regions in Anatolia were nevertheless the scenes of great troubles and devastation throughout the period in question, with the countryside of the provinces of Sivas, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, Diyarbekir, and Van being most affected. Hundreds of Armenian villages in the affected provinces were practically ruined by an unprecedented degree of pillage, plunder, and robbery mostly conducted by groups of Kurdish tribes, Laz marauders, Caucasian immigrants, and partly local Muslim villagers. In most cases, violence in rural areas was directed only when villagers resisted pillagers as they tended to focus on pillaging and robbery rather than killing. Yet events in rural areas also included murderous attacks on Armenian villages mostly by the nomadic Kurds, which were typically followed by looting and destruction of property. Disorders in rural settlements were also persistent and recurrent due to the lack of efficient, permanent security and also because the military troops and other law enforcement agencies avoided using deadly force against raiders and pillagers until late November.

Caucasian immigrants and the Kurds of Dersim were very active in the countryside of the province of Sivas, raiding numerous Armenian villages and towns, killing the inhabitants, and looting their property. Acts of raid and pillage in rural settlements in the southern parts of the province of Erzurum and throughout the provinces of Bitlis and Van were extensive and committed by powerful Kurdish tribes, most of which were affiliated

with the Hamidiye Regiments, such as the Haydaranlı and Hasananlı Kurds. In these areas, pillage and robberies were not usually accompanied by bloodshed as the primary motives of the tribes involved were pillage, intimidation, and land usurpation/occupation. Yet, as was the case with other regions, the devastation in these areas was widespread and it took years for Armenian villagers to recover. In many regions, pillagers robbed helpless Armenian and Assyrian peasants of even their clothing, bedding, and cooking utensils. Abduction was conducted more often in rural areas of the provinces of Diyarbekir and Bitlis and across rural settlements within the *sancak*¹¹⁶ of Urfa.¹¹⁷

Mass killings and plunder in the towns of Peri (Mamuretü'l-Aziz), Çapakçur (Bitlis), Gürün (Sivas), and Palu (Diyarbekir) were committed by big crowds of Kurdish tribal forces from the neighboring areas although it is probable that some local inhabitants joined the ranks of Kurdish assailants. Likewise, the massacre in Harput was mainly the work of Kurdish tribal groups of over 2000 people raiding the town.¹¹⁸ Kurdish tribes also made serious attempts to enter the towns of Silvan, Lice, Çüngüş, and Çermik in very large groups but they were driven off. Throughout November 1895, they pillaged almost the entire Armenian villages and many Assyrian settlements around these towns.

As implied before, the state-sponsored massacres narrative underestimates the significance of local contexts, agency, and actors in understanding the complex dynamics of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97. In addition, given that the riots did not take place simultaneously in all locations, one should admit that the peculiar character of precipitating events and the reactions of local actors in each case are significant and must therefore be thoroughly investigated. This is, however, not to mean that the incidents that took place in multiple locations were isolated from each other and can be understood only when

¹¹⁶ *Sancak* was a subdivision of a province in the Ottoman administrative system, which is occasionally referred to as “sanjak” in English-language historical sources. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a *sancak* was administrated by a *mutasarrıf*, or sub-province governor.

¹¹⁷ Selim Deringil has already documented and insightfully analyzed mass conversions of Armenians to Islam out of fear and threat of death during the massacres of 1895-97 in “Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897;” Also see, idem, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chapter 5.

¹¹⁸ On the mass killing of Armenians in Harput in 1895, see Sipahi, “Narrative Construction in the 1895 Massacres in Harput.”

considering the specific conditions of each locality or region and in each period. Indeed, the anti-Armenian riots were episodes of mass violence that spread in waves across territorially contiguous provinces that comprised a vast region, distinct from the riots staged in the imperial capital and in the town of Akhisar (İzmid). The majority of the riots in multiple locations also occurred over almost the same period of time and the incidents that took place in different settings were ultimately almost identical in all essential respects: (1) They fed from the same climate of fear and hostility that was conducive to violence; (2) they originated from the same source of antagonism, fear, and resentment embedded in the political imaginary; (3) they involved instigators, perpetrators, and accomplices who came from similar backgrounds, with some local variations; (4) they went through similar episodes of killing, atrocity, and destruction; and, (5) they targeted the same category of victim. Likewise, the background factors and the stimuli to violence were not site-specific. Therefore, these outbreaks of violence cannot be regarded as localized, isolated, single events.

3.5. Number of Casualties or Counting Dead Bodies: Between Western Hyperbole and Official Underestimation

Exactly how many Ottoman Armenians and Muslims were killed and injured during the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 will probably remain unknown forever. Furthermore, the history of wars, genocides, mass killings, and ethnic conflicts all over the world shows that the difficulty of determining accurate numbers of casualties that occur during such horrific events, as well as the politically sensitive nature of such events, leaves much room for controversy, exaggeration, and falsification.

In addition to official Ottoman figures, there is a plethora of numbers and estimates presented by the contemporary Western media, foreign government representatives, missionaries, humanitarian organizations, and European and American politicians, clergymen, publicists, public intellectuals, and authors, ranging from 50,000 to 400,000, not to mention even higher numbers claimed by several sources. As we shall see below, there is a great disparity not only between official Ottoman figures and the numbers in Armenian-Western accounts but also among the estimates given by the representatives of

foreign governments, missionary circles, and contemporary European and American citizens in and outside the empire. In other words, foreign sources themselves differ greatly in the numbers they have mentioned. It is important to note that the numbers given by especially British, French, and U.S. officials, which were based on consular reports and missionary accounts from the affected areas, were much lower than the estimates offered, or rather mentioned, by diplomats, politicians, publicists, clergymen, and authors outside the empire.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that figures produced in foreign accounts in close temporal proximity to the events—more specifically until February 1896—were usually much lower, while as of Spring 1896, numbers cited in such accounts dramatically increased even though after February 1896, only three locations—Van, Istanbul, and Eğin—witnessed disturbances of great magnitude. Further, in many of the contemporary western accounts, that put the number of casualties as high as 150,000 to 400,000, we come across the mostly unsubstantiated claim that many more Armenians died after the massacres as a result of starvation, disease, and exposure than were killed during the disturbances. Foreign diplomats, and especially British, French, and American representatives in the Ottoman Empire, drew attention to the gravity of the situation in the aftermath of the killings, but they did not provide official and definitive estimates regarding the number of indirect deaths caused by starvation, diseases, and exposure. As we will see later on in this chapter, many other contemporaries based their estimates on “personal opinions” or sketchy material that obviously exaggerated the number of victims to an extravagant extent. This uncertainty on the part of European and American contemporaries seriously affected modern-day scholars who later drew on these accounts as primary sources, usually with a clear tendency toward choosing the highest estimates.

Estimates of Armenian deaths in modern Armenian and Western scholarship range between 100,000 and 300,000. To mention only a few, according to Payaslian, the massacres of 1894-96 claimed the lives of more than 100,000 Armenians, adding that some estimate the number at about 300,000.¹¹⁹ Bloxham says that the mass killings of 1894-96

¹¹⁹ Payaslian, *The History of Armenia*, 120.

took “80–100,000 Armenian lives directly and tens of thousands indirectly.”¹²⁰ Recently, Hartmann refers to “Up to 300,000 Armenians fell victim to the massacres.”¹²¹ Somakian claims that the massacres ordered by Sultan Abdülhamid II resulted in the death of at least 200,000 Armenians.¹²² For Astourian, the death toll of the 1894-96 massacres was “probably between 150,000 and 200,000.”¹²³ Margaret Lavinia Anderson says that although numbers differ, the massacres of the mid-1890s “probably cost at least 200,000 Armenian lives.”¹²⁴ Lastly, Ervant Kazarovich Sarkisian and Ruben G. Sahakian, members of the Armenian Academy of Sciences in Erevan, have claimed that the massacres of 1894-96 “took the lives of 300,000 human beings.”¹²⁵

These extremely high numbers are not based on careful and critical research. Many authors do not even provide a single source for their claims regarding the number of Armenian losses. In the absence of comprehensive, original studies, most of the authors cited above either had to choose among a variety of numbers provided by contemporaries and previous studies or simply provided a wide range of rough estimates. Besides the lack of substantial research on the anti-Armenian massacres during the Hamidian period, the question of how many people died in 1895-97 is also politically charged and has its own ethical implications. Even if they are based upon a close, careful examination of multiple published and unpublished sources, revisionist attempts may end up being accused of underestimating the sufferings of a great many people as well as the political significance of anti-Armenian violence in the late Ottoman Empire.

¹²⁰ Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, 51.

¹²¹ Elke Hartmann, “The Central State in the Borderlands: Ottoman Eastern Anatolia in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, eds. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 184

¹²² Somakian, *Empires in Conflict*, 3.

¹²³ Astourian, “Silence of the Land,” 65.

¹²⁴ Margaret Lavinia Anderson, “A responsibility to protest? The public, the Powers and the Armenians in the era of Abdülhamit II,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 266, accessed November 24, 2016, doi: 10.1080/14623528.2015.1062281.

¹²⁵ E[rvant]. K[azarovich]. Sarkisian and R[uben]. G. Sahakian, *Vital Issues in Modern Armenian History: A Documented Exposé of Misrepresentations in Turkish Historiography*, ed. and trans. Elisha B. Chrakian (Watertown, MA: Library of Armenian Studies, 1965), 18.

It should nevertheless be noted most of these scholars and many others, including those who particularly focus on the riots of 1895-97, tend to use, or rather accept, contemporary sources faithfully and uncritically, assuming that those who provide such high numbers based their estimates on serious investigations or derived them from reliable sources. In other words, they fail to take into account the possibility that exaggerations, falsehoods, distorted information, biases, preconceptions, and falsifications for propaganda purposes well colored many of these press accounts and individual writings. Even though a completely accurate number of victims is difficult to establish, estimated numbers provided by a wide range of contemporaries should be evaluated with care, caution, and with a clear consideration of the agency and audience of the authors who wrote about these violent events. Moreover, instead of relying on a variety of different records drawn from all available sources that should be used critically, most authors also tend to easily discredit or ignore, in a rather arbitrary manner, lower numbers and estimates given by foreign officials, missionaries, contemporary observers, and authors. Clearly, they have no justification—whether methodological, analytical, or in terms of type of source material—for choosing higher numbers among the plethora of available “alternatives.” To repeat, sources of the same type and contemporaries of the same or similar backgrounds mentioned widely-varied estimates, the vast majority of which were not based on any investigation or survey.

As we shall see below, especially, British, French, and U.S. officials and American Protestant missionaries in the empire never made mention of such high estimates even though they stated that the number of Armenian deaths might be much higher considering the incidents in rural areas from which they were not able to receive reliable information as well as indirect deaths caused by the conditions in the immediate aftermath of the massacres. The numbers most frequently cited by the Hunchak and Dashnak leaderships ranged between 80,000 and 100,000. The Dashnak fighters who seized the Ottoman Bank in Istanbul in late August 1896, for instance, spoke of “100,000 martyrs” in their collective note to foreign embassies, referring to Armenian losses in 1894-96.¹²⁶ Consequently, as

¹²⁶ Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question, 1878-1918* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 143; Ronald Grigor Suny, *“They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else”: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 123.

already implied above, these extremely high estimates of Armenian losses, which have been taken for granted by modern scholars, have their roots in the contemporary Western press and the accounts of certain European and American politicians, clergymen, publicist, and authors. Most of the contemporary European and American authors who gave extremely high estimates had never visited the troubled areas, or any other part of the empire, and they mostly based their estimates on indirect sources and “personal beliefs.”

To give an example of modern-day scholars’ selective and uncritical use of sources, Kirakossian writes that Malcolm MacColl, a British clergyman and publicist, estimated the death toll for “the 1896 massacres” at 200,000. Then, he arrives at the conclusion that “[t]he total number of Armenian casualties in 1894–96 reached 300,000,” apparently taking for granted that some 100,000 Armenians were killed during the massacres that took place before 1896 although he does not give an exact total number for the earlier events but only provides a table based on European and U.S. sources putting the number of victims during the massacres of 1895 at 41,930.¹²⁷ Meanwhile, it should be noted that Kirakossian has apparently misread MacColl, whose estimate—200,000—referred the total number of Armenian deaths that took place during the riots in 1895-96, not in 1896 alone. Leaving aside Kirakossian’s misinterpretation of MacColl, there is no reason to believe that the number of 100,000 being accepted by him as the Armenian death toll in 1894 and 1895 is accurate and based upon a careful and critical use of multiple published and unpublished sources. More important, however, is that Kirakossian does not explain why the reader should believe in the reliability and plausibility of the estimate offered by MacColl, that is, 200,000. Indeed, it is not clear what makes MacColl an authoritative source in the eyes of Kirakossian, instead of another clergyman, George H. Hepworth, who estimated the total number of deaths at 50,000.¹²⁸ Reading MacColl’s book, one can clearly see that he was simply one of the many contemporary authors who wrote extensive pieces on the “Armenian Question” and the anti-Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire.

¹²⁷ Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, 260-61, and 273. Also see idem, “Introduction” (to *The Armenian Massacres, 1894-1896: British Media Testimony*), 51.

¹²⁸ For reference see below.

Indeed, MacColl's estimate itself is certainly problematic. Having referred to the British Ambassador Currie's December estimate of 30,000, MacColl claimed that this "moderate estimate" only reckoned the events until the end of October and embraced "only a limited area." Since then, he continued, massacres had taken place in many other places, and "a moderate estimate of the total number of victims, including deaths from exposure and starvation, down to now is 200,000."¹²⁹ As will be seen below, Ambassador Currie gave even a lower estimate (25,000) in late January 1896 referring to a Tabular Statement drawn up by a committee of delegates from various embassies in Istanbul although he noted that the number he gave might be increased if losses in some rural areas were added. Yet this was the case with the British ambassador's December estimate. It is therefore misleading to say that Currie's estimates only included the events until the end of October 1895. Moreover, MacColl did not provide any figures regarding the mass killings that occurred after November 1895, nor did he cite any sources or surveys. It is therefore not clear how he "moderately" estimated the total number of losses at 200,000. Like many other contemporary European authors who penned detailed accounts on the anti-Armenian massacres of the mid-1890s, he tended to think that tens of thousands of Armenians had died of starvation, disease, and exposure. For most, as already mentioned above, it was even more than the number of those who were killed during the riots. Numbers ranged from 100,000 to 250,000. Obviously, indirect deaths were more open to speculation.

Indeed, in as early as May 1896, an anonymous author claimed that there was evidence that the number of Armenians killed until February 1896 "was not less than 50,000," a figure which was reportedly based on an independent investigation conducted on behalf of the Italian government. The author added that when those who died of famine and cold were added, this number would raise "to little short of 200,000."¹³⁰ Likewise, earlier reports in well-known papers such as *the New York Times*, *London Daily Telegraph*, *the Daily News*, and *the Times* spoke of 20-25,000 Armenian deaths until early December.

¹²⁹ Malcolm MacColl, *The Sultan and the Powers* (London, UK; New York, NY; Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 53.

¹³⁰ [Anonymous], "Armenia and the Powers: From Behind the Scenes," *The Contemporary Review* 69 (May 1896), 629. Also see Arman J. Kirakossian, ed., *The Armenian Massacres, 1894-1896: British Media Testimony* (Dearborn, MI: The Armenian Research Center, University of Michigan, 2008), 436. The anonymous author was probably the Irish reporter and linguist Emil J. Dillon.

In late January 1896, estimates mentioned in these and many other newspapers printed in Europe and the U.S.A. ranged from 25,000 to 50,000 although they also published or mentioned telegraphic reports from Armenian citizens who gave especially higher numbers such as 60,00 and 100,000. *The New York Times*, for instance, published a long piece on January 26, 1896, in which it was claimed that according to the French Ambassador at Istanbul, “the latest authentic accounts” placed the number of victims during the massacres in Anatolian provinces at 50,000. And 350,000 more people were “starving and perishing from cold and exposure.”¹³¹

Throughout 1896 and 1897, numerous European and American periodicals continued to publish news and articles on the anti-Armenian carnages written by mostly clergymen, politicians, missionaries, journalists, publicists, and Armenian émigrés and refugees who gave countless different figures of Armenian losses ranging from 30,000 to 300,000, not to mention such fantastically high numbers as 1,000,000.¹³² Modern Armenian and western historiographies tend to ignore the fact that the main objective of most contemporary authors was actually not to provide accurate numbers and verified facts but to draw attention to the sufferings of Armenians and the policies of the Sultan and his government. They did not only call for international condemnation and protest against the Ottoman government but also sought to reinforce sympathy for and solidarity with a Christian population under Ottoman rule.

Like western press accounts, numbers given by individuals in Europe and the United States widely differed. George Hughes Hepworth, a prominent American clergyman and journalist who travelled through the eastern provinces in 1897 to probe into the recent massacres and the condition of the Armenian-populated provinces after the violent events, concluded that “it would be a moderate estimate to say that fifty thousand”

¹³¹ Vosgan Mekhitarian and Vahan Ohanian, eds. *Armenians at the Twilight of the Ottoman Era: News Reports from the International Press*, vol. 1: *The New York Times, 1890-1914* (n.p.: Genocide Documentation and Research Center, 2011), 597. For another piece, published on February 2, 1896, giving the same numbers, see *ibid.*, 627.

¹³² From a piece of news published in *the New York Times* on 6 August 1896: “A lady whose name is not given, who has just returned from Armenia, asserts that the foreign Consuls and missionaries there estimate that fully 1,000,000 deaths have occurred in that country as the result of the massacres and from starvation.” See *ibid.*, 769.

people were killed.¹³³ The American publicist and author Edwin M. Bliss, the editor of *the Encyclopedia of Missions*, who was born in Erzurum and the son of a minister sent to Istanbul by the American Bible Society for the Levant, wrote an extensive account of the “Armenian Question” in the Ottoman Empire and the massacres of the mid-1890s. Bliss penned his book in the U.S.A. and seems to have completed it in the spring of 1896. He drew up a table showing the number of Armenian losses in 25 towns including the villages in the immediate vicinity, which covered most of the troubled areas with the notable exceptions of rural areas in the province of Van, Amasya, and Siverek for which he says he was not able to obtain reliable data. The total number of victims in his table is 35,032. Relying on this data most probably provided by American missionaries, Bliss said that “those who are on the field and best qualified to judge make a general estimate of the entire loss of life at not less than 50,000, and this has the endorsement of the English and French Ambassadors at Constantinople.”¹³⁴

The American clergyman and former missionary Frederick Davis Greene, who travelled in the eastern provinces prior to the events, put the number of Armenian deaths in 1894 (Sasun) and 1895 at 40,000, 12,000 of which was claimed to take place in Sasun.¹³⁵ Dr. Johannes Lepsius, a German protestant theologian, pastor, and one of the founders of *die Deutsch-Armenische Gesellschaft* (the German–Armenian Society, founded in Berlin, 1914), travelled to the empire to conduct an investigation into the riots in the summer of 1896 but could visit only a limited number of cities in the eastern provinces. Relying on the material he collected from Armenian citizens, missionaries, and foreign nationals, Lepsius wrote that the total number of Armenians killed was about 85,000; towns laid waste about 2,500; churches and monasteries destroyed 568; churches converted into mosques 282. Yet Lepsius concluded that given “the thousands in the unregistered villages

¹³³ George H. Hepworth, *Through Armenia on Horseback* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1898), 344.

¹³⁴ Edwin Munsell Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities: A Graphic and Thrilling History of Turkey—the Armenians, the Events That Have Led Up to the Terrible Massacres that have Occurred in Armenia, with a Full Account of the Same—so Bloody and Brutal in Character and Extent as to Shock the Entire Christian World* (n.p.: Edgewood, [1896]), 553-4.

¹³⁵ Frederick Davis Greene, *Armenian Massacres or the Sword of Mohammed* (Philadelphia: International Publishing Co., 1896), 433, and idem, *The Armenian Crisis in Turkey: The Massacre of 1894, Its Antecedents and Significance* (New York; London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1895), 96.

who were murdered or died of their wounds, or who perished trying to escape, or succumbed to hunger or disease and were buried in the mountains under the winter snow, we shall be understating the number of victims of the Armenian massacres if we reckon it to be 100,000.¹³⁶ George H. Filian, an Ottoman Armenian clergyman who was banished from the empire, wrote in exile in the United States that more than 100,000 Armenians perished during anti-Armenian massacres. Yet elsewhere in the same book, he noted that since the Treaty of Berlin, the Sultan “directly and indirectly” had “killed 200,000 Armenians.”¹³⁷

As a result, amidst a lack of original research, discussions surrounding the number of victims during the anti-Armenian massacres of the 1890s have long been caught between official underestimation and Western hyperbole. Yet, as the following figures drawn from archival records show, the cost in terms of human lives and destruction to private and communal property was enormous in any case. Even the official casualty figures clearly display the scale and severity of the violence.

Table 2 Official number of casualties that occurred in the “Six Provinces” in 1895 and part of 1896¹³⁸

Province	Christian						Muslim					
	Male		Female		Child		Male		Female		Child	
	K*	W*	K	W	K	W	K	W	K	W	K	W
Bitlis	422	115	21	9	1	1	146	179	3	-	2	1
Diyarbakir	1,703	376	226	46	41	4	425	251	89	3	9	-
Erzurum	1,153	646	12	4	11	-	148	256	2	-	-	-

¹³⁶ Johannes Lepsius, *Armenia and Europe: An Indictment*, trans. J. Rendel Harris (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), 18. For a biographical study of Lepsius as a German voice for the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, see Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Johannes Lepsius: Theologian, Humanitarian Activist and Historian of Völkermord: An Approach to a German Biography (1858–1926),” in *Logos im Dialogos: Auf der Suche nach der Orthodoxie*, A. Briskina-Müller, et al. eds., 209-29 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011). For Lepsius and his account of the anti-Armenian killings, also see Stefan Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 47-54.

¹³⁷ George H. Filian, *Armenia and Her People, or the Story of Armenia by an Armenian* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Co., 1896), 151, 217, 319, and 327.

¹³⁸ BOA. Y.EE. 7/3. n.d. “Anadolu Vilayat-ı Şahanesinden Bazılarında Zuhura Gelen İğtişaçatta Nüfus ve Emval ve Ebniyece Görülen Telefat ve Zayıyatı Mübeyyin Cedvelleri Havidir” (Tables showing the human losses and property and building damages that took place during the disturbances in some of the Imperial Anatolian provinces).

Sivas	2,443 ¹³⁹	493	35	46	n/d	n/d	361 ¹⁴⁰	328	17	-	n/d	n/d
Van (1895)	98	34	7	3	-	4	40	13	1	2	-	-
	K			W			K		W			
Van (1896)¹⁴¹	1,211			99			433		388			
Mamuretü'l-Aziz¹⁴²	2,149			n/d			498		n/d			
TOTAL	9,533						2,174					

*K=Killed; W=Wounded

Table 2 shows the number of casualties that occurred during the incidents of 1895-96 in the empire's six major Armenian-populated provinces according to the statistical tabular data prepared by Ottoman officials. Most of these tabular accounts, on which Table 2 is based, give a detailed district-by-district count of human and property losses in these regions.¹⁴³ As the table shows, according to these official accounts, the total number of Armenians killed during the disturbances in these six provinces was slightly more than 9,500. The same accounts put the number of Muslim deaths at 2,174.

These tabular statistical accounts do not contain data on human and property losses that occurred in Istanbul (1895 and 1896), Trabzon (provincial center, 1895), Gümüşhane (1895), Kayseri (1895), Ayntab (1895), Urfa (1895), Birecik (1896), the Zeytun-Maraş region (1895-96), Kilis (1896), Niksar (1896), Eğin (1896), Everek (1896), and Tokad (1897) either because they fell outside the Six Provinces or because the disturbances in these places broke out after those statistical reports were drawn up and submitted to the Sublime Porte by the provincial governments. In the absence of a compiled statistical account providing information on the casualties that occurred in these places, I have collected data from the reports penned by the local authorities for each case as well as from the final investigation reports, which were drawn up either by the members of the

¹³⁹ Out of 2450, 5 were Greek (*Rum*), 4 Protestant (probably Armenian Protestant), and 2 Catholic (most probably Armenian Catholic). The genders of these Greek, Protestant, and Catholic victims are unspecified.

¹⁴⁰ Out of 361, 3 were soldiers.

¹⁴¹ There is no data regarding the gender of the killed and the wounded for the province of Van (1896).

¹⁴² There is no data regarding the gender of the killed and the wounded for the province of Mamuretü'l-Aziz.

¹⁴³ See Y.EE. 7/3. n.d.

Commissions of Inspection or by in-situ investigation committees. For such cases as Ayntab, Kayseri, Kilis, Niksar, Eğin, and Everek where no investigations were conducted by special government bodies, I have relied on the latest possible information provided by the provincial governments since prompt accounts are usually unreliable in terms of casualty numbers. Table 3 shows the numbers of casualties that occurred in these places.

Table 3 Official number of casualties (relating either to the regions outside the” Six Provinces” or to the events that occurred these provinces later in 1896 and early 1897)

Location (City/town/village)	Armenians		Muslims	
	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded
Istanbul (1895) ¹⁴⁴	80	241	4 ¹⁴⁵	73 ¹⁴⁶
Trabzon ¹⁴⁷	182	18	21	25
Trabzon (nearby villages) ¹⁴⁸	21	-	-	-
Gümüşhane ¹⁴⁹	8	n/d ¹⁵⁰	2	4
Environs of Maraş (October 1895) ¹⁵¹	22 ¹⁵²	13	24	14

¹⁴⁴ Y.MTV. 129/98 (5 October 1895).

¹⁴⁵ It is reported that one of the killed was a gendarme officer and the others ordinary Muslims. See *ibid*.

¹⁴⁶ It is reported that 7 Greeks and 1 Jew were also wounded. So, the total number of the non-Armenian wounded was 81. 39 of the wounded were policemen and 23 gendarmes. See *ibid*.

¹⁴⁷ BOA. Y.PRK.KOM. 9/2, 30 B. 1313 (16 January 1896). The final investigation report signed by Lieutenant-General Saadeddin Pasha, İbrahim Edhem, and Mehmed Ali Cemal, the members of the Commission of Inspection, who were dispatched to the Trabzon-Erzurum-Bitlis region, dated 30 B. 1313/3 KS 1311/16 January 1896. According to this final investigation report, among the killed in the town of Trabzon was also a Greek. Earlier, the Governor-General of Trabzon reported that the incidents in the town of Trabzon took the lives of 182 Armenians, 11 Muslims, and 1 soldier, while there were 19 Armenians and 25 Muslims wounded. See BOA. HR.SYS. 2812/4, 12-10-1895 (12 October 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Trabzon dated 30 Eylül 1311/12 October 1895. Several other reports by the provincial government authorities in Trabzon consistently put the number of Muslims killed at 11. See, for instance, Y.MTV. 130/10 (19 October 1895). It is not clear whether this difference in the number of Muslim deaths originated from the addition of casualties in the surrounding villages. No earlier reports referred to any disturbances in the neighboring villages that resulted in the death of any Muslims.

¹⁴⁸ Y.PRK.KOM. 9/2, 16 January 1896.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*. It is only reported that several Armenians were wounded.

¹⁵¹ BOA. DH.ŞFR. 184/66, 10 TS 1311 (22 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the former Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo to the Interior Ministry dated 10 TS 1311/22 November 1895.

¹⁵² It is reported as the number of “non-Muslims” killed, but not particularly of Armenians; yet it is safe to say that all or the majority of them were Armenians.

Location (City/town/village)	Armenians		Muslims	
	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded
Ayntab ¹⁵³	111	97	59	110
Kayseri ¹⁵⁴	180	n/d	5	n/d
Urfa (October 1895) ¹⁵⁵	16	26	4	10
Urfa (December 1895) ¹⁵⁶	600	319	4	31
Birecik ¹⁵⁷	20	n/d	5	n/d
Kilis ¹⁵⁸	8	10	0	4
Istanbul (1896) ¹⁵⁹	1252	n/d	n/d	n/d
Niksar ¹⁶⁰	120	10 (ca.)	2	5
Eğin ¹⁶¹	581	48	11	26

¹⁵³ Letter from the Aleppo Police Commissioner to the Minister of Police dated 12 TS 1311/24 November 1895 in Hüseyin Nazım Paşa, *Ermeni Olayları Tarihi*, vol. I (Ankara: T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1998), 131. On 22 November 1895, the former Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo reported to the Interior Ministry that in Ayntab, 50 Muslims were killed and approximately 100 wounded while the number of Armenian males killed was approximately 100 and about 110 wounded (10 of which were female). See DH.ŞFR. 184/66 (22 November 1895). For a similar report, see BOA. DH.ŞFR. 184/44, 07 TS 1311 (19 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo to the Interior Ministry dated 7 TS 1311/19 November 1895. For the number of casualties in the town of Ayntab, also see Kurt, “The Making of the Aintab Elite,” 44-45; Ramazan Erhan Güllü, “16 Kasım 1895 Antep Ermeni İşyanı,” *Tarih Dergisi*, no. 51, (2010), 145.

¹⁵⁴ BOA. HR.TH. 166/57, 01-12-1895 (1 December 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Ankara to the office of the Grand Vizier dated 19 TS 1311/1 December 1895, conveying a copy of a joint telegram from the *Mutasarrıf* and the Commander of Kayseri.

¹⁵⁵ DH.ŞFR. 184/66 (22 November 1895). It is also reported that during the incident that occurred in the town of Urfa in late October 1895, 1 Assyrian (Syriac Orthodox) male was killed, 1 Assyrian (Syriac Orthodox) male, 1 Assyrian Catholic male, and 2 Jews (male) wounded.

¹⁵⁶ BOA. DH.ŞFR. 186/67, 19 KE 1311 (31 December 1895). Cipher telegram from Zihni [Bey] on behalf of the office of Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo to the Interior Ministry dated 19 KE 1311/31 December 1895. According to the report, of 600 Armenians killed during the events in the town of Urfa, 8 women and 2 children. Of 319 Armenians wounded, 216 were adult males, 9 male children, 76 adult females, and 18 male children. In addition, it is reported that during the incident, 9 Assyrians were killed and 1 Chaldean wounded, and that no soldier or gendarme was killed or wounded.

¹⁵⁷ BOA. DH.ŞFR. 186/76, 20 KE 1311 (1 January 1896). Cipher telegram from Zihni [Bey] on behalf of the office of Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo to the Interior Ministry dated 20 KE 1311/1 January 1896.

¹⁵⁸ BOA. DH.ŞFR. 189/30, 08 Ma 1312 (20 March 1896). Cipher telegram (with “very urgent” mark) from the Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo to the Interior Ministry dated 08 Mart 1312/20 March 1896.

¹⁵⁹ BOA. Y.PRK.KOM. 9/21, 20 Ca. 1314 (27 October 1896). Report of the Military Investigation Committee dated 20 Ca. 1314/15 TE 1312/27 October 1896, p. 31.

¹⁶⁰ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 353/46, 10 M. 1314 (21 June 1896). Telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas to the First Secretary [of the palace] dated 10 Haziran 1312/22 June 1896. According to this report, also 1 Greek was killed and 1 wounded during the incident in the town of Niksar.

¹⁶¹ BOA. HR.SYS. 2812/5, 15-09-1896 (15 September 1896). Telegram from the Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz dated 24 Eylül 1312/6 October 1896.

Location (City/town/village)	Armenians		Muslims	
	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded
Everek ¹⁶²	27	10	2	4
Tokad ¹⁶³	79	28	1 (convert)	2
Five villages surrounding the town of Tokad (1897) ¹⁶⁴	36	n/d	0	n/d
TOTAL	3,201	820	144	308

The official figures presented in this table put the total number of Armenians and Muslims killed in these places at 3,201 and 141 respectively. Consequently, according to official Ottoman reports, the violent events that took place in the imperial capital Istanbul and across the central and eastern Anatolian provinces of the empire from September 1895 through March 1897 resulted in the death of more than 12,700 Armenians and over 2,300 Muslims. It should, however, be noted that these two bodies of data do not include figures relating to the comparatively minor losses that occurred in a few locations, mostly rural areas, in the provinces of Adana and Ankara, as well as in and around Zeytun (Aleppo), where a significant number of Armenians and Muslims were killed during the conflicts over the fall of 1895-96. Also, official reports do not provide clear information about Muslim casualties that emerged during the events in Istanbul in 1896. It is also possible that officials were not able to collect clear information about human losses in more isolated rural areas. On the other hand, it is safe to claim that the extent of the casualties that occurred in these locations—namely in the Zeytun region, Istanbul (only for Muslim

¹⁶² BOA. HR.SYS. 2804/2, 22-11-1893 (22 November 1893). Telegram from the Governor-General of Ankara dated 22 TE 1312/3 November 1896.

¹⁶³ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 371/27, 3 Za. 1314 (5 April 1897). Cipher telegram from the President of the Extraordinary Tribunal at Tokad, Hasan Fehmi [Pasha], dated 23 Mart 1313/4 April 1897. According to the official investigation, of 79 Armenians killed during the incident in the town, 4 were women. Of 28 Armenians wounded, again 4 were women. It is also reported that, apart from 79 Apostolic Armenians, 7 Armenian Catholics were killed, including a woman, and 3 Catholics and 2 Greeks wounded.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

deaths), and more isolated villages—would not dramatically change the overall figures presented above.

As Horowitz points out, official numbers of casualties that take place during ethnic riots “tend to be at the low end of the scale.”¹⁶⁵ There is no considerable inconsistency between the casualty figures (especially of Armenian deaths) provided by the provincial government authorities in the immediate aftermath of the events and the final investigations reports. However, official Ottoman figures seem to have underestimated the true extent of the damage. There are several reasons to suspect the accuracy of these figures although this certainly does not justify the exaggerated numbers cited in western and Armenian accounts. First of all, the Ottoman authorities evidently avoided providing accurate numbers of victims in several cases. For instance, the Military Investigation Committee and several other official bodies that prepared reports on the incidents of August 1896 in Istanbul claimed that the efforts of the authorities in Beyoğlu, Üsküdar, Galata, and other parts of the city to reach exact casualty numbers had failed for various reasons such as the difficulty of conducting survey while the disorders were still going on.¹⁶⁶ The Ottoman authorities were especially anxious about the disproportion between Armenian and Muslim losses and, therefore, they offered various pretexts to account for the lack of exact numbers. As Edhem Eldem has aptly observed, they even resorted to cultural anthropological discourse explaining this extreme disproportion on the basis of Islamic tradition requiring the prompt burial of the dead.¹⁶⁷ Beyond these official pretexts in the case of the Istanbul incident, it was the Ottoman authorities themselves who often hastened to bury the dead without conducting official procedures in many instances. Armenian corpses were usually carried on carts and buried *en masse*, which further aroused suspicion and rumors about official counts.

¹⁶⁵ Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riots*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Y.PRK.KOM. 9/21 (27 October 1896). Report of the Military Investigation Committee dated 20 Ca. 1314/15 TE 1312/27 October 1896; BOA. Y.PRK.ŞH. 7/64, 23 Ra. 1314 (1 September 1896). Report of the Mayor of Istanbul (*Şehremini*) dated 23 Ra. 1314/1 September 1896. For a copy and transliteration to Latin script of this document, see *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni İsyamları (1895-1896) II* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 2008), 185-192, 421-426. Also see Eldem, “26 Ağustos 1896 ‘Banka Vakası,’” 130-132.

¹⁶⁷ Eldem, “26 Ağustos 1896 ‘Banka Vakası,’” 131-132.

Furthermore, a careful comparison between earlier official accounts and the final investigation reports reveals that the Ottoman authorities might have sought to exaggerate Muslim losses in a number of cases although official figures are more or less consistent in most cases. For instance, like civilian authorities in Sivas, the Commander of the 16th Division in Sivas reported that a total of 476 Armenians and 60 Muslims died during the disturbances in Gürün, a small town which was the scene of an especially severe conflict in November 1895 as a result of an attack by the Kurds of Darende. On the other hand, the number of Muslim deaths raises to 98 in a final statistical account.¹⁶⁸ Likewise, all earlier reports, without exception, sent by the civilian and military authorities in the province of Sivas claimed that only 4 or 5 Muslims died during the riot in the town of Sivas. As will be mentioned in the following chapter, the authorities also reported that two of these Muslims had been killed by their Muslim fellows by mistake. In the final report, however, the number of deaths on the part of Muslims was pumped up to 128, 14 of which were women. No reports from the local authorities mention such high Muslim casualties, nor do they refer to any women killed in the town of Sivas. And, it does not seem likely that this increase originated from the deaths that might have taken place in the nearby villages counted in the casualty figures for the town of Sivas, because there is no report indicating that there were serious disorders and such a high number of Muslim casualties in the surrounding villages. It should be noted that similar disparities are also the case with the numbers of Muslim losses in the provinces of Diyarbekir and Mamuretü'l-Aziz.

Meanwhile, it might be useful to mention that at the beginning of the wave of violence, some provincial government officials tended to include the number of soldiers, policemen, and gendarmes killed and injured during the disturbances in the total number of Muslims losses and injuries. Such a manner may hint something about the official mindset regarding the concept of citizenship and the ethno-religious composition of the empire's law enforcement agents. It can be surmised that by counting law enforcement losses on the Muslim side, these officials admitted that law enforcement agents might not

¹⁶⁸ Cf. BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 108/27, 20 Ca. 1313 (The date on the file is wrong. The correct date must be 30 Ca. 1313/18 November 1895). Telegram from the Commander of the 16th Division dated 6 TS 1311/18 November 1895; and, Y.EE. 7/3. n.d. folio (*lef*) no. 2. “İğtişaat-ı ahire esnasında Sivas Vilayeti dahilinde nüfusca vukubulan telefât ile emvalce olan hasaratı mübeyyin cetveldir” (Table showing the human casualties and property damage that took place in the province of Sivas during the recent disturbances).

be neutral forces of order and peace, and that the ethno-religious identity of military and police power in a multiethnic and multireligious empire was significant. Such bureaucratic particulars also unintentionally urged officials to use a language attentive to sectarian identities in their daily reports and reinforced the perceptions of “us” (Muslims) and “them” (Armenians/Christians) in discursive realm.

As of early November, the representatives of the Great Powers at the imperial capital, specifically the six embassies (British, French, German, Russian, Austria-Hungarian, and Italian), increased their pressures on the Sublime Porte to intervene in the ongoing disturbances in Anatolia more effectively than it had hitherto done. Meanwhile, they were also discussing about the necessity and possibility of a concerted action among the six ambassadors to investigate the extent of the anti-Armenian disturbances and ensure the punishment of those responsible for the violence. In a meeting of ambassadors at the French Embassy on December 10, 1895, the British Ambassador proposed that the six ambassadors recommend their respective governments to appoint an international investigation commission, which would proceed to the affected areas and investigate what took place on the spot. According to the British proposal, the commission would also arrange for the restoration of the plundered property to the rightful owners, and point out the persons responsible for the massacres. Some of the ambassadors supported the British proposal while the others stated that they had no authority to discuss such a question. Yet, at the end of a lengthy discussion, the ambassadors agreed on the suggestion of French Ambassador Cambon, that is, preparing a joint tabular statement summarizing the information received from consular officials on the recent events in Anatolia.¹⁶⁹ It was decided that the statement would display the places where massacres took place; the numbers of victims; and, the conduct of the authorities during each case. For this purpose, the ambassadors agreed that one of the secretaries of each embassy be deputed to meet his colleagues, and that all the information in possession of the various embassies be combined in one document, which would later be submitted to the Sublime Porte.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 395. Currie to Salisbury. Constantinople, December 10, 1895.

¹⁷⁰ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 420. Currie to Salisbury. Constantinople, December 11, 1895.

Following this agreement, a Committee of Delegates from the British, French, German, Russian, Austria-Hungarian, and Italian embassies was formed. The committee worked in collaboration with consular officials in the provinces over December 1895 and January 1896. At the end of January, the committee completed their work and, as planned, drew up a tabular statement giving a concise account of the events, the number of human and property losses, and, as far as details were known to consular officials, the attitudes of the local authorities and various populations in the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, Diyarbakir, Sivas, Aleppo, Adana, and Ankara, and in the *Mutasarrıflık* of İzmid (İzmit), respectively.¹⁷¹ The Tabular Statement covered the incidents that had taken place in Anatolia between October 1895 and January 1896. Therefore, it does not contain any information on the riot of Istanbul that broke out in late September 1895.

As British Ambassador Currie says, the statement was mainly based on a comparison of the consular reports from the provinces addressed to their respective embassies. Some of the details concerning the provinces of Sivas, Mamuretü'l-Aziz (Harput), Adana, Diyarbakir, and Aleppo had derived from Catholic priests and Protestant missionaries. Currie noted that “their evidence was admitted only when they described events of which they were eye-witnesses, and when it was in harmony with the general tenour of the official Reports.”¹⁷² The six embassies submitted the Tabular Statement to the Sublime Porte with a joint communication dated February 4, 1896, in which the ambassadors stated that they had considered it advisable to prepare a tabular statement summarizing the information they had obtained from European sources or consular reports

¹⁷¹ For a copy of the Tabular Statement in French with a translated copy in English, see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 534. Inclosure in No. 534, “Événements de 1895 en Asie Mineure” (“Occurrences in 1895 in Asia Minor”) transmitted by Currie to Salisbury in a dispatch dated Pera, January 30, 1896. For other copies, see Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques. Affaires Arméniennes. Projets de Réformes dans l'Empire Ottoman, 1893–1897* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897), 199-211; Père Félix Charmetant, ed., *Martyrologe Arménien: Tableau Officiel des Massacres d'Arménie* (Paris: Au Bureau des Ceuvres D'Orient, 1896). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials translated the statement into Ottoman Turkish and brought it to the notice of the Sublime Porte. Lastly, what is known as the Charmetant report, which includes a copy of the Tabular Statement, has been translated into Turkish, though the translation has serious errors: Pere Felix Charmetant, ed., *Ermeni Katliamları Raporu, 1894-1895. İstanbul'da Görevli Altı Büyükelçiliğin Ortak Hazarladığı İstatistik*, translated by Mehmet Baytimur (Istanbul: Peri Yayınları, 2012).

¹⁷² Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 534. Currie to Salisbury, Pera, January 30, 1896.

on the subject of recent events in Anatolia. The information had been verified as far as possible, and it had not been derived in any case from “interested sources,” the embassies emphasized.¹⁷³

Regarding the number of casualties, the committee entered the data that the embassies were able to obtain from the aforementioned places “for forming an accurate estimate.” As Currie says, their knowledge about the incidents in rural areas was quite limited. The Tabular Statement did not, for example, contain data on the number of the loss of life in the districts of Van, Mamuretü’l-Aziz, and Diyarbekir. Relying on the data entered in the Tabular Statement, the British Ambassador Currie estimated the total number of Armenian losses at about 25,000. The ambassador, however, added that the estimate might be increased to a much higher figure if this number was added the mass killings about which they had no hitherto information.¹⁷⁴ It should also be noted that Ambassador Currie had given other estimates before the completion of the joint Tabular Statement; yet none of them was higher than 30,000. On December 8, for instance, he wrote that although he hesitated to give figures for lack of reliable information, it was “probable that at least 30,000 people” had perished.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, in his telegram of December 13, he reported to Salisbury “A moderate estimate puts the loss of life at 30,000.”¹⁷⁶ As a result, this collective tabular statement is one of the rare statistical accounts concerning the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97. Especially British representatives in Istanbul and the provinces often treated with circumspection various casualty figures and accounts they received from Armenian sources. On the other hand, although the embassy officials emphasized that they entered the data for each case as far as accurate information was obtainable, it is hard for the historian to determine how accurate it was. In the end, like every historical document of this nature, the accuracy of the numbers and information contained in this statement is open to dispute and speculation.

¹⁷³ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 535. Inclosure in No. 535. “Collective Communication made to the Sublime Porte,” transmitted by Currie to Salisbury in a dispatch dated Constantinople, February 6, 1896.

¹⁷⁴ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 534.

¹⁷⁵ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 739. Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, December 8, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 417.

¹⁷⁶ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 403. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, December 13, 1895.

There are no such collective accounts drawn up by the six embassies' officials respecting the riot of 1895 in Istanbul and the incidents that took place after February 1896, most notably those in Van (June 1896), Istanbul (August 1896), and Eğin (September 1896), which took the lives of more 3,000 Armenians according to Ottoman sources. British officials gave separate numbers for each of these locations in their reports. When they are combined with the number of 25,000, the total estimate of Armenian deaths in British sources amounts to over 40,000. In other words, according to British estimates, the anti-Armenian disturbances of 1895-97 claimed the lives of approximately 40,000 Armenians. However, British officials stated on several occasions that they estimated a much higher number of human losses considering the lack of accurate information about rural areas and the loss of life that might have taken place by starvation, exposure, and disease in the aftermath of the events.

Lastly, the U.S. officials at the Ottoman capital submitted to their superiors a tabular statement of human and property losses prepared by American Protestant missionaries in the provinces. As Table 4 shows, this statement put the total number of Armenian deaths that took place only in the provinces, not in Istanbul, until the end of February 1896 at 37,085. The number of Muslims killed was 938. A total of 39,749 homes had been looted, 7,942 shops plundered, and 40,950 Armenians converted to Islam by force. However, according to Jeremy Salt who has investigated reports of the U.S. Minister in Turkey, these figures were provisional and, Minister Alexander W. Terrell gave even higher numbers than stated in the table provided by the missionaries considering the estimates he received from Clara Barton, president and treasurer of the American National Red Cross who worked in the eastern provinces over the spring and summer of 1896 to organize the distribution of international relief to Armenian survivors.¹⁷⁷

Table 4 **Number of casualties that occurred in the provinces between early October 1895 and the end of February 1896 according a tabular report based on information provided by American Protestant missionaries¹⁷⁸**

Province	Population	Christian Population	Plundered Homes	Plundered Shops	Christians Killed	Muslims Killed	Forced Conversion
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¹⁷⁷ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism, and the Ottoman Armenians*, 104.

¹⁷⁸ See Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques*, 238.

Erzurum	595,500	125,700	7,500	2,600	6,715	30	1,177
Sivas	1,087,500	173,000	4,830	882	3,225	45	1,540
Harput (Mamuretü'l- Aziz)	524,300	81,400	10,577	915	11,584	319	6,412
Diyarbakir	472,000	133,600	5,400	1,430	5,720	500	2,138
Bitlis	399,000	138,700	6,050	430	1,400	3	450
Van	431,500	175,200	2,900	255	463	-	365
Subtotal	3,509,800	827,600	37,257	6,512	29,107	897	11,812
Aleppo	410,500	46,650	1,200	850	6,600	-	700
Adana	403,500	97,500	600	40	50	32	-
Ankara	210,000	48,500	200	200	350	-	24
Trabzon	115,000	14,000	492	340	978	9	191
Subtotal	1,139,000	206,650	2,492	1,430	7,978	41	915
General Total	4,648,800	1,034,250	39,749	7,942	37,085	938	12,727

By now, I have shown various figures derived from three different sources—the Ottoman official reports, the Tabular Statement drawn up by the six embassies' officials, and the information provided by American Protestant missionaries. A great disparity between these figures is evident—it is however important to note that the disparity between the figures provided in these archival sources and the numbers cited in modern accounts is much greater. Unsurprisingly, Ottoman officials consistently claimed that the Armenians and foreign representatives were inclined to exaggerate Armenian losses. On their part, foreign officials and observers were skeptical of Ottoman figures and criticized the authorities for their reluctance to conduct comprehensive, diligent and transparent investigations regarding the extent and nature of the violent events. These figures also show that foreign observers themselves, specifically the six embassies' officials and American citizens living in the empire, put different numbers and estimates. It is therefore impossible to find a compromise among these differing numbers.

As already implied, none of these accounts properly reflect the true extent of events in rural areas, particularly in the provinces of Mamuretü'l-Aziz and Diyarbakir, which today's international news media would regard as backwaters where no standard, regular

information comes from. The violence perpetrated in rural areas may not have been as extreme as the carnages in urban areas; yet lack of sufficient information makes it even harder to reach more reliable numbers. Furthermore, these reports do not include the loss of life due to starvation and disease in the aftermath of the riots. Indeed, the violence and property destruction placed thousands of Armenian families in entirely hopeless and devastating situations. The situation after the massacres was gruesome in many regions, and besides starvation, epidemic diseases like dysentery and typhoid posed a serious threat to those who survived the massacres. It is undeniable that the general view in the affected areas could only be defined as a humanitarian crisis.

Foreign officials, observers, missionaries, humanitarian relief teams and contemporary accounts spoke of tens of thousands of deaths from hunger and disease. However, it is obvious that they exaggerated the situation to attract the attention of politicians, civil society, and religious organizations in the West to the crisis that a vulnerable population was facing in the Ottoman Empire. The numbers they mentioned were not based on comprehensive surveys. British officials, for instance, usually expressed their concerns over the gravity of the situation and the urgent need to take prompt steps to bring relief to the destitute rather than giving detailed facts about deaths from starvation, disease, and exposure. As a matter of fact, if tens of thousands of Armenians had died of starvation and disease in the aftermath of the mass killings, as foreign sources claimed, details about these indirect deaths would definitely have been reflected in archival records in many ways. In other words, it is not likely that such high death rates and the socioeconomic effects of the devastation of a great number of people could be kept out of historical records. The number of deaths due to the conditions following the large-scale killings and looting nevertheless remains unknown.

Lastly, as noted above, the data provided by these sources does not properly reflect the considerable number of Muslim villagers and Ottoman soldiers killed during the incidents in the Zeytun-Maraş region. Although foreign officials and missionaries cannot be blamed of being completely blind to Muslim losses, especially missionary circles and much of the European press did not pay sufficient attention to Muslim victims and overlooked the systematic Armenian attacks on Muslim villages around Zeytun. In this

regard, there is a good deal of truth in Salt's observation that missionary reports represented Muslims mostly as perpetrators not as the victims of intercommunal conflict.¹⁷⁹

Consequently, for all these reasons, forming a completely accurate estimate of the total number of Armenians and Muslims who lost their lives during the incidents of 1895-97 is almost an impossible mission. A study of mass violence of this scale has of course much to do with factual analysis and should address historical accuracy problems. It is also important to challenge and refute long-standing myths surrounding the extent and nature of the anti-Armenian massacres in the mid-1890s on the basis of multiple archival sources and critical reasoning. Yet, in some ways, arriving at an estimated number is not of critical importance as even official figures clearly display the scale and disproportionate nature of the violence. Also, discussions surrounding the number of victims in such large-scale cases of intercommunal violence ultimately has their own political and ethical implications.

Relying on the findings presented above, one may nevertheless conclude that the total number of the Armenian victims of the 1895-97 massacres is, on the one hand, much higher than given by the Ottoman authorities; yet, on the other hand, it is much lower than figures ranging from 100,000 to 300,000 or even more. Even the lowest figure so far adopted by modern Armenian and Western historiographies is an overestimate. If these fantastically high numbers still appear on scholarly work, it is not only because of the hitherto lack of comprehensive studies on the subject, but also because the nature of topic is overtly political and directly related to the subject position of a given author. Today, a scholar who attempts to engage the problem from a critical perspective may be labeled as a government apologist by some or as an "Armenophile" by others for some reason. It is because of this overtly politicized nature of the problem that even new research like this may not be able to help undermine widely-held myths and official narratives regarding the number of Armenian and Muslim losses. Indeed, it is likely that interpretations of the Armenian death-toll in 1895-97 will remain an article of faith rather than a matter of fact despite serious, careful, and comprehensive research conducted by unbiased and critical historians. It should nevertheless be stated that sources that claim such hyperbole do no

¹⁷⁹ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism, and the Ottoman Armenians*, 105.

justice to addressing the sufferings that a large number of Armenian civilians experienced in the mid-1890s; but, on the contrary, they further complicate the issues on the table.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, despite the official conceptualization of the anti-Armenian riots as “Armenian uprisings,” even the official casualty figures above clearly show the great disparity between Armenian and Muslim losses; hence, the asymmetrical nature of intercommunal conflict. Indeed, even in the cases where the disturbances were precipitated by an event that both sides were equally involved in, conflicts quickly escalated into massive riots that resulted in untold Armenian deaths while Muslim losses mostly remained very minimal. Armenians could put up considerable resistance or organize relatively strong self-defense only in a few locations such as Diyarbakir, Arabgir, and Gürün, where fierce battles between the Muslim mob and armed Armenian groups destroyed entire Armenian quarters. It seems that armed self-defense in such cases was viewed by Muslim populace as even more provocative and raised the degree of violence. Yet, no matter the strength of Armenian organized self-defense, the level of violence was already extreme in most cases.

It can be said that the number of wounded in a balance of typical street fighting is usually more than the number of killed as many intended victims may escape merely with injuries during a spontaneous street riot. The exact opposite situation may be interpreted as an indication of both the unevenness of conflict and the intensity of violence. Indeed, the fact that the number of Armenian deaths during the riots of 1895-97 was much higher than the number of wounded (see Table 2 and Table 3) suggests that extreme violence was perpetrated against Armenians, who were apparently suddenly exposed to violence and could not protect themselves well in many places. It can also be surmised that in many instances, Armenians did not engage in organized action prior to the disturbances.

In addition, as Horowitz points out, residential attacks, in which particular victims are sought and the possibility of escape is slimmer, play an important role in generating heavy death tolls and disproportionate figures of death and injury.¹⁸⁰ During the anti-Armenian riots, conflicts usually broke out in the market area and most of the victims were

¹⁸⁰ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 202.

caught in the streets. Yet, in a good number of cases, the rioting immediately moved on to residential areas, where Armenian homes were targeted by the mob for hours. In several instances, the perpetrators also directly attacked Armenian neighborhoods. Disparity between casualty figures, high number of deaths, and heavily residential targeting can be seen as strong indicators of the organized character of violence. Evidence suggests that there were strong signs of preparation for violence in some cases while others were more spontaneous. In any case, the above-mentioned figures clearly reveal the virulence of violence directed against the victims as well as the vulnerability of Armenians as targets of collective violent action over the course of the events of 1895-97.

3.6. The Nature and Victims of Violence: Passion and Calculation

The forms of violence perpetrated against an untold number of civilians during the years 1895-97 included killings, atrocities, mutilation, injury, destruction of property, plunder, forced conversion, land usurpation, internal displacement etc. Also, arson was widely used by the mob as an extremely blunt instrument in many locations. Arson attacks on Armenian property and neighborhoods set hundreds of buildings on fire and left many corpses severely burnt in fires. The instruments of murder included axes, daggers, knives, iron bars, clubs, revolvers, rifles etc. During these carnages, the destruction of churches and Christian Armenian symbols was widespread in many towns, where the Muslim mob set the Armenian churches on fire and vandalized church structures, prayer books, bible scrolls, icons, and similar Christian ritualistic symbols. The desecration of churches and attacks on Armenian religious symbols were integral to the violence, aggression, and humiliation perpetrated upon Armenians throughout the period in question.

Unsurprisingly, Ottoman government documents do not contain detailed descriptions by which the researcher may imagine scenes of horror, death, pain, devastation, and destruction that unfolded in tens of cities and in rural settlements during the catastrophic events of the mid-1890s. However, eyewitness accounts, survivor narratives, and reports of contemporary observers such as consuls, missionaries, and members of humanitarian relief teams portray the massacres quite dramatically, as massive in their scale and inhuman in their brutality. Emanating from these accounts are horrifying

descriptions of the treatment by the rioting mob of the victims, who were killed in unspeakably cruel ways in a very short period of time, mostly within a couple of hours; murdered, torn-apart, or intentionally destroyed bodies; ruthless plundering, looting, and vandalizing of a great number of Armenian properties; and, of displaced Armenians masses with full of suffering and anguish. Although it is probable that such accounts contained a certain degree of exaggeration to dramatize the situation to the outer world, there is no doubt that during such events passionate crowds act with diabolic brutality against their victims, and that suffering from such forms of extreme violence is always momentous. In what follows, I would like to present several lengthy quotes from these accounts as they describe the actions of the perpetrators and the suffering of their victims more eloquently than I could.

The Acting British Consul at Ankara, Raphael A. Fontana, for instance, reported on the mass killing in the town of Gürün, extracting an account he received from a local:

T[owards] the middle of November thousands of Turks, Kurds, and Circassians from the villages of Azizié, Darenté, Kangal, and Albistan, after burning the Armenian villages of Manjillik, Darenté, Kasar, and Ashut [?], in the neighbourhood of Gurun, and slaughtering the inhabitants, attacked the town of Gurun itself. They swept through the Armenian quarter like a flood, shouting, ‘Our Padishah wills it.’ They broke into the houses, killed the men, and outraged the young women and girls. They cut open mothers with child, and tossed little children from knife to knife. After killing the people and plundering their all, the rabble set fire to the houses; old men and children, who had been hidden, perished in the flames.

[...]

The majority of the survivors are homeless and penniless; famine is staring them in the face; they are begging their bread.¹⁸¹

Likewise, a report received by the British Ambassador Currie from a missionary resident in Trabzon gives a detailed, dramatic account of the riot in this town that broke out on October 8, 1895:

¹⁸¹ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 448. Inclosure 2 in No. 448, “Substance of Report respecting the Massacre at Gurun” dispatched from Acting Consul Fontana to Currie. Angora, December 6, 1895. Fontana says that he received the report “from a presumably trustworthy source at Gurun [Gürün], in the Vilayet [province] of Sivas.”

Until Monday, the 7th October, matters seemed to be quieting down, when an incident stirred up the excitement anew. On the previous Friday night the son of a leading Turk was wounded on the street, some say by one of his companions, others that he was shot by an Armenian whom he was trying to arrest. On Monday he died, and the funeral revived the excitement in an intensified form, and loud and many were the threats of massacre that night, and hundreds of the Armenians rushed to places of safety. Nothing occurred, perhaps on account of the rain. The next morning, the 8th October, all dispersed in the hope that the danger was passed. Men went to their shops and were encouraged to open them, as they had not done for two or three previous days. Suddenly, like a clap of thunder in a clear sky, the thing began about 11 a.m. yesterday. Unsuspecting people walking about the streets were shot ruthlessly down. Men standing or sitting quietly at their shop-doors were instantly dropped with a bullet through their heads or hearts. Their aim was deadly, and I have heard of no wounded men. Some were slashed with swords until life was extinct. They passed through quarters where only old men, women, and children remained, killing the men and large boys, generally permitting the women and younger children to live. For five hours this horrid work of inhuman butchery went on, the cracking of the musketry, sometimes like a volley from a platoon of soldiers, but more often single shots from near and distant points, the crashing in of doors, and the thud, thud of sword blows sounded on our ears. Then the sound of musketry died away, and the work of looting began. Every shop of an Armenian in the market was gutted, and the victors in this cowardly and brutal war glutted themselves with the spoils. For hours bales of broad cloth, cotton goods, and every conceivable kind of merchandize passed along without molestation to the houses of the spoilers. The intention evidently was to impoverish, and as near as possible to blot out, the Armenians of this town[.]¹⁸²

Especially since the 1980s, there has been a growing literature of survivor testimonies, memoirs, and autobiographical texts penned by Armenian men and women who survived the mass killings and deportations of 1915. Although there is still no comprehensive study of these accounts that embody personal narratives of survival and experiences of suffering during the genocide, they increasingly attract popular and scholarly attention and have become an integral part of the Armenian genocide memorialization. In addition, Armenian and western scholars have conducted extensive oral history research among thousands of survivors living in Armenia, Europe, and the

¹⁸² FO 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 194. "Report by a Missionary at Trebizond" dated Trebizond, October 9, 1895, which was forwarded by Ambassador Currie to Prime Minister Salisbury. See *ibid.*, No. 194, Currie to Salisbury, Therapia, October 21, 1895. For another copy of this report entitled "Report by a Resident at Trebizond," see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 122.

United States.¹⁸³ Most of the survivors who penned autobiographical narratives or were interviewed by oral history researchers were born after 1895. As the Millers say, their knowledge of the events of the 1890s, therefore, came from their parents or grandparents.¹⁸⁴ One of the few Armenian memoir authors who survived both the massacres of the mid-1890s and the genocide was Abraham H. Hartunian, an Armenian Protestant pastor born in the town of Siverek (Diyarbakir), whose autobiographical narrative originally written in Armenian was translated by his son into English. Hartunian's memoir contains a vivid description of the horrific scene of the mob attack on the Armenian Protestant church and school in Siverek in early November 1895:

All this lasted about half an hour. The mob had plundered the Gregorian church, desecrated it, murdered all who had sought shelter there, and, as a sacrifice, beheaded the sexton on the stone threshold. Now it filled our yard. The blows of an ax crashed in the church doors. The attackers rushed in, tore the Bibles and hymnbooks to pieces, broke and shattered whatever they could, blasphemed the cross and, as a sign of victory, chanted the Mohammedan prayer:

La ilaha ill-Allah

Muhammedin Rasula-llah.

There is no other God but one God

And Mohammed is His prophet.

We could see and hear all these things from the room in which we huddled.

From the church they headed toward our building. They were coming up the stairs. A few of the stronger women in the room closed the door and stood against it, thinking in this way to prevent the entrance of the enemy. But before savage force they gave way, and now butchers and victims were face to face.

The leader of the mob cried, '*Muhammed'e salavat!* Believe in Mohammed and deny your religion!'

No one answered.

¹⁸³ See, for instance, Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Verjine Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors*, trans. Tigran Tsulikian and Anahit Poghikian-Darbinian (Yerevan: Gitoutyoun Publishing House of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, 2011).

¹⁸⁴ Miller and Miller, *Survivors*, 61.

[...]

The leader repeated again: ‘*Muhammed’e salavat!*’ and gave orders to massacre.

The first attack was on our pastor. The blow of an axe decapitated him. His blood, spurting in all directions, splattered the walls and ceiling with red. Then I was in the midst of the butchers. One of them drew his dagger and stabbed my left arm, and I, convinced that they were about to torture me, instead of remaining standing, squatted on the floor with my head bent in front of me. Another second, I lost consciousness.¹⁸⁵

During such violent events as pogroms and ethnic riots, it is a common phenomenon that the vast majority of victims are young and adult males. Women, the elderly, and children are often, but not exclusively, spared. As Horowitz points out, although rapes certainly occur in ethnic riots, “the killing and mutilation of men is much more common than is the murder or rape of women.”¹⁸⁶ This selective behavior can also be considered to be an important point that differentiates the logic of collective violent actions such as pogroms and communal riots from genocidal programs targeting a total extermination of a particular group irrespective of age and gender.

As Table 2 clearly displays, a great majority of the victims of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 were Armenian adult males while instances in which women and children were killed or harmed were very rare exceptions. Apart from casualty figures, eyewitness accounts and contemporary narratives indicate that the mob exclusively concentrated on Armenian men and tended to not harm women and children although the abduction of Armenian women and girls and forced marriage to Muslim men were very common in some regions, most notably in districts of the provinces of Diyarbekir and Mamuretü’l-Aziz. It is not clear why the rate of women and children killed is higher than average in some cases; yet one may speculate that comparatively high numbers of female and children fatalities derived from residential targeting, attacks on churches, and village conflicts where the aggressors acted with less precision in targeting their victims. As a result, by concentrating on young and adult males as Armenian household heads, the Muslim

¹⁸⁵ Abraham H. Hartunian, *Neither to Laugh nor to Weep: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide*, trans. Vartan Hartunian (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968), 13-14. Also see Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide*, 150-151.

¹⁸⁶ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 73.

instigators and perpetrators aimed to destroy or weaken the ablest, the most productive, and, from the perspective of killers, the most “threatening” segment of the Armenian population.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Armenian Protestant and Catholic communities in the Ottoman Empire became separate, officially recognized confessional entities gaining the status of *millet*, a protected religious community, at least in theory, with a high degree of legal autonomy in confessional matters. Although the vast majority of the Armenian-speaking subjects of the empire were Apostolic, small Armenian Catholic and Protestant communities flourished, mainly by way of conversion, in Anatolia as well in Istanbul throughout the nineteenth century. The main target and victims of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 were the empire’s Apostolic Armenian subjects, not other Christian and non-Apostolic Armenian communities. To a large extent, foreign consulates and residences were not harmed in most instances; on the contrary, they were carefully protected by soldiers in accordance with categorical orders from the Sublime Porte to this effect. In many respects, the authorities in Istanbul were more anxious about the diplomatic and economic aspects of the pogrom crisis than the lives and property of the empire’s Armenian subjects.

Nevertheless, foreign residences and property were severely attacked in a number of places, notably in Harput and Maraş, where American mission schools and buildings were targeted by the Muslim rioters. In Harput, the mob, mainly consisting of hundreds of armed Kurds, set on fire and destroyed the Euphrates College buildings and missionary houses belonging to the American Protestant mission. The total loss was great. The US government demanded the Sublime Porte to pay an indemnity of \$100,000 for the damages done to mission property in these two cities. The problem of damage indemnities led to a last-longing diplomatic crisis and negotiations between the Sublime Porte and the US government, as was the case with several other foreign states whose citizens and their property were harmed during the disturbances in Istanbul and in the provinces.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ For details, see BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 647/39, 20 C. 1313 (8 December 1895), among many other documents dealing with the damages done to American protestant mission property during the riots of 1895.

The fact that in most cases, great care was taken by the massacring mobs not to attack Catholic and Protestant Armenians and other non-Muslim groups suggests that the perpetrators were acting with the malice of forethought and had obviously already chosen their victims. To give a few examples, while according to final official reports, only one Greek was killed in the town of Trabzon, there was no loss of life among the Catholic Armenian community of this town. Indeed, the British Consul at Trabzon wrote that the massacre was so well organized that it had been “conducted with discrimination as to race.”¹⁸⁸ As we shall see in the following chapter, the Governor-General of Sivas reported that Muslims attacked Armenians (Apostolic ones), but not other Christian communities, because they only wanted to retaliate the former group for their “seditious actions.”¹⁸⁹ Similarly, British officials received a letter from a resident in Sivas in which the anonymous author claimed that Catholic Armenian houses were protected by Muslims during the carnage in Gürün.¹⁹⁰

In fact, as the literature of ethnic/communal violence demonstrates, such a precise selection of people and property as targets is a recurrent feature of deadly ethnic riots.¹⁹¹ As mentioned above, riots are usually accompanied by atrocities, mutilations, torture, and, sometimes, ritual killings as rioting crowds often act with passion and frenzy. Nevertheless, they know what they are doing. Horowitz has characterized this as “a bizarre paradox of rationality:” “The riot is often a bestial slaughter, yet it involves elements of prudence and foresight. An orgy of killing is punctuated by interludes of detached planning.”¹⁹² As Horowitz mentions, there are many historical examples of precision in target selection during episodes of intercommunal violence in which the victims are chosen by their group membership. In Philadelphia (1844), anti-immigrant mobs burned down an Irish Roman Catholic, but bypassed a German one, underlining the anti-Irish character of their actions.

¹⁸⁸ FO 424/184. Inclosure 1 in No. 194, Consul Longworth to Currie, Trebizond, October 9, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896). Inclosure 1 in No. 122.

¹⁸⁹ BOA. Y.MTV. 132/116, 15 C. 1313 (3 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 21 TS 1311/3 December 1895.

¹⁹⁰ Turkey No. 2 (1896). No. 454. Inclosure in No. 454, extract from a letter of 3 December 1895 from Sivas communicated by Consul Longworth to Ambassador Currie, Trebizond, December 9, 1895.

¹⁹¹ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 125.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 124.

During the anti-Bengali riots in Assam, the victims of violence were precisely Bengali Hindus rather than Bengali Muslims.¹⁹³ Rioters may take advantage of various remarks and features to recognize their victims and differentiate them from members of other communities such as color, name, facial characteristics, body type, dress, circumcision, tattoos, linguistic fluency etc.¹⁹⁴ In cases of highly organized, well-planned mass killings, perpetrators may identify and mark the houses and shops of their prospective victims before the action. As seen in various cases from Bombay to Baku, tax lists, electoral lists, and address lists were used to locate the houses and shops of members of the targeted groups.¹⁹⁵

However, in the case of anti-Armenian riots, the identification of prospective victims in many localities did not require such particulars and was not difficult at all. Factors such as spatial segregation between Muslim and Christian neighborhoods in typical Anatolian towns, daily acquaintances, different clothing habits etc. helped perpetrators easily choose and target their Armenian victims and their properties. It should be reminded that in many cases, those who took part in the incidents were local inhabitants. It is therefore safe to say that the killed and the killer were neighbors or knew each other one way or another, which obviously facilitated the process of selecting and haunting in relatively small Anatolian towns.

As mentioned above, selective targeting is an important aspect of communal riots. Yet such care taken by rioters to be accurate in the identity of targets in a given case may also be an indication that the violence was not a spontaneous outburst of popular anger directed against a particular group. In other words, it may tell something about the degree of organization and preparation although precise selection, I believe, is not necessarily a strong sign of advance plan and official complicity per se. In the case of anti-Armenian violence, like many other foreign observers, British officials stated on several occasions that there were signs of arrangements and preparations prior to the events in many places. Ambassador Currie, for instance, reported to Salisbury that the attacks were organized, considering the fact that foreign subjects and their residences were spared by the mob. The

¹⁹³ Ibid., 125-127.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 125-126.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 130.

British diplomat also thought that “orders must have been given to single out” the Armenians although he did not openly spoke about who were the organizers and who might have given such orders.¹⁹⁶

In the case of Erzurum, a report reached the British Embassy claiming that the massacre in this town was organized by the authorities; that the houses of various Christian communities were marked before the disturbances; and that the Greeks tied white bands around their arms to indicate that they were not Armenians. Upon receiving this report, Secretary of Embassy Herbert requested Consul Cumberbatch in Erzurum to investigate these serious claims. Having made inquiries to this effect, the British consul reported that there was no “organization” of the massacres that took place in the town of Erzurum in the sense reported to the embassy, and that Greek houses and shops were not marked with a few exceptions where they did so on their own initiative after the riot broke out. There were other methods employed by the Greeks of Erzurum to escape being targeted. One or two had “big daubs of red paint;” some hung Ottoman flags or simple red flags on their windows with a piece of paper attached announcing that those were “Greek houses”; and some wrote “Muslim shop” across the doors and shutters of their shops. However, Consul Cumberbatch noted, all this had been done the day after the riot in the event of further pillaging. As for the reported white bands, the consul said that certainly no body wore white bands before the massacres in the town:

...I saw many Greeks escaping from their shops, and only one had his white handkerchief tied round his arm. He has been interrogated, and says he did it because he had heard that at Trebizond the Greeks had done so. I have made further inquiries on this point, and I can only hear of one Greek who had been seen with a white band round his head, but he was made to discard it by the police directly he showed himself in it.¹⁹⁷

As a matter of fact, the course of events in many places indicate that the rioters acted with considerable discrimination and precision in their attacks at least in the initial phase of the disturbances. Although it seems that the ringleaders did not resort to methods

¹⁹⁶ FO 424/184, No. 739. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 417.

¹⁹⁷ Turkey No. 2 (1896). No. 374. Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 26, 1895; Inclosure in No. 374, Cumberbatch to Herbert, Erzeroum, November 14, 1895.

such as marking the shops and houses of Armenians prior to the riots, coordinated attacks, disproportionate numbers of casualty, and selective targeting, among other indications, suggest that in most cases, especially after the riots of Istanbul, the behavior of Muslims was not impromptu. The nature and level of organization varied from one case to another, and, in some ways, the dynamics of mass violence embraced elements of planning and spontaneity at the same time.

On the other hand, the perpetrators did not always act in such a discriminate and precise manner in every instance; nor could the above-mentioned methods always ensure that members of non-Armenian Christian communities escape death. As Table 5 shows, hundreds of people from other Christian groups, particularly Orthodox Greeks, Assyrians (Syriac Orthodox), Catholic and Protestant Armenians, and Chaldeans, were killed and considerable damage done to their property during the anti-Armenian riots in many places, most notably in Diyarbekir, Harput (Mamuretü'l-Aziz), Malatya (Mamuretü'l-Aziz), rural Silvan (Diyarbekir), rural Lice (Diyarbekir), rural Mardin (Diyarbekir), rural Çermik (Diyarbekir), Şirvan (Bitlis), and Urfa (Aleppo). According to official sources, the total number of killed and wounded from other Christian communities in the five provinces was 396 and 62 respectively.

Table 5 Casualty figures for other Christian (non-Apostolic Armenian) confessions in official reports¹⁹⁸

Province	Greek (Orthodox) or, <i>Rum milleti</i>		Catholic (Armenian) ¹⁹⁹		Protestant (Armenian)		Assyrian (Syriac Orthodox) or, <i>Süryani-i Kadim milleti</i>		Assyrian (Syriac) Catholic		Chaldean		Greek Catholic	
	K*	W*	K	W	K	W	K	W	K	W	K	W	K	W
Bitlis	1	-	-	1	1	1	42	1	-	-	9	7	-	-

¹⁹⁸ Unless otherwise specified, the figures in Table 5 come from the tables in Y.EE. 7/3. n.d. Unfortunately, there are no detailed statistical accounts concerning the number of casualties by confession in the provinces of Mamuretü'l-Aziz and Van.

¹⁹⁹ The provincial authorities in Bitlis and Sivas, who provided detailed casualty accounts, did not specify whether their data for “Catholic” and “Protestant” losses includes all Catholic and Protestant Ottoman citizens and foreigners regardless of their denominations or it refers only to Armenian Catholics and Protestants. It would, however, be fair to guess that the authorities referred to Armenian Catholic and Protestant communities.

Diyarbakir	2	2	16	14	20	1	281	26	5	3	4	-	1	1
Erzurum	2 ²⁰⁰	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sivas	5	5	4	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trabzon ²⁰¹	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	11	7	20	15	23	2	323	27	5	3	13	7	1	1

*K=Killed; W=Wounded

In addition to these five provinces shown in Table 5, a considerable number of Catholic Armenians were killed in various districts of the province of Mamuretü'l-Aziz, particularly Harput, Arabgir, and Malatya. About Catholic losses, conflicting reports came from Arabgir, where, according to a report signed by local notables, 649 Christians and 57 Muslims were killed during the disturbances.²⁰² In his telegram of thanks addressing the Sublime Porte, the Catholic Armenian bishop of Arabgir initially claimed that thanks to the vigorous efforts of the officials and the soldiers, the lives and property of his community of over 90 households and their church had been well protected during the riot although they had minor losses brought about by the fire.²⁰³ As will be discussed in the following chapter, the authorities seem to have “advised” or urged local non-Muslim community leaders and notables to send such letter of thanks to the Sublime Porte or the Yıldız Palace in which they categorically put the blame on Armenians and thanked the authorities for restoring order and peace broken by the Armenian “mischief-makers.” The credibility of such documents is, therefore, dubious. Indeed, unlike this earlier telegram, the Armenian Catholic Patriarch reported to the Sublime Porte that 26 Catholic Armenians inhabiting the town of Arabgir were killed, 46 houses (out of 82) burnt, 32 houses and 40 shops looted. The total cost of damage was over 9,000 liras. The patriarch also noted that they had informed the local governments of these incidents and losses; yet they had remained negligent.²⁰⁴ The Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz, on the other hand, claimed that

²⁰⁰ The confession of one of the two killed, a woman, is not specified but it is likely that she was a Greek too.

²⁰¹ Source: Y.PRK.KOM. 9/2 (16 January 1896).

²⁰² BOA. Y.A.HUS. 347/28, 18 N. 1313 (3 March 1896). The *mazbata* (report) signed by nineteen Muslim and Armenian notables in the town of Arabgir dated 25 TS 1311/7 December 1895.

²⁰³ BOA. Y.MTV. 132/82, 11 C. 1313 (29 November 1895). Telegram by the Acting Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz dated 15 TS 1311/27 November 1895. A copy of the bishop's telegram is conveyed on the same page.

²⁰⁴ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 658/30, 2 Za. 1313 (15 April 1896). Letter from the Armenian Catholic Patriarch to the Grand Vizier dated 17 KS 1311/29 January 1896.

the investigation conducted by local officials revealed that 7 Catholic Armenians were killed and the damage estimated at 2,500 liras.²⁰⁵ Likewise, according to the same Ottoman reports, Catholic Armenians losses in the whole *sancak* (sub-province) of Malatya included 71 deaths and 28 houses, 1 church, and 2 schools burnt.²⁰⁶

The table above clearly displays that after the Apostolic Armenians, the Assyrians (also known as Syriacs and Syrian Jacobites) were the second most affected Christian community from the anti-Armenian disturbances of 1895-97. The vast majority of Assyrian losses took place in the province of Diyarbekir, both in urban and rural areas. Official figures put the number of Assyrians killed only in the town of Diyarbekir and the surrounding villages at 185. Killings in and around this town seem especially indiscriminate as among the Assyrians killed were 45 women and 17 children. The number of Assyrian deaths amounts to 261 in the whole *sancak* of Diyarbekir comprising, apart from the town of Diyarbekir itself, the districts of Siverek, Silvan, and Lice.²⁰⁷ In rural areas, the losses resulted from Kurdish attacks on Assyrian villages mostly scattered across the districts within the *sancak* of Diyarbekir and around the district of Mardin. In the absence of clear evidence, one is only forced to speculate whether local enmities and rivalries played a role in the occurrence of such lethal attacks on Assyrians across the province of Diyarbekir, or it was simply because the riotous behavior and crowds may not always be predictable and controllable.

During the disturbances, several members of the Catholic Assyrian community, too, lost their lives, specifically in the province of Diyarbekir. Indeed, the Assyrian Catholic bishop in Diyarbekir begged the government to furnish each member of his community with “signs of loyalty” (*alâim-i sadakat*) affirming that the Assyrian Catholics were the “loyal subjects” of the Sultan, as the reason behind the sufferings of members of this community during the incidents in the town of Diyarbekir was that “they could not be

²⁰⁵ Ibid. Letter from the Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz dated 2 Za. 1313/15 April 1896.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. Letter from the Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz dated 2 Za. 1313/15 April 1896.

²⁰⁷ Y.EE. 7/3. n.d. folio (*lef*) no. 7. “*Diyarbekir Vilayeti dahilinde hadise-i mündefi’a esnasında vukubulan telefât ve mecruhatın mikdar-ı umumisini mübeyyin cedveldir*” (“Table showing the overall number of deaths and injuries that took place during the past incidents in the province of Diyarbekir”).

distinguished and discriminated [from Armenians].” In other words, the bishop claimed that members of his community were killed and looted because they were mistaken for Armenians. The Sublime Porte officials transferred the matter to a special Council of Ministers, which negotiated the request and rejected it on the basis of the principle of equal treatment among groups of the imperial subjects as well as because it was not necessary as order and peace had already been restored in the town of Diyarbekir.²⁰⁸ In addition, although available sources do not provide details to this effect, it seems that members of other Christian communities in the town of Diyarbekir had placed placards or signs on the windows or doors of their shops to indicate their identity to the riotous crowds to escape being mistaken targets.

Similar requests were also made by the Vicar of the Assyrian (Syriac Orthodox) Patriarchate and notables of the community from the province of Mamuretü'l-Aziz, where the disturbances took the lives of a considerable number of Assyrians, specifically in the town of Harput. However, the story behind their request to be “distinguished” from Armenians is somewhat intriguing. The day after the mass killings in the town of Harput, the Acting Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz, Ali Emirî Efendi, sent a telegram to the authorities in Istanbul, reporting the outbreak of disturbances in this town. He gave especially low official casualty figures, which would later go much higher, as even the acting governor-general had no idea of what had happened in Harput on November 11. Among the killed and wounded were also several Assyrians. According to Ali Emirî Efendi, notables of the Assyrian community claimed that their losses were caused by some “known Armenians” who had cross-dressed, wearing bands (turbans) around their heads, as Muslim clergy (*hoca*) and directed the Kurds against Assyrian homes saying “these were the houses of treacherous Armenians, don’t stay, attack!” The acting governor-general noted that this statement of Assyrian notables explained the reason of several Assyrians being killed and wounded during the disturbances even though they were “an obedient people.” The enmity shown by Armenians toward Assyrians was because the latter disliked the former’s seditious behavior lately. The authorities in the palace did not omit to send a

²⁰⁸ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 340/138, 14 C. 1313 (2 December 1895). *Tezkire* from the Grand Vizier to the *Mabeyn* (the Palace Secretariat) dated 14 C. 1313/2 December 1895.

copy of this telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, obviously in order to use before foreign governments and public opinion as a proof of Armenian conspiracy behind the disturbances.²⁰⁹

Later, the Vicar of the Assyrian Patriarchate in Mamuretü'l-Aziz and nine notables of this community sent a petition to their patriarch in Istanbul requesting that the patriarch appeal to the government on behalf of the community for necessary steps to be taken for “the discrimination of [members of the Assyrian people from Armenians] in every aspect.” The petitioners wrote that they had been living in utmost prosperity (*kemal-i saadetle*) under the rule of the Sublime State for 600 years, during which they had never suffered any injustice from the government or from the Muslim population. Today they were also thoroughly satisfied with and grateful to their Muslim fellow countrymen, and they would remain proud of being subjects of the Sublime State eternally. However, some Armenians had dressed as Muslim clergy and incited the Kurds during the recent events in Harput. They had also killed several Assyrians and plundered the entire property of the group including their church. The petitioners claimed that “samples of the usurped goods” had been found in these Armenians’ houses.²¹⁰ The Assyrian Patriarch transmitted this petition attached to his letter to the Ministry of Justice and Religious Sects alleging the Armenians for the sufferings of his people during the recent incidents, and requesting that his “loyal and obedient community be distinguished in every respect [from Armenians]” and relieved

²⁰⁹ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/83, 25 Ca. 1313 (12 November 1895). Telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz dated 31 TE 1311/12 November 1895.

²¹⁰ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 344/4, 1 Ş. 1313 (16 January 1896). Petition signed by the Vicar of the Assyrian Patriarchate and nine notable members of the community inhabiting in the province of Mamuretü'l-Aziz, dated 8 KE 1311/20 December 1895. To quote the entire original source in Ottoman Turkish: “*Cenab-ı Hakk ömr ü şevket-i şahaneyi efsun buyursun. Süryani-i Kadim milletimiz altı yüz seneden beri Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye'nin taht-ı tâbiyetinde kemal-i saadetle yaşadı[.] Gerek Hükümet-i Seniyye'den ve gerek ahali-i İslamiye'den hiçbir vakit muğayir-i adalet bir hal görmediğimiz gibi şu zamanda Müslüman vatandaşlarımızdan her suretle memnun ve müteşekkir bulunduğumuzu ve şu dünya durdukça Devlet-i Aliyye'nin tâbiyetiyle müftechir iken geçen hadise esnasında Ermeni milletinden başlarına sarık sararak hoca kıyafetine girerek Kürdleri teşvik ve tahrikle çend nefer dahi milletimizden katl ve bi'l-cümle emval ve eşyalarımızı yağma ve eşya-yı mağsubemizin nümuneleri Ermeni merkumların hanelerinden zuhur eylediğinden başka kilisemizi dahi külliyyen yağma eylemiş olduklarından tâbiyet-i sadıkamız namına milletimizin her bir hususca ayrılmasına lazım gelen tedabirin bir an evvel icrası zımında lazım gelen mahallere müracaatınızı dû-çeşm ile bekleriz[.] Ol babda[.]”*

with special protection.²¹¹ It seems that the Grand Vizier did nothing regarding the Assyrians' plea but sent copies of these documents to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and published them in the Ottoman press for the above-mentioned purposes.²¹²

As will be mentioned in the following chapter, given the official involvement in the generation of such documents as well as the fact that Assyrians were attacked in many other places, the claims of the representatives of the Assyrian community in Mamuretü'l-Aziz should not be given much credit. Furthermore, if those who attacked the Assyrians were really Armenians, why did the Assyrian notables request to be distinguished from Armenians in the eyes of attackers? In any case, it is obvious that, for some reason or other, the Assyrian notables avoided stating that the Muslim mob attacked members of their community and plundered their church and property. Put aside the truthfulness of these representations, it is hard to imagine how the community could be distinguished.

In the absence of reliable sources, it is hard to speculate about what members of the Assyrian community really thought about the causes of the anti-Armenian riots and the responsibilities of state actors for the violence. Also, it is not clear whether rivalries between Armenian and Assyrian communities, if any, played a role in the generation of such hostile representations. Indeed, further research is needed to reflect upon relations among various non-Muslim communities in the troubled areas over the course of the anti-Armenian disturbances of the mid-1890s.²¹³ Although it is impossible to speak with full certainty, the Assyrian Orthodox and Assyrian Catholic leaders' requests for "discrimination" and protection may nevertheless suggest that they tended to think that the fate of Armenians was determined by the conditions and events which were not entirely beyond the control of Armenians themselves while Assyrians and other non-Armenian

²¹¹ Ibid. Letter from the Vicar of the Assyrian Patriarchate in Istanbul to the Ministry of Justice and Religious Sects dated 29 B. 1313/2 KS 1311/14 January 1896.

²¹² Ibid. Letter from the Grand Vizier to the Palace dated 1 Ş. 1313/4 KS 1311/16 January 1896.

²¹³ For the only serious attempts that have been made in this direction, see J. K. Hassiotis, "The Greeks and the Armenian Massacres." Also see idem., "Greek Foreign Policy towards the Armenian Question: A Historical Survey," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 36, no. 2 (January 2012): 215–33. And Julia Phillips Cohen discusses the ways in which members of Istanbul's Jewish community acted towards their Armenian fellow citizens and the government during and after the episode of mass violence that occurred in the imperial capital in 1896: *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 74-77.

communities' sufferings were caused by the random behavior of the Muslim rioters; hence, they were completely unjust, unjustifiable, and outrageous. What is certain is that such Christian community leaders feared further attacks and obviously focused, above all, on the safety and welfare of their own communities over the period in question.

A considerable number of human and property losses on the part of other Christian groups that occurred during the anti-Armenian riots also indicate that whatever the character of the precipitating events was, the violence took place in the form of extremely lethal, one-sided attacks on vulnerable targets in many places. The indiscriminate killing of an untold number of people by the Muslim crowds negates the flimsy official thesis that Muslims only defended themselves against Armenian assailants. The following chapter investigates the representation of these violent events in official language and narratives.

Chapter 4. The Official Conceptualization of the anti-Armenian Riots of 1895-97: Bureaucratic Terminology, Official Ottoman Narrative, and Legitimizing Discourses

4.1. Introduction

From the beginning, the terminology deployed by Ottoman policy-makers and government officials in reference to the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 was of key importance. The bureaucratic use of language and its specific terms bore an implicit logic about these incidents of collective violence to which state authorities reacted. Indeed, official language and terminology provide evidence useful in understanding the ways in which the representatives of state power, administrators, and military commanders, both at provincial and central levels, conceptualized and responded to the riots and their political implications. As the first part of this chapter demonstrates, although the government documents analyzed in the present study were generated purely for internal use, the customary descriptions of anti-Armenian riots by government officials contained substantial ambiguity, linguistic camouflage, and euphemisms. I argue that through the constant use of the passive voice and euphemistic statements, the imperial authorities sought to neutralize the violence committed against a particular segment of the population and tried to conceal the agency of the perpetrators in the mass killing of Ottoman Armenians.

In the second part of this chapter, I examine the chief motifs of the official Ottoman narrative regarding the origins and nature of these episodes of collective violence. The imperial authorities made no serious attempt to explore the underlying causes of the anti-Armenian riots as they had one omnipotent explanation: Armenian provocation. Indeed, from the very beginning, the central and local government officials' immediate response to the outbreak of intercommunal violence was to blame Armenians for causing disorders by provoking Muslims. Within the context of anti-Armenian violence in the late Ottoman Empire, the term "provocation thesis" has been first used by the political scientist Robert Melson, whose 1982 article is still relevant and successfully demonstrates principal

weaknesses of the thesis.²¹⁴ “The concern here,” Melson writes, “is that the provocation thesis neglects to inquire into the intentions of the sultan [*sic*], his view of the Armenians, or the context of Armenian-Ottoman relations which might have exaggerated the Armenian threat.”²¹⁵ As this quotation illustrates, here Melson issues a historiographical critique of modern-day scholars such as Stanford Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw, William L. Langer, and Bernard Lewis for their approach to the controversy surrounding the Ottoman government’s treatment of its Armenian subjects in the last decades of the empire.

Notably absent from Melson’s study is, however, the fact that the so-called provocation thesis was not simply formulated by modern scholars but rather, as we shall see in the following pages, it was developed by the Ottoman authorities themselves although they obviously never named their case a thesis. In a nutshell, the official contention advanced by the Ottoman authorities was that the mass violence was simply the reaction of Muslim masses to the acts of provocation and aggression on the part of Armenians closely connected with revolutionary, “seditious” committees. According to this view of the matter, the victim’s actions and intentions posed a serious threat and provoked the perpetrator, who eventually responded with violence in order to eliminate the threat or punish the provoking party. Consequently, Ottoman officials—and later government apologists—claimed that Armenians themselves bore responsibility for the violence.

The official narrative—or the deployment of the concept of provocation as a direct explanation for violence—did not simply arm the Ottoman authorities with a rhetoric they could effectively use for domestic political consumption as well as in the diplomatic arena against their European and American critics, but it also freed them from moral responsibility and the punishment of Muslim perpetrators and instigators. Importantly, narratives of provocation raise a host of significant questions about agency, causality, accountability, and victimhood. The Hamidian administration’s overall reaction to the

²¹⁴ Melson, “A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres.” Also see *idem*, *Revolution and Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43-69.

²¹⁵ Melson, “A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres,” 486.

outbreak of violence and the representation of the anti-Armenian riots of the mid-1890s in official discourse also reveal the distinct positions that Muslim and Armenian communities occupied in the Ottoman political imaginary and state policies at the turn of the century.

In the third part of the chapter, I will treat the Sivas riots as a case study and offer a thorough examination of the reports of local civilian and military officials to further analyze the official Ottoman language and narrative. A full consideration of the events as they are reflected in Ottoman documents will help us better understand not only the paradoxes of official theses, but also the discursive methods through which the Ottoman officials sought to neutralize, trivialize, and justify violence. This case study will be followed by a general discussion on the nexus between Armenian revolutionary movements and intergroup violence to reflect upon what legitimizing narratives obfuscate and submerge.

4.2. Euphemism for Mass Violence: Writing in the Passive Voice, Neutralizing the Violence, and Concealing the Agency of Perpetrators

The Ottoman authorities mostly referred to these major episodes of collective violence as *iğtişâş* (usually used in the plural, that is, *iğtişâşât*) meaning disturbance, turbulence, or disorder; *şuriş*, or turmoil, tumult, disarray, or chaos; *galeyan*, or boiling over with rage, effervescence, or outburst; and, *teheyyc*, or excitement. In official reports and the heavily censored Ottoman press, the most utilized term to denote the mass killings of Armenians was *iğtişâşât*, which was a generic, catch-all term employed by Ottoman administrators and the press to describe a wide range of civil unrest, internal disorders, and riots.²¹⁶ Like *şuriş*, the word “*iğtişâş*” had no particular connotations for intercommunal

²¹⁶ Despite its Arabic origin, the word “*iğtişâş*” (اغتشاش) seems to have come into Ottoman Turkish from Persian as there is no such word in contemporary Arabic dictionaries. In modern Persian, the word “اغتشاش” (*eğtešâš* or *eghteshash*) means disturbance, turbulence, disorder, or confusion, and is typically used by law enforcement agencies and press to describe various forms of civil, urban unrest such as riots, disarrays, and violent uproars. See “اغتشاش - Translation - Persian-English Dictionary,” *Glosbe*, accessed February 6, 2017, <https://glosbe.com>.

conflict or attacks directed against a group of people by another.²¹⁷ Terms such as “disturbances,” “turmoil,” “chaos,” and “turbulence” tellingly reflect the ways in which the Ottoman authorities conceptualized the events of 1895-97 as unorganized mass conflict, spontaneous outburst of popular anger, or happenstances that were triggered by the “seditious” actions of Armenians. In the language of Ottoman governing circles, the anti-Armenian riots were also sometimes treated as if they were an epidemic or a natural disaster rather than a mass conflict that involved conscious human beings, political motivations, and violent means.

When dealing with various aspects of the pogroms in general and the actions of perpetrators in particular, Ottoman bureaucrats also systematically used the passive voice in their voluminous records, employing a language that meticulously refrains from identifying Muslims as transgressors and Armenians as victims. For instance, in the language of Ottoman bureaucrats, the perpetrators’ deliberate act of inflicting harm on Armenians becomes “the killing and wounding that took place during the said disturbance” (*iğtişâş-ı mezkûre hengâmında vuku bulan katl ve cerh*).²¹⁸ Likewise, when the authorities referred to the buildings that were set on fire by the Muslim mob during the riots, they often used the terms “*mahruk*” and “*muhterik*,” meaning burning, burnt, or being consumed

²¹⁷ Despite the virulent and extensive nature of the violence perpetrated against Armenians as well as the huge gap between Armenian and Muslim casualties that emerged during the incidents, the Ottoman authorities never used the word “massacre” (*katl-i amm*), or any other terms specifically denoting a one-sided act of mass murder, to describe these violent episodes. They, however, occasionally used the words “*mukatele*” and “*kıtal*” (both meaning mutual slaughter, mutual fighting to kill, combat) to label the events in question. See, for instance, BOA. Y.MTV. 131/13, 15 Ca. 1313 (3 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Commander of the 7th Division forwarded by the Commander of the 4th Imperial Army, Zeki Pasha, dated 21 TE 1311/2 November 1895; BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/5, 6 Ca. 1313 (25 October 1895). Joint letter (*ariza*) from the Grand Vizier and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the palace dated 6 Ca. 1313/13 TE 1311/25 October 1895; BOA. HR.SYS. 2812/4, 12-10-1895 (12 October 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Trabzon dated 26 Eylül 1311/8 October 1895; BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/67, 22 Ca. 1313 (10 November 1895). Telegram from the District-Governor of Arabgir forwarded by the Acting Governor-General of Mamuretü’l-Aziz, dated 29 TE 1311/10 November 1895; BOA. Y.MTV. 132/217, 28 C. 1313 (16 December 1895). Telegram from Lieutenant-General Saadeddin to the First-Secretary dated 4 KE 1311/16 December 1895.

²¹⁸ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 34/12, 12 C. 1313 (The date on the file should be wrong since the document is dated 19 *Teşrin-i Sani* 1311/1 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 19 TS 1311/1 December 1895. To quote the original statement in Ottoman Turkish: “*Mahal-i muhtelifede zuhura gelen iğtişâşâtın çend seneden beri Ermenilerin hükümet-i seniyye ve ahali-i İslamiye aleyhinde ika’ etdikleri mefasid-i mütenevvia ve cinayat-ı azimenin tesirinden münbais olduğu aşikâr idüğüne nazaran iğtişâş-ı mezkûre hengâmında vuku bulan katl ve cerh maddelerine ceraim-i âdiye nazarıyla bakılamaması tabii olduğundan...*”

by fire, as if the fires occurred without context or the buildings were “burnt down” due to a fire that occurred by accident.²¹⁹ Similarly, Ottoman administrators constantly referred to the properties that were looted and grabbed from Armenian shops, houses, and villages by rioters and pillagers as the “usurped properties” (*emval-i mağsube*) without making references to the group identity of the rioters and the owner-victims of the properties.²²⁰ In some cases, the authorities went so far as to describe the properties sacked and stolen from Armenian villages in Karakilise as “the goods that the Muslim people of Karakilise and the Kurds took from some Armenian villages” (*Karakilise kasabası ahali-i İslamiyesiyle Kürdlerin bazı Ermeni kurasından aldıkları eşyanın...*).²²¹

One of the most striking examples of what can be characterized as “Ottoman linguistic camouflage” comes from the government documents dealing with the abduction of Armenian women and girls and with their conversion to Islam. As Deringil has aptly observed within the case of the mass conversions of Armenians during the years 1895-97, the Ottoman administrators, specifically the Governor-General of Diyarbekir, Enis Pasha, frequently referred to the Armenian women and girls who had been abducted and forced into marriage by Muslims as “Armenian women who were dispersed here and there during the disturbances” (*zaman-ı iğtişâşda öteye berüye dağılmış olan Ermeni kadınları*).²²² In another case, they were spoken of as “the Christian women and children who were reported to be staying here and there since the time of disturbances” (*İğtişâşât zamanından beri ötede beride kaldıkları haber verilen Hristiyan nisalar ile sübyanı*).²²³ Likewise, when the

²¹⁹ To give an example, in a letter from the Grand Vizier to the Minister of Justice and Religious Sects, the Armenian schools that were set on fire by the rioters in the town of Malatya in November 1895 were referred to as “the Armenian Protestant boy’s and girl’s schools burnt during the disturbances” (*esna-yı iğtişâşda muhterik olan Ermeni Protestan cemaati zükur ve inas mekteblerinin...*). See BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 659/29, 29 Z. 1314 (31 May 1897). Letter from the Grand Vizier to the Minister of Justice and Religious Sects dated 19 Mayıs 1314/31 May 1897.

²²⁰ See, for instance, BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 686/18, 8 R. 1314 (16 September 1896). Letter from the Grand Vizier to the acting President of the Aid Commission dated 9 R. 1314/5 Eylül 1312/17 September 1896.

²²¹ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 353/52, 11 M. 1314 (22 June 1896). Telegram from the Governor-General of Erzurum conveyed in a letter by the Grand Vizier.

²²² Deringil, “Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897,” 350.

²²³ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 637/19, 27 L. 1313 (11 April 1896; but the date on the file is incorrect; it should be 3 Za. 1313/16 April 1896). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Diyarbekir, Enis [Pasha] dated 31 Mart 1312/12 April 1896.

Diyarbakir authorities reported about the resettlement of the Armenian villagers who had fled their villages due to fear of attacks, they constantly referred to them as “some villagers who were scattered due to the current circumstances and are being [re]settled in their villages by special officials” (*Ahval-i hâzıradan dolayı dağılan ve memurîn-i mahsusa vasıtasıyla karyelerinde tavattun ve iskan edilmekte olan bazı kura ahalisi...*).²²⁴

Conversely, the Ottoman authorities carefully emphasized in their reports the alleged role of Armenians, or “Armenian mischief-makers/intriguers” (*Ermeni fesedesi* or *Ermeni müfsidler*) in the outbreak of the riots. The passive voice used by Ottoman bureaucrats in describing the crimes committed by Muslims against Armenians is replaced by a clear active voice stressing Armenian agency. As seen in a brief report written by the Field-Marshal (*müşir*) of the Fourth Army Corps, Mehmed Zeki Pasha, when the Muslim perpetrators’ deliberate actions are concerned in official reports, the disturbances simply “take place;” yet, when the Ottoman authorities referred to the larger context of the events, the troubles “are created by the Armenians.”²²⁵ For some administrators and military commanders, it was almost a standard “style” to start their reports with phrases like “the disturbances that took place because of the seditious actions of Armenians” or “the turmoil brought about by the Armenians.”

Furthermore, when Ottoman officials and military authorities needed to refer to the systematic attacks of Kurdish tribes on Armenian villages, they did not omit to indicate that the context in which these attacks occurred was the “Armenian provocation.” They systematically emphasized that village raids and attacks took place simply because the Kurds, like other Muslim populations, had been provoked by Armenians. For instance, when the Governor-General of Diyarbakir reported about Kurdish assaults on Armenian villages across his province throughout the month of November 1895, he described these crimes as “the attacks on some Christian villages in the districts by the Kurds who were provoked by the Armenian sedition” (*Ermenilerin ifsadatından dolayı galeyana gelen*

²²⁴ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 636/43, 29 C. 1313 (17 December 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Diyarbakir to the Grand Vizier dated 3 KE 1311/15 December 1895.

²²⁵ BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 109/61, 1 Ş. 1313 (17 January 1896). Cipher telegram from the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps, Zeki Pasha, to the First Secretary dated 5 KS 1311/17 January 1896.

Ekradın mülhakatça bazı Hristiyan karyelerine tecavüzü...).²²⁶ Similarly, the Kurdish tribes involved were often referred to by the governor-general as “the tribes that were provoked by the Armenian sedition” (*Ermeni ifsadatı ile galeyana gelen aşairden...*).²²⁷ In addition, whenever officials and military commanders referred to systematic attacks by Kurdish tribes on Armenians, these crimes were also depicted as the actions of “ignorant” and “savage” Kurds. By doing so, they discursively transferred responsibility from the authorities and the wider Muslim crowds who had participated in the mass murder and the looting to the “simple,” “ignorant” segments of the population.

At times, the imperial administrators also referred to those who participated in the anti-Armenian violence as the Muslim folks who interfered in the government’s measures to restore order and peace or to punish Armenians.²²⁸ For instance, after the riots in Tokad in March 1897, Grand Vizier Halil Rifat Pasha sent a letter to Inspector-General Şakir Pasha, conveying a series of stringent orders in accordance with the decisions suggested by a Special Council of Ministers (*Encümen-i Mahsus-ı Vükelâ*) regarding the overall measures to be taken to maintain public tranquility and prevent the outbreak of new episodes of violence in the Anatolian provinces. Characteristically, these official orders primarily focused on measures to be taken against any attempts on the part of “seditious Armenians” to create trouble. The Grand Vizier demanded that, if any disorders occurred, all measures be taken immediately to suppress them “without allowing the Muslim population to interfere in” the incidents, and that wrongdoers be interned and brought to trial immediately. It was also of critical importance to anticipate and preclude such occurrences before they already commenced, and, in case of any trouble, it was the responsibility of government officials to make certain that those (1) who dare to cause

²²⁶ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 619/14, 17 Ca. 1313 (5 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Diyarbekir dated 24 TE 1311/5 November 1895.

²²⁷ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/64, 21 Ca. 1313 (9 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Diyarbekir dated 28 TE 1311/9 November 1895. For another copy of the telegram, see BOA. Y.EE. 81/19, 21 Ca. 1313 (9 November 1895).

²²⁸ Deringil notes that when the Minister of Police, Hüseyin Nazım Pasha, made mention of “classes of the population who intervened in the restoration of order” (*asayişin iadesinde müdahil olan sınıf-ı ahali*), he actually referred to those who attacked the Armenians. See Deringil, “Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897,” 350. However, I have not been able to confirm this statement of the Minister of Police quoted by Deringil who refers to Nazım Pasha’s two-volume collection of Ottoman police documents entitled *Ermeni Olayları Tarihi*.

turmoil; (2) who use weapons against the police and the military; and (3) who “dare to participate and intervene in the duty of the government” (*hükümetin vazifesine iştirak ve müdahaleye mücaheret edenler*) face legal punishment, “regardless of who they are and whatever confession they belong to.”²²⁹

By “those who participate and intervene in the duty of the government,” the Grand Vizier obviously referred to Muslims who might attempt to “punish” Armenians for their “rebellious actions,” as they recently have. Regardless of whether there were any criminal actions, prior to the beginning of the events, on the part of Armenians that deserved punishment within the framework of Ottoman law, it is important to see how Ottoman administrators attributed a logical framework to the violent actions of Muslim crowds in line with the official discourse representing the anti-Armenian disturbances as the reaction of Muslims to the “Armenian uprisings.” As a result, by doing so, the Ottoman bureaucrats in Anatolia and Istanbul both justified the violence and empathized with the perpetrators even though they did not sanction their extremely violent behavior that they stated had undesirable political, economic, and diplomatic consequences for the imperial government.

Before moving to the analysis of the official Ottoman narrative about the origins of the events, I would like to give one final example illustrating the peculiar language used by Ottoman bureaucrats in responding to the incidents of 1895-97. When the Sultan’s secretariat at the Yıldız Palace received the news that following an unrest in Bayburd, Muslim groups had attacked the Armenian villages around this town, seized the villagers’ goods, and murdered the entire male population in an Armenian village named Kısanta (or Ksanta), they ordered the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps in a cipher telegram to inform the palace in definite terms by next morning whether the news received was true, and, if so, who the actual offenders were, Muslims or “Armenian brigands” (*Ermeni eşkıyası*). Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha was also instructed to report, separately, the number of casualties of Muslims, Armenians, and other groups that took place in the above-mentioned village and other places up to that time. The last question to which the palace requested a reply was a shameful one: “Who has been winning during the clashes that

²²⁹ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 612/11, 18 L. 1314 (22 March 1897). Letter from the Grand Vizier to Inspector-General Şakir Pasha dated 10 Mart 1313/22 March 1897.

occurred so far, Armenians or Muslims?”²³⁰ It would be revealed soon by the authorities that there were no clashes in the reported areas but, instead, lethal attacks and mass murders were committed against Armenian civilians. Even if we suppose that the disorders in these areas took place in the form of a clash between more or less equal participants, how could the palace authorities ask such a question when receiving the news of two groups of Ottoman citizens slaughtering each other in a corner of the empire? As should be evident by now, official discourses reflected in the government documents analyzed so far reveal that the Ottoman policymakers around the Sultan were biased in favor of the local Muslim population.

4.3. The Official Ottoman Narrative: Revolutionary Provocation

The Ottoman administrators consistently claimed that the disorders in each and every case had grown out of the provocative and importunate conduct by Armenians who attacked Muslims and security forces. According to the official version of the events, the instigators of the disorders were Armenians while the Muslims simply “boiled over with rage” or acted in self-defense although the Ottoman authorities did not furnish any convincing evidence or substantiation that it was the Armenians who initiated the attacks in most cases. In the final analysis, the official narrative held Armenians responsible for the incidents, and reduced the origins of extremely violent behavior on the part of Muslim perpetrators to psychological conditions like “effervescence,” “rage,” and “excitement.” Such official claims imply that the Armenians had brought on their own destruction. The imperial authorities were ultimately political actors who sought to control the interpretations of these events afterward by constructing an official narrative as well as by employing a specific vocabulary even though they never succeeded in assuming a

²³⁰ BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/10, 27 Ca. 1313 (15 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the *Mabeyn* (the Palace Secretariat) to the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Imperial Army Corps dated 17 TE 1311/29 October 1895. To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “...zıkr olunan muhacimler İslam mı Ermeni eşkıyası mı hakikaten kim olduklarının ve mezkur karyenin zükur nüfusunun denildiği gibi kamilen kat olunduğu sahih olup olmadığının ve sahih ise bunların İslam mı yoksa Ermeni mi olduklarının ve gerek mezkur karyede ve gerek sair mevakide şimdiye kadar İslam’dan ve Ermeni’den ve saireden maktul ve mecruh olanların ayrı ayrı mikdarlarının ve şimdiye kadar vukua gelen müsadematda İslamlar mı yoksa Ermeniler mi galib olduklarının din-i mübin hakkıçün ve şevket-meab efendimiz hazretlerine olan muhabbet ve sadakatleri ve namus-ı askerileri namına doğrusunun tafsilan be-heme-hal yarın sabaha kadar arz-ı atabe-i ulya olunması emr u ferman buyurulmuştur.”

monopoly over them. In what follows, I examine the key characteristics and motifs of the official Ottoman narrative that situated the causes of the riots of 1895-97 in the circumstances allegedly created by Armenian revolutionaries in an attempt to launch a general insurrection throughout the empire's eastern provinces.

To begin with one particularly telling example, Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha, the Commander-in-Chief of the Fourth Army Corps, briefly—and quite ambiguously—explained the origins of the incidents in a report as follows:

Since the Armenian intriguers (*Ermeni erbab-ı mefsedeti*), who seduced and incited the entire Armenian community with the hope of realizing the idea of autonomy and provoking foreign intervention, dared to attack mosques, public areas, and, in some localities, government houses, disorders (*şuriş*) took place in certain cities and towns. On the one hand, the [ordinary] Armenians were deceived by the incitement of [those] Armenian intriguers; and, on the other, the disorders that occurred in these cities and towns spread to villages as various fabricated rumors (*ürçufeler*) to the effect that the Armenians were granted some concessions affected the [mind of] Muslim population very adversely. The disturbances and excitement were, [however,] quelled in a short span of time by the execution of military assistance in response to the requests made by the [local] governments.²³¹

The content, form, and terminology of Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha's account of the incidents closely resemble those provided by other civilian and military officials, which invariably accused Armenians of initiating the disorders. In fact, the marked similarities regarding the plot, terms, and wording of the reports on the incidents in different parts of the region made some contemporary observers suspicious of the truthfulness of these accounts. British Ambassador Currie, for instance, reported to Prime Minister Salisbury that “[t]he accusation against the Armenians of having provoked the outbreaks appears to rest upon very slight foundations, and the similarity of the terms in which it has been

²³¹ Y.PRK.ASK. 109/61 (17 January 1896). Cipher telegram from the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps, Zeki Pasha, to the First Secretary dated 5 KS 1311/17 January 1896. To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “*Ermeni erbab-ı mefsedeti muhtariyet idare-i fikrine vucud vermek ve müdahalat-ı ecnebiyeyi davet eylemek emeliyle umum Ermenileri tahrik ve teşvik eylediklerinden cevami-i şerifeye ve bazı mahallerde hükümet konaklarına ve mecma’-ı nas olan mahallere saldırarak katl ve cerhe ve ika-ı şurişe cüret eylemeleri üzerine malum olan şehir ve kasabalarda şuriş zuhur etmiş ve Ermeni fesadının teşvikatına Ermeniler firifte oldukları gibi Ermenilere bazı imtiyazat verildiğine dair işaa olunan dürlü dürlü ürçufeler de ahali-i İslamiyeye pek fena tesir eylediğinden berüce maruz şehir ve kasabalarda ika olunan şuriş köylere de sirayet eylemiş ve hükümetlerin gösterdiği lüzum vechile muavenat-ı askeriye icra olunarak şurişin devamına meydan verilmeksizin az vakit zarfında iğtişâş ve heyecan saye-i şahanede teskin kılınmıştır.*”

repeated from every place where disturbances have occurred, make it clear that a ‘mot d’ordre’ was given from head-quarters to lay the blame upon them.’²³²

In fact, the Ottoman official narrative about the outbreak of riots tells almost the same story for virtually every place that witnessed widespread violent episodes in the fall of 1895-96: one Armenian or two suddenly appears in the market square or in front of mosques and begins to randomly shoot Muslims, which eventually provokes a disturbance to be followed by a carnage. As if they were expecting an attack, Muslims fight back without panicking, and within a couple of hours, the streets are packed with corpses of Armenians, nearly all shops and houses belonging to Armenians looted, and Armenian neighborhoods set on fire. In most instances, the Ottoman authorities provided no details about the beginning and escalation of the events; nor did they identify the names of alleged Armenian provocateurs who were reported to have initiated the attack, or those of the Muslims who were supposedly killed by the Armenians in the very beginning.

Non-Ottoman sources such as reports of the foreign consular agents in the riot centers, missionary accounts, and eyewitness statements clearly acknowledge the role that Armenian revolutionary agitation played in the formation of a tense atmosphere prior to the events in a number of places, particularly in Trabzon, Erzurum, and Arabgir. At times, they also complained about revolutionary activities as an encouragement for violent manifestations on the part of resentful Muslims. However, in their accounts respecting the events in other towns, they clearly state that the claim that disorders were the work of Armenian “seditionists” cannot be substantiated. In many towns, they report, Armenians were quiet before the riots, refraining from doing anything that might provoke the Muslims especially after the acceptance of the scheme of reform by the Sultan on 17 October 1895.

To give only one example, according to the acting British consul at Ankara, Raphael A. Fontana, the massacre in Merzifon (or Marsovan, a northern Anatolian city in the province of Sivas) started as an unprovoked event when a crowd of Muslims assisted

²³² FO 424/184, No. 739. Also see TNA: FO 424/184, No. 172. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 26, 1895. For published copies of these documents respectively, see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 417, and Turkey No. 2, (1896), No. 105.

by Kurds and Circassians from the nearby villages suddenly raided the market, where most of the shops were rented by Armenian merchants.²³³ In a longer report based upon two detailed accounts he received from different sources in the town of Merzifon, Fontana writes that two or three days before the massacre, Muslims beat several Armenians and killed one in a street brawl. On 14 November, an Armenian priest went to the district governor (*kaim-makam* or *kaymakam*) to inform him of the fear prevailing among the Armenians of Merzifon, and of their intention to close their shops the following day. In return, the district governor assured the priest that nothing would happen. On 15 November, Friday, about noon, a Muslim ran into the Kara Mustafa Pasha Mosque, where Muslims had gathered for Friday prayer, shouting “the Armenian Committee were advancing to the attack.” Upon that scream, the Muslims rushed from the mosques, just like the villagers from the neighboring areas did, and the crowd started to kill any Armenians in the market and loot the shops. According to Fontana, the whole market was pillaged by the crowd with the exception of three shops owned by Greeks:

“The doors of closed shops were broken in, the inmates murdered, and the wares dragged out and carried off. Even the iron doors of the Bedestan, or covered bazaar, were smashed with axes, and the whole of it pillaged—‘not a needle was left.’ A young Turk of rank was seen meanwhile encouraging the rabble, and shouting to them to make the most of their time.”²³⁴

In his aforementioned report, Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha also claimed that Armenians who were actively involved in the intrigue had usually used revolvers and had sometimes been armed with Russian and Martini rifles during the events, while Muslims “defended” themselves with clubs, pieces of wood, swords, daggers, and guns like *şişhane* and *kapaklı* rifles.²³⁵ Indeed, other civilian and military authorities, too, constantly maintained that while Armenians used modern firearms during the clashes, Muslims had

²³³ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 634. Inclosure in No. 634. Copy of a dispatch from Acting Consul Fontana to Herbert, Angora, November 21, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 375.

²³⁴ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 790. Inclosure 2 in No. 790. “Report on the Disturbance at Marsovan” by Raphael A. Fontana, transmitted in a dispatch from Acting Consul Fontana to Currie, Angora, December 4, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 441.

²³⁵ Y.PRK.ASK. 109/61 (17 January 1896). To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “*Bi'l-fil fesada karışan Ermeniler umumen revolver ve bazen sürmeli Rusya tüfengi ve martini ile müsella olub İslamlar ise sopa ve ağaç ve kılıç ve kama ve hançer ve kapaklı ve şişhane gibi silahlarla müdafaa eylemiş oldukları...*”

to resort to defending themselves with sticks and knives, which are obviously hard to be seen as “defense tools” vis-à-vis modern weapons. Unfortunately, the absence of autopsy reports or similar official documents in most cases makes it hard for us to exactly determine the nature of killings as well as the tools of violence that the killers used in each episode. Ottoman and foreign sources indicate that the most common tools that the perpetrators used during the massacres included knives, axes, clubs, and daggers. However, the two important facts mentioned in the previous chapter—that the number of wounded was much lower than the number of dead, and that the killing was done within a relatively short time—suggest that firearms like rifles, pistols, and revolvers were possibly widely used in most cases.

One of the most important contradictions inherent in the Ottoman official narrative concerning the causes and unfolding of the riots is that although the number of Armenians killed was, in many cases, 20 to 40 times higher than that of Muslims, the authorities uniformly asserted that Muslims defended themselves using the most primitive tools. Such a disparity in death tolls, however, suggests that the killing of Armenians could not simply derive from a defensive action on the part of Muslims. Also, as we have seen in the previous chapter, evidence suggests that Armenians were exposed to violence suddenly and could not properly defend themselves in most cases. One can also easily infer from Ottoman reports that in most cases, disorders came to an end only after the authorities stopped Muslims, while those Armenians who were able to escape death either took refuge in their houses, churches, missionary buildings, consulates, and in the houses of their Muslim neighbors, or, in rare cases, fired from their houses on the Muslim rioters. That the rioting in most cases ended in this way provides yet further evidence that Armenians were not equal participants in these disorders, let alone perpetrators advancing the attacks.

The Ottoman government’s version of the events contains further paradoxes and inconsistencies. Although Ottoman officials claimed that in every instance, it was Armenian intriguers or armed bandits who began the clashes and committed arson attacks, even the official casualty figures indicate that the vast majority of the victims were Armenians, and that arson attacks mainly destroyed the Armenian quarters and the buildings owned or rented by Armenians. To take only one example, Ottoman officials in

Bitlis claimed that Armenians had set on fire several Muslim buildings in Bitlis in an attempt to spread the riots in this town and committed arson attacks in the villages of the districts of Eruh and Garzan within the *sancak* of Siird. Yet, these alleged Armenian arsonists set on fire a total of 59 Armenian and 129 Assyrian homes while only one Muslim house suffered from the fire in these villages.²³⁶

During the riots, the religious leaders and notables of Armenian and other non-Muslim communities from provincial capitals and other riot centers sent letters or telegrams of thanks and “declarations of loyalty” to the Sultan or the Sublime Porte. Some of these letters were signed jointly by community leaders from several non-Muslim confessions including Apostolic, Catholic, and Protestant Armenians, Assyrians, and Orthodox Greeks, while in some cases, signatories included only the notables of a particular non-Muslim community inhabiting a particular town. These letters or telegrams generically declare that it was the “Armenian plotters” who provoked the Muslims and initiated the disorders, and, therefore, that they were responsible for these outbreaks of violence. Several such letters signed by non-Armenian Christian community leaders also express their gratitude to the Sultan and the government for having been protected by the police and military during the riots.²³⁷

Various sources claim that the Ottoman authorities forced or “encouraged” non-Muslim community leaders to sign such collective letters, telegrams, and declarations generated by government officials in the immediate aftermath of a riot in a certain place, reflecting official versions of the events. For instance, the British Consul at Trabzon, Henry

²³⁶ BOA. HR.SYS. 2805/1, 30-01-1894 (30 January 1894). Letter from the Ministry of Interior dated 9 KS 1311/21 January 1896.

²³⁷ For a few examples, see BOA. Y.PRK.AZN. 15/1, 2 B. 1313 (19 December 1895). Letter signed by twenty-four persons from Diyarbekir including Assyrian and Orthodox community leaders; BOA. Y.A.HUS. 342/57, 7 B. 1313 (24 December 1895). Letter signed by the Vicar of the Armenian Patriarchate and fourteen notables of the Armenian community in Ankara dated 29 C. 1313/4 KE 1311/16 December 1895. This archival file also contains another copy of the above-mentioned letter signed by Christian religious leaders in Diyarbekir. And, Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 258. English translation of the telegram sent by the Vicar of the Assyrian (Syriac Orthodox) Patriarchate and some notables of his community from Harput to the Sublime Porte dated 15 November 1895. This telegram, declaring the loyalty of the Syrian community to the Sultan, was transmitted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tevfik Pasha, to the Ottoman Ambassador in London, Rüstem Pasha. There are also similar documents signed jointly by Muslims and Armenians. See, for instance, Y.A.HUS. 347/28 (3 March 1896). The *mazbata* (report) signed by nineteen Muslim and Armenian notables in the town of Arabgir dated 25 TS 1311/7 December 1895.

Z. Longworth, reported to Ambassador Currie that in order to put the blame on the Armenian community, the authorities in Trabzon were resorting to the “worn-out expedient of compelling the inhabitants to sign a Declaration,” claiming that unfortunate incidents had taken place in the town due to “a latent spirit of revolt detected among some Armenians.”²³⁸ Reports of the Greek Consul at Trabzon investigated by Hassiotis confirm that the authorities compelled the Greek Metropolitan and Catholic Armenian Bishop in the city to sign such a declaration. Yet, since the metropolitan and the bishop refused to sign, the Governor-General of Trabzon issued another document and invited some notables of these non-Muslim communities to sign it.²³⁹ This second attempt of the governor-general seems to have succeeded in producing a joint account of the events bearing the signatures of the local civilian and military authorities, ulema, and notables of the Muslim, Greek, and Catholic (Armenian) communities in Trabzon.²⁴⁰

Likewise, in a letter from Giresun (Kerassunde) addressed to Michael H. Herbert, Secretary of the British Embassy at Istanbul, a British subject resident in the province of Sivas claimed that after the mass killings in the town of Karahisar (Karahisar-ı Şarkî), the Ottoman authorities had required the Greeks of this town to sign a *mazbata* (report) to the effect that it was the Armenians who had provoked the incident by attacking and killing several Muslims. The Greeks had signed the document in order to save their lives. The anonymous author of the letter added that he had examined “unimpeachable witnesses,” and that he was in a position to prove all he had written. It was “utterly untrue that the Armenians gave the slightest provocation on this occasion.”²⁴¹

²³⁸ Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 235. Longworth to Currie, Trebizond, October 18, 1895.

²³⁹ Hassiotis, “The Greeks and the Armenian Massacres,” 84.

²⁴⁰ See Y.MTV. 130/10 (19 October 1895). Report addressed to the office of the Grand Vizier signed by the local civilian and military authorities, the ulema, and the notables of Muslim, Catholic, and Greek Orthodox communities in Trabzon dated 2 TE 1311/14 October 1895. The Sublime Porte communicated a French translation of this report to British Secretary of Embassy Herbert. See Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 239. “Account of the Trebizond Massacres,” which was transmitted, with an English translation, by Herbert to Salisbury, in a dispatch dated Constantinople, November 6, 1895.

²⁴¹ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 621. Inclosure 2 in No. 621, “Letter addressed to Mr. Herbert,” dated Kerassunde [Giresun], November 19, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 364.

According to British sources, a similar procedure was observed in the town of Kayseri. In his letter addressed to the acting British Consul at Ankara, Henry K. Wingate, a well-known American missionary in Talas, wrote that there had been attempts on the part of the authorities to get signatures to a paper declaring that Armenians were responsible for the outbreak in the town of Kayseri. Yet, Wingate went on to say, it was a failure thus far as the Armenians showed “considerable nerve in the matter.”²⁴² Lastly, in his memoirs, Karekin Pastırmacıyan (better known by the revolutionary alias “Armen Garo”) writes that Şakir Pasha and provincial officials in Erzurum invited his father, Harutyun Pastırmacıyan, to the government office and asked him to sign an official version of the events that took place in the town. Pastırmacıyan had daringly refused the demand saying that he could not sign such a telegram because it did not tell the truth. According to Garo, 10 to 12 Armenian notables of Erzurum had fearfully signed the telegram.²⁴³ Yet, one should be cautious taking Garo’s account for granted since, unlike contemporary foreign sources, he claims that his father had been urged to sign the document one day before the events in the town of Erzurum, implying that the massacre was planned and organized by officials.

Given the multiple cases in which such practices were observed, it can be surmised that, rather than being a local initiative, it was a central policy to generate such documents signed by the leaders and notables of non-Muslim communities in the region so that the official version of the events could be more convincingly presented to the representatives of the Great Powers. The Ottoman government sent copies of these documents to the Ottoman embassies in European capitals via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the government efforts to refute critical foreign press coverage and make the Ottoman case before the European public. It should also be noted that these letters and declarations were widely published in the Ottoman press.

²⁴² TNA: FO 424/184, No. 846. Inclosure 2 in No. 846, letter from H. K. Wingate to Acting Consul Fontana dated Caesarea [Kayseri], Turkey, December 12, 1895. Acting Consul Fontana extracts the letter and forwards it to Currie in a dispatch dated Angora, December 17, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 476.

²⁴³ Armen Garo, *Osmanlı Bankası: Armen Garo'nun Anıları*, trans. Attila Tuygan (Istanbul: Belge Uluslararası Yayıncılık, 2009), 81-83.

The official Ottoman narrative has further weaknesses and contradictions. For instance, in such major riot centers as Sivas, Harput, Merzifon, Kayseri, Ayntab, and Urfa, riots took place several weeks after the beginning of the wave of largescale violence in October 1895. And the incidents in these locations did not erupt simultaneously. Why did Armenian revolutionaries, or provocateurs as portrayed in official representations, wait for a considerable time to pass before they took action? And why did they not implement their sinister plans everywhere simultaneously if their ulterior motive all along was to provoke European intervention as soon as possible? Furthermore, as mentioned above, during the upheavals of the winter of 1895, violence erupted in many parts of the region regardless of the size of the Armenian population living in any particular area. For instance, in Gümüşhane, where Armenians constituted not even 5 percent of the population, an attack launched by Armenian provocateurs on Muslims, as claimed by the Ottoman authorities, would mean nothing but a collective suicide. Indeed, reporting on the origins of the disturbances in this town, British Consul Longworth concluded:

The Sandjak [*sancak*] of Gumush-Kaneh [Gümüşhane] has a population of about 118,500 souls, of which 2,500 are Armenians. Forming as they do a very small minority, it would be suicidal on their part, one would think, to raise a hand against the Moslems. The authorities, however, are inclined to take, on apparently insufficient evidence, the one-sided view that in all Armenian communes, large and small, there are a number of men who are ready to make martyrs of themselves and their people. Such blind patriotism, calculated to extinguish the whole race, does not seem incredible to them. Even the Vali, from the contents of some intercepted letters written mostly in invisible ink, is convinced that such is the case, though who these desperate characters are within this vilayet, he does not pretend to know positively. The letters, if really compromising, are very likely such as may prove, I think, the existence among the Armenians of not an active but a passive disaffection.²⁴⁴

Given the destructiveness of the initial storm, it is unlikely that the Armenian revolutionaries would have difficulty in fully foreseeing the outcomes of events they would trigger in new localities. New episodes of anti-Armenian violence could even be much more enormous and devastating. Such a manner—that is, provoking such lethal riots—would ultimately mean playing with edged tools and might lead to total annihilation.

²⁴⁴ FO 424/184, Inclosure in No. 620. Longworth to Herbert, Trebizond, November 15, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 363.

Moreover, one should also question the paradox inherent in the alleged revolutionary plan aiming to launch such provocations right after the proclamation by the Sultan of Armenian reforms. The Armenian revolutionaries might have been aware that disorders and violence would definitely impede the implementation of reforms. Remarkably, in a number of cases, the Ottoman authorities also claimed that the Armenians attacked Muslims shouting, “We are granted principality!”²⁴⁵ It is hardly comprehensible why the Armenians took this news as an occasion to attack the Muslims.

4.4. The Riots of Sivas: Official Language and Discourses of “Vengeance” and “Provocation” in a Case Study

The long-dreaded riot in the town of Sivas took place on 12 November 1895. The same day, the Governor-General of Sivas, Halil Bey, sent a telegram to the Sublime Porte reporting in outline form that an outbreak occurred in the town following the provocative actions of a number of Armenians who shouted at Muslims “What are you waiting for? Let whatever is going to happen start now!” (*Ne duruyorsunuz? Ne olacaksa olsun!*) and attacked them with guns. In response, Halil Bey continued, Muslims had attacked Armenians and the fighting between the two sides had immediately spread. According to the governor-general’s version, when he telegraphed the central government in Istanbul, the killing and looting were still on-going, while provincial administrators, the military, and the police were closely cooperating to suppress the incident. In his report, the governor-general also claimed that a group of local Armenian traders had secretly carried some of the goods stored in their shops to their houses the day before the incident broke out. By saying this, he implied that the Armenians knew what would happen beforehand, and, therefore, the reason behind the events in the town was nothing but an organized Armenian provocation.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ For a case from Tercan, see BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 32/122, 27 R. 1313 (The date on the file is obviously wrong as the document is dated 5 *Teşrin-i Sani* [1]311/17 November 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Erzurum dated 5 TS 1311/17 November 1895.

²⁴⁶ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 660/29, 24 Ca. 1313 (12 November 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 31 TE 1311/12 November 1895. To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “*Sivas kasabası Ermenilerinden bir takımı dünkü gün Taş Han'da ve bazı dükkânlarda bulunan eşya-yı ticariyelerini hafiyyen hanelerine nakl idüb bugün dahi çarşuda 'Ne duruyorsunuz ne olacaksa olsun'*”

The same day, the Commander of the Fourth Army's 16th Division stationed in Sivas, Lieutenant-General (*ferik*) Mehmed Hulusi Pasha, reported the same claims with almost the same wording to the Yıldız Palace by telegraph.²⁴⁷ Both reports, however, do not explain why the local authorities did nothing to prevent the alleged Armenian provocation since they anticipated that the Armenians would take action. According to the commander, the civilian and military authorities were vigilant the days before the outbreak and took necessary precautions to keep order and peace in the town. Yet, following an attack by Armenians, the Muslims "had gotten excited" and a disturbance had taken place suddenly in the market place at a time when all the high-ranking provincial officials were together in the government office. The commander also reported that the riot was suppressed within hours and that the town was now well patrolled by about five hundred soldiers. The number of casualties from the two sides, the general added, was still unknown but expected to be low, while official investigations would later show that within just a few hours, hundreds of Armenian men had been killed in the town of Sivas on November 12.²⁴⁸

(quotation marks mine) *diyerek ahali-i İslamiye üzerine müsellahan hücum etmelerine binaen İslamlar dahi mukabele ederek beynlerinde arbede zuhur etmekle Fırka Kumandanı ve erkan-ı vilayet ve asakir-i şahane ve zabtiye ve polis ve saire ile müttehiden teskinine çalışılmakta olduğundan neticesinin ba'dema arz edileceği maruzdur fermân.*" I would like to thank Zeynep Devrim Gürsel for her help with the translation of a sentence from this document, as well as for her comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

²⁴⁷ BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 108/37, 24 Ca. 1313 (12 November 1895). Telegram from the Commander of the 16th Division General Mehmed Hulusi [Pasha] to Derviş Pasha dated 31 TE 1311/12 November 1895. For another copy of this telegram sent to the *Serasker*, see BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 108/40, 25 Ca. 1313 (13 November 1895).

²⁴⁸ Y.PRK.ASK. 108/37 (12 November 1895). To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: "Ermenilerin ne vakitlerden beridir itiyâd edindikleri ahval ve hele dünden beri dükkânlarındaki bazı eşyayı hafıyyen tahliye eylemeleri böyle bir şuriş vukuuna cür'et edeceklerini imâ etmekle öteden beri gayet müteyakkız bulunularak müteaddid devriye kolları gezdirildiği gibi dünkü günden beri de gayet mütebassırane hareket ve uykular terk olunarak arbedeye meydan verilmemek için vali-i vilâyetle müttehiden tedabir-i lâzime icra edildiği ve bugün umumen daire-i hükümetde müctemian bulunulduğu bir sırada çarşı derununda Ermeniler tarafından ne duruyorsunuz, ne olacaksa olsun deyip İslamlar üzerine hücum etmeleriyle ahali-i İslamiye de heyecana gelerek ân-ı vahidde ortalık karmakarışık olmuş ve vüs ü iktidarın yetdiği mertebelerde çalışılarak ve mahallat ve çarşı aralarında bizzat gezilerek hamd olsun saye-i seniyye-i hazret-i hilafet-penahide şuriş teskin edilmiş ve şimdi de gece vukuat tekerrür etmek için eşraf ve muteberanın refakatlerinde olarak dolaşmak ve sokak başlarında bekleyerek bir gune harekata meydan verilmemek için devriyeler tertib olunmakta bulunulmuştur. Telefatin mikdarı şimdilik muayyen değilse de cüz'icedir. Çarşıdan yağma ziyadece vuku bulmuş ise de badema hükümetle beraber icabına bakılacağı ve mevcut asakir-i şahanenin mikdarı beş yüze karib olduğu ve bu babda Ordu-yı Hümayun Müşiriyeti'ne arz-ı malumat edildiği maruzdur."

After the riots were suppressed, the authorities had collected the dead bodies in an abandoned house on the outskirts of the town, to be counted before burial.²⁴⁹ Three days after the outbreak, British Embassy Secretary Herbert informed Salisbury that according to the intelligence sent by American missionaries to the U.S. Minister in Istanbul, 10 Muslims and 800 Armenians had been killed in the town of Sivas.²⁵⁰ Later, British Consul Longworth extracted a letter from the U.S. Consul at Sivas, Milo A. Jewett, estimating the number of Armenian casualties at least to be 1,200. According to Longworth, Jewett also reported that the Armenian priests had claimed to have the names of 2,050 missing Armenians, while a police officer had said that 17 Muslims had been killed, some by mistake.²⁵¹ According to Barbara J. Merguerian, who has investigated the records of the U.S. ministers to the Ottoman Empire and of the U.S. Consulate at Sivas, Consul Jewett reported that “Turkish sources” estimated that 1,200 Armenians and only 4 Muslims had been killed in Sivas.²⁵² One final official statistical account, on the other hand, put the total number of Armenians killed in the town of Sivas at 600, six of which were women.²⁵³

Several days later, the Governor-General of Sivas sent a longer telegram to the Sublime Porte explaining the reasons for the recent disorders in a rather ambiguous way. According to the governor-general’s version, the disturbances took the lives of more than 400 Armenians and only 4 or 5 Muslims, two of whom were accidentally killed by Muslims themselves. In the other towns of the province, the number of Armenians killed and the damage done to Armenian property was great, while Muslim losses once again remained

²⁴⁹ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/80, 24 Ca. 1313 (12 November 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas to First Secretary dated 31 TE 1311/12 November 1895.

²⁵⁰ TNA: FO 424/184. No. 421. Telegram from Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 15, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 262.

²⁵¹ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 809. Inclosure in No. 809, Consul Longworth to Currie, Trebizond, December 9, 1895. In his dispatch to Ambassador Currie, Consul Longworth extracts a letter, dated 3 December 1895, from Dr. Jewett, the American consul at Sivas. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 454.

²⁵² Barbara J. Merguerian, “The United States Consulate at Sivas, 1886-1908,” in *Armenian Sebastia/Sivas and Lesser Armenia*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004), 257. For Consul Jewett’s report that Merguerian refers to, see the National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, Despatches from the U.S. Consuls in Sivas, 1886-1906, No. 69, Nov. 22, 1895.

²⁵³ Y.EE. 7/3. n.d. folio (*lef*) no. 2. “İğtişâşât-ı ahire esnasında Sivas Vilayeti dahilinde nüfusca vuku’ bulan telefat ile emvalce olan hasaratı mübeyyin cedveldir” (Table showing the human casualties and property damage that took place in the province of Sivas during the recent disturbances).

insignificant. After giving this brief information about the extent of the events in his province, the governor-general suggested that the Armenians had become especially impudent during the past couple of years, as their “malignant and malicious” actions were not punished properly and vigorously enough. For this reason, he claimed, the local Muslims had “boiled over with rage beyond measure” (*derecesiz galeyana gelerek*) and attempted to take revenge on and punish the Armenians for their alleged seditious actions.²⁵⁴ Having said that, the governor-general explained the anti-Armenian violence as the Muslim people’s retribution against Armenian “sedition” and “insubordination.”

The themes of “boiling over” (*galeyan*, or ebullition) and revenge were repeated in Halil Bey’s subsequent reports in no less an ambiguous and equivocal fashion. According to the governor-general, “the fact that the Muslims did not attack the Greeks and the Catholic Armenians during the disturbance proves that the [Muslims’] boiling was based on the idea of taking revenge only from the [Apostolic] Armenians who were involved in seditious actions.”²⁵⁵ This is an odd statement because by definition, “boiling over” (in the sense of ebullition) refers to a sudden outburst of emotion erupting with strong excitement and rage, which is a feeling of intense and violent anger that suddenly explodes in response to an external symptom or event, real or perceived.²⁵⁶ Therefore, such an emotional

²⁵⁴ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/109, 29 Ca. 1313 (17 November 1895). Telegram (?) from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 5 TS 1311/17 November 1895. To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “*Nefs-i Sivas’da vuku bulan arbede esnasında İslam’dan yalnız dört-beş telefât olduğu ve hatta bunlardan ikisinin sehven yine İslamlar tarafından itlaf edilmiş olduğu ve Ermeni’den telefolanların adedi dört yüzü müteceviz bulunmuşdur. Vilayetin sair kasabat ve kura-yı malumesince de İslamların telefâtı pek cüz’i ve Ermenilerin maktulleriyle hasarat-ı maliyeleri kesretli idiği cereyan eden muhabereden müsteban olmuş olub mülhakatdan bu babda malumat-ı musahhah istenilmekle alınacak cevab üzerine tafsil-i keyfiyet arz olunacaktır. Ermenilerin şimdiye kadar ika etdikleri bunca habaset ve melanetden dolayı haklarında mücazat-ı şedide icra olunmadığı cihetle büsbütün şımarmış tezyid-i mefsedet etmelerinden naşi efrad-ı Müslime ahz-ı sar fıkriyle derecesiz galeyana gelerek Ermenileri tedibe kıyam etmişlerdir.*”

²⁵⁵ Y.MTV. 132/116 (3 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 21 TS 1311/3 December 1895. To quote the original statement in Ottoman Turkish: “*...iş bu galeyan yalnız ifsadda bulunmuş Ermenilerden ahz-ı sar eylemek fikrine münhasır idiği şuriş esnasında Rumlara ve Katolik Ermenilere bir güne taarruzda bulunmamalarıyla müdelleldir.*”

²⁵⁶ “Boil, v.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 17, 2017, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/view/Entry/21011>; “Boil over Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary,” accessed February 17, 2017, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/boil-over>; “Boil over,” *TheFreeDictionary.com*, accessed February 17, 2017, <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/boil+over>; “Rage, n.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 17, 2017, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/view/Entry/157438>; “Rage Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary,” accessed February 17, 2017, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/rage>; “Rage | Define Rage at Dictionary.com,” accessed February 17, 2017, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rage>.

outburst does not take place on the basis of an idea. Obviously, by the word “*galeyan*,” the Governor-General of Sivas referred to the very action of the Muslims, that is, attacking and killing the Armenians, apparently because in describing the events, he, like most officials, refrained from using any words that might admit or underscore the agency of Muslim perpetrators. In other words, in the governor-general’s language, the word “*galeyan*” was a linguistic euphemism that served to mask whatever the Muslims did.

In addition, not one of these official Ottoman reports provided details about the identity and actions of the alleged Armenian offenders who were reported to have initiated the incident. Nor did they mention any specific events immediately prior to the riots in the town of Sivas that could produce anger and a strong desire for vengeance on the part of Muslims. Nevertheless, in a telegram dated 3 December 1895, the Governor-General of Sivas linked the outbreak of disorders—hence the reason for the Muslims’ desire for retaliation—to the Armenian revolutionary activities that had taken place over the past couple of years, not specifically in Sivas Province but in general, such as printing “harmful publications,” posting placards and leaflets, burning public and private buildings, committing murder and assassination, forming armed bands, attacking mail coaches, causing affrays, using improper/abusive language against the government, and raising funds for their committees.²⁵⁷ It appears that in the governor-general’s language, these revolutionary activities, no matter whether they had occurred in the province of Sivas or elsewhere, were anger-generating events etched into the minds of Muslims who then killed their Armenian fellow citizens in response. Meanwhile, it is significant to note that the precise trigger for the violence—that is, the alleged Armenian attack—was only mentioned

²⁵⁷ Y.MTV. 132/116 (3 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 21 TS 1311/3 December 1895. To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “...çend seneden beri evrak-ı muzırır neşretmek ve yafta ve hezeyan-name talik eylemek ve emakin-i emiriye ve hususiyeyi yakmak ve memurîn ve ahali-i Müslime’yi ve hareket-i fesadiyelerine iştirak etmeyen bazı Ermeni muteberanını öldürmek ve komite eşkiyası namıyla bir takım eşhası teslihi ile kırlarda ve dağlarda gezdirmek ve postaları urmak ve işbu efal-i gayr-ı merziyelerini İslamlara atf ve isnad ve bazı gunâ arbedeler ihdas eylemek ve Hükümet-i Seniyye ve komite [sic] aleyhinde tefevühât-ı bi-edebanede bulunmak ve komite namına cebren ve alenen para toplamak gibi ve buna mümasil daha bir hayli harekât-ı mefsedet-kârâne ve asayiş-şikenaneye cür’et eylemeleri ahali-i İslamiyeyi galeyana getirerek iğtişâşât-ı malumenin zuhuruna sebebiyet vermiş olduğu...”

in the first report of the governor-general and it disappeared from his later accounts of the events.

As a matter of fact, not one of these aforementioned events explain the specific timing of the riots. Evidently, the Governor-General of Sivas sought to situate the violence of Muslim crowds in a logical, understandable framework, retrospectively linking the past events to the outbreak of the anti-Armenian carnage in the town. Indeed, openly stating that the violence was driven by an act of revenge with “rage beyond measure” (*derecesiz galeyana*), he implied that the action of the Muslims was understandable to a certain extent, if disproportionate, unfortunate, and unacceptable. In fact, not only in the Sivas case but also in every instance, the lethal and widespread anti-Armenian riots were justified both by Ottoman state actors and those who participated in or supported the violence as political vengeance for the “seditious” activities of the Armenians—perceived or real.

Meanwhile, about two weeks after the riots, Governor-General Halil Bey held an interview with the French Vice-Consul at Sivas, Maurice Carlier, in the government office, where they talked about the recent events that unfolded in the town. According to his report on this meeting, the governor-general repeated the same claim to the French consul: the disorders had been caused by the “seditious actions” and murders that Armenian revolutionaries had committed for the past couple of years. For Halil Bey, the looting and seizure of Armenian properties had simply taken place as a natural consequence of the disturbances. More interestingly, the governor-general told Vice-Consul Carlier that “one should not be surprised by the light damage (*hasarât-ı hafifeye*) that the Armenians suffered in some parts of the empire, considering that a lot of properties and goods belonging to the Italians were looted by the French following the assassination of the French President, Mr. Carnot, by an Italian [anarchist].”²⁵⁸ Vice-Consul Carlier must have been very surprised by this analogy, as the Armenian sufferings during the fall of 1895 can hardly be compared to the relatively minor damage done to the Italians during the incidents of June 1894 in France. Obviously, the governor-general deliberately belittled the true

²⁵⁸ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 34/13, 13 C. 1313 (1 December 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 12 TS 1311/24 November 1895. For a published and transliterated version of this document, see *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni İsyamları II*, 33.

extent of the anti-Armenian riots and sought to justify the violence perpetrated by the Muslims before the French diplomat.

On the other hand, it should be noted that like several other high-ranking provincial administrators, Governor-General Halil Bey often openly spoke about the serious threats that the current situation posed to government authority, public security, and civil tranquility not only in his province but also across the whole eastern provinces. In one of his above-mentioned reports, for instance, he expressed his concern about the potentially negative effects of negligence on the part of the government toward the suppression of disorders and the punishment of Muslims involved in the incidents by frankly saying:

If such actions of the Muslims are not immediately put to an end with every precaution, and, when needed, even with armed forces and severe legal and political punishment, the government will seem to be a mere spectator, a condition which, as stated before, may lead to foreign intervention. A disruption of government authority due to the ongoing situation may also cause the disobedience of the Kurds and the like.²⁵⁹

To move back to the main topic discussed above, apparently upon the inquiries made by the central government authorities in Istanbul regarding the reason for the huge disparity between the Armenian and Muslim losses that occurred in the town of Sivas, Governor-General Halil Bey reported that it was simply because of “Armenians’ cowardliness” and their inability to use guns properly.²⁶⁰ In fact, Ottoman officials almost uniformly claimed that although it was the Armenians who caused disturbances and mass killings everywhere by provoking Muslims, they had displayed their customary cowardice vis-à-vis “the courage and might of Muslims.” These claims raise two important questions: Could the extreme disproportion between Armenian and Muslim casualties be explained

²⁵⁹ Y.PRK.UM. 33/109 (17 November 1895). Telegram (?) from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 5 TS 1311/17 November 1895. To quote the original statement in Ottoman Turkish: “*Şu kadar ki efrad-ı Müslimenin bu hareketine her türlü tedabirle ve hatta lede'l-hace kuvve-i müsellaha ve mücazat-ı şedide-i kanuniye ve siyasiye ile bir an evvel nihayet verilmezse hükümet seyirci gibi kalarak evvelce de arz olunduğu vechile müdahale-i ecnebiyeyi badi olacak bir rengi vermesi ve nüfuz-ı hükümetin sekte-dar olarak bi'l-ahire Ekrad ve emsalinin adem-i itaatlerini intac etmesi melhuz bulunduğu cihetle...*”

²⁶⁰ Y.MTV. 132/116 (3 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 21 TS 1311/3 December 1895. To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “*İslama nisbeten Ermeni telefatının ziyadece olması Ermenilerin melanet-i vakıalarının binde bir nisbetinde bile cesaretleri olmayub derece-i nihayede cebanetle mütehallik olduklarından ve ehl-i İslama karşı istimal-i silah edememelerinden münbais olduğu...*”

by the “fact” that the Armenians did not have the ability to use guns effectively? And, how could Muslims consider these so-called coward and incompetent revolutionaries to be a serious threat that deserved such ruthless revenge?

Not only the huge disparity between Armenian and Muslim losses but also the aforementioned statements of the governor-general unequivocally indicate that what happened in the town of Sivas on 12 November 1895 was an indiscriminate, deadly attack by a group of people on another, not necessarily wholly planned and well-organized but deliberate, politically motivated, and calculative. Even though the precipitating event, if any, is still unclear, it was an episode of extreme violence inflicted upon the Armenians by a Muslim crowd that took place in the context of the anti-Armenian riots of the fall of 1895. Even if we suppose that it was indeed a number of Armenians who triggered the violence, it is evident that the attack was used as a pretext for the local Muslims to kill Armenians indiscriminately and *en masse*. The Muslim crowd did not simply punish the reported provocateurs but targeted the collective identity and existence of Armenians.

Although the killings in Sivas came to an end within less than a day, plunder and looting in the town lasted seemingly frantically for more than twenty-four hours and continued sporadically during the next three days. In addition to “marauder” groups who already came to the town to join plunder, especially Muslim villagers, the Kars *muhacirs* (Muslim immigrants from South Caucasia settled in East Anatolia after the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-78) and Circassians were still coming from nearby villages for the spoil. Indeed, the governor-general reported that such “marauders” had been detained when seen in the town center upon the orders that he gave during his visit to the scene of disorder for inspection with the commander the day after the riots.²⁶¹ Likewise, the commander informed his superiors that necessary measures were being taken to expel such groups of immigrants, Muslim villagers, and Kurds from the town, as well as to prevent the looting

²⁶¹ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/88, 25 Ca. 1313 (13 November 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas to the First Secretary dated 13 November 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 257. A copy and translation of a telegram from Tewfik [Tevfik] Pasha to Rustem [Rüstem] Pasha, Constantinople, November 15, 1895.

from spreading to the neighborhoods.²⁶² Yet it seems that the provincial authorities was not able to restore order and tranquility completely, as they reported a couple of days later that excitement had not been fully quelled in the town due to the ongoing looting and plunder, and that they therefore called for three more *redif* (second reserve) troops from the district of Zile to deploy in the town.²⁶³ Moreover, on 15 November 1895, a few more Armenians were killed by the Muslims in a minor clash caused by, according to official reports, “those marauders who instigated the [Muslim] people by spreading the rumor that the Armenians are attacking the Muslims.”²⁶⁴ However minor, this attempt at a second round of anti-Armenian carnage in the town of Sivas, as seen in many others instances, suggests that the Armenians were very exposed to the danger of sudden attacks easily stimulated by false rumors and gossip throughout the events of 1895-97. Also, who can be assured that the first incident in the town was not triggered by such an unfounded rumor deliberately spread by someone who wished to incite violence against Armenians?

Foreign sources, particularly the first-hand accounts received from local observers by British consular officials, present stark contrasts to Ottoman official reports and claims with regard to the outbreak of the riots and the conduct of the local officials during the events in the town of Sivas. It seems that for British consular officials, the main source of information concerning the events in Sivas was the U.S. consul resident in the center of this province. We understand that the British consul at Trabzon, Longworth, and U.S. Consul Jewett exchanged letters throughout this period. In what follows, I present an account of the outbreak in the town of Sivas as reflected in Jewett’s letters extracted by British Consul Longworth in his dispatches to the British Embassy at the Ottoman capital.

²⁶² BOA. Y.MTV. 131/118, 25 Ca. 1313 (13 November 1895). Letter from the *Serasker* to the *Mabeyn* (the Palace Secretariat) dated 25 Ca. 1313/13 November 1895.

²⁶³ BOA. Y.MTV. 131/138, 26 Ca. 1313 (14 November 1895). Telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas to the First Secretary dated 2 TS 1311/14 November 1895.

²⁶⁴ BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 108/55, 29 Ca. 1313 (17 November 1895). Telegram from the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps dated 4 TS 1311/16 November 1895. To quote from the original source in Ottoman Turkish: “...üçüncü günü Ermeniler İslamı basıyor diye yağma-giran tarafından halka ilka edilen fitne tesiriyle bazı mertebe heyecan vukua gelmiş ise de derhal teskin edildiği ve ortada yine Ermenilerden birkaç telefât vukuu bulduğu ve vakıanın dördüncü günü olan dünkü gün sükûnet yine devam üzere bulunduğu arz olunmuşdu.”

In response to Longworth's questions as to whether the events in the province of Sivas were provoked by Armenians in any way, Consul Jewett openly wrote in a letter, dated December 10, that he had no doubt in his mind that "[s]ome branch of the Government ordered the massacres or some clique that appears in the guise of the highest authority." According to the U.S. consul, for a long time before the riots, there was rumor of a massacre on the part of Christians in the town, which was originated partly by revolutionary Armenians who wanted to stir up trouble. But after the promulgation of the reforms in mid-October, all the Armenians of Sivas kept very quiet, with most of them being "ready to put up with all manner of annoyances and wrongs rather than give any excuse for disturbances." Afterwards, the Muslims had said, Jewett went on to report, that they were going to slaughter the Christians, and several Armenians had been warned by their Muslim friends that "the massacre was going to occur on the morning of the 12th November."²⁶⁵ It was probably due to these warnings or rumors that the Armenian traders had moved the valuable goods in their shops before the riots, which, as mentioned above, was interpreted by the governor-general and other local authorities as a sign of the alleged malicious intention of the Armenians to stir up disorder. Such interpretations drawn by provincial officials and their superiors in Istanbul, in the case of Sivas and elsewhere, tended to ignore, or deliberately deny, the possibility that Armenians might have done so simply because they feared a Muslim attack.

In fact, to continue with Jewett's account, some Armenian traders and craftsmen had not opened their shops on 11 November and others had wanted to close them the next day. Yet, upon the governor-general's order, Armenian priests went about the city and told their co-religionists that they must keep the shops open. Also, the Mayor of Sivas told some of the leading members of the community that the Armenians should carry on with their businesses as usual, and that nothing would happen. However, half-an-hour before noon

²⁶⁵ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 854. Inclosure in No. 854, Consul Longworth to Currie, Trebizond, December 17, 1895. Almost the entire dispatch of Consul Longworth consists of full passages from a letter from Jewett, dated December 10. In another letter to Longworth, dated November 13, Jewett claimed that on 11 November, that is, one day before the incident broke out, a Turk had warned an Armenian acquaintance of his not to go to the market the next day and had promised to go to his house and guard it. See TNA: FO 424/184, No. 736. Inclosure in No. 736, Consul Longworth to Currie, Trebizond, November 28, 1895. Longworth's dispatch mainly embodies full passages from two letters sent by U.S. Consul Jewett.

on 12 November, suddenly a turmoil took place throughout the market. According to local Armenians, Jewett claimed, “in all parts of the market, the Turks, Karslis [Kars *muhacirs*], and Circassians began killing and plundering” upon the signal given by Bazarbashi Shukri (Pazarbaşı Şükri). As soon as the incident broke out, the soldiers had sounded the trumpets, “To Arms.” At the same time, the muezzin had called from a minaret “*La illaha ill-Allah*” (“there is no god but Allah”), which appeared to Jewett and local Armenians alike not as a call to prayer, but rather as a call to massacre. During the riots, the soldiers and *zabtiyes*, including their officers, had taken a large part in the killings. As soon as hearing the firing began in the market, Jewett himself had seen soldiers and policemen who rushed into the market place laden with spoils. Indeed, the reason for the absence of self-defense on the part of the Armenians, he believed, was that the mob was composed largely of soldiers and policemen.²⁶⁶

“An exceptionally reliable Armenian,” Jewett continued, had heard a lieutenant-general shout out to the soldiers and the Bashi-Bazouks (*başıbozüks* or irregulars) as he rode through the streets: “The city is delivered up to you for three hours.” Other Armenians said that the Mufti of Sivas had gone through the market the next morning and said to some of the rioters “[A]re you not ashamed to keep up for twenty-four hours when the order was only for three?” During the turmoil, an officer with a squad of soldiers in the market had cried out: “[L]et the Mahommedans stand aside; we are going to kill the Giaours [*gavurs*, or infidels].” Furthermore, in Jewett’s account, the Commissary of Police and a Lieutenant are reported to have said that the soldiers might easily have stopped the riot if they had wanted to. The U.S. consul also claimed that the governor-general, the commander of the city, the judge (*kadı*), and the gendarmerie commander had kept away from the scene of disorder until quite late in the day or until the next day.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ FO 424/184, Inclosure in No. 854. In addition to his letter to the British consul at Trabzon, as seen in Merguerian’s study, Jewett also reported to his superiors in Istanbul that “on the basis of personal observation and corroborating testimony,” there was no doubt that the soldiers and police actively participated in killing and looting, and that the government made no serious attempt to stop the riots until the next morning. See Merguerian, “The United States Consulate at Sivas, 1886-1908,” 256. For Consul Jewett’s report that Merguerian refers to, see NARA, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, Despatches from the U.S. Consuls in Sivas, 1886-1906, No. 67, Nov. 16, 1895.

²⁶⁷ FO 424/184, Inclosure in No. 854.

In addition to these observations and testimonies from locals, the following account had been given to Jewett by the dragoman of the French Consulate at Sivas:

A Turkish woman said to him [the French dragoman] that they killed the Armenians at the order of the Government, and the plunder was what they got for doing the work. Bekir Chaoush [Çavuş] said, in his [the dragoman's] presence, that he killed 48 [Armenians]. When asked if it was not murder, he said, no. It might have been murder, he said, if he had [not] done it on the order of one of his superior officers, but when the orders came from the Caliph it was right. On the 6th (of December), a Turk, from whom the Government was demanding some stolen goods, objected to giving them up, and said they had done these things by the order of the Government and had got the plunder at great risk to their lives. He was immediately arrested and put in heavy chains.²⁶⁸

As a result, British and American sources suggest that the attacks on Armenians in the town of Sivas were coordinated by Muslim community leaders and conducted with the permission of the authorities who left Armenian civilians at the mercy of the Muslim crowd for a certain period of time. Moreover, as implied above, foreign consular officials believed that the massacre in Sivas was planned long ago and completely organized down to the smallest detail. Whether the anti-Armenian riots grew out of an official order and plan, on the levels of both the central and provincial governments, is certainly a question of evidence and interpretation, which will be investigated in detail in the next two chapters of this study. It is, however, significant to note that, as a recurrent theme both in the Sivas case and in general, contemporary observers, specifically British, French, and American citizens living in the affected areas, reported that the local Muslims believed killing and plundering had been done at the request of the government or with its permission. In fact, in the case of Sivas, Merguerian writes that Jewett also reported to his superiors that a variety of reasons were given for the violence; but “whether justly or unjustly the Muslims think the government wanted them to kill and ruin the Armenians, and the conduct of government soldiers and police corroborates this.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Merguerian, “The United States Consulate at Sivas,” 257. For Consul Jewett’s report that Merguerian refers to, see NARA, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, Despatches from the U.S. Consuls in Sivas, 1886-1906, No. 67, Nov. 16, 1895. Indeed, Jewett is reported to have written in his letter received by the British Consul at Trabzon that “The Turks think all the massacre and plundering is done at the request of the Government.” He also claimed that the President of the Court of Appeal in Sivas had

4.5. Armenian Revolutionary Movements and intergroup Violence: What Official Narratives Eclipse

Melson aptly points out that putting the record straight against the provocation thesis does not mean that “the victim was a pure scapegoat whose motives and actions played no role in the violence.”²⁷⁰ The conventional Armenian historiography tends to think that the Ottoman authorities and local Muslims used Armenian revolutionary agitation as a mere pretext to perpetrate violence against the empire’s Armenian subjects. Such perspectives treat anti-Armenian violence as a goal in itself, rather than a result of complex, interweaved forces and factors.²⁷¹ A rigid victim-perpetrator dichotomy fails to recognize that Armenian revolutionaries were active agents in the intercommunal tensions in the region. Indeed, we should not underestimate the anxiety, suspicion, and fear that Armenian revolutionary movements and activism might have evoked among Muslim masses on the eve of the riots, especially after the events that took place in Istanbul (September, 1895) and Trabzon (October, 1895).

Lack of substantial research and comprehensive studies on Armenian revolutionary organizations and activities in the Ottoman Empire on the provincial/regional/local levels makes it hard for us to properly situate the actions and reactions of Armenian revolutionaries in the full picture of these events. The existing literature focuses exclusively on the ideologies, programs, and leaderships of the Armenian revolutionary parties, while Ottoman government documents mostly consist of police reports and exaggerated accounts written by local government functionaries. There is, however, no doubt that Armenian revolutionary agitation contributed to the formation of an atmosphere conducive to hostile confrontations, and that Armenian revolutionaries had motivations for sacrificing civilian lives for their supreme cause, especially when they thought peaceful political action was fruitless vis-à-vis increasingly oppressive state mechanisms and violent manifestations on

said “the Armenians are only spared as hostages to prevent foreign intervention.” See FO 424/184, Inclosure in No. 809. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 454.

²⁷⁰ Melson, “A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres,” 496.

²⁷¹ See, for instance, Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*.

the part of the local Muslim populations.²⁷² Riots and anti-Armenian violence might have provided Armenian revolutionaries with the opportunity to accustom the people to violence and street disorders, as well as to arouse antagonism between Muslim and Armenian communities.

On the other hand, to render Armenian revolutionaries responsible for these violent outbreaks is to suppose a great deal of influence and power on the part of Armenian political organizations, which there is ample reason to doubt. A revolutionary organization that was as threatening as portrayed in official narratives would require a resistance equivalent to the power attributed to it by the Ottoman authorities. Apart from the assassination attempt on a former Governor-General of Van in Trabzon (see Chapter 3) and the intensification of Armenian revolutionary activities in a number of locations on the eve of widespread riots, there were no signs of strong revolutionary activity and organization anywhere that could be blamed for provocative actions, let alone preparations for a coordinated Armenian rebellion across the eastern provinces in the fall of 1895. On the contrary, evidence suggests that in many instances, the anti-Armenian massacres were made possible by the lack or weakness of Armenian revolutionary organizations and armed self-defense capacity.

Furthermore, we should also be careful about how the imperial authorities and local Muslim populations conceived certain actions as threatening in essence. Indeed, what constituted a “legitimate provocation” in the eyes of the Ottoman authorities and ordinary Muslims was not always clear. In such situations open to hostile confrontations, any action of a given minority group can arouse the passions of the majority. A request for a certain percentage of Armenian civil servants to be employed in provincial administration, for instance, could be disturbing and intolerable enough for the Muslim populations inhabiting the region. Likewise, a plea for the appointment of a Christian to a high-ranking provincial position could be a provocative, insolent demand. Given that Ottoman ruling elites traditionally defined the term “*fesad*” (sedition, mischief, intrigue) very broadly and

²⁷² For a comment on the Armenian revolutionary parties’ use of violence for revolutionary purposes, see Libaridian, “What Was Revolutionary about Armenian Revolutionary Parties,” 99-101.

liberally, even any peaceful demonstration and protest, especially from non-Muslim groups, or any condemnation of state officials and practices could be seen as a revolt.

As Ronald G. Suny aptly points out, the provocation thesis neglects to inquire into what he terms as “the negative features of the Ottoman social and political order” and “the social and political conditions out of which [Armenian] resistance and protest grew.”²⁷³ Also, this view of the matter makes even less sense since it does not take into consideration the Hamidian regime’s propensity to deploy violent and coercive measures to “solve” the so-called “Armenian question” for good. At this point, although by “the perpetrators,” Melson actually refers to Ottoman policy-makers (first and foremost the Sultan himself) but not ordinary Muslims, in that he tends to believe “massacre” was a policy choice, he nevertheless makes an important point: “[t]he principal weakness of the provocation thesis is that it neglects the independent predispositions toward violence, the perceptions, and the actions of the perpetrators.”²⁷⁴

Furthermore, even if one supposes that the anti-Armenian pogroms took place only because Armenian revolutionaries’ political actions became visible and threatening, provocation narratives nevertheless cannot explain why it was so easy for revolutionary agitators to trigger such a great wave of massacres across a vast region, or in Melson’s words, “why the reaction was so heavily incommensurate to the supposed provocation.”²⁷⁵ To put it another way, the official Ottoman narrative and the resultant modern historical accounts have blamed the violence on its main victims without questioning the immediate, extensive, and extremely severe character of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97. Both at interpersonal and intergroup levels, accepting the notion of provocation as a valid explanation for violence ultimately justifies the action by transferring responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim. Leaving aside its evident paradoxes in the face of factual evidence, the official Ottoman narrative also serves to neutralize a host of significant

²⁷³ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Writing Genocide: The Fate of the Ottoman Armenians,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24-25.

²⁷⁴ Melson, “A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres,” 495

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 494.

questions regarding the intentions and political agency of the perpetrators, as well as about the processes by which ordinary Muslims and Armenians descended into an unprecedented level of hostility and conflict in the 1890s.

Chapter 5. Massacres Ordered by the State? Concepts and Practices of Ottoman Government Responses to the anti-Armenian Riots

5.1. Introduction

The commonly-held belief that the Ottoman government organized, sanctioned, supported, or at least welcomed the anti-Armenian massacres is contemporaneous with the events in question themselves. Indeed, many contemporaries—including European and American diplomats, politicians, missionaries, foreign observers, publicists, and clergymen—believed that the Sultan and his government ordered or approved violence against Armenians. Perhaps more importantly, as we have mentioned before, many perpetrators themselves and ordinary Ottoman citizens contemporary with these events were convinced that the central Ottoman government itself organized, encouraged, or countenanced anti-Armenian violence. Such popular opinions manifested themselves in abundant rumors that the Sultan himself ordered or favored popular action against his Armenian subjects by issuing an imperial decree. It seems that some contemporary observers, including foreign diplomats, took the myths of an anti-Armenian decree seriously.

For understandable reasons, scholars, experts, and ordinary observers tend to look for a hidden hand behind or official involvement in mass killings and one-sided deadly attacks directed against a designated population on a massive scale. Once the late Benedict Anderson went so far as to argue: “Domestic mass murder on a large scale is always the work of the state, at the hands of its own soldiery, police and gangsters, and/or ideological mobilization of allied civilian groups.”²⁷⁶ It may not be surprising that first contemporaries and then modern historians suspected or suggested that the central government and its local agencies were behind the anti-Armenian violence given that the majority of the riots at different locations occurred sequentially, if not simultaneously, in three weeks of each other from October 25 to November 15, 1895. In other words, the fact that the events at

²⁷⁶ Benedict Anderson, “Impunity and Reenactment: Reflections on the 1965 Massacre in Indonesia and its Legacy,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 11, issue 15, no. 4 (April 14, 2013), 1.

most locations across a vast region took place in rapid succession led contemporaries and later scholars to accuse the Sultan and the central government authorities of organizing or at least permitting these excesses.

Also, we should remember that although the anti-Armenian riots ceased to be epidemic in early January 1896, sporadic but serious and massive pogroms occurred in several places, such as Istanbul and Eğin, throughout that year. The riot of Tokad in March 1897 was the last in the spasms of anti-Armenian violence that had begun in the autumn of 1895. Contemporaries and modern scholars may explicitly or implicitly have suggested that if those in control of the government at the time had not been actively involved in the massacres, it would not have been possible that such large-scale events persisted for a long period of time. Among other reasons, the negligent and indulgent attitude of local government authorities and law enforcement agencies toward the riots, especially during their initial stages, in most cases contributed to such widespread accusations of official instigation and collusion in the collective violence committed against Armenians. Indeed, from the inactivity and ineffectiveness on the part of authorities and law enforcement, contemporary observers arrived at only one conclusion: The massacres were organized or permitted by the government. However, historical and contemporary episodes of intercommunal conflict clearly demonstrate that there can be a variety of reasons for officials taking such attitudes, which alone may not always be taken as a strong sign of the direct implication and participation of state actors in mass violence.

The scope of this chapter does not permit us to delve into the genealogy and development of the state-led (or state-sanctioned) massacres narrative; yet it would be useful to note that the contemporary Western press, personal accounts penned outside the empire, and diplomatic sources played a significant role in the formation and spread of this narrative as well as the numerous myths surrounding these events. Not every periodical or personal account published outside the empire uniformly claimed that the massacres were planned in advance or instigated by the Ottoman authorities or that the Sultan had prior knowledge of them. On the contrary, it is safe to say that most of the contemporary foreign accounts focused on the question of responsibility for the bloodshed, in the sense of who caused it, rather than the question of whether the government deliberately engineered the

massacres. For instance, many “Armenophil” authors, publicists, and clergymen also blamed the British, Russian, and French governments, besides the Sultan himself, either because they failed to protect the Christian Armenian population against internal hostilities or because they exploited the “Armenian Question” for their imperial interests.²⁷⁷

However, although European and American media accounts, as well as diplomatic sources, were less consistent and less uniform than modern scholars may assume, the overall picture emanating from these accounts was nevertheless that the Ottoman government was deeply complicated in the massacres committed against Armenians, a poor people suffering at the hands of the Sultan’s troops and his “fanatical” Muslim subjects in the inner parts of Asia Minor. News of official inactivity and the participation of the military and the police in killing and looting paved way to allegations of official plan and complicity, which was accompanied by rumors that the authorities permitted violence for a certain period of time, ranging from three hours to three days, and that the attacks almost everywhere were started and finished with a bugle call.

Over a century, the judgments of European and American contemporaries have easily shaped the interpretations of modern historians, who in turn uncritically accepted these a priori assumptions, allegations, and rumors, and helped them develop into a full paradigm without conducting original research with vast empirical data that can be drawn from voluminous archival records available in multiple settings. At this point, it should also be noted that the direct role of the regular army troops in the violence at the Sasun mountains in 1894 made it easier for contemporaries, and later scholars, to mesh these different incidents into one coherent narrative. Along this process, the image of the Ottoman Empire as a declining power and of the Sultan as an autocratic, Islamic monarch played an important role in the representation of these events in western media and public opinion. Furthermore, the official treatment of the Ottoman Armenian population during

²⁷⁷ For western media response to the events of the mid-1890s, see Arman J. Kirakossian, ed., *The Armenian Massacres, 1894-1896: U.S. Media Testimony* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004); idem, ed., *The Armenian Massacres, 1894-1896: British Media Testimony*; Joceline Chabot et al., eds., *Mass Media and the Genocide of the Armenians: One Hundred Years of Uncertain Representation* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), especially chapters 4 and 5; S. Chase Gummer, “The Politics of Sympathy: German Turcophilism and the Ottoman Empire in the Age of the Mass Media, 1871-1914” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2010); Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide*, 41-47.

the First World War, which culminated in a genocide of untold numbers of people, led modern scholars and observers to easily link the wartime events to the previous outbreaks of collective violence and find a common pattern: Policies of atrocity and extermination engineered by the Hamidian and Young Turks regimes to eliminate the “Armenian Question.”

As already implied before, no documentary and conclusive evidence has, of course, been produced so far to substantiate that the anti-Armenian massacres of 1895-97 were organized, initiated, or condoned by the Sultan and his government per se. Neither could the anecdotal evidence, on which much of the secondary literature has relied uncritically and eclectically, prove that whatsoever the governing circles in Istanbul took an affirmative view of the anti-Armenian riots. Also, the claim that the central and provincial government authorities did not take any serious actions and measures to suppress and prevent the riots is completely unfounded and false. This chapter presents significant counterevidence and empirical considerations that argue against the state-led massacres narrative based on hitherto largely untapped primary sources, drawn especially from the Ottoman and British archives.

An examination of government documents, including daily internal communications, reports, memoranda, cipher cable messages, and official correspondence among the Sublime Porte, the palace, and the provincial authorities concerning the events of 1895-97, reveals an entirely different picture of the mood and behavior of Ottoman officials with regard to the outbreak and spread of riots. It is significant to note that these voluminous documents are completely unknown to virtually every scholar who has suggested a government conspiracy behind the mass killings or who has imagined these events as state-sponsored or state-sanctioned massacres without conducting serious research. The reaction of the Yıldız Palace to the events throughout the period under question also eliminates the possibility of special agents carrying out the Sultan’s confidential orders given orally for the administration of massacres.

Significantly, as the first part of this chapter demonstrates, in a number of important towns such as Muş, Ankara, Aleppo, and Eleşkird (Eleşkirt), the timely interventions and

preventive measures taken by the local civilian and military authorities (namely governors-general, *mutasarrıfs*, sub-district governors, military commanders, and other civilian and military functionaries) ensured that Armenian civilians were not subjected to collective violence. Elsewhere, for instance in Mardin, Midyat, Silvan, Kığı, Behisni and many other towns, the government authorities, army troops, and local Muslim and Christian townspeople were successful in repelling crowds of Kurdish tribal forces seeking to enter urban spaces to attack Armenian civilians and loot their property. If massive attacks directed against Armenians were organized, sponsored, or countenanced by the palace or the Sublime Porte, why were official orders, advices, or insinuations put into effect in some places but not in others? Indeed, if the anti-Armenian massacres had been planned, ordered, or promoted by the central government, it would be difficult to explain why the local governors and army commanders in these places had suppressed incipient violence and taken energetic preventive actions to keep order and tranquility in their areas of responsibility, or why, from the very beginning, they had taken a responsible, vigorous attitude toward attempted assaults by large, armed groups. As we shall see, some of these officials were rewarded by the Sultan for their responsible behavior during the events in their districts upon the recommendations made by British diplomats or Ottoman officials. These crucial instances where attempted riots were immediately suppressed or prevented from being more destructive owing to the prompt interventions of the local government authorities and Muslim notables also provide ample evidence about the significance of local contexts and actors. As mentioned before, as crucial variables, the actions (and inactions) of these actors directly determined or influenced the course of events and the severity of violence in many cases.

The other main part of the chapter examines the responses and reactions of Ottoman officials to these widespread events, documenting the measures, methods, institutions, and instruments employed by the imperial government in suppressing disorders and restoring law, order, and tranquility in the provinces. Indeed, a thorough investigation of official responses and actions indicates that, from the very beginning, the central government authorities were genuinely concerned about the events and, especially as of early November, they made genuine and extensive—but not necessarily firm, decisive, proper, and adequate—attempts to suppress riots and prevent further violence. Had the Hamidian

regime premeditated, promoted, or authorized the attacks, none of those measures, actions, and initiatives, including a costly and colossal military mobilization, would have been required. The Sultan himself, his advisers at the palace, and highest-ranking officials at the Sublime Porte, including the Grand Vizier and ministers, also often expressed concern that the ongoing events might produce further unpleasant political, diplomatic, and economic consequences for the imperial government. Among the most notable concerns were the possibility of foreign intervention and the economic and financial dislocation caused by the ongoing violent disturbances.

This, however, is not to say that anti-Armenian violence occurred and spread in the teeth of strong government opposition and counteraction. Nor do I claim that the measures and actions taken by the government authorities in Istanbul and the provinces were sufficient, effective, diligent, timely, and consistent. In practice, most of these measures were neither energetic nor timely. Examination of daily official communications, ministerial memoranda, and orders originating from the palace and the Sublime Porte also suggests that the responses of the central and local government authorities to the riots were *ad hoc*, rather than being well-measured, strategic, and systematic. Furthermore, this investigation also reveals a complex situation in which the authorities grappled with certain dilemmas, complications, and failures either for reasons that were outside their direct control or due to their outright anti-Armenian outlook. Indeed, the ways in which the central and provincial government authorities dealt with these episodes of intercommunal violence produced a host of contradictions, inconstancies, and paradoxes. Significantly, the very fact that the central Ottoman government sought to put an end to the wave of riots does not relieve the Hamidian regime of responsibility for the violence.

5.2. Responsible Officials, Energetic Measures: Preventing Violence

As mentioned above, in a number of towns, the stringent action and precautionary measures taken by the local authorities, who were usually aided by Muslim notables, diligently prevented the initial violence from spreading or ensured the maintenance of order and security in their areas of responsibility although violence was imminent and

threatening. The swiftness with which civilian and military authorities cooperated in order to suppress street disorders or to keep tranquility in these towns intimates that they were genuinely concerned about a major violation of order and peace, which would otherwise lead to the mass murder of Armenians and the looting of their property during the wave of anti-Armenian riots. In what follows, I investigate a number of such cases starting with a lengthy account of the affairs in the town of Muş throughout the fall/winter of 1895-96. This section will be followed by other cases such as Ankara and Mardin.

5.2.1. The Case of Muş

As was the case in many places across the eastern provinces, the atmosphere in the town of Muş was rather tense over the summer and autumn of 1895. In addition to the general uneasiness that prevailed in these provinces over this period, the inhabitants of Muş—both Armenians and Muslims—felt the effects of the 1894 events in Talori and its environs more strongly than those of other Armenian-populated towns in the region because of its geographical proximity to the Sasun area. Indeed, several reports from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis, Ömer Bey, indicate that the Muslim notables and inhabitants of Muş were irritated at the presence of the American missionaries in Sasun, who were organizing the distribution of relief to the distressed Armenian villagers who survived the massacres of 1894. The Muslim inhabitants of the town constantly demanded that the missionaries stop relief work and leave the area immediately. Their expressed perception was that the American missionaries were inciting the Armenians of Sasun to unleash attacks on Muslims in the town of Muş, while the missionaries themselves were not willing to leave the area before finishing their relief work. The Protestant missionaries seem to have believed that their presence in Sasun was also to ensure the safety of a destitute, vulnerable group of villagers surrounded by hostile tribal groups.

Despite the news of recent disorders in Istanbul, Trabzon, and the Erzurum province reaching the town, even a small outbreak of violence did not occur in Muş throughout October 1895. The *Mutasarrıf* (or the sub-province governor) of Muş, Fiham Pasha, regularly notified his superiors in Bitlis and Istanbul that despite the tense atmosphere in the town as well as throughout his *sancak*, he was taking necessary measures

to keep order and peace. In fact, the British Vice-Consul at Muş, Charles S. Hampson, reported several times that the tranquility in the town had been “much to the credit of the Mutessarif [*Mutasarrıf*],” who was taking every precaution in the way of keeping the town carefully patrolled.²⁷⁸

The situation in Muş, on the other hand, became more critical towards the end of October. According to Vice-Consul Hampson, the news that the Sultan had accepted the proposed reforms and the rumors of disturbances in the capital and other places added to the gravity of the situation in the town. On receiving the news of the acceptance of internal reforms from the British Ambassador, Hampson requested the chief men of Armenians to disseminate it very gradually and refrain from any demonstration so that unpleasant events might be avoided. More importantly, Hampson also reported that the situation in Muş had been made even worse “by the ill-advised action of the authorities who, apparently fearing attacks from the Armenians,” distributed arms to all Muslims who could afford a deposit of 7 liras. If true, this was an extremely dangerous measure on the part of the authorities given the climate of fear and insecurity prevailing not only in Muş but also in the whole region in late October. Indeed, Hampson also noted that Muslims had largely welcomed this offer, which might cause even a small street quarrel to result in a large-scale incident.²⁷⁹ On the receipt of this news, the British ambassador proposed to protest the reported distribution of arms by the local authorities in Muş among the local Muslims.²⁸⁰

The atmosphere in the town was further exacerbated by the news of disturbances in Bitlis that broke out on October 25. Indeed, on the same day, the *mutasarrıf* telegraphed his superiors in Istanbul that there had occurred a great deal of excitement among the local Muslim population in Muş because of the riots in Bitlis as well as the rumors that the American missionaries were carrying provisions to the Armenians in Sason under the name of relief work with the help of the British vice-consul in this town. Any malicious action on the part of Armenians, *Mutasarrıf* Fiham Pasha said, was strongly expected to cause a

²⁷⁸ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 451. Inclosure 3 in No. 451. Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, 16 October 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 277.

²⁷⁹ FO 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 466.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

great deal of trouble that might eventually “ruin the Armenians [of Muş]” given the excited state of mind prevailing among the local Muslim population. Upon the receipt of the news of disturbances from Bitlis, he had admonished “both sides”—the Armenians and the Muslims—to adhere to peace in the town. The *mutasarrif* also reported that he had ordered the local commander to organize patrols and secure the protection of the reserve army arsenal with two squadrons as part of his anti-rioting measures.²⁸¹ After receiving the *mutasarrif*'s telegram, Grand Vizier ordered the *Serasker* to inform the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps of the critical situation in Muş and ask the local military authorities to take precautions against a possible disorder by concentrating the army units scattered throughout the town in a number of central places, where they would be ready to be summoned to an area when needed.²⁸²

Meanwhile, the British vice-consul in Muş telegraphed his superiors in Istanbul that the state of affairs in Muş was grave after the riots in Bitlis; however, the *mutasarrif* had authorized the vice-consul to say that he would make sure that no disturbances be initiated from the side of Muslims.²⁸³ In another report, he noted that although there had been no disturbances in the town so far, all the shops were closed, and that he had urged Fiham Pasha to issue orders that no one carry arms in the town, while the *mutasarrif* only assured him that there would be no disorder.²⁸⁴

On 26 October, the town of Muş escaped an apparently dangerous situation thanks to the prompt measures taken by the local authorities, who were assisted by local Muslim notables and religious leaders. According to Fiham Pasha's report, following the riots in the town of Bitlis, the Kurds of Huyut and a group of men from the Cibranlı and Hasananlı tribes in Hınıs and Varto had raided some of the Armenian villages in the districts of Muş and Bulanık. Then, these Kurdish groups had come to the town of Muş and, spreading the

²⁸¹ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 619/8, 8 C. 1313 (The date on the file and digital catalogs is wrong. The correct date is 8 Ca. 1313 [27 October 1895]). Telegram from the *Mutasarrif* of Muş dated 13 TE 1311/25 October 1895.

²⁸² Ibid. Letter from Prime Minister to the *seraskeri* dated 15 TE 1311/27 October 1895.

²⁸³ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 171. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 26, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 104.

²⁸⁴ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 177. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 27, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 108.

rumor that 600 Armenians would raid the town, they assembled a crowd joined by Muslim townspeople apparently in order to attack Armenians. While the Muslim crowd, armed with guns, axes, and pickaxes, was growing around the market area, the *mutasarrif* immediately proceeded to the scene with a number of gendarmes, local notables, and the mufti of Muş to successfully dispel the assembly and the rumor, admonishing them that the government was powerful enough to crush any rebellious attempt on the part of Armenians with its soldiers and gendarmes. Fiham Pasha also noted that after people were returned to their homes, a group of gendarmes and soldiers had been dispatched to restore the property and livestock usurped by the Kurds from Armenian villages to their rightful owners.²⁸⁵

It seems, however, that at least some of these Kurdish groups continued to stay in Muş over the next couple of weeks, and, as was the case in many places, they would play a significant role in new tensions and disorders in the town. British consular officials, for instance, reported several times that the town was full of Kurds in late October.²⁸⁶ Meanwhile, virtually almost every day since mid-October, Kurdish tribes, especially those who were associated with the Hamidiye Regiments such as the Haydaranlı, Hasananlı, and Cibranlı Kurds, had been pillaging Armenian villages and committed murder and many other excesses across the rural settlements in and around the Muş plain. Indeed, the *Mutasarrif* of Muş frankly reported that although they were able to restore the property and livestock looted and stolen by the non-Hamidiye Kurds plundering Armenian villages within the *sancak* of Muş, they had failed to recapture even a single piece of property sacked and swept away from Armenian villagers by Kurdish tribesmen from the 31st, 32nd, and 33rd Hamidiye Regiments, who were reported to have committed the worst crimes throughout his *sancak* despite the orders given by Şakir Pasha to this effect. He emphasized that currently the most important and urgent task in this region was to prevent the Hamidiye Kurds from committing such offenses and to reconstitute the entire property and livestock they

²⁸⁵ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 619/19, 3 C. 1313 (21 November 1895). Telegram from the *Mutasarrif* of Muş, Fiham Pasha, dated 1 TS 1311/13 November 1895.

²⁸⁶ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 220. Telegram from Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 31, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 139.

had seized to the rightful owners without them being perished or abused.²⁸⁷ In a sense, Fiham Pasha admitted that as civilian officials, they had been unable to put an end to and punish the acts of pillage and murder committed by the Hamidiye Kurds in his area of responsibility without stringent measures that could be made possible by the intervention of the Fourth Army authorities. On the other hand, especially Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha strongly opposed, in most cases, punitive measures to be taken against the tribes who had taken part in the Hamidiye Regiments for these and many other crimes despite the attempts to this effect on the part of governors-general and Inspector-General Şakir Pasha.

Meanwhile, two days after the above-mentioned event, the British vice-consul in Muş wired a telegram to his superiors in Istanbul conveying an important message. According to Hampson, the Muslim notables of Muş held a meeting with local Armenian chiefs to discuss means of “restoring confidence” and openly declared that:

...all would go well if the missionaries left Sasun, and said they must do so, otherwise we should have at Mush a repetition of the scenes enacted at Bitlis. An answer is to be returned to this request within three days, and the Mussulmans declare that even an order from the Sultan himself will not make them alter their minds.²⁸⁸

The question of American missionaries in Sasun remained unsettled for a long time, just as the atmosphere in the town of Muş. Evidence also indicates that most Armenians kept their shops closed over the week following the Bitlis riots. All these Ottoman and British reports suggest that feelings of distrust and mutual fear were prevalent among the Muslim and Armenian communities in the town of Muş throughout October and the first half of November. It can also be surmised that certain segments of the Muslim population in this town were looking for an occasion to attack the Armenians. Historical and contemporary cases of ethno-religious conflict have proved that in such a tense atmosphere, only a minor

²⁸⁷ A.MKT.MHM. 619/19 (21 November 1895). Telegram from the *Mutasarrıf* of Muş dated 1 TS 1311/13 November 1895. Also see BOA. Y.A.HUS. 338/87, 13 Ca. 1313 (1 November 1895). Telegrams from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis dated 18 TE 1311/30 October 1895 and 19 TE 1311/31 October 1895.

²⁸⁸ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 205. Telegram No. 2 from Vice-Consul Hampson dated 28 October 1895, forwarded by Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 29, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 128.

quarrel, a gunshot, or a rumor might play a precipitating role in the development of mutual fear and hostility into a large-scale conflict.

Indeed, such an event took place in the town of Muş on 15 November 1895. About 11 a.m. on that day, a pistol shot had gone off by accident while a reportedly Armenian locksmith was repairing it. According to Fiham Pasha's report, as soon as the sound of the pistol shot was heard from the locksmith's shop, people in the market place left their shops in panic, while, "a mob of ignorant people" and Kurds who were in the town for buying-and-selling immediately rushed into the market—to this official version, British sources added that the mob had begun to attack any Armenians they met. Fiham Pasha had promptly gone to the market place and intervened in the outbreak, ordering the military Commander of Muş to patrol the area with a sufficient number of *zabtiyes*, or gendarmes, and soldiers to prevent any further disorders. After the mob was stopped and dispersed, Fiham Pasha had also collected guns from the Muslims he encountered in the streets and expelled the Kurds from the town with the help of Muslim notables and ulema. Although the disorder was suppressed in a short time, four Armenians were killed by daggers, and one wounded during the quarrel.²⁸⁹

The following day, Vice-Consul Hampson sent a letter to Consul Cumberbatch in Erzurum reporting the event in detail based on information provided by an eyewitness, an Armenian boy in the vice-consul's service, who was in the market at the time. He and some thirty other Armenians, Hampson reported, had been saved by a Muslim named Murad, who took them in a khan and held the door against the mob. Hampson had also made the boy repeat his statements to the mufti of Muş, who visited the British official on the evening of November 15. Remarkably, Hampson noted that the pistol shot had probably been a "preconcerted signal," reminding the same manner in which the massacre in the town of Bitlis was commenced. Moreover, the authorities had arrested the locksmith, who was reported to have confessed that he had fired the pistol "in obedience to the orders of certain Turks." Even if this was not true, the fact was that as soon as they heard the sound, a crowd

²⁸⁹ BOA. Y.MTV. 132/14, 1 C. 1313 (The correct date should be 27 Ca. 1313/15 November 1895 as the date of the report is 3 TS [1]311, which was apparently misread by archivists as 7 TS 1311.) Cipher telegram from the *Mutasarrıf* of Muş dated 3 TS 1311/15 November 1895.

of armed Muslims had begun to shoot and cut down Armenians they met. “Luckily,” Hampson added, “the latter were on their guard, and comparatively few were in the streets.” His informant had seen three Armenians cut down, one by a “softa,” a second by a Muslim butcher, and a third by a young Muslim. During the incident, six Armenians had been killed and about forty wounded, not of a serious nature however.²⁹⁰

Hampson’s report confirmed that the disorder was suppressed in a short time owing to the prompt action taken by the authorities in Muş. He especially emphasized “the energy and personal courage” of *Mutasarrıf* Fiham Pasha, who had ridden into the market with soldiers and ordered the troops to shoot any person, Muslim or Christian, who attacked people or property. The *mutasarrıf* himself had seemed to be everywhere, successfully dispersing the Muslim rioters and reassuring the Armenians. Hampson clearly stated that if the *mutasarrıf* had not acted in this way, a repetition of the riots in Bitlis, or perhaps even an incident of larger scale, would have occurred. Also, the conduct of the military authorities during “such an emergency” seemed excellent to the British vice-consul. Soldiers had arrived in the market area in a very short time and patrols had immediately appeared in every direction. Hampson also reported that the authorities had arrested about twenty Muslims, including two gendarmes, for participating in the riot.²⁹¹ It seems, however, that most of the arrestees were released soon and never brought to the court for trial. In late November, it was reported that only four or five of those who had been arrested on November 15 remained in prison as many, including two *zabtiyes*, were released although there was evidence that they had taken an active part in the attack.²⁹² From an official tabular statistical account showing the number of Muslims arrested or convicted in nine Armenian-populated provinces on charges such as participation in killing and looting during the riots, we find that by April 1896, only one person from Muş was in prison awaiting trial.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 785. Inclosure 2 in No. 785. Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, Mush, November 16, 1895.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 456. Inclosure 2 in No. 456, Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, Mush, November 26, 1895.

²⁹³ For the source, see Table 6 in the following chapter.

In addition, when he visited the town of Muş towards late December, Lieutenant-General (*ferik*) Saadeddin Pasha, a member of the Commission of Inspection dispatched from Istanbul to the region, reported to the palace that the disturbances that took place in Muş could have been more extensive than other places given the large size of the Armenian population in this town and the surrounding villages, which was almost equal to that of Muslims. However, it was certain that as a result of the “superior measures” taken merely (*mücerred*) by Mufti Emin Vehbi Efendi and Hacı Tayyib Efendi, a highly respected religious leader, the town had escaped a major outbreak of violence. Saadeddin Pasha therefore suggested that these two figures deserve the Sultan’s favor.²⁹⁴ What the pasha said about the role played by the two ulema in the suppression of the disturbance in Muş is certainly significant; yet perhaps more interesting is his insistence that only their interventions prevented the disorder from escalating and becoming more severe. In so doing, however, Saadeddin Pasha clearly dismissed the apparently vigorous efforts of Fiham Pasha and other officials which were highly praised by British and other foreign sources. As we shall see below, Vice-Consul Hampson would make significantly different claims about Hacı Tayyib.

According to the British-vice consul, the “better class” Muslims had behaved very well during the riot. He hoped that the event of November 15 would help improve the relations between Armenians and Muslims inhabiting the town of Muş, and that the prompt and wise conduct of the authorities during this event would be a lesson to “evilly-disposed” inhabitants that no further disturbances would be allowed by the authorities in this town. However, in a postscript to his report, Hampson also noted that there was considerable discontent among “certain classes” of the Muslim population in Muş because of the Fiham Pasha’s energetic efforts to keep order and peace in the town.²⁹⁵ Indeed, as will be discussed below, not every Muslim in Muş was sympathetic to the actions of Fiham Pasha throughout the period in question.

²⁹⁴ BOA. Y.MTV. 133/29, 4 B. 1313 (21 December 1895). Telegram from Lieutenant-General Saadeddin Pasha to the First Secretary dated 9 KE 1311/21 December 1895.

²⁹⁵ TNA: FO 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 785.

In late November, Vice-Consul Hampson inferred from Armenian and Muslim sources that there was little doubt that the outbreak on November 15 had been premature, and it seemed clear to him that “a certain class” of Muslims had planned the event. He continued by claiming:

Kurds were to be brought into the town to start the disturbance, and a general massacre of the Christians was to follow. But a lucky accident precipitated matters, and the Government were able, by prompt action and the exceptional energy of the Mutessarif [*mutasarrif*], to suppress a rising which had taken the promoters by surprise.²⁹⁶

As already implied above, on several occasions, British embassy and consular officials appreciated the energetic and responsible conduct of Fiham Pasha and other local authorities in Muş including the military commander and the mufti. The British representatives also proposed that the Sultan should praise the conduct of the *mutasarrif* for his endeavor to maintain law and order in Muş. In response to this British proposal, the Sultan’s First Secretary informed the embassy officials that the Sultan was much pleased with Embassy Secretary Herbert’s message and intended to decorate Fiham Pasha.²⁹⁷ Indeed, nearly one week later, it was announced in the official press that Fiham Pasha had been decorated by the Sultan with the second class of the *Nişan-ı Osmanî*, or the Order of *Osmanî*.²⁹⁸

The state of affairs in the town, however, was not so clear-cut. As already implied above, it seems that the actions of Fiham Pasha over the months of October and November 1895 had disturbed certain personalities from the local administration and contributed to the intensification of earlier disagreements among various sectors of the local government, specifically between the *mutasarrif* and the judge, or *naib*²⁹⁹ of Muş, Osman Efendi. The disagreement between Fiham Pasha and *Naib* Osman Efendi may initially have been of a

²⁹⁶ Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 456.

²⁹⁷ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 354. Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 21, 1895.

²⁹⁸ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 376. Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 27, 1895.

²⁹⁹ *Naib* literally meant a deputy *cadi* but with the Tanzimat regulations in judicial system, *naibs* served as *cadis* (*kadis*), or judges, who mostly presided both the local *Nizamiye* and *Şeriat* courts in districts and provincial centers. It should also be noted that, in the case of Muş, the person to whom British consular officials referred as “*cadi*” was the *naib*, or judge.

personal nature; yet it seems that it became intertwined with the “Armenian crisis” in the fall of 1895. One may also speculate that one of the parties, or both of them, sought to utilize this situation to strengthen his hand against his opponent. Indeed, the security anxieties of the Hamidian regime vis-à-vis the Armenian population provided ample opportunities for local administrators and commanders to use the “Armenian Question” for the purpose of undermining their opponents.

On 7 December 1895, Fiham Pasha reported to his superiors in Istanbul that there had been various complaints about Osman Efendi for a long time, and that he had recently made improper speeches exciting “some ignorant people” against the Armenians. The *mutasarrif* therefore recommended that the *naib* be removed from Muş considering the sensitive situation that this town was going through.³⁰⁰ It appears that the *naib* himself had requested dismissal of Fiham Pasha from his office. On their part, British embassy officials, as well, made representations to the Sublime Porte regarding the removal of Osman Efendi. According to the British Vice-Consul at Muş, Osman Efendi was one of the two “great sources of danger” in the town, the other being Hacı Tayyib, an influential local religious leader who Hampson claimed was accused of organizing the massacre in Bitlis, which took place immediately after he had made a visit to this town.³⁰¹ There is no evidence to verify the accuracy of the allegations about both Osman Efendi and Hacı Tayyib; yet it is obvious that Fiham Pasha and Hampson collaborated in their actions against whom they regarded or presented as threats to security in the town as well as to the *mutasarrif*'s authority. At this point, it might be suitable to note that, as was the case in many places, foreign consular officials and missionaries were not simply observers of events in Muş but they were also active participants. As should be evident, especially British representatives in the provinces and the capital not only interfered with political developments and events but also frequently acted like advisors, initiators, curious critics, and negotiators, sometimes in a way that exceeded diplomatic norms and practices. To a large extent, the gravity of political events as well as inadequacies, failures, and abuses in administration laid the ground for

³⁰⁰ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 34/18, 19 C. 1313 (7 December 1895). Telegram from Fiham Pasha dated 25 TS 1311/7 December 1895.

³⁰¹ Turkey No. 8 (1896), No. 3. Inclosure 4 in No. 3. Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, Mush, December 17, 1895.

such a high degree of diplomatic/non-diplomatic interference on the part of the representatives of the Great Powers in the empire.

Several days later, the British vice-consul also claimed that the military authorities in Muş had joined the *naib* in his opposition to Fiham Pasha, who was accused of having “English sentiments.” Thereupon, Ambassador Currie asked Adam Block, the chief dragoman at the British Embassy, to bring the matter to Sultan’s attention through his First Secretary and to warn that if his government failed to support an official who had strove to suppress attempts at violence in the face of those who were seeking to excite the Muslims against the Christians, “it would produce a very painful effect in England, and would lead to disagreeable comments on the attitude of the Imperial Government.”³⁰² Throughout December 1895 and early 1896, British embassy officials continued to press the Sultan and the Sublime Porte on the importance of supporting the *Mutasarrif* of Muş, as a responsible and energetic governor, against the opposition to his authority of the *naib* and the commander, and Prime Minister Salisbury approved the actions that the embassy officials took in this regard.³⁰³

Indeed, the Sublime Porte investigated the matter via the Governor-General of Bitlis and Saadeddin Pasha, the member of the Commission of Inspection dispatched by the Sultan to the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van to oversee the employment and movement of reserve troops as well as to inquire into the situation after the disturbances in every town of importance in these provinces. During his conversation with the Grand Vizier and the Minister of Foreign Affairs about the objects and power of these commissions, Chief Dragoman Block reminded the Grand Vizier of the suitability of removing the *naib* of Muş. Grand Vizier Halil Rifat Pasha is reported to have replied that, in response to his inquiries, the Governor-General of Bitlis had stated that the *naib* of Muş was “the most loyal, devoted, and excellent of all officials,” and that the quarrel between the *mutasarrif* and the *naib* of Muş was of a private nature. When the Chief Dragoman

³⁰² TNA: FO 424/184, No. 803. Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, December 17, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 450.

³⁰³ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 833. Salisbury to Currie, Foreign Office, December 27, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 470.

spoke very strongly and urged the Grand Vizier to remove the naib from Muş, emphasizing that the Sublime Porte would be responsible in the event of further disturbances in this town, Halil Rifat Pasha had stated that he would ask for information from Saadeddin Pasha, who was in Muş at the time with the other members of the commission. Meanwhile, upon receipt of the telegram from Ambassador Currie about the Grand Vizier's statements, Vice-Consul Hampson had wired back that "all the respectable Turks and Armenians" in Muş declared that Osman Efendi was "a most unscrupulous and dangerous man."³⁰⁴

Saadeddin Pasha and the other members of the Commission of Inspection reported to the Sublime Porte that although the *Mutasarrıf* of Muş seemed a hardworking administrator, he had fallen out with the judge and the commander of Muş only within a month since his arrival in the town. Perhaps more importantly, they also claimed that the local Muslim people, as well, were railing against Fiham Pasha for "leaning on" the British Vice-Consul (*Ahali dahi İngiliz konsolosunu kendisine istinad-gah ittihaz etdi deyu aleyhinde söylenmekdedirler*).³⁰⁵ Indeed, Hampson himself reported that among the charges against the *mutasarrıf* were the friendly relations he established with the British vice-consul.³⁰⁶

Meanwhile, a British proposal added another component to this complex picture of struggles among local civilian and military functionaries in Muş. According to Ottoman sources, the British Ambassador demanded via the Minister of Foreign Affairs that the Commander of Muş, Rahmi Pasha, be replaced with a new commander since he was at a ripe old age, and therefore, incapable of doing service. Upon receipt of this British demand, the palace asked for information from the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps about Commander Rahmi Pasha. The Sultan's officials at the palace also noted that it was probable that British diplomats were using Rahmi Pasha's alleged incapacity as a pretext since he was protecting the rights of the Muslim population and seeking to prevent the

³⁰⁴ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 863. Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, December 24, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 490.

³⁰⁵ BOA. Y.MTV. 134/49, 20 B. 1313 (6 January 1895). Telegram from Saadeddin [Pasha], İbrahim [Bey], and Cemal [Bey] dated 25 KE 1311/6 January 1895.

³⁰⁶ Turkey No. 8 (1896), No. 13. Inclosure 2 in No. 13. Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, Mush, December 31, 1895.

realization of Armenians' seditious intentions.³⁰⁷ By doing so, the authorities in the palace constructed, once again, a binary opposition in which the Muslim population was imagined as imperial subjects to be protected by Muslim officials, and the Armenians being backed by foreign subjects.

In response, Marshal of the Fourth Army Zeki Pasha reported that Rahmi Pasha was a loyal official but indeed at the ripe old age and, he himself constantly requested to be replaced due to his age and health problems. However, Rahmi Pasha had been kept in his place since he was also an acting commander of cavalries who was endeavoring to put the Hamidiye Regiments in order, as required, and he had provided good service in suppression of the recent disorders, as an experienced commander. According to the Field-Marshal, although Rahmi Pasha's age mattered, it was most probably due to Fiham Pasha's "inculcations" that the British Vice-Consul spoke against him given the quarrel between the *mutasarrif* and the commander.³⁰⁸ From Zeki Pasha's report and the letter of *Serasker* Rıza Pasha, it appears that Fiham Pasha had already been at odds with the military authorities over the Hamidiye Regiments during his service as *mutasarrif* in the *sancak* of Bayezid before moving to Muş, and he was accused of disregarding military affairs and requirements. On receipt of Zeki Pasha's report, the *Serasker* recommended the palace that, if Rahmi Pasha was to be removed from Muş, *Mutasarrif* Fiham Pasha, too, should be dismissed from office on the grounds that he ignored military administration.³⁰⁹ All these reports from high-ranking officials in the region would determine the fate of Fiham Pasha.

Consequently, these three officials—the *naib*, the commander, and the *mutasarrif*—lost their posts in Muş during the first three months of 1896. It seems that Rahmi Pasha and Osman Efendi were appointed to other posts in and outside the province of Bitlis. On 26 March 1896, the Grand Vizier informed the Governor-General of Bitlis that *Mutasarrif* Fiham Pasha had been dismissed from office and ordered to come to

³⁰⁷ BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 110/60, 11 L. 1313 (26 March 1896). Telegram from Mehmed Kamil, Secretary to the Sultan, to the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps dated 4 Mart 1312/16 March 1896.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. Cipher telegram from the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps, Zeki Pasha, dated 5 Mart 1312/17 March 1896 and letter from the *Serasker* to the First Secretary dated 14 Mart 1312/26 March 1896.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. Letter from the *Serasker* to the First Secretary dated 14 Mart 1312/26 March 1896.

Istanbul at once. The governor-general was also instructed to take the former *mutasarrıf* out of town with escort immediately, a measure which might only be taken for the administrators accused of serious crimes. Indeed, Fiham Pasha's dismissal was not an ordinary one as he was also banned from holding public office for good although it seems that several years later, he was pardoned and allowed to resume his rank in civil administration. On March 30, when it was reported that Fiham Pasha was still in Muş and meeting with the British Vice-Consul, the Grand Vizier repeated the order to the Ministry of Interior and the *Seraskeri* that the former *mutasarrıf* be removed from the town immediately. Indeed, the next day, Fiham Pasha was set off with an escort of *zabtiyes* and cavalries toward Erzurum.³¹⁰

Fiham Pasha must have felt humiliated by the way he was dismissed and removed from Muş. Archival records do not clearly indicate the reason for his dismissal; yet it was obviously related to his close relations and alleged meetings with the British vice-consul, which might have been reported to Istanbul by his opponents in an exaggerated way. In many occasions, Sultan Abdülhamid and the policy-makers around him proved that they would certainly punish the officials who were accused of establishing "intimate" relations with foreign representatives and missionaries when they felt there was sufficient evidence or reason to suspect. Also, the Acting *Mutasarrıf* of Muş appointed after Fiham Pasha reported that the local Muslim population was "celebrating" the dismissal of the former *mutasarrıf*. If it is true, it can be surmised that various classes of the local Muslim population must have been disturbed by the way the *mutasarrıf* had acted since his arrival in the town.³¹¹

Three months before Fiham Pasha was dismissed, Vice-Consul Hampson had reported that there appeared to be "a general intrigue against" the *mutasarrıf*. Various high-ranking officials in the region, including Zeki Pasha and the governors-general of Bitlis

³¹⁰ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 620/13, 11 L. 1313 (26 March 1896). Various telegraphic correspondence between the Grand Vizier, the Interior Minister, the *serasker*, and the Governor-General Bitlis respecting the dismissal of the *Mutasarrıf* of Muş.

³¹¹ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 348/116, 15 L. 1313 (30 March 1896). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Bitlis conveying the telegraphic message by the acting *Mutasarrıf* of Muş dated 17 Mart 1312/29 March 1896.

and Diyarbekir, had complained to Istanbul that Fiham Pasha was an incapable governor and showing a “want of firmness” toward the Armenians. Hampson implied that these civilian and military figures were disturbed by the fact that Fiham Pasha had prevented “a massacre” in the town of Muş, thereby “reflecting on what has happened in their own district[s].” When the Grand Vizier inquired into Fiham Pasha’s answers to these charges, he replied that he had acted “in accordance with justice and with the interests of the country, and that the Armenians here [in Muş] have given no cause for harsh treatment.” Hampson concluded that it would be “a most regrettable and disastrous thing if an official who has endeavoured to rule justly and to maintain order, and has practically succeeded in preventing a massacre of Christians, should, for that reason alone[,]... be dismissed and disgraced.”³¹²

Indeed, when he received the news, Vice-Consul Hampson interpreted the dismissal of Fiham Pasha as the success of the intrigues against him to which he had long drawn attention. Once again, he noted that Fiham Pasha was “an excellent official” who, despite the great difficulties he faced, had endeavored to govern his district “fairly in the interests of all the inhabitants.” The vice-consul believed that his dismissal would be a direct encouragement to “all the worst fanatics and disturbers of the peace” among the local Muslim population. The news of the removal of Fiham Pasha, Hampson claimed, had been received by Armenians with “the utmost consternation,” and with “deep regret and anxiety” by Muslims who desired order and peace in the town.³¹³

As a result, to move back to our main discussion, the town of Muş remained one of the several places with a considerable Armenian population where no serious disturbances took place during the great wave of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 thanks to the responsible and timely actions of the civilian and military authorities. The case of Muş is illuminating in several respects. First of all, it suggests that if the anti-Armenian massacres had been orchestrated by the government, it would have been difficult to explain the conduct of the authorities in Muş over the period in question. In other words, one may

³¹² Turkey. No. 8 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 13.

³¹³ Turkey. No. 8 (1896), No. 164. Inclosure 2 in No. 164. Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, Mush, March 28, 1896.

certainly suppose that an official plot would require Fiham Pasha and others to act in a different way unless there is evidence that they deliberately ignored official orders at the risk of being punished. And there is no reason to think that different orders were sent to the authorities and Muslim notables in the town of Muş. As a matter of fact, the dynamics and mechanisms of anti-Armenian violence in the 1890s were more complex than conventional historiography has hitherto suggested. As was the case in several other places, the responsible behavior of the civilian and military officials in Muş during the two crises also suggests that when the Ottoman authorities did their duty as required, they were able to thwart outbreaks of violence or to prevent them from turning into large-scale riots although the conduct of officials was not the only variable for violence or non-violence.

Secondly, the case of Muş confirms the significance of the behavior of local Muslim notables and religious leaders as authoritative figures whose statements and actions had a major impact on the course of events in a great many cases. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, Muslim elites and local power-holders directly influenced the course of events and the severity of violence when they implicitly or explicitly agitated the masses or, albeit in rare cases, sought to prevent the agitators and mobs. From British and Ottoman sources, it appears that at least a certain part of the Muslim elites in Muş did not condone violence against Armenians and assisted the authorities in suppressing minor disorders in the town during the fall of 1895. It is safe to state that the behavior of some Muslim notables was a significant variable in explaining the lack of widespread massacres in Muş. Further evidence is needed to reflect upon their observed unwillingness, or even outright refusal, to organize or tolerate anti-Armenian violence during this period.

5.2.2. From Mardin to Ankara

As has been noted above, attempted assaults, in most cases by the Kurds, on several towns in different parts of the eastern provinces, especially in the Diyarbekir region, were successfully repulsed by the troops. In some cases, local Muslim power-holders assisted the authorities in their efforts to defend their towns against attacks. Among these places was Mardin, an ancient city on the northern edge of the Mesopotamian plain, which was also the center of the *sancak* of Mardin within the province of Diyarbekir. From Ottoman,

British, and missionary accounts, we understand that after raiding and pillaging many villages around Mardin, Kurdish tribesmen in large numbers made several serious attempts to enter the town from November 8 to 10, 1895, as they did in tens of other places across the whole eastern provinces during the period in question. However, they had to draw off as the local government authorities, the troops, and Muslim and Christian notables and inhabitants of the town managed to successfully defend the town of Mardin for three days. The troops had also recaptured a sum of property and livestock that these tribes had seized from villages with large Christian populations. In late November, the city walls were still protected day and night by soldiers, and the officials provided the American Protestant missionary compound with a special guard of 25 soldiers.³¹⁴ Contemporary accounts especially emphasized and praised the united efforts of the authorities and the inhabitants in this town. One anonymous observer from Mardin, probably a Protestant American missionary, noted that the Mardin authorities who felt Kurdish tribes would attack the town were preparing for defense and the Muslim and Christian leaders of the town joined their efforts “in a most fraternal spirit” to prevent the tribes.³¹⁵

Similar efforts were also made in Midyat, another town in the same *sancak* of Mardin. Elsewhere, in early November 1895, the *Mutasarrıf* of Dersim (Mamuretü'l-Aziz) suggested to his superiors in Istanbul that the Mayor of Dersim, Hıdır (or Hızır) Ağa, be awarded the honorary title of *kapucu başılık* (or *kapıcıbaşılık*, which can roughly be translated as Head Gatekeeper) as he informed in a timely manner on the arrival of the Kurds who had been gathered to raid and loot the town; thereby, helping to save the officials and the inhabitants from a danger “so terrifying even to imagine.” Indeed, about two weeks later, the Sultan conferred upon the mayor the suggested title.³¹⁶ In Behisni

³¹⁴ For several brief accounts of the attempted assaults on the town of Mardin and the defense of the town by the authorities and the inhabitants, see Y.PRK.UM. 33/64 (9 November 1895); TNA: FO 424/184, No. 869, Inclosure in No. 869, “Letter addressed to Rev. Mr. Dwight,” dated Mardin, November 25, 1895; Greene, *Armenian Massacres*, 304; Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 474-476, which contains an anonymous letter probably written by an American Protestant missionary resident in Mardin. The above-mentioned letter addressing to Rev. Henry Otis Dwight of the Bible House in Istanbul was probably written by the same missionary from Mardin.

³¹⁵ Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 475.

³¹⁶ BOA. Y.MTV. 131/28, 16 Ca. 1313 (4 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the *Mutasarrıf* of Dersim dated 23 TE 1311/4 November 1895. For the decree concerning the awarding of the title to the Mayor of Dersim, see BOA. İ.TAL. 87/2, 3 C. 1313 (21 November 1895).

(Mamuretü'l-Aziz; today Besni), an assembly of “savage Kurds” (*Ekrad-ı vahşiyye*) who gathered around Mount Behisni with the intention of attacking the town were dispelled by the authorities, who were also reported to have placed 400 Armenian families temporarily in the houses of their Muslim neighbors obviously to protect them from any outside threats.³¹⁷

All these cases of repressed assaults and energetic action on the part of the Ottoman authorities perhaps represented an anomaly in the eyes of some European and American contemporaries who tended to believe that the anti-Armenian massacres were ordered or, at least, encouraged by the Sultan and his agencies. Many contemporary observers kept silent about such cases, while a few offered explanations on the basis of personal observation and information they received from various sources. In the context of the events in and around Mardin, the Protestant missionary and scholar Bliss claimed that the authorities in Mardin and Mosul had suppressed the attempted attacks on the Christian populations in these cities taking rigorous measures “under the most imperative orders” from Istanbul. “It clearly shows,” he concluded, “what the government might have done in other towns to protect the Christians if it had wished to do so.”³¹⁸ Although Bliss presented a more careful and balanced picture of the anti-Armenian riots of the 1890s than in most contemporary Western accounts dealing with these events, he did not provide any substantiation why the government adopted a different policy for the Christian populations in these regions. Also, why did the authorities fail to protect a large number of villages in these areas from Kurdish attacks and pillage despite this policy? Bliss’s claim also disregarded the fact that in a considerable number of places across the other regions of the eastern provinces, where he believed the massacres were condoned, the local officials and, in some cases, Muslim notables stood firmly against attempted riots and attacks and instituted effective measures to maintain order in their areas of responsibility, as we have already seen in various cases. Obviously, such accounts oversimplified the circumstances

³¹⁷ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/96, 26 Ca. 1313 (14 November 1895). Telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz to Derviş Pasha dated 2 TS 1311/14 November 1895.

³¹⁸ Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 158.

at work in 1895-97 and offered unsubstantial explanations for lack of violence or the responsible conduct of the local authorities in certain locations.

During the period under scrutiny, there were also several Armenian-populated districts where, notwithstanding various hostile preparations on the part of Muslims, virtually no street disorders occurred thanks to the timely action and vigilance exercised by the local civilian and military authorities. In what follows, I present a relatively brief account of the vigorous efforts that the authorities in Ankara exerted towards maintaining order and tranquility in this provincial capital during the wave of anti-Armenian pogroms in central and eastern Anatolia.

According to the Acting British Consul at Ankara, Raphael A. Fontana, who reported to his superiors on the state of affairs in that town in late October 1895, since the disturbances in Istanbul and the declaration of the introduction of Armenian reforms, a great deal of anxiety prevailed among the local Christian population of all sects in Ankara while, at the same time, the Muslims had begun to secretly purchase arms and ammunition and openly threatened the Christians in the marketplace “to exterminate, when sufficiently armed, every Christian” in the town. Moreover, the acting consul claimed, a committee that consisted of six “fanatical Turks” had held private meetings to arrange for an attack on the Christians in the various quarters of the town of Ankara and in its suburbs, individually doing their best to incite “the fanaticism of the lower-class Turks” against the local Christian population.³¹⁹

The Governor-General of Ankara, Memduh Pasha, however, had taken “strenuous and hitherto successful” measures to prevent disturbances of any kind not only in the provincial capital but also across the district towns, forbidding the sale of arms and banishing those six men to various parts of the province one by one upon hearing of their meeting and plans. In addition, he had also set up a special safeguard to patrol the town day and night, issuing strict orders to arrest anyone, Christian or Muslim, attempting to create disorder. It seems that the governor also tried to keep the Muslim and Christian

³¹⁹ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 203. Inclosure in No. 203. Copy of a dispatch from Acting Consul Fontana to Currie, dated Angora, October 26, 1895.

inhabitants of the town from engaging in any kind of political dispute that might trigger a violent conflict under such a tense atmosphere. According to the British acting-consul, he had ordered the coffee shops owners in the town to ban discussion on, or even reference to, political matters among the customers. Consul Fontana also noted that Memduh Pasha had told him that he had no sufficient police and military forces to restore order in the event of a clash between Muslims and Armenians as the regular troops stationed in the town consisted of only less than 100 soldiers while the local police force was deficient even in peaceful times.³²⁰

Meanwhile, in early November, Memduh Pasha left the province of Ankara since he was appointed the Interior Minister in the cabinet of Halil Rifat Pasha who became the new Grand Vizier replacing Kamil Pasha. Originally an army commander, Ali Rıza Pasha served as an acting in the interim. During his interim period, he seems to have managed to keep order and peace in the town with energetic measures at a time when the anti-Armenian pogroms swept across tens of towns in Anatolia. The acting British consul noted that as a commander, Ali Rıza Pasha had no administrative power and experience required for a position that he temporarily occupied, and that he was not able to keep in check various elements of the local population.³²¹ On several occasions, he nevertheless appreciated the pasha's efforts to successfully prevent a possible outbreak of violence in the provincial capital of Ankara.

Acting Consul Fontana especially underscored that the pasha appeared to handle the troops under his control with skill as well as with a clear consideration of the gravity of the situation in his province. In describing the general situation in the town of Ankara, he drew attention to three facts: (1) The entire local Muslim population being armed; (2) the insufficiency of security forces; and (3) the fear and mutual distrust prevailing among the Christian communities. Considering these circumstances at work, he suggested that Ali Rıza Pasha request permission from the Sublime Porte for additional troops to be employed in the town. He also reminded him that although the former governor-general had put an

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ FO 424/184, Inclosure in No. 634. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 375.

end to the open sale of firearms and ammunition as part of preventive measures, the majority of Muslims “were now openly carrying large knives in their belts” in the town whereas any Christian who was caught in possession of arms was arrested and punished immediately. The acting British consul therefore also suggested to the pasha that the authorities in Ankara disarm, at least, some of “the lower-class Turks if only as a means of reassuring the terrified Armenians.” In response, Ali Rıza Pasha had said that he would telegraph the Sublime Porte for a reinforcement of troops for Ankara. He thought, however, it would be impossible to disarm all the Muslims although he promised to single out a number of more suspicious Muslims and confiscate their weapons.³²² Indeed, the Sublime Porte authorized Ali Rıza Pasha to reinforce the number of troops by recruiting a force of 400 soldiers from the reserves to keep the town under control.³²³

In accordance with the introduction of tighter measures imposed by the Sublime Porte as of late November, the new Governor-General of Ankara, Tevfik Pasha, prohibited all the inhabitants, including Muslims, from carrying arms in the town. Repeating that the Ankara authorities had done their best to keep the peace in the town so far, Acting-Consul Fontana reported on December 17 that such preventive measures had further reassured the Armenians. The acting consul also noted that they did not apprehend any immediate disorder in Ankara.³²⁴ Yet, a couple of days later, an excitement occurred among the Armenians of Ankara, as, Fontana reported on December 19, several persons had assured him that the Muslims were contemplating an attack on the Armenians in a few days. Certain Muslims had claimed that the authorities had secretly issued a *müsaade*, or license, allowing for two hours’ killing and looting in Ankara. At the same time, villagers from the surrounding areas were reported to be gathering in the town with the purpose of joining the plunder in mind. Acting-Consul Fontana visited the governor to inform him of the reports circulating in the town, and advised him to cause the police and the military to be more

³²² Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 388. Inclosure 1 in No. 388. Extract from a report on the general state of affairs in the Ankara province sent in a dispatch from Acting Consul Fontana to Currie, dated Angora, November 25, 1895.

³²³ Ibid., Inclosure 2 in No. 388. Copy of dispatch from Acting Consul Fontana to Currie, dated Angora, November 28, 1895.

³²⁴ FO 424/184, No. 846. Inclosure 1 in No. 846. Acting Consul Fontana to Currie, Angora, December 17, 1895. Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 1 in No. 476.

vigilant during the next couple of days as well as to prevent further influx of villagers to the town. He also called the governor's attention to the fact that the sale of powder, which had once been prohibited, was now free in a certain market. In Fontana's presence, the governor had ordered an officer to proceed to the market and ensure that the sale be stopped once for all. Tevfik Pasha had also promised that he would set up extra patrols in certain places to ensure that the whole town be carefully watched and guarded. On December 20, no Armenian had opened their shops, while soldiers and gendarmes were on duty.³²⁵ On receipt of Fontana's report, the British Ambassador informed his superiors in London that he would urge "the Sublime Porte to give every support to the Vali of Angora [Ankara] in his efforts to maintain order."³²⁶ Fortunately, no disturbances took place in the town of Ankara. It might have been a false report that caused excitement among the Armenians of Ankara or it was simply an unsubstantiated fear; but the way in which the authorities handled the situation was nevertheless significant.

Consequently, as British officials pointed out several times, the authorities in Ankara acted quite responsibly and vigilantly over the course of the anti-Armenian disturbances across the Anatolian provinces. One may speculate that, besides the responsible conduct of the authorities, there might have been other reasons for the lack of violence in the town of Ankara throughout the period in question, such as a lack of social support for violence against Armenians or the absence of a precipitating event that might trigger aggression on the part of Muslims. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the local authorities in Ankara displayed their intolerance for violence by taking a number of energetic measures in collaboration with the British representatives.

5.3. Conspiracy and Conspirators: Şakir Pasha as the Author of Massacres?

A conspiracy requires conspirators, working in the shadows to execute and accomplish a secret plan on their behalf or on behalf of someone in power. Indeed, not only

³²⁵ Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 515. Inclosure in No. 515. Copy of a dispatch from Acting Consul Fontana to Currie, dated Angora, December 21, 1895.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 515. Currie to Salisbury, Pera, December 27, 1895.

in Armenian popular imagination but also in academic literature and contemporary accounts, it has been claimed that the massacres of 1895-97 were organized and implemented systematically by the special agencies sent by the Sultan to the provinces in disguise or officially but with a secret agenda. Even governors and other civilian officials were unaware of this secret plan and its execution by these special agents.

Inspector-General of Anatolian Reforms Şakir Pasha was a “usual suspect” as he arrived in the region in early September 1895, prior to the beginning of the wave of anti-Armenian riots, to superintend the execution of the not-yet-introduced reforms. Indeed, in the eyes of some contemporaries and later modern historians, Şakir Pasha virtually casted the role of conspirator-in-chief who mobilized his forces and Muslim people against Armenians in every region he visited while coordinating reform-related work. As the architect of the anti-Armenian pogroms, Şakir Pasha and his agents had gone from town to town to spread the report that the Sultan had ordered the Armenians to be punished, murdered, and robbed.

Filian, an exiled Ottoman Armenian clergyman in the United States, for instance, referred to the pasha as “the butcher.”³²⁷ In his history of the late Ottoman Empire, the British historian and journalist William Miller claimed in 1913 in plain language that “the murders were organised by the Sultan’s officials, headed by Shakir Pasha.”³²⁸ Later, in the 1970s, Lord Kinross wrote the following passage without citing any source:

“The conduct of these operations was placed in the hands of Shakir Pasha, one of the Sultan’s more sinister advisers, who had once served him as ambassador in St. Petersburg. His ostensible post was that of ‘inspector of certain localities in the provinces of Asiatic Turkey’ in connection with the Sultan’s own pretended reform plans. Under this cover his actual role was the planning and execution of massacres in each specified locality. Their objective, based on the convenient consideration that Armenians were now tentatively starting to question their inferior status, was the ruthless reduction, with a view to elimination, of the Armenian Christians, and the expropriation of their lands for the Moslem Turks.”³²⁹

³²⁷ Filian, *Armenia and Her People*, 192.

³²⁸ William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire, 1801-1913* (Cambridge, UK: The University Press, 1913), 429.

³²⁹ Lord Kinross [John Patrick Douglas Balfour, 3rd Baron Kinross], *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1977), 559. For another

Yet consular officials, missionaries, and authors and clergymen from Europe and the U.S.A. who visited the affected areas during and after the events portrayed Şakir Pasha in a different manner. For instance, the British Consul at Erzurum, Cumberbatch, who wrote a report giving a general overview of the situation in his consular district in late November 1895, stated that, whatever the officials in Istanbul and “fanatical” Muslims felt, both Şakir Pasha and Rauf Pasha, the Governor-General of Erzurum, deplored the riots and they were doing their best to restore order and peace. “If they are allowed a free hand,” the consul continued, “there is reason not to despair of the success of their efforts for the future good government of the Armenian provinces, notwithstanding the unfavourable outlook, but, if they are to be thwarted in their good intentions by superior interference, Shakir Pasha will most certainly fail in his mission of reform...”³³⁰

Indeed, cipher correspondence between Istanbul and Şakir Pasha indicates that from the very first, the Inspector-General was anxious about the outbreaks of violence and sought to find ways to effectively contain them. At this point, it would be useful to mention that, in general, official communications, including cipher telegrams, which were generated for purely internal use did not bear any signs of anti-Armenian conspiracy or of prior knowledge of the events. Rather, a careful examination of numerous cipher telegrams, official orders, and regular correspondence between Istanbul and the riot centers displays that the officials at the Sublime Porte and the palace were genuinely curious and anxious about what was happening in the provinces, and from the very beginning, they gave decisive orders to local governors and military commanders to take all measures to contain the riots and prevent further disorders.

5.4. Government Response to Popular Violence: Military Measures and Mobilization

It was only towards late October that the central and provincial authorities realized that the ongoing events in the Anatolian provinces were more serious, more extensive, and

account claiming that Şakir Pasha was sent to the region to organize the massacres, see Pars Tuğlacı, *Tarih Boyunca Batı Ermenileri Tarihi*, vol. 3 (1891–1922) (Istanbul: Pars Yayın ve Tic., 2004), 71.

³³⁰ FO 424/184, No. 734. Inclosure in No. 734. Consul Cumberbatch to Herbert, Erzeroum, November 21, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 413.

more persistent than they had imagined at the very beginning although it can hardly be said that the anti-Armenian riots came suddenly and unexpectedly. When the first disorders broke out in the Six Provinces, the typical reaction of the Ottoman authorities to them was to summon army troops to the centers of trouble to reinforce the local police and the gendarmerie, which were vastly outnumbered and incapable of intervening in such widespread civil disorders. As of the third week of October, the Fourth Army authorities received so many urgent requests of military assistance from the local governments that neither military nor civilian officials were able to sufficiently address administrative and logistical problems regarding where and how to use armed forces to suppress the riots in the face of inefficient and undertrained security personnel and resources in the provincial centers and district towns across the eastern provinces.

According to state regulations, it was the responsibility of the police and gendarmerie in the first instance to monitor, anticipate, and contain civil disorders and unrest, especially of a political nature, in the empire's urban areas. Theoretically, army troops were only assigned a backup role in the suppression of such incidents and the restoration of public order in urban and rural settlements upon requests made by provincial authorities, which required certain procedures and correspondence between various offices. Yet, as already implied above, the local Ottoman police and gendarmerie everywhere, even in larger provincial centers, were in short supply, underpaid, poorly trained, poorly disciplined, and overall unsatisfactory even for periods of peace. In the very fragile state of the police and gendarmerie forces, the Ottoman field armies were practically primary internal security agencies undertaking large domestic missions beyond a backup role. Indeed, this imbalance between theory and practice often caused disagreements between military and civilian authorities. On provincial level, governors-general were the only authorized officials to call for military assistance through the commander-in-chief of a particular field army. Lower civilian officials, such as *mutasarrifs* and district governors, had to appeal first to governors-generals to summon army troops to a particular area in their areas of responsibility although this procedure was temporarily suspended in mid-November 1895 by the government in order to enable local authorities in the affected areas to intervene in disorders more quickly.

In the under-policed towns of the eastern provinces, regular and reserve army troops became the main designated enforcers of law and order during the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97. At the initial stage of events, the Ottoman authorities were reluctant to employ *redif* (second reserve) troops for the suppression of riots. It appears that it was Inspector-General Şakir Pasha who first suggested abstaining from using *redif* soldiers for this purpose when the first riots broke out in the Erzurum province in late October. The main concern behind his proposal seems to have been that the representatives of foreign government might have objected the use of soldiers recruited from among local people in a particular area to quell unrest.³³¹

According to the initial plan, regular army troops would be mobilized, in the first place, to reinforce the local security forces in a troubled area if the police and gendarmerie fell short of containing the disorder and restoring public security. If further military assistance was needed, *ihdiyat* (first reserve) troops would be dispatched, while the deployment of *redif* battalions was contemplated as the last resort.³³² As seen in a report dated 24 October 1895, in response to the riots in the town of Erzincan (October 21), Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha, as well, still suggested increasing the existing forces in this town to 800 troops by calling new regular and *ihdiyat* (first reserve) soldiers under arms instead of employing *redifs* for the restoration of order.³³³ On the other hand, from the very beginning, there were serious delays and logistical problems in the recruitment and dispatch of regular and first reserve troops. The civilian authorities, most notably the Governor-General of Sivas, often complained about shortage of troops and delays in the deployment of forces that they urgently needed for several places likely to be troubled before it was too late. Likewise, the officials at the Sublime Porte and the high-ranking military authorities in the region criticized the civilian provincial administrators, as authorized officials responsible for the administration of recruitment processes, for acting slowly. Even in their initial stages, the events clearly demonstrated that a close coordination and cooperation between

³³¹ See BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/4, 4 Ca. 1313 (23 October 1895). Cipher telegram from Şakir Pasha in Erzurum dated 10 TE 1311/22 October 1895.

³³² Among other documents, see BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 609/6, 6 Ca. 1313 (25 October 1895). Letter from the Grand Vizierate to the *Serasker* dated 6 Ca. 1313/13 TE 1311/25 October 1895.

³³³ BOA. Y.MTV. 130/45, 5 Ca 1313 (24 October 1895). Letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 5 Ca. 1313/12 TE 1311/24 October 1895.

civilian and military functionaries were essential. Accordingly, the palace and the Sublime Porte advised the civil and military officials to closely cooperate and ensure a rapid mobilization of troops to the required locations; but, repeated warnings to this effect sent from the Sublime Porte and the palace to the provincial authorities and the reports of local functionaries indicate that such logistical, financial, and administrative challenges and failures persisted throughout much of the period under question.

Furthermore, with the subsequent outbreak of mass killing and plunder in the towns of Gümüşhane (October 25), Bitlis (October 25), Bayburd (October 26), and Erzurum (October 30), the policy-makers in Istanbul and the provincial authorities realized that the riots were not localized and casual events that could be handled with the forces and resources at hand. As of late October 1895, the government began to deploy and mobilize a great number of *redif* troops, which gradually became the main forces in the suppression of disorders and the preservation of domestic order in the Anatolian provinces. By the end of the first week of November, 64 *redif* battalions were called under arms, which compromised a total of about 32,000 troops to be mobilized under command of the Fourth and Fifth Army authorities. By late November, the government called out 64 more *redif* battalions to be deployed in the Fourth and Fifth Army regions.³³⁴ As a matter of fact, over the period under question, the Ottoman government mobilized more than 50,000 reserve troops, in addition to tens of thousands of regular forces, to deal with the disorders of an extraordinary scale. The mobilization of *redif* troops was so vast that thousands of newly-recruited reserves were transferred to the affected areas from different parts of the empire, including even Kuds (Kudüs, or Jerusalem) and western Anatolia.

As will be mentioned below, the movement and activities of these reserve battalions were supervised by two high-ranking officers dispatched from Istanbul to the affected

³³⁴ For *redif* mobilization, see, among other documents, BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 609/8, 10 Ca. 1313 (29 October 1895). Various communications between the Grand Vizier, provincial authorities, the *Serasker*, and the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps dated between 29 October 1895 and 11 January 1896; BOA. Y.MTV. 130/124, 11 Ca. 1313 (30 October 1895). Telegram from the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps dated 16 TE 1311/28 October 1895 and the letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 11 Ca 1313/18 TE 1311/30 October 1895; BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/19, 18 Ca. 1313 (6 November 1895). The *mazbata*, or protocol/resolution, drawn up by the Council of Ministers dated 18 Ca. 1313/25 TE 1311/6 November 1895; and BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 609/13, 18 Ca. 1313 (6 November 1895). Various communications between the Grand Vizier, provincial authorities, and the *Serasker* dated between November 6 and 19, 1895.

regions towards late November. In accordance with the instructions given from Istanbul, the authorities stationed a certain number of battalions in and around tens of designated towns, already troubled or likely to be troubled, across the central and eastern Anatolian provinces, the eastern Black Sea coast, Cilicia, and northern Syria (Aleppo). As such, the civilian and military authorities made sure that at least two squadrons commanded by a major were placed in each Armenian-populated town in these regions. In some cases, the *redif* battalions were placed on midways between two or more towns for possible emergency. Within cities, reserve troops were usually stationed with a number of gendarmerie or regular troops in guardhouses or were deployed for routine patrolling day and night.

As a result, tens of thousands of undertrained, ill-equipped, undisciplined reserve troops moved from a town to another to restore and preserve domestic order, to protect Armenian-populated towns and villages, and to safeguard foreign offices, residences and buildings. Obviously, these reserve troops had no training or experience in riot control. Although they successfully protected Armenian neighborhoods and market areas in some locations, these simple troops were not aware of what they were exactly supposed to do, nor did they have a clear conception of responsibility. Equally important is that these regular and reserve troops had no clear orders and instructions related to the use of deadly force and repressive methods against the Muslim mob in case of an outbreak. Events in many places proved that they were overall unsuited to deal with outbreaks of mass violence of this nature and scale. What is more, theft or participation in looting was very common among reserve troops in certain places.

To take an example, as part of these preventive actions taken by the government, a number of military units, which consisted of more 600 troops (apparently mostly *redifs*), were sent to the town of Urfa to protect the Armenian quarter there following the first, minor incidents in this town in late October 1895. The Aleppo authorities, however, reported that some of these soldiers, who cordoned off the Armenian neighborhood there, were entering Armenian houses for looting at night as they were natives of the town (not necessarily Urfa but from the surrounding areas). It was therefore decided to reinforce the

forces in Urfa with the troops to be brought from other places.³³⁵ More important is that, as will be mentioned below, two months later, when an episode of extremely lethal violence broke out in this town, the Urfa authorities stated that they had failed to stop the attackers because the troops at hand were composed of “native” (*yerli*) people.³³⁶ According to the Aleppo authorities, in response to the ongoing official inquiries into the extent and nature of the incident, the local officials in Urfa also reported that the *redif* troops had not executed the orders given to them.³³⁷

The authorities later decided to replace the reserve troops in Urfa with a battalion stationed in another place as the [acting] Commander of Urfa informed his superiors that “the restoration and maintenance of security in [the town of] Urfa is dependent on the removal of the Battalion of Urfa from there” (*Urfa'da asayişin iade ve temini Urfa taburunun oradan kaldırılmasına vâ-beste olduğu...*).³³⁸ However, instead of simply blaming the *redif* troops, one should lay the responsibility for the mass killings in the town of Urfa on the Ottoman government in the first place primarily because it was the Ottoman authorities themselves (on both central and provincial levels) who kept “native” reserve troops in the town of Urfa over the period of two months between the two incidents even though they saw that from the very beginning, these troops proved to be unsuited to maintain order and security in Urfa. Also, other than stationing a certain number of reserve troops in the town, the government took no energetic and aggressive measures to remove the *de facto* state of siege in the Armenian quarter in Urfa. Nor did they take strong legal action against the perpetrators of the first incident and the local forces continuously threatening the Armenians of Urfa with violence. As will be mentioned in the following

³³⁵ BOA. Y.MTV. 131/8, 15 Ca. 1313 (3 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Commander-in-chief of the Fifth Army Corps in Damascus dated 19 TE 1311/31 October 1895, and letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 15 Ca. 1313/22 TE 1311/3 November 1895.

³³⁶ For sources, refer to Chapter 6.

³³⁷ DH.ŞFR. 186/67 (31 December 1895). Cipher telegram from Zihni [Bey] on behalf of the office of Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo to the Interior Ministry dated 19 KE 1311/31 December 1895.

³³⁸ BOA. Y.MTV. 135/11, 3 Ş. 1313 (18 January 1896). Letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 3 Ş. 1313/6 KS 1311/18 January 1896. From archival records, we see that these troops were indeed removed from Urfa and brought to Aleppo by the Fifth Army authorities. It seems that their presence in Aleppo caused new troubles for the authorities there. See BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 649/18, 28 Ş. 1313 (12 February 1896). Communications from the Grand Vizier, the *Serasker*, and the Aleppo authorities dated variously.

chapter, the Ottoman official themselves reported that certain Muslim notables were instrumental in organizing or instigating the violence that occurred in this town.

Over the period that these reserve battalions were on active duty, the provincial governments, whose chronic shortage of revenue was aggravated by the massive riots, which considerably harmed local economy and trade, had serious problems provisioning such a great number of *redif* troops stationed in towns and rural settlements. Official communications respecting the financial and logistical needs of the Fourth Army Corps and the provincial governments due to this large military mobilization are voluminous. The recruitment of a large number of reserve troops further paralyzed local economy as thousands of male populations left their business in trade, crafts, and agriculture. Convinced that order and tranquility were reestablished in the provinces to a certain extent, the authorities gradually disbanded half of these *redif* battalions by April 1896 to avoid further financial burden that the mobilization of these troops would put on state treasury. Most of the remaining troops returned home by the end of 1896.

5.5. Instructions to the Provincial Governments: Anti-Disorder Measures

As of early November, the Sublime Porte began to issue a flood of instructions and circulars to the governors-general and military commanders in the Armenian populated provinces, making the prevention and suppression of disorders a special concern for the local authorities. These circular letters and telegrams typically communicated the Sultan's absolute order to the local authorities, demanding that all necessary measures be taken to allay the excitement existing among the populations inhabiting the empire's Anatolian provinces and to prevent further disorders and clashes between Muslim and Armenian communities. These circular instructions from the Sublime Porte, as well as the imperial decrees issued directly from the Yıldız Palace, stringently ordered the civilian and military authorities in these Armenian-populated regions to anticipate any disorders and clashes in a timely fashion, and, if occurred, to deal with them expeditiously using the troops at their command. The policy-makers in Istanbul also demanded that the local authorities steadily

issue warnings—written and oral—to the local populaces to desist from further hostilities and disorders.

Instead of introducing maximum measures, including a rapid resort to deadly force and imposing severe punishment on the authors of disorders, these earlier circular instructions from the Sublime Porte stressed the need, on the part of local officials, to exercise a quieting influence over the minds of people through public proclamations, convocations, and admonitions. Unsurprisingly, these circular orders also failed to adequately address the deliberate violent acts of Muslim mobs all over the eastern provinces as well as the underlying causes of riots by representing them as the outbursts fueled by anger and excitement over the Armenian sedition and assaults in various places. In such official communications, the governing circles in Istanbul also continued to define the behavior of Muslims as an attempt to punish, on behalf of the government, the Armenian mischief-makers for their evil actions.

In a circular telegram to the governors-general of fifteen Armenian populated provinces and the *mutasarrıfs* of İzmid ve Kuds (Kudüs/Jerusalem) on 5 November 1895, the Grand Vizier, for instance, requested the provincial authorities to explain the Muslim populations, through ulema and notables, and the non-Muslim subjects, through their notables and those “who might listen to reason,” that the main purpose of Armenian plotters was to incite the Muslims and “other obedient populations” to participate in the “disorders” (*uygunsuzluğa*; literally meaning impropriety, unfavorableness) they created, thereby forcing the government to exercise coercion against these populations in the same manner as against the Armenian seditionists in order to restore public order and security. According to this cynical conspiracy, the continuation of disorders would eventually arouse foreign objections. The authorities were also to admonish the local Muslim and non-Muslim populations to take into account the imbalance between “the benefit” that they would gain if abstaining from any action disturbing public order and “the harm” that might otherwise occur.³³⁹

³³⁹ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 609/12, 17 Ca. 1313 (5 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Grand Vizierate to the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, Edirne, Diyarbekir, Ankara,

Three days later, another circular to the governors-general of ten Armenian populated provinces (Ankara, Trabzon, Aleppo, and Adana, in addition to the Six Provinces), reminded that it was only the Imperial Government that had the right to punish the Armenians who were involved in rebellion and seditious activities, and that nobody else could arrogate to themselves the right to do so on their own as well as to violate the laws. Clearly referring to the “mutual slaughter between both sides,” the circular declared that everybody be advised that all those who took an armed stand against the imperial troops would suffer an equivalent retaliation (tit-for-tat, or *mukabele-i bi'l-misl*) and punishment. At this point, it should be noted that the government authorities in Istanbul were still reluctant to authorize the troops to open fire on those who were involved in riotous, murderous activities and did not comply with the demands of the law enforcement agencies to disperse in the event of an outbreak of mass conflict. Only those who used, or attempted to use, weapons against the government troops or law enforcement agencies would immediately suffer retaliation and punishment. As a result, the circular demanded that the provincial authorities dispatch Muslim clergy and notables to the required Muslim villages to carry out these advices to everybody in straight and certain terms, and make extraordinary efforts to deter people from killing one another and seizing others' goods as contrary to the wishes of the Sultan, as well as to help put an end to the animosity and hostility between the two groups.³⁴⁰

In the meantime, the government also took a variety of bureaucratic measures to better respond to the riots and to examine the performance of military and civilian officials in the provinces. In accordance with an imperial decree issued on November 10, the local army commanders in the Six Provinces were urged to report to the palace through the *Serasker*, every twenty-four hours, whether or not any incidents occurred in the areas under their jurisdiction. If occurred, the commanders were also to inform their superiors in

Hüdavendigâr, Haleb (Aleppo), Adana, Beyrut (Beirut), Kastamonu, Musul, and Suriye (Syria) and the *mutasarrıflık* of İzmîd ve Kudüs (Kudüs/Jerusalem) dated 17 Ca. 1313/24 TE 1311/5 November 1895.

³⁴⁰ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 609/15, 20 Ca. 1313 (8 November 1895). Telegram from the Grand Vizierate to the provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Diyarbakir, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, Sivas, Ankara, Trabzon, Haleb (Aleppo), and Adana dated 27 TE 1311/8 November 1895.

Istanbul of the nature and perpetrators of the incident.³⁴¹ As will be shown below, later in mid-November, the governors-generals of the Armenian populated provinces, as well, would be ordered to submit such daily reports to various offices in Istanbul. Indeed, as of November 11, the local officials from all over the eastern provinces regularly wired short, generic incident reports to Istanbul every day for a certain period of time. Moreover, the ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Police were required to prepare daily reports on the ongoing incidents in the provinces and submit them to the office of the Grand Vizier on a regular basis.³⁴²

In contrast to the optimism expressed in the circular telegram of November 5, which noted that the disturbances were being removed thanks to the measures taken,³⁴³ the tone and content of such identical instructions to the provincial authorities somewhat changed within a space of several days. Importantly, towards mid-November, even the officials occupying the highest positions in the Sublime Porte and the palace started to express—more often and clearly—concern over the possibility of a foreign intervention in the ongoing incidents in the empire’s Anatolian provinces. In a circular telegram, dated November 12, the Grand Vizier instructed the provincial authorities “to take extraordinary care to safeguard the honor, lives, and property of [all] classes of imperial subjects (*sunûf-ı teba‘a-i şahanenin*)” by taking every measure as the Sultan “strongly demanded the elimination of disturbances and the maintenance of security.” Advising that disorders should be anticipated by taking precautionary measures, the Grand Vizier warned the local authorities that the officials who did not perform their duties properly would be held gravely accountable and those who showed good service would be rewarded and favored. Lastly, it was certain that, the Grand Vizier noted in plain language, the outbreak of such regrettable incidents “here and there” would have unfavorable and harmful consequences

³⁴¹ BOA. Y.MTV. 131/100, 23 Ca. 1313 (11 November 1895). Letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 23 Ca. 1313/30 TE 1311/11 November 1895.

³⁴² BOA. İ.DH. 1328/52, 23 Ca. 1313 (11 November 1895). Imperial decree dated 23 Ca. 1313/11 November 1895; and BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 535/24, 24 Ca. 1313 (12 November 1895). Letter from the Grand Vizierate to the ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Police dated 24 Ca. 1313/31 TE 1311/12 November 1895.

³⁴³ See A.MKT.MHM. 609/12 (5 November 1895).

for the state and lead to foreign objections and intervention.³⁴⁴ Likewise, later on November 16, the Palace Secretariat clearly stated in an addendum to a resolution of a Council of Ministers that the civilian and military officials in the provinces should be advised, once again and in a stringent manner, that the continuation of the present disorders for “a while more” might obviously invite—“God forbid!”—foreign intervention.³⁴⁵

In order to counter international pressure (including threats of military intervention), press coverage, and critics about the anti-Armenian pogroms, the Yıldız Palace and the Sublime Porte took various actions to ensure that the foreign embassies at the imperial capital be regularly informed of the measures taken by the government to stop the violence, and that these measures and some of the related imperial decrees be well publicized in foreign press as well as in the Ottoman newspapers. Apart from the earlier orders to this effect, on November 14, the Grand Vizier requested the Minister of Foreign Affairs to inform the foreign embassies in Istanbul, the Ottoman embassies abroad, and some foreign correspondents that as part of the measures taken to put an end to the disorders that occurred in certain parts of Anatolia and to completely preserve order and security, the imperial government called 128 *redif* battalions under arms, in addition to the regular troops of the Fourth and Fifth Imperial Army Corps, and instructed the governors-general and army commanders, once again and in certain terms, to restore tranquility and security expeditiously and definitely, treating all subjects equally fairly (*siyyân muamele-i âdile*), regardless of race or religion (*cins ve mezheb*). Therefore, there was no doubt that, owing to these measures, tranquility and peace would soon be restored everywhere. Moreover, in accordance with the Sultan’s order, several high-ranking military, administrative, and judicial officials had been dispatched from Istanbul to all the required places (namely, the

³⁴⁴ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 609/21, 24 Ca. 1313 (12 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Grand Vizierate to the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Diyarbakir, Suriye, Mamuretü’l-Aziz, Sivas, Haleb (Aleppo), and Adana dated 31 TE 1311/12 November 1895.

³⁴⁵ BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/32, 28 Ca. 1313 (16 November 1895). Addendum to the *mazbata* (or resolution/protocol) of a Council of Ministers, dated 28 Ca. 1313/4 TS 1311/16 November 1895, signed by the Sultan’s secretaries.

troubled regions in the eastern provinces) to execute the administrative and military measures taken for the maintenance of public security and order.³⁴⁶

As reflected in a variety of government documents, in the first half of November 1895—when the government began to resort to an enormous number of reserve troops; sent decisive directives to the provincial authorities to make every effort to restore order and tranquility and to punish indiscriminately the authors of disturbances; and took a variety of measures to allay excitement, agitation, and hostility among the local populations—the policy-makers in the palace and the Sublime Porte believed, or rather hoped, that such measures would bring an end to violent disturbances and guarantee the maintenance of peace in the provinces. Such actions did not, however, prevent the repetition of riots and attacks on Armenian towns; the situation even deteriorated in some regions throughout the period under question. The central government authorities tended to think that their subordinates did not something more substantial and more effective was clearly needed.

On the evening of November 17, the Council of Minister held an apparently urgent meeting at the Sublime Porte to discuss the actions required to respond to the ongoing crisis, which they believed was gaining further importance and urgency in both internal and external respects. The council draw up two draft telegrams to be sent to the provincial authorities in the Armenian-populated provinces and the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps before submitting them to the approval of the Sultan. In one these telegrams, conveying the Sultan's categorical orders to put an end to the disorders, the policy-makers in Istanbul clearly stated that although they had employed “every means” (*esbâb ve vesâil*) and authorized the local governments to adopt all necessary measures, failures in the proper execution of government duties against the incidents of pillage and attacks on towns and villages” were making the situation worse and more dangerous for the government. They also noted that the governors-general suspected the [lower-ranking] local authorities of

³⁴⁶ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 613/11, 26 Ca. 1313 (14 November 1895). Letter from the Grand Vizierate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 26 Ca. 1313/2 TS 1311/14 November 1895. Indeed, British archival records show that the Minister of Foreign Affairs wired a telegram to the Ottoman Ambassador in London to this effect. See TNA: FO 424/184, No. 413. Telegram (in French) from Tewfik [Tevfik] Pasha to Rustem [Rüstem] Pasha, dated November 15, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 256.

being indolent and negligent in fulfilling the directives from the central government. It was certain that, the authorities were warned, if the government failed to avert incidents of killing and plunder in the next couple of days, it would face “a politically dangerous situation.” The telegram categorically ordered the authorities to “extinguish the fire of disorder/anarchy within a few days, punishing, promptly and severely, whoever dare to commit any kind of murder, bloodshed/massacre, and pillage.”³⁴⁷ As a result, the Council of Ministers clearly accepted the gravity of the situation and the danger it posed to the imperial government. It is also important to see that the ministers admitted that there was serious negligence and lethargy on the part of local officials. Yet, in a sense, the policy makers in the Sublime Porte also transferred the entire responsibility for the failure to put an end to the riots to the local authorities, perhaps to avoid criticism that might have been directed against their performance by the Sultan and the representatives of foreign governments.

5.6. The Imperial Decree of November 17: Prohibiting “Attacks of One Class of the Population upon Another”

On 17 November 1895, the Yıldız Palace issued a decree in telegraphic form addressed directly to the provinces of Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Aleppo, Diyarbakir, Trabzon, Sivas, and Mamuretü'l-Aziz. It should be noted that only in rare cases had the palace issued decrees directly addressed to the provincial government authorities thus far. The decree clearly stated that despite the repeated orders (*irades*) demanding the adoption of precautionary measures to prevent any acts that might disturb public peace and to preclude bloodshed and “attacks of one class of the population upon the other” (*bir sınıf halkın diğer sınıfa tecavüzünün*), such cases continued to take place in the provinces. “As it is the most important function of the governors to preserve and ensure public order and peace in the provinces,” the decree continued, “if, after the receipt of the present telegram, there should occur incidents such as incendiarism, seditious plotting, perturbation of the public peace,

³⁴⁷ BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/33, 29 Ca. 1313 (17 November 1895). We see that the draft telegrams were sent to the provincial authorities with a few changes in wording. See BOA. Y.A.HUS. 340/2, 1 C. 1313 (19 November 1895; the correct *Hicrî* date should be 2 C. 1313). Letter from the Grand Vizier to the palace dated 1 C. 1313/7 TS 1311/19 November 1895.

or bloodshed [in the regions under your jurisdiction], that [such an omission of duties] will not be forgiven and will involve an absolute and grave responsibility.” Such responsibility would also fall on *mutasarrıfs*, *kaim-makams*, or district governors, and other officials in the civil administration. The palace also ordered the governors-general to act in concert with military commanders for the adoption of preventive measures and to take great care in protecting foreign subjects and the consulates so as to avoid any complaints on the part of foreign officials and subjects in this matter. In addition, it was demanded, once again, that all guilty parties be arrested and punished according to law. Lastly, the palace required the governors to send a telegram *en clair* (*açık telgrafla*) every twenty-four hours to the Sublime Porte, the Interior Ministry, the office of *Serasker* (*Seraskerî* or Seraskerate), and the Imperial Palace on the situation of their provinces.³⁴⁸ On the same day, the palace informed the Grand Vizierate and the Interior Ministry of the above-mentioned instructions sent to the related provinces, and requested the Grand Vizier and the Interior Minister to act in accordance with these stringent orders and avoid any situation that might entail responsibility on their part.³⁴⁹

In another decree on November 17, addressed to the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps and the military commanders of Aleppo, Bitlis, Adana, Trabzon, Diyarbekir, Sivas, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, and other parts of Anatolia, the palace declared that it was the Sultan's absolute demand that the authorities in these provinces be more careful and vigilant than

³⁴⁸ BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/16, 29 Ca. 1313 (17 November 1895). Folio 1, telegram from the *Mabeyn* (palace secretariat) to the governors-general of Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Aleppo (Haleb), Diyarbekir, Trabzon, Sivas, and Mamuretü'l-Aziz dated 5 TS 1311/17 November 1895. To quote the entire decree in Ottoman Turkish: “*Dahil-i vilayetde muhill-i asayiş ahval zuhura gelmemesi için vukuundan evvel ittihaz-ı tedabir olunması ve kan dökülmesine asla meydan verilmemesi ve bir sınıf halkın diğer sınıfa tecavüzünün men'i ve kimse hakkında hilaf-ı adalet muamele olunmaması evvel ve ahir şeref-sudür buyurulan ve tebliğ kılınan iradat-ı seniyye-i hazret-i hilafet-penahi iktiza-yı âlisinden olduğu halde yine vukuat devam ediyor[.] Taşralarda hıfz ve temin-i asayiş valilere aid vezâifin en mühimi olduğundan işbu telgraf-namenin vusulünden sonra harik ve fesad ikâ' etmek ve asayiş ihlal eylemek ve kan dökülmesine sebep olmak gibi bir hal zuhuruna meydan bırakılursa bunun kabil-i afv olmayacağı ve kat'iyen ve şediden mucib-i mes'uliyet olacağı ve mutasarrıf ve kâ'im-makam ve sair memurinin dahi bu vechile taht-ı mes'uliyete alınacakları bilinüb ve askeri kumandanlarıyla da müzakere olunub ana göre ittihaz-ı tedabir olunması ve tebaa-i ecnebiyenin ve konsoloshanelerin dahi muhafazalarına pek ziyade itina ile hilafına bir hal vukuuna ve şikâyet zuhuruna asla meydan bırakılmaması ve erbab-ı cürm ve kabahatin bi't-tevkif kanunen tertib-i mücazâtı ve her yirmi dört saat zarfında vilayetin ahvali Dahiliye Nezareti'ne ve makam-ı Seraskerî'ye ve Sadaret'e ve mabeyn-i hümayun-ı mülukaneye açık telgrafla bildirilmesi irade-i kat'iyeye-i hazret-ı padişahi iktiza-yı celilinden bulunduğu beyan olunur ol babda[.]”*

³⁴⁹ Ibid., folio 6, letter from the *Mabeyn* (palace secretariat) to the Grand Vizier and the Interior Minister dated 29 Ca. 1313/17 November 1895.

ever to preserve public order and peace and to categorically prevent incendiarism, seditious movements, bloodshed, and attacks by one part of the population upon another or upon consulates and foreign subjects. Noting that the instructions to this effect had already been communicated to the functionaries of civil administration, the decree asked the military commanders “to act in concert with the governors-general and the *mutasarrıfs* for the maintenance of public order and to ensure that the officers and soldiers of the Imperial Army act in accordance with the military regulations, abstaining from any actions that might cause complaints.” The palace emphasized that any failure to obey these orders, any lethargy, or any act contrary to military law would incur grave responsibility.³⁵⁰ Also, the *Serasker* was instructed to follow up the affairs.³⁵¹ Three days later, Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha reported to the palace, with the note “very urgent,” that the imperial decree in question had been communicated to military personnel as ordered.³⁵²

The Ottoman printing press regularly published news, articles, and official announcements about the above-mentioned instructions to the governors-general and the commanders regarding the measures to be taken to restore order and prevent new disorders in the provinces.³⁵³ The Sublime Porte also sent translated copies of these ordinances of November 17 and the instructions to the governors and the commanders to the foreign embassies in Istanbul, informing them and their counterparts in Europe and the U.S.A. of the initiatives and anti-pogrom measures taken by the authorities to contain disorders and

³⁵⁰ Ibid., folio 3, telegram from the *Mabeyn* (palace secretariat) to the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps and the military commanders of Aleppo (Haleb), Bitlis, Adana, Trabzon, Diyarbekir, Sivas, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, and other parts of Anatolia dated 5 TS 1311/17 November 1895. To quote the entire decree in Ottoman Turkish: “*Asayiş-i memleketin muhafazasına her zamandan ziyade ve fevke'l-ade itina olunarak öyle harik ve fesad ikâ' etmek ve kan dökmek ve bir sınıf halk tarafından diğer sınıf ahaliye ve tebaa-i ecnebiyeye ve konsoloshanelere taarruzatda bulunmak gibi ahvalin vukuuna asla meydan verilmemesi matlub-ı kat'i-i hazret-i padişahi olub bu babda memurîn-i mülkiyeye icra-yı tebligat edildiği ve cihet-i askeriyeye de vali ve mutasarrıflarla bi'l-müzakere hıfz-ı asayişe çalışılması ve asakir-i şahanenin ve zabitanın nizam-ı askeriyeye muhalif hareketin mucib-i mes'uliyet-i şedide olacağı irade-i kat'iyye-i hazret-i padişahi iktiza-yı âlisinden bulunduğu beyan olunur[.]”*

³⁵¹ Ibid., folio 4, letter from the *Mabeyn* (palace secretariat) to the *Serasker* dated 5 TS 1311/29 Ca. 1313/17 November 1895.

³⁵² BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 108/81, 2 C. 1313 (20 November 1895; the correct *Hicrî* date should be 3 C. 1313). From Zeki Pasha, the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps, to the *Mabeyn* (palace secretariat), 8 TS 1311/20 November 1895.

³⁵³ See, for instance, *Sabah*, 1 C. 1313/18 November 1895; 2 C. 1313/19 November 1895; 3 C. 1313/20 November 1895.

restore public safety and order in Anatolia.³⁵⁴ Throughout the period in question, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials also regularly drew up collections of documents and sent them to the Ottoman embassies and consulates in Europe and the U.S.A. and to the news agencies for publication in foreign press not only to blame Armenian revolutionaries for the outbreaks but also to show that the government made sincere efforts to establish order and peace in the Armenian-populated provinces with a view to counter strong foreign critics.

Typically, the earlier and subsequent decrees of this kind meticulously avoided mentioning the names of the groups in conflict, i.e. Armenians and Muslims, when referring to the episodes of collective violence throughout the period under question. The officials at the palace and the Sublime Porte only—and systematically—used the phrase “attacks of one class of the population upon the other” (*bir sınıf halkın diğer sınıfa tecavüzü*) and its variations to refer to the intercommunal violence in such decrees issued in the fall of 1895-96, thereby further blurring the identities of those were involved in the incidents, possibly to avoid the impression that the Armenians were under the special protection of the government against its Muslim subjects as well as to deny any moral responsibility that the government might bear when clearly acknowledging the situation as it was in official documents.

On November 22, the Yıldız Palace issued another decree as a reiteration of the decree of November 17. From the reports, it was understood that, the decree noted, although tranquility had been reestablished in the provinces to a certain extent, damage to telegraph wires and plunder in some villages was carrying on. Reiterating the previous orders and warnings to the governors-general of the provinces of Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Aleppo, Diyarbakir, Trabzon, Sivas, and Mamuretü'l-Aziz, the palace reminded in no uncertain terms that any indolence (*bataet*) manifested in the prevention and suppression of disorders and “the slightest degree of negligence” (*zerre kadar tekâsül*) on the part of

³⁵⁴ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 535/30, 29 Ca. 1313 (17 November 1895). Letter from the Grand Vizier to the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 29 Ca. 1313/17 November 1895. For the copies sent to the British Embassy, see FO 424/184, No. 557. Inclosure 1 and 2 in No. 324. Copies of the imperial decrees of November 17 and the instructions to the governors-general in French. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 324.

officials in the adoption of necessary measures would absolutely incur grave responsibility.³⁵⁵ The same instructions were also sent by the palace to the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps, the Commander-in-chief of the Fifth Army Corps, and the military commanders of Adana, Trabzon, Diyarbekir, Sivas, Mamuretü'l-aziz, and other parts of Anatolia. The palace also requested the Sublime Porte to wire a telegram to this effect to the aforementioned provinces and military commanders.³⁵⁶

Meanwhile, on November 18, the representatives of the Six Powers at the Ottoman capital held a meeting following the Sultan's wish to have advise from the embassies regarding the steps that his government should take to restore public order and confidence in the provinces. According to British sources, the Sultan had decided to do so upon the strong representations made by the German ambassador, who had reportedly "hinted at the possibility of his dethronement" and stated that "this was possibly the last warning he would receive."³⁵⁷ Further evidence is needed to verify what the German ambassador exactly told the Sultan or his secretaries because it is evident from a variety of diplomatic sources that the Great Powers had no intention or consensus to intervene in the Ottoman Empire on the grounds of the ongoing massacres of Armenians in such a radical manner.³⁵⁸ Yet it is also fair to say that they sometimes used very strong language, to the point of intimidation and threats of military intervention on the part of the Great Powers, to urge the Sultan to take much more effective and harsher measures to put an end to the disturbances and violence against the Armenians. Leaving aside the question of great power involvement with the empire's affairs during this period, the representatives of the Six Embassies decided to send a message to the Sublime Porte through the Austro-

³⁵⁵ BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/27, 4 C. 1313 (22 November 1895; the correct *Hicrî* date should be 5 C. 1313). Telegram from the palace to the provinces of Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Aleppo (Haleb), Diyarbekir, Trabzon, Sivas, and Mamuretü'l-Aziz dated 10 TS 1311/22 November 1895.

³⁵⁶ BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/32, 5 C. 1313 (/22 November 1895). From the palace to the Grand Vizierate dated 10 TS 1311/22 November 1895. As required by the Sultan's order, the Grand Vizier telegraphed the related provinces and the commanders on the same day. See BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 609/30, 4 C. 1313 (22 November 1895; the correct *Hicrî* date should be 5 C. 1313).

³⁵⁷ FO 424/184, No. 556. Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 21, 1895.

³⁵⁸ For the question of European intervention/non-intervention on behalf of Armenians during the events here under study, see Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914: The Birth of a Concept and International Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), Chapter 8.

Hungarian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Heinrich Freiherr von Calice (Baron Calice). In their message, they stated that “[t]he only means of restoring confidence is to put a stop to the massacres,” which they believed “the Sultan can do if he is sincere in his professions.” And, instead of indicating the measures to be taken, they suggested:

That the functionaries responsible for the massacres should be dismissed.

That an inquiry should be held as to the participation of soldiers in the outrages, and the guilty be punished.

That the orders recently sent to the Valis [governors-general] and Military Commanders should be published, and assurances given that previous orders have been cancelled.

That a Hatt [edict] should be issued by the Sultan ordering his subjects to obey his wishes, and abstain from creating disturbances.³⁵⁹

In his letter to the British Embassy about his meeting with Tevfik Pasha, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Baron Calice wrote that the minister did not make any objections to the suggestions of the Six Embassies, rather appearing to have regarded the whole message “perfectly justifiable and regular.” Tevfik Pasha was also reported to have stated that the measures being taken by the government would certainly be effective for the restoration of order and tranquility in the Anatolian provinces although he regretted that they had not been adopted sooner. The Minister of Foreign Affairs had also requested Baron Calice to bring to the attention of the ambassadors the “important fact” that Hüseyin Pasha of the Haydaranlı, a powerful, notorious Kurdish chief and a Hamidiye commander whose men committed many excesses against Armenian villagers throughout the period in question, was arrested under the military laws and would be tried shortly, which Tevfik Pasha believed demonstrated the energy and fairness of the government.³⁶⁰ The Haydaranlı chief would, however, never be brought to justice despite the seemingly sincere efforts of Şakir Pasha to this effect.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., Inclosure in No. 556. Letter from Baron Calice to Herbert, dated Constantinople, November 18, 1895. For a translation of Baron Calice’s letter to English, see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 323.

Later, on November 21, Tevfik Pasha called on the Secretary of the British Embassy in Istanbul, Michael H. Herbert, to convey the Sultan's thanks for the advice presented to him by the Austro-Hungarian ambassador on behalf of the representatives of the Powers in Istanbul. Tevfik Pasha stated that the Sublime Porte had already communicated to several embassies the instructions to the governors-general, and that they were drawing up a list of the officials in the regions where disturbances had broken out although it was never made clear what the Sublime Porte intended to do with this list. Regarding the issuance of an imperial edict (in the form of a *hatt* written or signed by the Sultan himself) ordering his subjects to abstain from creating disturbances, the Sultan had thought it was unnecessary because the instructions to the governors-general about anti-disorder measures had already been published in the newspapers. The Sultan also expressed his belief, or hope, that the British government would be able to judge from these measures that how earnest he was in his desire to put an end to the disturbances.³⁶¹

5.7. The Imperial Commissions of Inspection: Investigating the Events, Supervising Measures, and Quieting the Minds

In mid-November 1895, the Sultan also dispatched two special commissions of inspection and supervision to the troubled areas as part of the relatively stringent military and administrative measures taken for the restoration of public order and tranquility in the eastern provinces. These two inspectorial bodies, known as the "Commissions of Inspection" (*Teftiş Heyetleri* or *Heyet-i Teftişiyye* in the singular form), were charged with supervising the implementation of these measures and examining the performance of civilian and military authorities with respect to anti-disorder precautions pursuant to the recent imperial orders. The imperial commissioners were expected to check whether the local government functionaries carried out, energetically and faithfully, the instructions given to them by their superiors in Istanbul. Importantly, the military members of the commissions, two pashas from Istanbul, would also temporarily be in command of a large

³⁶¹ FO 424/184, No. 557. Herbert to Salisbury, Pera, November 21, 1895.

number of regular and reserve troops mobilized for the suppression of disorders and the reestablishment of tranquility in Anatolia.

Remarkably, British sources claim that in response to the British Prime Minister's message, the Sultan told that his orders were not obeyed by the governors-general, and, as he had no more confidence in them, he had decided to dispatch his aides-de-camp (referring to the commissioners mentioned below) to the region to investigate the conduct of provincial authorities. The Sultan had also expressed his "deep sorrow" at the outbreaks, remarking "that the movement was well organized through a very large extent of country, and it was impossible to deal with it quickly." In the same British document, the Secretary of Embassy also reported that, in accordance with the Sultan's promise, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had called on him to explain the measures that the government was taking to restore order. Among the measures were the commissioners "being sent to various parts of Armenia to see that the provincial authorities obey these instructions."³⁶² Although the Sultan and the central government authorities clearly stated at various times that the provincial authorities—both civil and military—were not properly fulfilling instructions from Istanbul and showed negligence in duty, there is no Ottoman source indicating that the Sultan clearly blamed them for not obeying his orders. It is therefore hard to measure how much sincerity or exaggeration this statement of the Sultan carried. It might have been a diplomatic representation containing a certain degree of exaggeration to convince its audience. Yet what is clear is that the dispatch of several special military and civilian officials from Istanbul to the region with extraordinary missions was a strong message to the provincial authorities.

On 9 November 1895, the Sultan authorized the appointment of two high-ranking military officers—Lieutenant-General (*ferik*) Saadeddin Pasha, a General-Staff officer, and Major-General (*ikinci ferik*) Abdullah Pasha, an aide-de-camp to the Sultan—as officials to be dispatched to the disturbed areas to conduct the above-mentioned duties and more.³⁶³

³⁶² TNA: FO 424/184, No. 554. Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 20, 1895.

³⁶³ For the appointment of Saadeddin and Abdullah Pashas and the instructions given to them about their duties, see BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/21, 21 Ca. 1313 (9 November 1895). The *mazbata*, or protocol/resolution, drawn up by the Council of Ministers dated 21 Ca. 1313/28 TE 1311/9 November 1895; "The instructions to the military and civil officials who will be dispatched to the provinces where Armenian disturbances/riots

Each pasha would have a designated area of responsibility and would be accompanied by two civilian officials. These six officials from Istanbul formed the two would-be commissions, each of which was to be functioning under the presidency of the appointed military member. Saadeddin Pasha was accompanied by İbrahim Edhem Bey, member of the Requests (or Petition) Department of the Court of Cassation (*Mahkeme-i Temyiz İstid'â Dairesi*), and Cemal Bey, member of the Personnel Records Commission (*Sicill-i Ahval Komisyonu*). The civilian officials accompanying Abdullah Pasha were Hüseyin Rüşdi Efendi, member of the Criminal Section of the Court of Cassation (*Mahkeme-i Temyiz Ceza Dairesi*), and Sami Efendi, member of the Council of State (*Şura-yı Devlet*).

Contrary to the initial plan, the commission under the *de facto* presidency of Saadeddin Pasha proceeded to the region covering the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, and Bitlis. Arriving first in the city of Trabzon on the shore of the Black Sea, the pasha and the other commissioners visited the towns of Gümüşhane, Bayburd, Erzurum, Hınıs, Muş, and Bitlis. Abdullah Pasha and the civilian commissioners accompanying him were dispatched to the Sivas-Mamuretü'l-Aziz-Diyarbakir region, travelling southward from Samsun to Diyarbakir passing through the towns of Amasya, Tokad, Sivas, Malatya, and Harput. As such, in accordance with the instructions given to them, the members of the two commissions visited several major towns on their designated routes. After visiting all these places, the commissioners submitted their final reports in January 1896. They did not, however, return to Istanbul as soon as they finished their investigatory work. Saadeddin Pasha moved from Bitlis to the town of Van, where he stayed from early February to October 1896. After the dismissal of the Governor-General of Van, he served as an acting governor-general, or rather like an extraordinary commander-governor, in this province for several months. During the clashes in the town of Van in June 1896, he commanded the Ottoman troops. It seems that Saadeddin Pasha regularly kept diaries during his journey, part of which has been published in modern Turkish in the early 2000s.³⁶⁴ Unlike the

occurred" (*Ermeni ihtilali zuhur eden vilayâta cihet-i askeriye ve mülkiyeden i'zâm olunacak memurîne talimatdır*), n.d.; and, letter by the Grand Vizier to the palace requesting the Sultan's authorization for the appointment and the instructions given to these officials, dated 21 Ca. 1313/28 TE 1311/9 November 1895.

³⁶⁴ Sadettin Paşa, *Sadettin Paşa'nın Anıları: Ermeni-Kürt Olayları (Van, 1896)*, ed. Sami Önal, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2004). Fatma Müge Göçek has inspiringly analyzed Saadeddin Pasha's diaries within the context of the collective violence committed against the Armenians in the 1890s. See *Denial of*

official reports that he regularly sent from the region to his superiors in Istanbul, Saadeddin Pasha's diaries provide a unique personal account of this turbulent period, the nature of his official activities in Van, the relations among the Armenians, Kurdish tribes, and the local authorities as well as of the ways in which he interpreted these outbreaks of mass violence with abundant details. It may be relevant to note that Saadeddin Pasha's diaries (like his official reports), as well, contain evidence that counters conspirational explanations.

Likewise, Abdullah Pasha stayed in the town of Diyarbekir until mid-April 1896 and played an important role in keeping the town in order and quiet. Notably, he successfully suppressed a number of attempts on the part of Muslims at creating fresh anti-Armenian disorders. Indeed, especially the French consul at Diyarbekir, Gustave Meyrier, made strong representations to the Sublime Porte in March 1896 for the extension of the pasha's stay in this town on the grounds that he acted very well in the maintenance of public security and order. The four civilian commissioners, as well, stayed in the region for several more months, undertaking a series of administrative, judicial, and investigatory activities in accordance with new instructions from Istanbul, which sometimes required them to travel to various spots. When Abdullah Pasha, Hüseyin Rüşdi Efendi, and Sami Efendi arrived in the town of Diyarbekir, they reported to Istanbul that they were receiving many requests from Armenians beyond the scope of their designated duties, such as those concerning the abducted Armenian women and the restitution of stolen/looted property after the riots.³⁶⁵ Obviously, a great many Armenians desperately appealed to these high-ranking officials dispatched from Istanbul with special missions for the solution of their immediate problems. Yet, over the course of time, their duties extended into other areas as a result of exigencies for action and official orders from Istanbul and therefore they undertook new assignments such as supervising the special local commissions established for the purpose of discovering and restoring pillaged goods to their rightful owners and the

Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 67-71

³⁶⁵ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 34/33, 15 B. 1313 (1 January 1896). Cipher telegram from Sami Efendi, member of the Council of State, Major-General Abdullah Pasha, an aide-de-camp to the Sultan, and Rüşdi Efendi, member of the Court of Cassation, in Diyarbekir [members of the Commission of Inspection] dated 20 KE 1311/1 January 1896.

distribution of relief funds to destitute Armenians as part of the initiatives taken by the central government in the aftermath of the riots of 1895.

As mentioned above, throughout this period, Saadeddin and Abdullah Pashas remained in command of the regular and reserve battalions deployed for the suppression and prevention of newer disturbances in urban and rural areas across the eastern provinces although it appears that after January 1896, they focused on the employment and movement of troops in the regions they stayed until the end of their temporary service, namely in the provinces of Van and Diyarbekir. With respect to their military duties, it is possible to say that they were a sort of extraordinary commanders who oversaw the employment and mobilization of armed forces in response to requests from local governments and exigencies for a given period of time. In order to avoid a possible confusion of authority and responsibility, the instructions given to them emphasized that the two pashas, not the civilian functionaries, would be functioning under the “general command” of the Commander-in-chief of the Fourth Imperial Army Corps until the end of their service in the provinces.³⁶⁶

No serious crisis or disagreement seems to have occurred between the two pashas and Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha although—and this is an important although—later in September 1896, when the Hamidian administration contemplated to appoint an extraordinary commander (*fevkelade kumandan*) responsible only for military/security measures against the “Armenian sedition” in the eastern provinces, Zeki Pasha stated, in response, that the appointment of two *feriks* (referring to Saadeddin and Abdullah Pashas without naming), after the disturbances were already suppressed, had upset the army commanders and officers working “wholeheartedly” (*can-siparâne*) on active duty. He also hinted at a discontent with the actions of Saadeddin Pasha during the incidents of June 1896 in Van without mentioning the nature of these actions, however.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Y.A.RES. 77/21 (9 November 1895). “The instructions to the military and civil officials who will be dispatched to the provinces where Armenian disturbances/riots occurred,” n.d.

³⁶⁷ BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 114/99, 28 Ra. 1314 (6 September 1896). Cipher telegram from Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps Mehmed Zeki [Pasha] dated 25 Ağustos 1312/6 September 1896. Also see BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 115/87, 29 R. 1314 (the correct date is obviously 30 Ra. 1314/8 September 1896).

As clearly defined in the instructions to these officials drawn up by the Council of Ministers, the commissioners were also charged with the duty of taking necessary steps “to quiet the effervescent and excited minds and hearts of the people” (*duçar-ı galeyan ve heyecan olan kulûb ve ezhan-ı âmmenin... teskini*), which was conceived as “the most effective measure” to quell such internal disorders. Without such a measure being taken, use of “force and violence” (*cebr ve şiddet*) could be effective in one place but not in the other. Therefore, the policy-makers in Istanbul demanded that the civilian members of the commissions summon the “trustworthy, reliable, and influential” classes of the local Muslim population (especially of tribal populace), ulema, sheikhs, and Armenian notables who were not involved in any “seditious affairs” in each town they would visit and advise them that it was the duty of the Imperial Government to punish those who dared to revolt against state authority. The interference of people (read ordinary Muslim citizens) in this would not only further disturb public order and security but also “serve the seditious purposes of those who harbor ill-will [towards the government]” (*erbab-ı ağrazın makasid-i fâsidederine hizmet edeceği*)—“*erbab-ı ağraz*” was obviously a euphemism for Armenians and foreign powers and their representatives in the empire. The commissioners were also to convey to the local populaces the message that the Sultan was very much grieved in heart at the news of bloodshed, referring to the ongoing episodes of mass killings.³⁶⁸

Given the official conceptualization of the anti-Armenian riots as a reaction of the angry Muslim populations to the “Armenian sedition” and uprisings, it is not surprising to see that the officials at the Sublime Porte reduced the crimes committed against Armenian civilians to the interference of Muslim crowds in the government’s business. Yet, whatever the manner in which the imperial administrators defined the anti-Armenian riots, they expected that such measures would help to mitigate tensions and deadly clashes between Muslim and Armenian populations. At this point, it is important to note that the instructions given to the commissioners included another clear warning: use of force and violence against Muslims might also make them indignant against the imperial government. Indeed,

³⁶⁸ Y.A.RES. 77/21 (9 November 1895). “The instructions to the military and civil officials who will be dispatched to the provinces where Armenian disturbances/riots occurred,” n.d.

throughout the period under question, the government confronted a certain dilemma: the main concern of the authorities was how to put an end to the crisis without taking severe measures against the local Muslim populations. On the one hand, they clearly hesitated to take any action that would seem to support the “disloyal” Armenians at the expense of the Sultan’s Muslim subjects. Numerous documents show that the highest-ranking authorities at the palace and the Sublime Porte also warned the local officials against the measures that might “upset” the local Muslim populations. Yet, on the other hand, it was obviously impossible to combat riots without resorting to harsher methods, including deadly force, and punishing the instigators and perpetrators of violence. The dilemma, or rather paradox, between the official desire to suppress disorders and the official task of avoiding “upsetting” Muslims at any cost had a significant impact on the way in which the government dealt with anti-Armenian riots.

To go back to our main discussion, in accordance with these instructions, the commissioners admonished the notables of Muslim and Armenian communities, local religious leaders, and, if applicable, Kurdish tribal chiefs in every town they visited to remain calm, continue their usual routine of business, and refrain from any acts contrary to the wishes of their Sovereign, who deplored the disturbances and bloodshed that broke out in the provinces. Muslim and Armenian citizens were assured that their life, chastity, and property would be protected by the Sultan’s government. The commissioners also conveyed the Sultan’s decree (probably the one issued on November 17) to Muslim notables, ulema, and muftis, probably advising them to act in accordance with these imperial ordinances and assist the authorities in restoring and preserving order. At least in one case, they would also summon *nahiye*, or sub-district, heads to government office and ask them to carry out advice and admonitions to Muslim villagers in their areas of responsibility.³⁶⁹

Although the officials at the Sublime Porte assigned this duty to the civilian commissioners, it seems that admonitory speeches were delivered especially by the military members (*de facto* presidents) of the commissions in most places. The

³⁶⁹ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 340/143, 14 C. 1313 (1 December 1895). Telegram from Lieutenant-General Saadeddin [Pasha] in Bayburd to the Grand Vizierate dated 16 TS 1311/28 November 1895.

commissioners, or at least Saadeddin Pasha, mostly addressed Muslim and Armenian notables and community leaders separately. When reporting to his superiors in Istanbul about his admonitory activities regardless of his audience, he usually stated that he had delivered “*nasihat*” (primarily meaning advice) or “*vesaya*” (again meaning advice or recommendation) to all parties. Yet he often, if not always, termed what he delivered to gatherings of Armenian notables and religious leaders as “*tenbih*” (warning, excitation, caution, or admonition), while he mostly preferred to use the terms “*nasihat*” or “*vesaya*” when referring to his speeches to Muslim notables, ulema, and Kurdish chieftains.³⁷⁰ Unlike *nasihat* or *vesaya*, *tenbih* generally means warning or even exhorting someone not to repeat what they have done previously or to give up doing something undesirable, dangerous, or harmful. All these terms may have close meanings to each other and some of them can be used interchangeably depending on context. Indeed, *nasihat* can also be translated as admonition, though not of a stern nature. And I should also note that the pasha sometimes used the word “*tenbih*” when referring to his admonitions to Kurdish tribal chiefs. In other words, it was not exclusive to his Armenian audience. Nevertheless, these terminological choices may not have been arbitrary or coincidental given that the content and tone of the speeches that he delivered to his Muslim and Armenian audiences was significantly different from each other.

Indeed, almost in every place he visited, Saadeddin Pasha consistently blamed “Armenian seditionists” for fomenting disorders and warned Armenian notables to refrain from even the least provocative behavior as well as from “seditious affairs.” He almost implied that the Armenians themselves brought about their own sufferings, shifting the blame onto the main victims of mass violence. Indeed, in her analysis of Saadeddin Pasha’s diaries, Göçek has aptly pointed out that his speeches “seem to target and threaten the Armenian subjects more than the Muslim ones, almost entirely blaming them for bringing this collective violence against themselves.”³⁷¹ The pasha also cautioned Armenian

³⁷⁰ See, for instance, BOA. Y.A.HUS. 345/11, 18 Ş. 1313 (2 February 1896). Telegram from Lieutenant-General Saadeddin [Pasha], İbrahim [Bey], and Cemal [Bey] dated 20 KS 1311/1 February 1896; and, BOA. HR.SYS. 2791/10, 24-12-1895 (24 December 1895). Telegram from the aforementioned officials to the Grand Vizierate dated 4 KE 1311/16 December 1895.

³⁷¹ Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 71.

notables and clergymen that their communities were on the wrong path, showing insubordination and ingratitude to the state, which permitted them to practice their language and culture freely as well as to enjoy toleration for centuries.

Saadeddin Pasha's regular reports to his superior in Istanbul contain limited information on the content of his speeches to the notables of urban and tribal Muslim populations. His diaries, however, provide detailed descriptions of what he advised and admonished to Kurdish chieftains from various parts of the province of Van and the Armenian notables and clergymen inhabiting the capital of this province. He delivered especially long speeches to several gatherings of tribal chiefs, where he used religious discourses and references widely and very effectively, stressing that the protection of non-Muslims under Islamic rule was a religious necessity. To be brief, he lectured the chieftains that it was not true that the Sultan had issued a decree (*ferman*) permitting the killing and plundering of Armenians. Had he done so, he would not have deemed it necessary to dispatch the pasha and other commissioners to the region. Nor was it true that the Armenians had been granted a principality. From the reforms that the government wished to carry out now, the Muslims would benefit even more than the Armenians. The government was also powerful enough to properly chasten and punish the Armenians, and it did not need the interference of his Muslim subjects *for now*.

Furthermore, said Saadeddin Pasha, these outbreaks had left the Sultan and his government in a difficult position vis-à-vis foreign powers. Owing to the modern means of communication and transportation such as the telegraph, steamers, and railways, "Christian states" (i.e., the governments of predominantly Christian societies in Europe and elsewhere), were able to hear anything happening in the empire only within half an hour. They would not allow or tolerate the Muslims to attack the Armenians, their co-religionists. Because of these events, the Sultan had difficulty in finding answers to the European governments—indeed, the Ottoman authorities were more concerned about the diplomatic repercussions of these events than the very fact that their Muslim subjects perpetrated such dreadful acts against their Armenian fellow citizens. In addition to the international challenge and pressure, the present crisis had compelled the government to call a large number of reserves (*redif* soldiers) under arms in order to prevent Muslims from attacking

Armenians, which ultimately increased expenses and placed a huge burden on the state treasury. What is more, these reserve soldiers, who had to leave their families and business [for a while now], were drafted from among the Muslims themselves, namely “the children, brothers, and brothers-in-law of you,” the pasha addressed the chieftains.³⁷²

On the other hand, neither Saadeddin Pasha’s official reports nor his diaries bear any signs that the pasha or the other commissioners strongly condemned the behavior of Muslims who perpetrated such acts of violence against the empire’s Armenian subjects although they explained them the adverse diplomatic and economic consequences of the riots. Nor do we see that they explicitly lectured their Muslim audiences on the lawlessness, criminality, and liability of their recent actions. In other words, there is no sign that they were warned of severe legal consequences of riot-mongering and other crimes, the past or future. As Göçek aptly observed, what Saadeddin Pasha stated to the Kurdish chieftains “oddly fails to note that the Ottoman state should and would hold the Muslim perpetrators accountable for” the collective violence against Armenians.³⁷³

Although the members of the Commissions of Inspection were not clearly charged with the duty of making complete investigations into the origins, nature, and development of the riots, they were also sometimes referred to as the Commission of Inquiry (*Heyet-i Tahkikiye*) and each commission drew up a long investigation report at the end of their initial inspectorial work in January 1896.³⁷⁴ However, just like an investigating committee sent to the provinces in the Spring of 1896, the Commissions of Inspection never conducted

³⁷² Sadettin Paşa, *Sadettin Paşa'nın Anıları*, 20-22, 48-50.

³⁷³ Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 69.

³⁷⁴ For a copy of the final investigation report prepared by the Commission of Inspection dispatched by the central Ottoman government to the Sivas-Mamuretü'l-Aziz-Diyarbakir region, see BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 109/69, 9 Ş. 1313 (24 January 1896). The report is dated 9 Ş. 1313/24 January 1896 and although it bears the signature of Abdullah Pasha, who submitted it to his military superiors, the report was obviously drawn up by the three members of the commission, that is, Major-General Abdullah Pasha, Hüseyin Rüşdi Efendi, and Sami Efendi. Another file in the Ottoman archives contains a copy of the final report of this commission signed and submitted by Hüseyin Rüşdi Efendi to his superiors at the Sublime Porte. There are only some minor differences in wording between this report and the report signed and submitted by Abdullah Pasha. See Y.A.HUS. 347/28 (3 March 1896). And for a copy of the final investigation report drawn up by the members of the Commission of Inspection dispatched to the Trabzon-Erzurum-Bitlis region, see Y.PRK.KOM. 9/2 (16 January 1896). The reports is signed by Lieutenant-General Saadeddin Pasha, İbrahim Edhem, and Mehmed Ali Cemal and dated 30 B. 1313/3 KS 1311/16 January 1896.

diligent, serious, unbiased, and comprehensive investigations. They certainly failed to investigate the root causes of the disturbances and the crimes committed against a large number of victims, with a special focus on the conduct of those with command or authority and the actions of those who were alleged to instigate violence. Nor did they inquire into whether the disorders might have been anticipated by the local authorities in a timely fashion or not, and into the possibility of dereliction of duty by the civilian and military officials. They simply repeated and reinforced official theses and narratives only by examining the reports of the local authorities in the districts and provincial capitals they visited. Indeed, when presenting their investigatory report to the Grand Vizierate, Hüseyin Rüşdi Efendi stated that “the present report ascertained and proved with evidence... that the initial/antecedent assaults were unleashed by the Armenians and the Muslims did nothing but defended [themselves].”³⁷⁵

5.8. Dismissals: Penalizing Officials for Failure, Negligence, and Recklessness

By the time of the issuance of the decree of November 17, six provincial capitals and most of the major towns in the Armenian-populated provinces had already witnessed mass killings and looting on a massive scale. Therefore, the timing of these stringent orders was rather questionable. Moreover, they basically had nothing to do with the earlier events as the imperial administrators did not retroactively impose any disciplinary consequences for the officials who might have been accused of acting imprudently or unmistakably neglecting their duties during the previous outbreaks. It goes without saying that by late November 1895, no civilian or military functionaries had been seriously punished by the Sultan for failing to prevent disorders or tolerating violence, let alone instigating it, despite the enormity and severity of the riots that took place in a great number of places during this period. Nor is there evidence that by mid-November, the highest authorities in Istanbul expressed strong disappointment at the performance of the governors and the local forces

³⁷⁵ Y.A.HUS. 347/28 (3 March 1896). From Hüseyin Rüşdi [Efendi] to the Grand Vizierate dated 21 KS 1311/2 February 1896. To quote the original statement in Ottoman Turkish: “*Tecavüzat-ı mütekaddimenin Ermeniler tarafından vuku ‘uyula ahali-i İslamiyenin müdafaadan başka bir meslek ittihaz etmemiş olduklarını layiha-i maruza delail ve teşrihatıyla tayin ve isbat eder.*”

of law and order including the military over the course of riots in the regions under their jurisdiction.

The decrees of November 17 and their reiterations nevertheless carried the hitherto most serious warnings to the civilian and military authorities in the provinces. These repeated decrees from the palace and the Sublime Porte unambiguously warned civilian and military authorities of severe legal consequences for officials who failed to prevent disorders and showed negligence in averting violence in their areas of responsibility. In a sense, these stern warnings made the prevention of riots the personal responsibility of governors and military commanders. Indeed, the Sultan and the imperial administrators soon manifested a relatively high degree of willingness and determination to penalize local officials for the failure to anticipate and prevent new disorders. The number of civilian and military officials dismissed from office due to their conduct during the events in their districts remarkably increased as of mid-November.

The pace of the wave of riots considerably slowed down as of the second half of November 1895. With the sole exception of a relatively minor outbreak in the town of Zile (Sivas), no serious disorders took place in urban areas between November 16 and 30, not necessarily thanks to the adoption by the government of harsher administrative and security measures. Immediately following the outbreak of riots in the town of Kayseri on November 30, the Council of Ministers gathered at the Sublime Porte to discuss the matter upon the Sultan's order. The Council clearly put forward that the occurrences of sporadic cases of violence in spite of every kind of military and administrative measures taken for the prevention of disorders in the provinces demonstrated that the orders from the civilian administration (Sublime Porte) and the military were not carried out by the local functionaries perfectly. It was obvious that the combined efforts of the government would remain ineffective as long as the local officials displayed an indolent attitude toward them. Considering that the priority of the government was now to preserve public security and to punish the officials who displayed laxity in this, the Council suggested that the Governor-General of Sivas and the *Mutasarrif* of Kayseri be immediately dismissed from office due to the repetition of "undesirable" incidents under their jurisdictions. The district-governors of Zile (Sivas) and Bayburd (Erzurum), as well, were to be removed from office because

of their “maladministration.” The Council also resolved that the *Serasker* take necessary steps to penalize the commanders and officers who shall be found negligent and indolent in carrying out the instructions given to them by their superiors.³⁷⁶

Significantly, the Sublime Porte also resolved that the reason for the dismissal of an official who failed to fulfill the imperial orders and instructions regarding the prevention of disorders would be published in the press.³⁷⁷ This was another strong message to local officials.

The palace approved the dismissal of the *Mutasarrif* of Kayseri and the district-governors of Zile and Bayburd; yet it seems that the Governor-General of Sivas was only censured once again for failing to prevent the outbreaks throughout his area of responsibility. There were no recurrent riots in Bayburd but the dismissal of the district-governor was probably related to the persistence of a climate of insecurity and fear in the town as well as in some of the villages of this district, where, according to a telegraphic report wired by Saadeddin Pasha on November 30, Armenian villagers professed Islam out of fear, wearing white turbans and placing a flag above their church. Armenians in the village of Balahor (mistyped as Balasor in the document), too, were reported to have worn white turbans around their heads and prayed with Muslims in the Armenian church, which was apparently converted *de facto* into a mosque. Saadeddin Pasha reported in the same telegram that during his visit to these villages, he had recommended the Armenians villagers to take off the turbans and take down the flag, explaining them that their conversion was contrary to the wishes of the Sultan who desired everyone to remain in their original religion and pray in their own place of worship. He had also advised that they continue their routine of business without fearing of anything, assuring them that there would always be soldiers patrolling around their villages. The district-governor of Bayburd had also been dispatched by the pasha to the village of Balahor with a group of cavalries,

³⁷⁶ BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/46, 14 C. 1313 (1 December 1895). *Mazbata* (protocol/resolution) of the Council of Ministers dated 14 C. 1313/19 TS 1311/1 December 1895.

³⁷⁷ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 661/3, 21 C. 1313 (8 December 1895). Letter from the Grand Vizierate to the Interior Ministry and the *Serasker*.

obviously to carry out similar messages to the Armenian villagers professing Islam.³⁷⁸ A few days later, Saadeddin Pasha and the other commissioners reported to his superiors in Istanbul that they had notified the Fourth Army authorities that “the laxity (*rehâvet*) seen in the military command [of Bayburd]” posed a challenge to the ability of the local authorities to ensure public security and prevent “a repetition of the incident,” referring to the riots that broke out in this town in late October.³⁷⁹

Ironically, the Governor-General of Sivas, Halil Bey, seemed an energetic and honest administrator throughout the period in question. Notwithstanding his subtle or outright anti-Armenian outlook, Halil Bey was genuinely anxious about the violent events that took place across the whole eastern provinces as well as in his area of responsibility, and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, he frankly spoke about the political dangers that the disturbances posed to the government from the beginning. On several occasions, the governor-general also openly criticized, and even blamed, the military authorities for acting imprudently, sluggishly, and recklessly. It was also the governor-general who suggested severer preventive and repressive measures to combat disorders and mob attacks on towns. Yet it was certainly true that disturbances and mass killings in his province were frequent and persistent. Consequently, Governor-General Halil Bey was dismissed from office after the riots of Tokad in March 1897 as a result of the strong pressures, or rather threats, put on the Ottoman government by the six embassies in Istanbul.

From November 30 to late December 1895, no disorders took place in the Armenian-populated provinces although isolated cases of village raids and pillage by Kurdish tribes continued in rural areas in decreasing numbers. After the mass killing of Armenians in the town of Urfa, where one of the most lethal and most destructive riots

³⁷⁸ BOA. Y.MTV. 132/106, 14 C. 1313 (1 December 1895). Cipher telegram from Lieutenant-General Saadeddin Pasha in Bayburd to the *Serasker* dated 18 TS 1311/30 November 1895. For the atmosphere in the town, where Armenians were reported to have still feared going out of their homes and neighborhoods, see Y.A.HUS. 340/143 (1 December 1895). Telegram from Lieutenant-General Saadeddin [Pasha] in Bayburd to the Grand Vizierate dated 16 TS 1311/28 November 1895.

³⁷⁹ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 639/10, 18 C. 1313 (5 December 1895). Cipher telegram from members of the Commission of Inquiry (*Heyet-i Tahkikiye*, referring to the Commission of Inspection) Cemal [Bey], İbrahim [Bey], and Lieutenant-General Saadeddin [Pasha] dated 21 TS 1311/3 December 1895. This report was sent to Istanbul after the district-governor of Bayburd was already dismissed but it is obvious that the situation reported in the above-mentioned communications was the main reason behind dismissal.

took place on December 28, the *Mutasarrıf* of Urfa, Hasan Rıza Pasha, was immediately dismissed from office as the provincial government authorities in Aleppo reported in a telegram to Istanbul that it was felt that the *mutasarrıf* had acted “recklessly and negligently” (*lâubaliyâne ve bî-kaydâne*) during the riots in this town.³⁸⁰ In an addendum to this telegram, the Aleppo authorities also reported that a Major present in the town had estimated the number of killed in Urfa at 700-800, and that the Commander of Urfa, as well, had acted in the same manner as the *mutasarrıf* during the events. According to the same report, the role that the negligent conduct of both officials played in the escalation of “this deplorable incident” to such a level was undeniable. Importantly, when the provincial government authorities in Aleppo asked the *Mutasarrıf* of Urfa “what the civil and military functionaries were doing” during the turmoil that resulted in the death of such a great number of people, the *mutasarrıf* responded that they had failed to defend against the assailants (predominantly Kurdish tribesmen who raided the town) because the reserve troops at hand were composed of local (*yerli*) people and the number of non-local (*yerli olmayan*) *müfrezes*, or detachments, and cavalry soldiers was insufficient.³⁸¹

Although the dismissal of Hasan Pasha was instantly approved by the Sultan, there is no direct evidence that the Commander of Urfa was removed as well. Yet, given that a lieutenant-general from the Fifth Army Corps, Ahmed Lutfi Pasha, served both as the acting *mutasarrıf* and the acting commander in Urfa for several months, it can be assumed that the Commander of Urfa was also dismissed or suspended from active duty for a while. Furthermore, the palace also ordered the Commander-in-chief of the Fifth Army Corps to launch an investigation into the matter and bring the commander to justice if he was found to be negligent in his actions. The Fifth Army authorities commissioned the Aleppo

³⁸⁰ BOA. Y.A.HUS. 342/105, 13 B. 1313 (29 December 1895). Cipher telegram from Zihni [Bey] on behalf of the office of the Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo dated 17 KE 1311/29 December 1895. Also see BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 648/9, 12 B. 1313 (28 December 1895). Various communications between the Aleppo authorities, the Grand Vizier, the *Serasker*, and the Commander-in-chief of the Fifth Army Corps in Damascus.

³⁸¹ Y.A.HUS. 342/105 (29 December 1895). Cipher telegram (addendum to the telegram dated 17 KE 1311) from Zihni [Bey] on behalf of the office of the Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo dated 17 KE 1311/29 December 1895.

Commandership to conduct the investigation.³⁸² Unfortunately, I have not been yet able to trace any certain information in the Ottoman archives regarding the result of this investigation.

From January 1896 to March 1897, only several towns in the Anatolian provinces witnessed minor and major disturbances. As will be mentioned in the next chapter, no high-ranking officials were dismissed or punished by the central government in the aftermath of the outbreak of mass violence at the empire's capital city Istanbul in August 1896. In the majority of other cases, the Hamidian administration, however, responded to the riots by holding civilian and military officials liable for the failure to prevent conflicts or suppress them without assuming a massive character. Some of the dismissed officials were also ordered to be tried for their actions or inactions during the events that occurred in their area of responsibility during this period. Most notably, in Tokad (March 1897), the *mutasarrıf*, the chief commissioner of police, and the commander of the gendarmerie were dismissed and arrested although they were acquitted by an extraordinary tribunal several months later. As mentioned above, the Governor-General of Sivas, too, was dismissed following the riots of Tokad, which marked the last episode of the anti-Armenian massacres of 1895-97.

As a result, the riots of 1895-97 changed the careers of a number of civilian administrators, police officers, and military commanders. Most of the officials who were removed from office for negligence or dereliction of duty did not, however, face severe disciplinary or criminal sanctions. Many dismissed officials were simply appointed to other offices or they remained suspended from active duty for a while. Only in a handful of cases, relatively severe administrative and criminal sanctions were applied against officials, particularly at a time when the authorities in Istanbul very much feared another wave of disturbances in the Armenian-populated provinces.

³⁸² BOA. Y.MTV. 133/101, 15 B. 1313 (31 December 1895). Letter from *Serasker* Rıza [Pasha] to the palace dated 15 B. 1313/31 December 1895.

5.9. The Final Phase: Firmer Actions, Harsher Measures

The government's attitude towards anti-Armenian pogroms nevertheless gradually improved as of late 1895, even though it is hard to say whether the Ottoman authorities regained complete control of the situation in the eastern provinces until late 1896. The Hamidian administration made it plain to the relevant ministries and local government agencies that the repetition of violent episodes might entail serious and dangerous consequences for the Imperial Government. The civil and military officials in the provinces were regularly instructed to cooperate in anticipation of any sort of disorders and "seditious activities" and exercise a high degree of vigilance in order not to allow even minor incidents to occur in their districts.

In several towns, such as Diyarbekir, Erzurum, and Kayseri, the civilian and military authorities successfully suppressed the attempts on the part of Muslims at starting fresh rounds of violence in short order, thus communicating that they would not tolerate any more violence in their districts and provinces. In a few locations, such as Nevşehir (a central Anatolian city in the province of Konya), the local and provincial authorities promptly cooperated to launch legal action against the individuals who were reported to have been seeking to instigate Muslims against Armenians by placing anti-Armenian placards at mosques and by spreading false, provocative rumors.³⁸³ As will be shown in the following chapter, in March 1897, the provincial government authorities in Bitlis had nine Muslims arrested for being involved in anti-Armenian conspiracies and for instigating Muslims against the Armenian inhabitants of the town. Among the arrested were several highly influential figures who previously took part in the provincial administration of Bitlis.

Indeed, on 31 March 1897, British Ambassador Currie remarked that the attitude of the Ottoman government towards anti-Armenian riots recently improved although he

³⁸³ For Nevşehir, see BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 613/20, 17 C. 1313 (5 December 1895). From the Governor-General of Konya to the Grand Vizierate, dated 21 TS 1311/3 December 1895; and from the Minister of Police to the Grand Vizier, dated 23 TS 1311/5 December 1895.

ignored the fact that, as we have seen above, a number of civilian and military officials in several major riot centers had been dismissed from office and put on trial:

T[hough] the political situation in Turkey at this moment presents few hopeful features, it is worth noticing that the attitude of the Government towards the authorities responsible for outrages on Armenians is quite different from what it was in the winter of 1895-96.

At that time not a single official of any importance was dismissed, or otherwise punished on account of the disorders which had taken place in the districts under his charge. In the last few days, however, the Valis of Adana and Sivas have been dismissed. Various officials have been placed under arrest at Tokat. The Kaimakam [Kaim-makam or district-governor] of Arbaa [Erbaa], where disturbances were rumoured to have taken place, was promptly transferred, and a telegram received to-day from Her Majesty's Vice-Consul at Bitlis reports that the Governor-General of that town has arrested nine important Mussulmans suspected of planning a massacre.

[...]

The success which has recently attended my representations and those of the other Ambassadors, is a proof that the Porte at last admit that the disturbances are not due to revolutionary attacks made by Armenians, but to the fanaticism or rapacity of the Mahommedan population, and the negligence or active encouragement of the Ottoman officials.³⁸⁴

Significantly, the manner in which the Ottoman authorities responded to the mass conflict in the town of Tokad, which marked the last episode of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97, was unprecedented in many respects. In addition to the dismissal of the Governor-General of Sivas in the aftermath of the riots in this town, the *mutasarrif*, the chief commissioner of police, and the gendarmerie commander were arrested for taking no precautions to prevent the riots. The government immediately launched an investigation into the conduct of these officials and other functionaries during the events. The local authorities were ordered to bring the authors and perpetrators of the incidents to justice at any hand as well as to take every precaution to prevent the renewal of a similar outbreak of violence.

³⁸⁴ TNA: FO 424/191, No. 264. Currie to the Marquess of Salisbury, Constantinople, March 31, 1897. Also see Turkey No. 1 (1898), No. 164.

Following the events in Tokad, the Sublime Porte also warned the provincial authorities in the Armenian populated provinces that any further disorders would put the imperial government in a very difficult position, ordering them to ensure that no hostility or quarrel between Muslims and Armenians shall take place. It was strongly reminded that the government would proceed against all civilian and military officials who neglected their duties in the maintenance of order and allowed disorders to occur in their districts.

The Sublime Porte also instituted an extraordinary tribunal for the immediate interrogation and trial of those who were implicated in the riots of Tokad. The members of the Extraordinary Tribunal (*Mahkeme-i Fevke'l-âde [fevkalade]*), including two non-Muslim officials from Istanbul, would also make in-situ investigations into the origin and development of the incident. The law enforcement agencies arrested a large number of Muslims who were accused of directly or indirectly taking part in the riots. At the end of the trials, nineteen Muslims were condemned to death and forty-eight Muslims were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment without appeal. Yet the capital sentences were later commuted by the Sultan to life imprisonment. Most of the convicts were exiled to Trablusgarb (modern day Tripoli, Libya) to remain under sentence of imprisonment and almost half of them were pardoned by the Sultan in 1899.

Over this period, the central and local government agencies acted with comparatively unusual promptitude and rigor. Fearing the commencement of a new wave of violence that might give rise to foreign intervention, the palace and the Sublime Porte demanded the members of the Extraordinary Tribunal and the local authorities in Tokad deal with the case promptly and carefully. Significant is to note that, as seen in a telegram from the Grand Vizier to the president of the Extraordinary Tribunal in Tokad, the policy-makers in Istanbul suggested that a quick trial and punishment of the perpetrators of the incident was “required before Europe” (*Avrupa'ya karşı muktezi*) and would be a warning and deterrent to others (i.e., would-be rioters/offenders).³⁸⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials regularly informed the embassies of the criminal proceedings as well as the measures taken for the restoration of order in Tokad. Indeed, perhaps the primary

³⁸⁵ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 662/14, 12 Za. 1314 (14 April 1897). From the Grand Vizierate to the President of the Extraordinary Tribunal in Tokad, dated 2 Nisan 1313/14 April 1897.

motivation of the policy-makers at the capital in responding to the riots of Tokad in such a way was to avoid the risk of a foreign intervention on behalf of Armenians, especially at a time when the Ottoman government had to deal with the crisis in Crete and Thessaly on the eve of the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897. Therefore, the governing circles in Istanbul unambiguously acknowledged the gravity of the situation and made it clear that the reoccurrence of riots was certainly unacceptable.

Ironically, even after the riots in Tokad, Ambassador Currie wrote “It is generally believed here [in foreign embassy circles at the Ottoman capital] that slaughter and pillage [in Tokad], lasting eight hours, would not have been possible without the sanction of the Palace, and the prompt receipt of the above telegram shows that the line was open, and that there was nothing to prevent communications passing.”³⁸⁶ Such views by foreign observers tended to oversimplify a complex situation, assuming that the Sultan could have stopped the excesses upon receiving the news of the riots in Tokad via telegraph. Obviously, it was not a well-reasoned argument reflecting official opinions on the part of the six embassies in Istanbul. Indeed, as we have seen above, at least the British ambassador later made positive remarks concerning the attitude of the government towards the recent events. However, when used in an uncritical and eclectic way, such accounts can be misleading amid a hitherto lack of comprehensive research on the anti-Armenian massacres of the mid-1890s.

That the authorities intervened in the Tokad riots energetically and took the necessary steps to punish a considerable number of Muslims does not automatically absolve the central government of responsibility for the killings and vandalism that unfolded in this town. It is hard to say whether that the Ottoman central government did everything that was necessary and possible before, during, and after the events in Tokad. Despite the relative improvement in the government’s attitude in late 1896 and early 1897, the central and local government authorities still failed to ensure that Armenians were not subject to violence and abuse anymore. Nevertheless, the conduct and policies of the central government during this period displayed the Hamidian regime’s overall opposition

³⁸⁶ TNA: FO 424/191, No. 214. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, March 22, 1897. Also see Turkey No. 1 (1898), No. 117.

to a new wave of disturbances. Particularly, in the aftermath of the Tokad incident, the authorities in Istanbul implied that such offences would no longer remain unpunished, whatever their motivations for putting a definite end to intercommunal violence. Perhaps, it is not coincidence that the series of anti-Armenian massacres ended in Tokad. The persistence of riots into late 1896 and early 1897 despite the comparatively stringent measures taken by the Hamidian administration—or in the teeth of its overall opposition to a new pogrom crisis—also further undermines the widely-held conclusion that the anti-Armenian massacres would not have taken place in any case without official organization, complicity, instigation, or sanction at the level of central authority.

Chapter 6. Ottoman State Actors and the Making of anti-Armenian Violence

6.1. Introduction: Permissive Context for Violence

If the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 did not grow out of a central policy devised by Ottoman state actors in a conscious attempt to specifically annihilate the Ottoman Armenian population, what roles did government policies and state actors play in the outbreak and escalation of these extreme instances of collective violence? Did the Hamidian regime actively encourage, support, sanction, or welcome the outbreaks of anti-Armenian violence even if its agents did not order or consciously instigate them? In what ways were the central and local government authorities implicated in the violence? Why were the government agencies, including the police and the military, unable, ineffective, or unwilling to forestall, suppress, or control intercommunal conflict and mass violence directed against a designated group of people? This chapter addresses the question of governmental responsibility in the making of anti-Armenian violence at the turn of the century. It identifies an array of factors, conditions, and mechanisms that enabled, facilitated, and tolerated the collective mass violence against Ottoman Armenians in the mid-1890s.

To describe the sociopolitical environment in which anti-Armenian riots occurred is not only meant to address the immediate historical context and underlying causes of these events, but it is also to identify the motivators and facilitators of anti-Armenian violence. In defining elements of the social environment for collective violence, Horowitz categorizes most of the background conditions that promote and facilitate deadly ethnic riots under three rubrics: *uncertainty*, *impunity*, and *justification* (the emphases are Horowitz's). "The vast majority of riots" he suggests, "occur when aggressors conclude that ethnic politics is dangerously in flux, that they are likely to be able to use violence without adverse consequences to themselves, and that they are thoroughly warranted in their action."³⁸⁷ Drawing on Horowitz's insight, we can suggest that ethnic riots are more

³⁸⁷ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 326.

likely when potential attackers sense that violence is necessary and even urgent (*exigency and appropriateness of violence*), that it can be inflicted with impunity (*zero or low probability of punishment*), and that it is considered justifiable and approbated by the wider society (*lack of social and moral inhibitions*).³⁸⁸ These socio-political circumstances ultimately serve to remove political, legal, and moral constraints that may restrict or prevent potential attackers from taking action, thereby providing a context propitious for, and supportive of, violence.

These background conditions and various facilitative mechanisms were abundantly present in the mid-1890s. Chapter 2 and part of Chapter 3 have demonstrated the existence of an unsettling environment that provided a fertile ground for intergroup hostility, an increased sense of insecurity, and for violent prospects. A chain of particular events crystallized out of this atmosphere and reams of anxiety-laden rumors ultimately persuaded the would-be rioters that violence was inevitable and acceptable. This chapter emphasizes the significant role that the policies, attitude, and behavior of the central and local government authorities—both prior to and during the early stages of the events—in providing the immediate conditions that underpinned, facilitated, and supported violence. I argue that the anti-Armenian outlook and measures of the Ottoman government created a permissive environment in which the local Muslim populations felt or assumed that violence against Armenians was encouraged, authorized, or permitted by the authorities. Indeed, as has been the case with many episodes of large-scale ethno-religious violence across the globe, *whether state-sponsored or not*, the Muslim crowds who participated in the events acted with the belief that the government itself desired and approved their extremely violent behavior. And whether such ideas are accurate or not is not of key importance for the result.

Moreover, when the first anti-Armenian riots broke out, the inaction, passivity, and ineffectiveness of the authorities lent credibility and legitimacy to the idea that violence was officially condoned or even authorized. This behavior on the part of the authorities

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 331. The words in brackets and the emphases are mine but I am inspired by Horowitz's treatment of the subject. For a deeper, inspiring analysis of the sociopolitical conditions that support and facilitate ethnic riots, see *ibid.*, 331-370.

also signaled to the wider segments of society that violence against Armenians was fair game. Evidence suggests that, even in cases where the local officials were genuinely eager to prevent violence, the would-be rioters and their ringleaders thought that their action would be viewed with favor, sympathy, or at least indifference by the authorities. Indeed, it was viewed so in many cases. At this point, it is also important to note that these events took place at a time when the instigators and perpetrators of the violence sensed that Armenians were a particularly weak, poorly defended, and justifiable target.

To better explain this kind of governmental role in enabling and facilitating violence (not necessarily consciously), I appeal to Horowitz's concept of "authoritative social support," which he considers as "perhaps the most significant facilitator of [ethnic] rioting." By *authoritative*, he refers to "conduct emanating from political authorities or social superiors." *Social support* suggests that the conduct of government authorities and/or community leaders "is construed by the participants in violence as lending tacit or active approval to their violent behavior." Authoritative conduct includes "words as well as deeds, omissions as well as commission" and, significantly, it need "only be interpreted as lending approval; it need not to be so intended."³⁸⁹ Therefore, this kind of governmental/social encouragement, support, or assistance should not be considered to be intended, conscious, and deliberate in each and every case. In other words, it is not a matter of intention or will. What is important is to know that, when received or perceived, it stimulates, inspires, facilitates, and accelerates violent conflict; it has a disinhibiting, encouraging effect; and it may also affect the mood and behavior of local authorities and law enforcement agencies toward a violent episode and its participants.

Likewise, the laxity, passivity, indetermination, and ineffectiveness of government agents and instruments should not be taken as indicative of the violence being actively planned, encouraged, or condoned by the authorities—at either central or local levels. In other words, inaction or ineptness alone does not automatically mean that officials have conspired or colluded with the organizers and instigators of the violence in a deliberate fashion. Historical and contemporary experiences show that during ethnic clashes or large-

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 343-44. The emphases are Horowitz's.

scale killings, central or local authorities may often abdicate their responsibilities, tolerate the mob action, show sympathy towards the rioters, refuse to protect the attacked group, or may become involved—directly or indirectly—in the violence in various ways even if the events have not been orchestrated or instigated by the government. For instance, as the research done since the 1990s has shown, although the anti-Jewish pogroms of 1881-2 and 1903-06 in Tsarist Russia, which claimed so many lives, were not organized, instigated, or sanctioned by Russian officials, the local authorities and Tsarist forces of law and order were found negligent, sluggish, inept, indecisive, or tolerant in many cases, where the mob violence directed against Jews went uncontrolled for a considerable period of time. Indeed, the conduct of the Russian authorities reinforced the widespread popular conviction that the Tsar himself issued an anti-Jewish ukase allowing pogrom activity for a certain period of time—usually three days. The local officials and Tsarist forces of law and order were particularly unwilling and unable to protect Jews against the most serious excesses for various reasons identical or very similar to other examples of ethno-religious violence throughout the world. Likewise, the judicial authorities mostly took a lenient attitude towards the perpetrators of pogroms in the aftermath of the events.³⁹⁰ Similar patterns were widely observed in numerous cases of large-scale communal riots in India and during episodes of racial violence in U.S. history. We should therefore certainly acknowledge that the thorny issue of official roles and responsibility in collective mass violence goes beyond the simple question of whether the action has been organized, inspired, or sanctioned by the state or its local agents.

Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate in the case of anti-Armenian riots, the effects of official negligence, inactivity, leniency, and toleration on the scale, intensity, and spread of violence are obviously great. The Ottoman authorities were particularly negligent, indulgent, ineffective, or inept at almost every stage of their handling of the riots, failing to take necessary steps to anticipate, prevent, and suppress violent conflict in most cases. Significantly, they did not take prompt, firm, and energetic actions until after the wave of riots was already under way, hitting several major centers and district towns in the eastern

³⁹⁰ See, for instance, Aronson, *Troubled Waters*; Klier and Lambroza, eds., *Pogroms*, especially chapters 3, 7, 8, and 9; Judge, *Easter in Kishinev*; Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882*; Dekel-Chen et al., eds., *Anti-Jewish Violence*.

provinces. Nor did the government agencies adopt effective measures, until a certain stage, to curtail the inflammatory rumors, speeches, and agitation that prevailed in the region over the autumn and winter of 1895. Also, the government failed to counter, in a timely and effective manner, the impression that anti-Armenian violence was permitted or even encouraged by the authorities. Specifically, the central government was quite lackadaisical to take timely counteraction against the detrimental effects of the widespread rumors—or rather the widely-held opinion—that the Sultan himself had issued a decree calling for or authorizing popular violence against Armenians. It was only after the wave of riots already swept tens of major towns that the authorities made some serious efforts to this effect.

The responsibility of state actors was not, however, confined to providing authoritative support for violence or to official negligence and ineptness facilitating the spread of riots. In certain cases, senior provincial administrators and military commanders openly instigated, encouraged, promoted, or condoned collective violence against Armenians by deed as well as by word. Furthermore, for the reasons explained throughout the present study, the Hamidian administration also systematically avoided resorting to deadly force and severe measures against the Muslim mobs during and in the aftermath of the violent events. Lack of proper prosecution and punishment, as a deterrent, further encouraged anti-Armenian activity and perhaps made the perpetrators think that they did not anything wrong and that the Armenians deserved the violence. Instead of accepting that the riots were outrageous, the government also belittled the problem and invented excuses for the violence, blaming Armenians for causing disturbances and chaos. Consequently, this chapter will suggest that for all these reasons and more, the ultimate political and moral responsibility for the anti-Armenian violence must lie exclusively with the Hamidian administration and its central and local representatives even though they did not orchestrate or initiate the events in question.

6.2. Laxity, Negligence, Ineffectiveness, and Tolerance

Historical and contemporary cases of ethnic and racial violence clearly indicate that the attitude of government forces during a certain episode of intergroup conflict is one of the most important proximal variables that directly determine or influence the extent,

nature, course, intensity, and spread of the violence. The conduct, decisions, actions, capability, and performance of government agencies and branches of law enforcement are particularly important when a collective violent action (or a chain of violent events, an epidemic of violence) begins to unfold. The conduct of the authorities with respect to the initial violence clearly affects the course of events in a particular case and may increase or decrease the likelihood of violence in another place if conflict tends to be epidemic. As Horowitz points out, when government authorities manifest their intolerance for violence during intergroup confrontations, “even in the face of strong popular sentiment and provocative precipitants,” violence is still a possibility, but it is unlikely that it takes the form of riot.³⁹¹ Throughout the wave of the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97, the civilian and military officials acted with varying degrees of diligence, carefulness, and willingness. Yet overall, the energy, determination, and performance of the Ottoman authorities—at both central and local levels—was highly questionable.

First of all, considering the fact that in most instances, a big number of Armenians were killed in a short time, one cannot help but ask whether the civilian and military authorities (security forces and/or public authorities), including police and gendarmerie officers, neglected their duties and/or showed tolerance for violence. In fact, a careful examination of numerous cases reveals that the unrestrained and excessive nature of violence in most places (but not certainly everywhere) was enabled by the failure of government officials to take effective, energetic, and timely measures. Especially foreign diplomatic sources and eyewitness accounts suggests that it was not until or after the killing and looting were already in full swing that the civilian and military authorities made serious efforts to stop the rioters in many places, especially during the events that occurred in October and November 1895. Evidence also indicates that particularly low-ranking policemen, gendarmes, and soldiers either failed to interfere with the incidents, or simply stood by and watched Muslims murder unarmed Armenians and loot their stores and houses.

³⁹¹ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 362.

The inactivity or ineffectiveness of the local authorities, however, should not be taken *in every instance* simply as a reflection of official collusion, anti-Armenian bias, or of blatant unwillingness to protect Armenian civilians against Muslim attackers. In other words, during such events, lack of diligence, energy, swiftness, vigor, and rigor on the part of authorities may have other causes than deliberate misuse of power, active neglect, or prejudices against the target group or one of the parties. At the very beginning of the wave of riots, the local authorities might have been unprepared for sudden outbreaks of violence although the violent events were not completely unpredictable after the disorders in Istanbul (late September 1895) and Trabzon (early October 1895). We should acknowledge that the local civilian and military functionaries encountered a series of difficulties, challenges, and dilemmas in containing a rapidly unfolding movement that emerged out of unprecedented and volatile circumstances in the autumn of 1895.

Also, even responsible officials or those who did not hold subtle or blatant anti-Armenian prejudices grappled with a clear dilemma: Suppressing the riots without resorting to violence, coercion, and harsh measures against Muslims or restoring order without creating a sense that Armenians were under the special protection of Muslim officials. Indeed, it is highly possible that even if some officials and military commanders wanted to maintain order and tranquility in their districts, they were nevertheless reluctant to use force against their Muslim coreligionists in defense of the Armenians perceived as a monolithic “fifth column.” Furthermore, the governors and military commanders had no clear guidelines and directives on how to handle the disorders without making use of deadly force against Muslims. As will be mentioned below, the situation was so confusing that a governor-general directed a question to his superiors in Istanbul as to what extent violence and force should be used against Muslims in the event of a riot.

Also, as already implied, the police and military forces at the disposal of the governors-general and district governors were mostly insufficient for maintaining order and dealing with the magnitude of such disturbances effectively. Even in provincial centers in Anatolia, as in other parts of the empire, the provincial governments did not have enough forces to quell massive rioting or any acts of public disturbance. Especially when the first outbreaks of violence occurred, the security forces at hand were clearly outnumbered by

the Muslim mobs and outside attackers. Indeed, virtually every high-ranking provincial administrator and military commander, including those responsible officials, who diligently suppressed incipient violence, successfully defended their districts against big groups of outside attackers, or kept their areas of responsibility safe despite imminent threats and growing tensions, complained about the insufficiency of the forces under their command. To this picture, we should add the incompetence of the Ottoman law enforcement agencies and the sheer ignorance on the part of soldiers, especially the widely-employed reserve troops, and gendarmes as to what to do when faced with such widespread incidents. Under normal circumstances, police forces are expected to have greater ability to suppress disturbances; yet the Ottoman police and gendarmerie were not only outnumbered, but also had no training in riot control and crowd dispersion.

The impact of these limitations, restrictions, and challenges on the behavior of the Ottoman officials, however, should not be exaggerated. The eruption and escalation of violent conflict of this nature and scale was *ipso facto* evidence of the failure of the central and local government authorities in their obligation to preserve order and peace. There is also a point that should be carefully framed: As a modern state, the Ottoman Empire employed a plethora of repressive laws, regulations, and practices to combat internal dissent through its local military and police agencies. This is not to say that the government was so powerful and omnipotent. Indeed, it is not easy—especially for a government whose manpower, financial resources, and infrastructural power were very weak—to control big, riotous crowds running amok. Nevertheless, imagine that it was exclusively the Muslims who were subjected to such intense, widespread attacks. Or the authorities had to cope with extensive uprisings directed against the government itself. Would the attitude, energy and determination of the central and local government agencies be the same? As a matter of fact, the response of the authorities to an outbreak of public violence was not independent of the nature of the violence itself. Obviously, the Ottoman government, like any other government, was not a neutral referee of conflict between Muslim and Armenian communities. I argue that these episodes of violence occurred or quickly escalated to massive proportions because officials at different levels of the central and provincial governments ultimately did not view the protection of Ottoman Armenians as a priority, which suggests that for them, Armenians were indeed Ottoman subjects of a lesser kind.

Furthermore, even at a time when the government mobilized much more resources—remember, for instance, the employment of a large number of reserve troops as of early November 1895—the civil authorities and armed forces proved ineffective, sluggish, negligent, or lenient in responding to the riots in many cases, if not everywhere. In fact, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the authorities admitted that the *redif* troops and a small number of gendarmes did nothing to stop the attackers in the town of Urfa (Aleppo, December 1895), which remained in the hands of an unstrained mob, predominantly composed of Kurdish tribesmen and local Muslims, who committed the most excessive crimes against an untold number of civilians for over a day. As we already know, the central government authorities held the *Mutasarrıf* of Urfa and the military commander responsible for the failure to thwart the excesses.

In Gürün (Sivas, November 1895), a Major of the reserve troops, named Murad Reşad Efendi, was ordered, directly by the palace, to be immediately placed under arrest as the provincial authorities in Sivas reported that the commander had neglected his duty in preventing and countering the attacks of the Akçadağ Kurds on this town despite the stringent instructions to the effect that any such attempts must be inhibited with armed forces. It was also reported that the negligent conduct of the commander had not only paved the way to a disturbance of public order but also encouraged the Circassians, the Karapapaks, and a group of “silly” people (*sebük-mağzân*, literally meaning the light-brained, the weak-minded, imbeciles) to further vandalize the region since they saw or heard the Kurds who had ravaged the districts of Gürün and Darende went unpunished. As a result, upon the report of the Sivas authorities, the Yıldız Palace concluded that the manner in which the Major handled the situation deserved punishment, and therefore ordered the *Serasker* to take necessary steps. The Palace Secretariat also directly wired a telegram to the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps conveying the Sultan’s order that the Major be brought to justice and that military commanders and officers [everywhere] be

further instructed to act carefully in performing their duty of protecting the lives and property of people in compliance with the state laws.³⁹²

Four months later, Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha, however, informed his superiors in Istanbul that the Commander of Sivas had maintained that Major Reşad Efendi was “innocent” and the allegations against him—that is, negligence of duty and failure to execute orders—were not true. From these statements, Zeki Pasha had apparently readily come to the conclusion that it was simply one of the false charges made by “some [civilian] government officials” against the commanders and officers who, he claimed, obviously made extraordinary efforts to suppress the disturbances and maintain order and security.³⁹³ We do not know whether the Major ever remained under arrest during this period of four months; but, considering the fact that the Fourth Army authorities waited for a long time before bringing their response to the attention of Istanbul, as well as that Zeki Pasha also requested instructions from his superiors regarding the action to be taken in this matter, it can be supposed that the Major was never brought before a court in this period. Available sources do not provide detailed information about the conduct of the commander during the events in the above-mentioned places but it is safe to claim that Zeki Pasha tended to defend the military commanders who were accused of negligence, recklessness, misconduct, or even criminal malfeasance throughout these events.

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, in several places, most notably in the important towns of Diyarbekir, Erzurum, and Kayseri, which witnessed massive outbreaks of violence in the fall of 1895, the authorities successfully suppressed new attempted attacks on Armenians and dispersed the Muslim rioters in short order. In other words, the vigilant, energetic, and effective measures taken by the civilian officials and military commanders in these places ensured that another round of rioting and violence did not occur. The fact that fresh attempts at creating disorders were immediately thwarted suggests that violence could be surpassed in a timely fashion if the authorities did their

³⁹² BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/24, 2 C. 1313 (19 November 1895). Letter from the First Secretary to the *Serasker* dated 2 C. 1313/19 November 1895, and telegram from the First Secretary to the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps dated 2 C. 1313/7 TS 1311/19 November 1895.

³⁹³ BOA. Y.MTV. 138/94, 13 L. 1313 (28 March 1896). Letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 13 L. 1313/16 Mart 1312/28 March 1896.

duties as required although the behavior of government officials and law enforcement agencies during times of intercommunal conflict is not the only variable that determines violence or non-violence. It is undeniable that the success and effectiveness displayed in these cases also had very much to do with the fact that the local authorities were more prepared, more organized, and more anxious about the possibility of bloodshed than they had previously been in the fall of 1895. Nevertheless, there is reason to maintain that if they had not been lenient, negligent, ineffective, or tolerant—let alone being instigators, promoters, or supporters of violence—in the previous cases, disorders might have taken place again, but it would have been less likely for them to transform rapidly into massive riots that claimed so many lives.

Furthermore, police officers, gendarmes, and soldiers did not only fail to intervene in the conflict in a timely and energetic way, but they also took the side of the rioting mob, abetting the attackers and participating in killing and/or looting in certain places, notably in Diyarbakir, Sivas, Urfa, and Istanbul (1896). Foreign consular reports and eyewitness accounts claim that in many cases, the uniformed security forces directed the Muslim mobs and joined civilians in butchery, theft, and plunder. There is indeed evidence that they behaved in a partisan fashion and especially—but not only—reserve soldiers took part in looting, and, in a smaller number of cases, in killing. However, military/police participation was never systematic, and it never characterized the anti-Armenian riots. In other words, the participation of the military and the police in killing was not an integral part of the events. The attitude of the forces of law and order, like that of civilian officials, changed from a place to another. In some places, the military commanders and the regular and reserve troops under their command were vigilant in their efforts to restrain Muslim rioters and armed revolutionaries and/or self-defending Armenians, vigorously seeking to suppress the disturbances and restoring order in a short time. They also successfully protected Armenian districts, neighborhoods, towns, and villages in many regions, especially as of early November 1895, when the government began to mobilize a great number of army troops and employed reserve battalions in and around almost every Armenian-populated town across the eastern provinces.

The Ottoman authorities removed and tried a number of military commanders and gendarmerie/police officers for negligence, dereliction of duty, or participation in the events. Yet, in many instances, they defended the behavior of the military and the police referring to the intensity of the shooting, bombing and attacks both by Muslims and Armenian revolutionaries, which, they argued, hampered the efforts of the security forces to contain the turmoil. They also mostly accused self-defending Armenians of shooting not only at the Muslims, but also at police, gendarmes, and soldiers. According to the bureaucrats, the state's security forces had to contend first with Armenians revolutionaries before turning their attention to Muslims as it was hard to stop them because the policemen and soldiers were diverted by revolutionaries who were shooting at them. Generally speaking, the central and local government officials and the high-ranking military authorities tried to shift the blame for the failure and improper actions of the police and military to the Armenian revolutionaries and the victims of the violence in most cases.

Even the most zealous “ethnic killers” should feel uninhibited in committing those excesses. Not so often though, ethnic riots may occur in the face of strong opposition from political authorities, which can sometimes be unexpected and frustrating for the participants. Yet, potential rioters do not usually dare to launch large-scale attacks on their target when they believe their action will be met with a harsh, repressive response and retribution by the enforcers of law and order. They therefore make calculations, trying to sense the mood of the authorities and superior segments of the wider society before taking action. “Many actions and events that precede the riot” writes Horowitz, “feed into the calculations of the rioters about the prudence and permissibility of the course on which they are about to embark.”³⁹⁴ Perhaps more importantly, largescale, widespread, persistent violent events (like the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97)—as opposed to smaller-scale lethal attacks and street fights—that require the participation of crowds and involve various forms of collective action can hardly occur without, among other conditions and mechanisms, a permissive context and a sense of impunity and legitimacy for violence.

³⁹⁴ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 367.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, during the fall of 1895, the news of ineffective, indulgent, or tolerant attitudes on the part of the local authorities towards suppressing the incident in one place quickly traveled to another via various channels and it then encouraged the potential rioters in close-by regions to think that the risk of retribution for “Armenian blood” and property was almost zero. Such news also gave credibility to the persistent rumors of an anti-Armenian decree issued by the Sultan prior to the events. Once a riot broke out, the inactivity or ineffectiveness of the civil and military authorities also encouraged participation in anti-Armenian activity in a particular case by reinforcing the conviction held by the Muslim masses that violence was approved by high quarters. In many cases, the leniency of officials, commanders, and soldiers towards the riots morphed into tacit or *de facto* support for violence, emboldening the perpetrators to commit such crimes with a sense of impunity.

In response to the inquiries made by the central government authorities regarding their conduct during the riots, most governors and military commanders claimed that they were neither indifferent nor negligent towards the disorders but they had no control over the situation for various reasons such as the abruptness, enormity, and intensity of the incidents and the insufficiency of the security forces at their disposal. In some cases, governors-general and district-governors complained of delays in deployment and movement of contingents of troops, the removal of armed forces from a region without their permission, and of the widespread dispersal of military units over large areas. Also, as an excuse, the rhetoric of Muslim crowds suddenly going out of control because of provocative actions on the part of Armenians was very common among official circles. Various investigatory bodies that the Ottoman government sent to the affected regions to make inquiries into the events never conducted specific, comprehensive investigations focusing on the conduct of the local authorities during the violent events or on the role and responsibilities of specific individuals, societal groups, or officials.

The number of the civilian and military officials removed from office for reasons associated with their conduct during the events that broke out in the districts under their jurisdiction is much bigger than those who imagine the events of 1895-97 as state-sponsored massacres are ready to believe. Dismissed officials include two governors-

general, several *mutasarrıfs*, a few district-governors, a number of military commanders, and several tens of medium- and low-ranking civilian functionaries and police and army officers. As already indicated in the previous chapter, especially after the Sultan's decree of November 17, the government began to hold governors or military commanders categorically responsible for the disorders that took place in their areas of authority and dismissed a higher number of officials than previously. Dismissals were regularly applied in the majority of the cases of outbreak of violence that occurred after mid-November 1895. There were, however, remarkable exceptions such as the massive riots of August 1896 that broke out in the empire's capital following the armed occupation of the Ottoman Bank by a group of Armenian revolutionaries, in the aftermath of which no high-ranking officials were dismissed from office or prosecuted despite serious allegations and evidence of official negligence, inaction, tolerance, and participation. In many respects, the attitude of the central government authorities towards the mass killings of 1896 in Istanbul very much resembled the manner in which they responded to the first riots that took place in September and October 1895, even though afterwards several police and gendarmerie chiefs and officers were prosecuted and arrested for serious misconduct and various criminal offences in connection with the incidents.³⁹⁵

Some of the removed civilian and military officials were tried in regular, martial, or extraordinary courts. A number of them were put in prison for a relatively short period of time or were subjected to different forms of confinement and exile. It is therefore misleading to think that Ottoman officials had absolute immunity from liability for their action or inaction during the events even though diplomatic pressures and fear of foreign intervention played a certain role in the introduction of harsher measures against civilian and military functionaries. Yet, on the other hand, it is hard to say that the officials who neglected their duties in preventing or suppressing the attacks or who were complicit in the violence paid the real price. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the dismissed governors, lower-ranking officials, and military commanders were either banned

³⁹⁵ For a document showing the names, ranks, and alleged crimes of the police and gendarme personnel who were prosecuted and arrested in the aftermath of the events of August 1896 in Istanbul, see BOA. Y.PRK.KOM. 9/31, 1314 (no exact date provided). The criminal offences these officials were alleged to have committed during the incidents included theft, participation in looting, and unjustified shooting.

from government service for a while (some for a long period of time) or were simply transferred to other posts. They were never met with serious disciplinary or legal action imposed by the Sublime Porte. Also, the Hamidian administration proved very reluctant to prosecute and punish most of the officials who were clearly complicit in or responsible for the outbreak and escalation of riots in their areas of authority.

6.3. Officials as Masterminds, Instigators, and Promoters of anti-Armenian Violence: The Cases of Amasya and Bitlis

In several cases, the malfeasance of local authorities and their involvement in or support for violence were more pronounced and more direct than others. Archival evidence clearly indicates that in some localities, senior provincial administrators, local military commanders, and government officials took direct part in the massacres by openly inciting local Muslim inhabitants against Armenians, disseminating anti-Armenian conspiracies among the public, or by refusing to use the troops to stop the rioters and attackers. Some of these individuals who masterminded, encouraged, or consciously allowed collective violence were at the same time heads or members of the local notable families and played part in the provincial administration previously. Others were provincial officials or military and gendarmerie commanders on active service.

I would like to begin with a brief but telling example from the case of Amasya (Sivas). On 21 November 1895, the Governor-General of Sivas sent a cipher wire to his superiors in Istanbul, reporting significant messages contained in the two detailed telegrams he received from the *Mutasarrif* of Amasya, Bekir Pasha. According to the telegrams from the *mutasarrif*, prior to the events in this town, the Area Commander (*mevki kumandanı*) of Amasya, Lieutenant-Colonel (*kaim-makam* or *kaymakam*) Edhem Bey, had provoked the local Muslim inhabitants against Armenians by fabricating the rumor that the Sultan had issued a decree to the effect that the Armenians were to be asked to submit their weapons to the authorities and if they refused to obey, they would be destroyed (*tenkil*

*edilmeleri*³⁹⁶) by the troops—other archival records indicate that the commander also claimed that this decree had been concealed [from the people]. Lieutenant-Colonel Edhem Bey had also spread the rumor “Mutasarrıf Bekir Pasha is pro-Armenian” (*Mutasarrıf Bekir Paşa Ermeni taraftarıdır*). Moreover, a Captain (*yüzbaşı*) of the *redif* troops stationed in the region, named Abdurrahman Ağa, who was reported to have been “of the same mind as the Lieutenant-Colonel,” had “uttered seditious words” like “*Mutasarrıf Pasha will have Muslims’ weapons taken away and hand them over to Armenians,*” with reference to the directives given by the provincial government to the effect that weapons of any “marauder” groups coming from villages for plunder be seized by the local authorities as part of preventive measures. Due to these rumors and agitations, the report continued, the excitement among the local population had grown, and eventually an affray had taken place in the town.³⁹⁷

What is more, as a result of the “misbehavior and agitation” of the commander and his officers, the civil authorities had never been able to make use of the *redif* troops at hand, numbered at over 900, during the events that occurred in the town. Rather, they had even participated in looting and confronted the local police and gendarmerie, apparently seeking to stop the killing and looting. When the civil authorities asked them [the commander and his officers] to restrain the troops from plundering, the only reply they received was “There is no order [from the government] to avert/repel the Muslims” (*İslamları def’e emir yokdur*). Consequently, the *mutasarrıf* suggested that the commander be removed from Amasya in order to avoid a greater harm [in the future].³⁹⁸ Available sources do not provide

³⁹⁶ In Ottoman Turkish, *tenkil etmek* originally meant “to banish” or “to punish” someone, a group of people, a party, a band, or a gathering; but, as can be seen in numerous government documents, in official and press terminology, it also meant “to destroy,” “to destruct,” or “to quell.”

³⁹⁷ BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/57, 22 C. 1313 (10 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas dated 9 TS 1311/21 November 1895. For another copy of this telegram addressed to the Interior Ministry, see BOA. DH.ŞFR. 184/55, 9 TS 1311 (21 November 1895).

³⁹⁸ Ibid. To quote the entire source in Ottoman Turkish: “*Ermenilere terk-i silah etmeleri teklif olunub kabul etmedikleri halde üzerlerine asker sevkiyle tenkil edilmeleri hakkında şeref-sudür buyurulan irade-i seniyye-i hazret-i padişahinin tebliğ olduğuna dair Amasya Mevki Kumandanı Edhem Bey’in ahali-i İslamiyeye karşı bazı şayiada ve Mutasarrıf Bekir Paşa Ermeni taraftarıdır deyu neşriyatda bulunarak ahali-i İslamiyeyi galeyana getirdiğinden ve kaim-makam-ı muma-ileyhin hem-efkârı bulunan Redif Yüzbaşısı Abdurrahman Ağa da karyelerden gasb u garet için gelen yağma-gerlerin silahlarının alınması hakkında hükümet-i mahalliye vuku bulan tebligata karşı Mutasarrıf Paşa İslamların silahlarını aldırub Ermenilere kaydıracak gibi bir takım tefevühatda bulunmuş olmasından naşi heyecan tezayüd ederek arbede-i malumenin zuhur etdiğinden ve dokuz yüzü müteceviz efrad-ı redifden esna-yı arbedede asla istifade*

information as to whether the commander and the captain were immediately removed from their posts for their reported part in the events; but in March 1896, the highest military authorities in Istanbul resolved that Lieutenant-Colonel Edhem Bey and the other officers involved, including Captain Abdurrahman Ağa, be tried for these charges by a court martial assembled in Tokad under the presidency of Lieutenant-General Mustafa Pasha.³⁹⁹

In what follows, I will first present a detailed account of the violent events that broke out in the town of Bitlis in late October 1895 as they are reflected in official reports and foreign consular accounts. Then I will examine official allegations and administrative/legal measures taken against a number of high-profile individuals, including prominent local officials and former or active members of the Council of Provincial Administration, who were accused of complicating the local government's efforts to restore order and tranquility in Bitlis in the aftermath of the riots, and of causing excitement among various segments of the local population. Later in late 1896 and early 1897, the Bitlis authorities would also reveal that these senior officials and local Muslim notables, already suspected for their part in the October riots, were actively spreading dangerous

olunamayub bi'l-akis yağma-gerlik etmeği ele alarak polis ve jandarmaya müdafaada bulunmaları kumandan-ı muma-ileyh ile zabıterinin su'-i hareket ve telkinatından neşet ettiğiinden ve askeri yağmadan gerü aldırılmaları hakkında vuku bulan tebligata 'İslamları def'e emir yokdur' demekten başka cevap alınmadığından bahisle daha büyük fenalığa mahall kalmamak üzere muma-ileyh kaim-makam Edhem Bey'in oradan kaldırılması mutasarrıf-ı muma-ileyhden varid olan iki kut'a mufassal telgraf-namede bildirilmiş ve keyfiyet Dördüncü Ordu-yı Hümayun Müşiriyeti'ne yazılmış olduğu maruzdur[.] Ferman." For this important case, also see BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 660/42, 1 B. 1313 (18 December 1895). Various communications among various offices. Official documents in this file, too, openly state that the commander and the captain incited and instigated the local Muslim population against the Armenians.

³⁹⁹ BOA. Y.MTV. 138/107, 15 L. 1313 (30 March 1896). The *mazbata*, or resolution, drawn up by the Department of Judicial Affairs (*Muhakemat Dairesi*) of the Seraskeriat, or the office of the *Serasker*, dated 9 L 1313/12 Mart 1312/24 March 1896; and letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 15 L 1313/18 Mart 1312/30 March 1896. To quote the entire source in Ottoman Turkish: "*Amasya Mevki Kumandanı Kaim-makam Edhem Bey'in Ermenilere terk-i silah etmeleri teklif olunub kabul etmedikleri halde üzerlerine asker sevk olunarak tenkil edilmeleri hakkında şeref-sudür buyurulan irade-i seniyye-i hazret-i hilafe-penahinin ketm olunduğuna dair ahali-i İslamiyeye karşı bazı şayiatta ve Mutasarrıf Bekir Paşa Ermeni tarafdarıdır deyu neşriyatda bulunarak ahali-i merkumeyi galeyana getirdiği ve mir-i muma-ileyhin hem-efkârı bulunan redif yüzbaşısı Abdurrahman Ağa'nın dahi karyelerinden gasb u garet için gelen yağma-gerlerin silahları alınması hakkında hükümet-i mahalliye'nin vuku bulan tebligatına karşı Mutasarrıf Paşa İslamların silahlarını aldırub Ermenilere kaydıracak gibi bir takım tefevühatta bulunduğu işaret-ı vakia-i mahalliyeden olmasıyla muma-ileyh Edhem Bey'le sair icab eden zabitanın Tokad'da Ferik Mustafa Paşa'nın riyasetindeki Divan-ı Harb'de icra-yı muhakemeleri istizanına dair Muhakemat Dairesinden tanzim olunan mazbata leffen arz ve takdim kılınmış olmağla ol-babda emr u irade-i seniyye-i hazret-i hilafet-penahi ne merkezde şeref-efzâ-yı sünuh ve sudür buyurulur ise mantuk-ı celili infaz olunacağı beyanıyla istizana ibtidar kılındı[.]"*

rumors and anti-Armenian conspiracies, thereby seeking to incite people and inculcate fear among the local Armenian population.

Following the outbreak of a riot in the town of Bitlis at noon time on 25 October 1895, the acting governor-general, Ömer Bey, wired a telegram to Istanbul reporting that a disturbance took place in this provincial capital as Armenians suddenly attacked the mosques while Muslims were performing Friday pray. When Armenians unleashed the attacks, Ömer Bey claimed, Muslims were unarmed and they found themselves obliged to act in self-defense with stones and sticks as well as with the guns that they captured from the Armenian assailants. The police, gendarmes, and regular troops dispatched by the civil and military authorities to the scene had immediately contained the incident and they were still striving to restore order in the remote parts of the town. What the acting governor-general referred to as “the remote parts of the town” were probably the neighborhoods as it seems that the riots had quickly spread from the market area to the Armenian quarter where the inhabitants suffered a certain degree of killing and looting. Even though the attacks carried out by Armenians tended to bring about a great deal of damage, Ömer Bey also maintained, the prompt action taken by the authorities did not allow them to spread out.⁴⁰⁰

However, other official sources suggest that the ongoing events were more persistent than the acting governor-general was ready to admit at the time he wired his report, and that a complete restoration of order in the town took more than a day. In fact, in his letter to the Grand Vizier, the *Serasker* wrote that the Commander of the Fourth Army’s 8th Division, Şemsi Pasha, had telegraphed his superiors, apparently on the day the incident occurred, that fighting and killing between the two sides were ongoing in the town, and that although the military were applying their energies to halting the riot, the number of troops at hand was insufficient. In return, the *Serasker* asked the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps to promptly despatch extra forces to the town of Bitlis from a suitable place if one battalion of regular troops stationed there was not sufficient to restore order and security. He also requested the Field-Marshal to advise the local commander to make

⁴⁰⁰ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/13, 6 Ca. 1313 (25 October 1895). Cipher telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis dated 13 TE 1311/25 October 1895.

drastic efforts for the prevention of further bloodshed and the pacification of the disorder and the excitement among the inhabitants of the town in cooperation with civil authorities.⁴⁰¹

The next day, the Grand Vizier telegraphed the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis that information about the number of deaths on both sides was still being awaited.⁴⁰² On October 27, with a one-day delay, Acting Governor-General Ömer Bey informed his superiors in Istanbul that the events in the town resulted in the death of 139 Armenians and 38 Muslims, including a female. The number of wounded on the part of Armenians and Muslims was respectively 40 and 135.⁴⁰³ There would be no significant change in these official figures of casualty in the subsequent reports of the authorities in Bitlis. The reason for the delay in reporting the number of casualties was, Ömer Bey claimed, because the judicial authorities had conducted the examination of the dead bodies, as well as because the local officials were occupied with taking urgent measures to prevent the Kurds of Mutki and other tribal groups from entering the town⁴⁰⁴—the aim of these Kurdish crowds who were approaching the town was obviously to join the rank of Muslim rioters or to start a fresh round of killing and looting in Bitlis. Over the next few weeks, British consular officials cited various estimated numbers of casualty, roughly ranging between 500 and 1500, none of which however claimed to be conclusive or based on any comprehensive survey.⁴⁰⁵ In early February 1896, the British Vice-Consul at Muş, who sought to collect

⁴⁰¹ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 619/7, 7 Ca. 1313 (26 October 1895). Letter from the *Serasker* to the Grand Vizier dated 7 Ca. 1313/14 TE 1311/26 October 1895.

⁴⁰² Ibid. Cipher telegram from the Grand Vizierate to the province of Bitlis dated 14 TE 1311/26 October 1895.

⁴⁰³ Ibid. Telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis dated 15 TE 1311/27 October 1895. For another copy of this telegram, see BOA. Y.A.HUS. 338/60, 9 Ca. 1313 (28 October 1895).

⁴⁰⁴ A.MKT.MHM. 619/7 (26 October 1895). Another telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis, again dated 15 TE 1311/27 October 1895.

⁴⁰⁵ See, primarily, TNA: FO 424/184, No. 186. Telegram from Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 28, 1895 (for another copy of this telegram, see Turkey No. 2 [1896], No. 115); TNA: FO 424/184, No. 188. Telegram from Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 28, 1895 (for another copy of this telegram, see Turkey No. 2 [1896], No. 117); TNA: FO 424/184, No. 343. Telegram from Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 8, 1895 (for another copy of this telegram, see Turkey No. 2 [1896], No. 221); FO 424/184, No. 205. Telegram No. 1 from Vice-Consul Hampson dated 28 October 1895, forwarded by Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 29, 1895; TNA: FO 424/184, No. 540. Inclosure 2 in No. 540, Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, Muş, October 29, 1895 (for another copy of this report, see Turkey No. 2 [1896], No. 310); and, TNA: FO 424/184, No. 625. Inclosure in No. 625, Vice-Consul

detailed information about the consequences of the events that took place throughout the whole province of Bitlis in the autumn of 1895, reported that he had not yet been able to obtain reports from various outlying districts but his tables so far showed a total of about 1,500 Armenians killed and about 4,300 forcibly converted to Islam. He added that these numbers would be increased substantially when he obtained complete information.⁴⁰⁶

In the meantime, the acting governor-general and the military commander sent identical reports to their superiors, containing details of the course of events in Bitlis, in which they made curious claims, akin to absurd conspiracy theories, about the conduct of Armenians during the riots. For instance, according to the acting governor-general's version of events, Armenians, on the one hand, had deliberately thrown goods into the streets in order to encourage the Muslim inhabitants, mixed with segments of the tribal population, and the Kurds, who were in the town for buying and selling, to engage in looting and plundering with a view to expanding the disorder. And, on the other hand, they had sought to direct the angry Muslims to the neighborhoods by spreading the rumor "the Muslim quarters were being attacked!" What is more, Armenians had attempted to set the market area on fire. Thereupon, the agitated Muslim crowd had rushed into the neighborhoods. The authorities, however, had put down the fire and prevented the events in the town's scattered neighborhoods from assuming a serious character. Yet Armenians had achieved their sinister purpose of encouraging looting and plundering in the market area as articles in various shops owned by Armenians and Muslims suffered attack and damage at the hands of various segments of the local population at a time when the police, gendarmes, and a small number of regular troops were already scattered in the neighborhoods.⁴⁰⁷

Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch. Mush, November 6, 1895 (for another copy of this report, see Turkey No. 2 [1896], No. 368).

⁴⁰⁶ Turkey No. 8 (1896), No. 89. Inclosure 2 in No. 89, Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Cumberbatch, Mush, February 5, 1896.

⁴⁰⁷ A.MKT.MHM. 619/7 (26 October 1895). Telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis dated 15 TE 1311/27 October 1895. For the commander's version, see BOA. Y.MTV. 130/97, 10 Ca. 1313 (29 October 1895). Cipher telegram from the commander of the 8th Division dated 15 TE 1311/27 October 1895. As already mentioned above, the reports of both officials were identical in terms of content and wording.

As was the case with many other places across the troubled regions, reports of foreign consular officials in the province of Bitlis and the information they received from Protestant American missionaries based in this region presented stark contrasts to the official version of the origin and course of violent events in the town of Bitlis. On October 28, the Secretary of the British Embassy, for instance, informed Prime Minister Salisbury that Vice-Consul Hampson had sent a telegram from Muş, reporting that according to the information he received from Bitlis, Muslims had attacked Armenians on coming out of the mosques following Friday pray.⁴⁰⁸ The next day, Hampson reported to Consul Cumberbatch at Erzurum that he was not able to receive detailed information about the incident in the town since the telegraph lines between Bitlis and Muş were cut, supposedly by Kurds; what he heard was nevertheless that the disturbances had begun when Muslims were leaving the mosques and lasted at least four hours. The whole bazaar had been pillaged and wrecked by Kurds on the day following the outbreak. Importantly, he claimed that he had “reliable information” to the effect that, on October 18, that is, the previous Friday, Muslims went to the mosques fully armed, with an eye to attacking Christians. However, the acting governor-general, warned of the intention of Muslims, did not allow any disorder to occur by taking timely precautionary measures. It was probable that, Hampson suggested, the circumstances on October 25 were outside his control, and this view was supported by the fact that he had requested more troops afterwards to restore order and security in the town.⁴⁰⁹

Several days later, Hampson finally received a letter, dated November 6, from a senior protestant missionary born in Bitlis and the local almoner of the Armenian Relief Committee, George Perkins Knapp, who was practically under the state of siege in his house since the outbreak of the riots in this town, waiting for intervention by the U.S. Minister in Istanbul and the representatives of other governments on his behalf. Knapp was accused by the Bitlis authorities of being the author of the disturbances, instigating Armenian revolutionaries to rebel against the government and to kill their fellow Armenian citizens, upon the statements obtained apparently forcibly from the Armenian prisoners

⁴⁰⁸ FO 424/184, No. 188.

⁴⁰⁹ FO 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 540.

who had been arrested following the riots of October 25. He was also charged with supplying firearms to Armenian seditionists. Even long before the events that unfolded in Bitlis, the Ottoman authorities already complained that the Protestant missionary was meddling in the domestic affairs of the state and trying to seduce the Armenians. To make a long story short, Knapp could not venture to step outside of his door for a long time, but it seems that his residence was well protected by security guards against any possible hostile action on the part of Muslims. In late March 1896, he was expelled from Bitlis under military escort to be taken to İskenderiye (İskenderun, or Alexandretta). After a while, he was sent from İskenderiye to Istanbul to be tried before the U.S. Minister on the charge of sedition. Yet it seems that the Ottoman government was more interested in banishing Knapp from the country than in having him tried by a court. As a result, he subsequently left the Ottoman Empire and moved back to the U.S.A in 1897.⁴¹⁰

As for his version of the events in Bitlis, Knapp wrote in his letter to Vice-Consul Hampson that when the news of the scheme of reforms being accepted by the Sultan was heard in Bitlis on October 21, the Armenians had reacted to it “with wonderful prudence.” Yet on their part, the Muslims, he claimed, sought an opportunity to provoke a quarrel. The following days, atmosphere in the town was very strained. On Tuesday and Wednesday, a number of Armenians closed their shops earlier than usual. On Thursday, the Armenian Bishop and several leading Armenians visited Acting Governor-General Ömer Bey to discuss the situation and expressed their concern over the safety of Armenians in the town. In response, the acting governor-general assured them that he would do everything necessary, and showed the telegram announcing the acceptance of the reform scheme. Upon these assurances, many Armenians had gone to market and opened their shops on Friday, October 25. However, when they saw the Muslims going to the mosques, armed,

⁴¹⁰ For official allegations against Knapp before and after the events in Bitlis and for subsequent developments, see BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 694/2, 13 R. 1313 (3 October 1895); BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 694/3, 11 Ca. 1313 (30 October 1895); BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 694/5, 29 Ş. 1313 (13 February 1896); BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 694/7, 21 L. 1313 (5 April 1896); BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 694/8, 22 Za. 1313 (5 May 1896); Grace H. Knapp, *The Tragedy of Bitlis* (New York, NY; Chicago, IL; London; Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1919), 116-19; and, Amerikan Bord Heyeti (American Board), Istanbul, “Memorial records for George P. Knapp,” American Research Institute in Turkey, Istanbul Center Library, online in Digital Library for International Research Archive, Item #17182, <http://www.dlir.org/archive/items/show/17182> (accessed October 9, 2017).

and locking up their shops before going, which was unprecedented, the Armenians began to close their shops too. Meanwhile, a certain Yusuf, the son of Mayor Hacı Yasin, scolded an Armenian for closing his shop, which eventually caused two other Armenians witnessing the scene to leave their shops and run away. Then, two gendarmes drew their swords and gave chase to them, while Yusuf fired off a revolver at the same time. When the sound of his revolver was heard at the Grand Mosque, the Muslims inside poured out right into the market and began to kill the Armenians they could get hold of. Following a bugle sound, soldiers came on the scene to join the riotous crowd for killing. Gendarmes and police were especially active in killing and pillage, Knapp claimed. Furthermore, he had “not the least doubt that the whole thing was planned by” the leading Muslims of the town and conducted “with the knowledge and even support of the Government.” It was safe to say that the incident resulted in the death of 500 people. Regarding the claim that it was the Armenians who initiated the events attacking the mosques, he noted “A more insane fabrication could not be invented.”⁴¹¹

When consular officials, missionaries, and other foreign nationals in the region referred to “the government,” they usually meant the local/provincial administration unless otherwise specified. There is no evidence to suggest that the local government as a whole was complicit in the riots; yet several developments in November 1895 and in late 1896 point to the direct role or involvement of a number of officials and Muslim notables in organizing or instigating violence against the Armenians of Bitlis.

On 15 November 1895, the acting governor-general wired a telegram to his superiors in Istanbul, reporting that two members of the Provincial Administration Council, Yasin Efendi and Yusuf Efendi, and an examining clerk at the office of the provincial Corresponding Secretary (*Mektubî* [Kalemi] *Mümeyyizi*), İbrahim Efendi, were “complicating government operations and procedures regarding the suppression of excitement and unrest” reigning in Bitlis in the aftermath of the recent events. The acting governor-general did not give details as to the nature of the activities of these provincial

⁴¹¹ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 731. Inclosure 2 in No. 731, letter from “Mr. Knapp to Vice-Consul Hampson” dated Bitlis, November 6, 1895, forwarded by Consul Cumberbatch to Sir P. Currie, Erzeroum, November 18, 1895. Also see, Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 411.

officials; yet, importantly, he noted that they were “of the same mind as Sheikh Emin,” an influential local religious leader. As we shall see in the following chapter, the Bitlis authorities previously, in early November, reported that Sheikh Emin was acting in such a way as to incite violence and disorder in Bitlis openly declaring “Armenian blood is of no account [that is, it is unrevenged] and [injuring] their property and chastity is [canonically] permissible” (*Ermenilerin kanı heder ve mal ve ırzı mubahdır*).⁴¹² It can therefore be said that Ömer Bey implied that these persons were acting against public order and peace. Indeed, somewhat opaquely, he also added that “naïve/simple clans and tribes” (*sade-dilân kabâil ve aşâir*) were being provoked by the existing situation, which was conducive to further agitation of minds. Consequently, he suggested that the state of affairs dictate the removal of the aforementioned individuals, including Sheikh Emin Efendi, from Bitlis in a swift manner.⁴¹³

Several days later, the Yıldız Palace asked the Sublime Porte to obtain information about these four persons from the local military commander in Bitlis via the office of the *Serasker*.⁴¹⁴ In response to the *Serasker*'s request, the Commander of the 8th Division stationed in Bitlis, Lieutenant-General Ahmed Şemsi Pasha, spoke quite positively about Yasin, Yusuf, and İbrahim Efendis, while he confirmed the allegations against Sheikh Emin—we will see what he reported about the sheikh in the following chapter. Şemsi Pasha clearly denied the claims made by the acting governor general about the three civilian officials although he also noted that they were “the kind of people who look after personal interests.”⁴¹⁵ Upon receiving these correspondences, a Special Council of Ministers gathered to discuss the matter and resolved that there was no need to banish Yasin, Yusuf,

⁴¹² For references and details, see the next chapter. As contemporary Ottoman dictionaries clearly show, in Ottoman Turkish, the word “*heder*” had a particular meaning in the context of the act of spilling blood. When someone’s blood is declared or believed to be *heder*, it means that shedding his/her blood goes unrevenged, being not subject to punishment, vengeance, or reprisal. In other words, it can be spilled with impunity.

⁴¹³ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/105, 27 Ca. 1313 (15 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis dated 3 TS 1311/15 November 1895.

⁴¹⁴ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 619/13, 14 Ca. 1313 (2 November 1895). From the *mabeyn* (palace secretariat) to the Grand Vizierate, 5 TS 1311/17 November 1895; and the letter from the Grand Vizier to the Office of the *Serasker* dated 5 TS 1311/17 November 1895.

⁴¹⁵ BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/62, 8 B. 1313 (25 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Commander of the 8th Division, Lieutenant-General Ahmed Şemsi Pasha, dated 8 TS 1311/20 November 1895.

and İbrahim Efendis from Bitlis.⁴¹⁶ As a result, the central government authorities made a decision about Yasin, Yusuf, and İbrahim Efendis relying on the information provided by Şemsi Pasha, which ensured that no administrative or legal action would be taken against these individuals. In early January 1896, the Grand Vizier sent a confidential note to Bitlis, stating that a special investigation into the matter indicated that neither before nor after the incident in the town of Bitlis had these persons acted in such a way as to complicate government operations and procedures.⁴¹⁷

Archival records show that in the following months, Yasin Efendi was dismissed from his position as member of the Provincial Administration Council due to misconduct, apparently independent of the above-mentioned allegations. Yet, perhaps more importantly, Yasin Efendi and several high-ranking provincial officials in Bitlis, including the provincial treasurer and the commander of gendarmerie, were accused by the provincial police authorities in Bitlis of being involved in various anti-Armenian conspiracies in late 1896 and in early 1897. We understand that throughout the months of October and November 1896, the rumors to the effect that the Muslims were preparing to massacre the Christians again caused a great deal of excitement and uneasiness among the Armenians of Bitlis. We also understand from a variety of reports that especially on Fridays, some Armenian traders and artisans closed their shops earlier than usual during this period. In early December, for instance, the Minister of Police informed the office of the Grand Vizier that a telegram from the police commissioner of Bitlis Province reported that on the last Friday of November 1896, there had been fear and excitement among the Armenians due to some rumors and, therefore, some had closed their shops ahead of time. Yet the authorities had managed to calm them down by taking prompt and effective measures. Importantly, the police commissioner also reported that they had obtained special

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. The resolution or protocol (*mazbata*) of the Special Council of Ministers dated 8 B. 1313/13 KE 1311/25 December 1895.

⁴¹⁷ A.MKT.MHM. 619/13 (2 November 1895). Confidential letter from the Grand Vizierate to the province of Bitlis dated 16 B. 1313/21 KE 1311/2 January 1896.

intelligence that the rumors had been originated from Yasin Efendi and Provincial Treasurer Osman Efendi.⁴¹⁸

In response to the minister's request for further information about the nature of these rumors and other details into the investigation, the police commissioner had reported that according to the information received from reliable sources, Yasin Efendi, who had recently been dismissed from the Provincial Administration Council for misconduct, had met Osman Efendi in the latter's house and arranged a plot to spread a rumor that the Muslims would kill and plunder the Armenians on Friday. They had used some Kurdish men to disseminate the rumor to the Armenians—in a sense, the police authorities in Bitlis had unearthed an organized rumor-mongering network. On these reports, the Minister of Police remarked that even though they had no information about Yasin Efendi, it was somewhat improbable that Head Treasurer Osman Efendi had taken part in the spread of such rumors. He naturally raised the possibility that the allegations made by the police commissioner against Osman Efendi might have stemmed from personal hatred and antagonism between the two officials. The minister suggested that the emergence and spread of such rumors was, on the other hand, unacceptable, and therefore that the provincial authorities be advised of the situation.⁴¹⁹ As a result, the Sublime Porte launched an investigation on Osman Efendi, which would last more than a year and lead to no criminal charges or no serious disciplinary sanction against him.⁴²⁰

While investigations into the allegations against Osman Efendi were underway, the police commissioner of Bitlis sent another telegram to his superiors in Istanbul towards mid-January 1897. He reported that on the past two Fridays, some Armenian shopkeepers had avoided opening their shops while others had closed their shops and rushed home during the prayer time. Thereupon, the police authorities had conducted a proper investigation and revealed that behind the fear that prevailed among the Armenians of Bitlis

⁴¹⁸ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 620/35, 1 B. 1314 (6 December 1896). Letter from the Minister of Police to the Grand Vizierate dated 27 C. 1314/21 TS 1312/3 December 1896.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ For documents concerning the official investigations on Osman Efendi, see *ibid.* Correspondences between various offices dated variously.

were again rumors of the same nature as mentioned above. The police commissioner claimed that the rumor had been spread by Hacı Necmeddin (a former member of the Provincial Administration Council), Yasin Efendi, Provincial Treasurer Osman Efendi, and Arif Bey, the commander of gendarmerie, who had met in Osman Efendi's house to devise this plot. The police commissioner underscored that Hacı Necmeddin and Yasin Efendi desired "evil of every sort" to occur since they had been dismissed from the provincial administration. If any harm occurred in the future, he suggested, all these aforementioned persons must be held responsible.⁴²¹ As should be evident, the police commissioner of Bitlis reported the same course of events as in his previous report cited by the Minister of Police, with two more individuals alleged to be involved. Therefore, it is hard to be sure whether he reported some recurrent events or repeated the same case that he previously mentioned in late November. In any case, however, he made remarkable claims about a group of active and former prominent members of the provincial government in Bitlis.

It seems that recurrent rumors and signs of a fresh round of conflict in the town of Bitlis prompted the local authorities to take more serious measures in mid-March 1897. In a report dated early April, the recently appointed British Vice-Consul in Bitlis, James Henry Monahan, wrote that there had been considerable disquiet among the Armenians during the past six or seven weeks, especially on Fridays. He reported that two weeks ago, he had received a written petition addressed to him, speaking of an impending massacre against the Armenians of Bitlis and of Muslims arming themselves. On their part, the Christian inhabitants of the town were keeping away from the bazaar as much as possible. The authorities had established strong guards patrolling the town, disarmed several Muslims, and issued a new long proclamation on the walls warning the inhabitants of the town against any attempt at creating disorder.⁴²²

In the meantime, the Governor-General of Bitlis demanded once again that Sheikh Emin, Necmeddin Efendi, Yasin Efendi, and their companions be banished from Bitlis as

⁴²¹ BOA. Y.PRK.ZB. 18/78, 7 Ş. 1314 (11 January 1897). Cipher telegram from the police commissioner of the province of Bitlis to the Ministry of Police dated 29 KE 312/10 January 1897.

⁴²² TNA: FO 424/191, No. 329. Inclosure in No. 329, Vice-Consul Monahan to Currie, Bitlis, April 2, 1897. Also see Turkey No. 1 (1898), No. 211.

soon as possible in order to avoid any situation endangering public order and security in the town of Bitlis. Finally, on 30 March 1897, the Bitlis authorities detained nine Muslims, including Hacı Necmeddin Efendi and Yasin Efendi, on the charge of attempting to create a disturbance in the town in collaboration with tribal chieftains. The Governor-General of Bitlis immediately demanded the banishment of all of these persons held in custody to elsewhere within and outside the province for, he maintained, they would not abstain from fomenting sedition as long as they continued to stay in the town. As soon as they received the news, the French and Austria-Hungarian embassies in Istanbul requested that the central government authorities support the governor-general's action and his demand for the banishment of the nine Muslims who, they learned, had been arrested in Bitlis "for inciting the Muslims to massacre the Christians." Over the period of their confinement (seemingly not typical incarceration), Necmeddin's sons, as well as Necmeddin and Yasin Efendis themselves, continuously petitioned several state departments, including the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Police, the State Council, and the office of *Şeyhü'l-İslam*, multiple times, certainly to the point of harassment, complaining that they were unjustly detained upon the order of the governor-general who harbored ill-will toward them. They requested to be allowed to move to Istanbul or to another province, and that special officials be sent to Bitlis to inquire into the matter on the spot. Having received so many petitions from these persons, the Interior Minister suggested to the Grand Vizier that an investigating commission be dispatched to the province to conduct an impartial inquiry into the claims of the parties. The case remained pending for the approval of the Grand Vizier for several months. Necmeddin and Yasin Efendis were released in July 1897 without being brought before a court, and their case was transferred by the provincial administration to the judicial authorities.⁴²³ There is, however, no evidence that they were ever prosecuted or put on trial for the charge stated above.

⁴²³ For all these events and developments, see BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 31/38, 6 Za. 1314 (8 April 1897), especially letters sent by the Interior Minister to the Grand Vizierate dated variously; BOA. DH.ŞFR. 207/32, 01-02-1313 (1 Nisan 1313/13 April 1897). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Bitlis to the Interior Ministry; BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 620/41, 2 Za. 1314 (4 April 1897). Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Grand Vizier dated 28 L. 1314/20 Mart 1313/1 April 1897; FO 424/191, Inclosure in No. 329; BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 33/78, 27 Z. 1314 (29 May 1897). Correspondence between the Interior Ministry and the State Council; BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 35/54, 3 S. 1315 (4 July 1897); BOA. DH.ŞFR. 212/29, 11-05-1313 (11 Temmuz 1313/23 July 1897); and, BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 37/18, 4 Ra. 1315 (3 August 1897).

Meanwhile, the authorities in Istanbul also dismissed the gendarmerie commander of Bitlis from office and appointed a new commander in May 1897.⁴²⁴ Importantly, although the case of Sheikh Emin will be examined in detail in the next chapter, I would also like to note that the sheikh was neither arrested nor wanted to be banished after those nine Muslims were detained, notwithstanding the fact that the Governor-General of Bitlis himself openly claimed that Necmeddin, Yasin, and the other persons involved were “infusing the seditious lessons they learned from the sheikh into evil-minded people.”⁴²⁵ Indeed, as will be shown later, from the very first, the central government authorities proved reluctant to prosecute the sheikh despite the strong allegations of instigating popular violence against Armenians. Indeed, there is a great deal of truth in British Vice-Consul Monahan’s remark that Sheikh Emin was perhaps too powerful to be touched at the time when the nine Muslims were arrested.⁴²⁶ The Sheikh Emin case provides a clear illustration of how the Hamidian administration systematically avoided any measures that might antagonize or upset Muslim notables, religious leaders, Kurdish tribal chieftains, and, to a certain extent, ordinary Muslim masses.

Currently, we have no direct evidence about the role that all the aforementioned Muslim officials and notables might possibly have played in the events of October 25, 1895 in Bitlis—with the significant exception of Sheikh Emin. Neither is the underlying motivation of these prominent figures for fresh conflict clear. Was it simply to incite violence against Armenians or to undermine the governor-general’s authority by creating disorders? As we already know, “Armenian affairs” were perfectly suitable for use in local power struggles. On his part, Vice-Consul Monahan noted that the ultimate design of the conspirators was less clear: “It may have been to discredit the Vali [governor-general], or to intimidate the Sultan.”⁴²⁷ On the other hand, what can be stated more confidently is that there is substantial reason to believe that at least Shiekh Emin, Yasin Efendi, and

⁴²⁴ BOA. BEO. 951/71278, 14 Z. 1314 (16 May 1897).

⁴²⁵ DH.TMIK.M. 31/38. Letter from the Interior Minister to the Grand Vizierate dated 6 Za. 1314/27 Mart 313/8 April 1897.

⁴²⁶ FO 424/191, Inclosure in No. 329.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

Necmeddin Efendi played significant roles in the various stages of the organization and instigation of the violence against Armenians in Bitlis.

6.4. The Absence of Use of Maximum/Deadly Force

During ethnic riots, resort to deadly force by public order instruments during ethnic riots is one of the most critical decisions that the authorities must make with considerable care and discretion. Indeed, during such events, law enforcement authorities usually apply deadly force against the participants as a last resort. The magnitude, duration, severity, speed, and persistence of disorders may influence the decision of government authorities to employ violence and lethal force. The presence of a big number of bystanders, the moral condition of law enforcement agencies, and the possibility that the application of deadly force may aggravate the situation usually deter the authorities from resorting to these types of measures. Yet the ethnoreligious composition of security forces or the specific nature of violence may also play a significant role in the absence of deadly force on the part of government forces. When the authorities are biased against one of the parties in conflict, when they actively support the violence, or when they are unwilling to use coercion and violence against their co-ethnics or co-religionists, deadly force may be absent. The specific relationship between the political authorities and members of the aggressive group affect the ways in which the former responds to the incident. The central government authorities may refrain from allowing the forces of law and order to employ legitimate lethal action against the participants or one of the parties considering the political implications of resort to such a drastic measure even though they oppose the violence.

In the case of the anti-Armenian massacres of 1895-97, the central government systematically avoided authorizing security forces to use deadly force against armed Muslim rioters and assailants although suppressing the riots without resorting to harsher and more repressive measures seemed impossible. Only in a handful of cases or situations (usually after a certain stage of the wave of riots), the troops fired on the Muslim attackers or crowds. When applied, timely efficacy of the measure was questionable in some cases.

From the very first, the local authorities and army commanders who strove to deal with the violent events were unsure what to do against aggressive crowds without clear instructions and orders from their superiors, especially with regard to the application of deadly force against Muslims. For instance, on 29 October 1895, *Serasker* Rıza Pasha submitted a letter to the palace, presenting the substance of a telegram he received from the Marshal of the 4th Army Corps, Zeki Pasha. According to Zeki Pasha's report, when a crowd of Muslims attacked the Armenian village of Kısanta, or Ksanta, (Bayburd, Erzurum)—where it was previously reported the entire male population had been massacred—the officer commanding the military unit dispatched to this village to stop the excesses reported to the commander of Bayburd that the suppression of the incident could be achieved only if the troops used weapons against the perpetrators, therefore asking for authorization to this effect. However, it is understood that the commander of Bayburd responded the officer's demand by saying that they were not able to use deadly force against the reported group unless they pointed their weapons at the soldiers, reminding the tit-for-tat rule. They therefore concluded that there was nothing to be done on the part of the local military authorities. Then, having faced with a clear dilemma, the commander and the district-governor of Bayburd sent a joint telegram to Zeki Pasha, apparently requesting instructions as to the course of action to be followed in such cases. The Field-Marshal immediately brought the matter to the attention of the *Serasker*. In response, *Serasker* Rıza Pasha, however, only ordered him to take prompt measures to make sure that no bloodshed occur between various classes of the imperial subjects, as was previously demanded.⁴²⁸

The next day, Zeki Pasha telegraphed the palace that from the *Serasker's* response message (referring to the above-mentioned telegram), it was not clear enough whether the use of weapons (read lethal force) against the Muslim population was allowed. He noted that he inferred from the *Serasker's* statements, equivocal however, that the use of deadly force against the Muslims was permissible. Nevertheless, the Field-Marshal implied that they needed clarification and authorization on the matter so that the military commanders

⁴²⁸ BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 108/41 25 Ca. 1313 (13 November 1895). Letter from the *Serasker* to the palace dated 10 Ca. 1313/17 TE 1311/29 October 1895.

could be instructed to act accordingly when intervening in incidents.⁴²⁹ The following day, the Palace Secretariat sent a cipher telegram to the Marshal of the 4th Army Corps, making it plain that the use of weapons (deadly force) by armed forces was obviously restricted to cases of tumult/disturbance (*şuriş*) and rebellion (*isyan*) against the government. And to date no reports of Muslims having rebelled against the government were received or heard, the Sultan's secretaries underscored. On the contrary, the local authorities by all means knew who actually revolted against the state—obviously alluding to the Armenians. It was therefore entirely unjustifiable, “by law and by humanity,” to use [deadly] weapons against people who were not involved in rebellion against the government. Moreover, in a sense, the policy-makers at the palace condemned Zeki Pasha by saying that it was “astonishing” to see the *Serasker*'s order was interpreted as allowing the troops to fire their weapons upon “obedient subjects.”⁴³⁰ As a matter of fact, at this stage of the events, the Hamidian regime proclaimed clearly and unequivocally its opposition to resort to deadly force and coercive measures by the military and the police against the Muslims who took part in violence at the cost of the lives and property of the empire's Armenian subjects.

As shown in the previous chapter, as of early November 1895, the Sublime Porte regularly issued decisive instructions to the governors-generals and the military commanders in the empire's Armenian-populated provinces, warning them to exercise a great deal of vigilance not to permit any disorder and bloodshed to occur. If a riot broke out, it was the primary obligation of the local authorities to promptly suppress it taking necessary steps to stop, disband, pursue, and punish, in accordance with law, whoever—whether Armenians or Muslims—attempted to commit bloodshed, sedition, plunder, or any acts disturbing public order and security. These stringent orders and instructions, along with a set of military and administrative measures, sincerely aimed to put an end to the pogrom crisis, as the previous chapter has shown. However, they did not mean that the security forces were absolutely authorized to resort to deadly force and punitive measures, where necessary, against the Muslim perpetrators when dealing with the riots or seeking to

⁴²⁹ BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 107/54, 2 Ca. 1313 (21 October 1895). Cipher telegram from the Field-Marshal of the 4th Army Corps, Mehmed Zeki [Pasha], dated 18 TE 1311/30 October 1895.

⁴³⁰ Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/10 (15 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the *Mabeyn* (palace secretariat) to the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Imperial Army Corps dated 19 TE 1311/31 October 1895.

contain the lethal attacks on towns unleashed by outsiders, mostly Kurdish tribes. Neither did the central government authorities provide the local civilian and military officials with a clear guide as to how they could combat excesses and restore order without resorting to violence and coercion against Muslim offenders. Indeed, once, the Governor-General of Sivas was reported to have asked his superiors in Istanbul to what extent the local authorities should exercise violent measures against the “malicious/wicked groups” growing around towns with a view to looting and pillage, if they did not act in accordance with the admonition to be given to them.⁴³¹

British sources claimed that on November 1, 1895, the Grand Vizier had sent orders to the governors-general to the effect that if the Muslims touched the Christians, they would be fired upon.⁴³² However, I suspect if the reported orders were as clear and unequivocal as represented to the British Embassy officials. It was probably an element of diplomatic window-dressing. In Harput (November 1895) and Urfa (December 1895), it appears that the troops fired into the gatherings of hundreds of Kurdish assailants; yet in both cases, they did so on the day following the main events in these towns, which resulted in the death of an untold number of Armenians, in an effort to prevent the mob from renewing attacks (Harput) or from entering the town (Urfa). According to British sources, relying on information brought by a consular cavass sent to visit the American missionaries in Ayntab, a military Captain ordered his troops to fire into the mob attempting to attack the American college at this town, the protection of which was strictly demanded by the government, and three of those standing at the mob’s forefront were shot dead on the spot. Then the crowd had dispersed.⁴³³

The weight of evidence, however, suggests that the prevailing attitude among Ottoman governing circles was still to avoid severe repressive and violent measures,

⁴³¹ BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/25, 26 Ca. 1313 (14 November 1895) *Mazbata*, or resolution, of the Council of Ministers dated 26 Ca. 1313/2 TS 1311/14 November 1895.

⁴³² TNA: FO 424/184, No. 248. Telegram from Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 2, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 162.

⁴³³ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 783. Inclosure 2 in No. 783, Consul Barnham to Currie, Aleppo, November 28, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 435. In a letter from the Aintab College, dated, November 18th, 1895, the anonymous author writes that it was a “bimbashi” (major, mistranslated by the author as colonel) who himself shot four of the mob. See Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 453.

including a rapid resort to deadly force, against the Muslims throughout most of the events of 1895-97. For instance, at a time when the anti-Armenian riots and crowd attacks on Armenian-populated towns reached their climax in magnitude and extent in-mid November 1895, the Governor-General of Sivas proposed several measures specifically intended to prevent excesses and suppress them in their initial stages. Among others, he suggested that the *redif* troops to be posted on the heights of each town possible to be attacked and the security forces, including army troops and gendarmes, stationed inside towns fire upon anyone, regardless of whether they were Muslim or Christian, who attempted to attack on towns and villages or to commit acts of bloodshed and plunder within urban areas, if they ignored the summons issued by the authorities. The Council of Ministers in the Sublime Porte, however, rejected the proposal on the ground that it was contrary to the provisions of the previous and last imperial decrees.⁴³⁴

To take another example, the Acting British Consul at Ankara, reporting details of the events in Kayseri (November 1895) based on an account provided by his informant, an American resident in this town, reported that when the riots broke out on November 30, the Commander of Kayseri had done his best to halt the assaults “by entreaty and gesticulation.” Yet he had not ordered his troops to fire their weapons upon the rioters, as he apparently had to wait to be authorized for this by his superiors. Indeed, according to the informant, it appeared that the local authorities would not allow the troops to shoot before receiving orders to this effect from Istanbul. Remarkably, the commander was reported to have protested against the delay, declaring that he would suppress the incident in ten minutes if he were given a free hand.⁴³⁵ The military authorities in Kayseri finally received the order from his superiors but obviously after hours of passivity and ineptness on the part of the troops, thus allowing the rioters to carry on their actions free of retribution.

⁴³⁴ BOA. Y.A.RES. 77/28, 26 Ca. 1313 (14 November 1895. The date on the file is obviously wrong since all the documents therein are dated h. 27 Ca. 1313, r. 3 TS 1311). Telegram from the Governor-General of Sivas to the Grand Vizierate, marked “very important and urgent,” dated 3 TS 1311/15 November 1895; and *mazbata*, or resolution, of the Council of Ministers dated 27 Ca. 1313/3 TE [*sic*, TS] 1311/15 November 1895.

⁴³⁵ TNA: FO 424/186, No. 23. Inclosure in No. 23, Acting Consul Fontana to Currie, Angora, December 24, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), Inclosure in No. 518.

The case of Çapakçur (Bitlis, February 1896), in which a deadly attack carried out by a crowd of over 500 armed Kurds on this district town met no serious resistance from a detachment of reserve troops and gendarmes on duty, is instructive in several respects. It shows, on the one hand, the relative improvement in the central government's attitude towards the responsibility of local officials for the outbreak of disorders in their areas of responsibility; but, on the other hand, it also reveals that the lack of decisive, firm, and drastic action on the part of the authorities was persistent to a large extent. Following the incident, his superiors in Bitlis censured the district governor of Çapakçur (present-day Bingöl) for failing to contain the attack despite the fact that the amount of military forces and gendarmes at hand was sufficient. The district-governor and the officers on active duty during the attack were grossly negligent and derelict in their handling of the incident, which was attested, the Governor-General of Bitlis wrote, by the fact that "the attackers even escaped unhurt" (*mütecavizlerden birinin burununun olsun kanamaması*). The governor-general therefore suggested that the district governor be dismissed from office and put on trial, and that the military authorities be requested to take an exemplary action against the soldiers and gendarmes found unmistakably negligent as well as the perpetrators themselves.⁴³⁶ As a matter of fact, the district governor was removed from office and ordered to be tried before a court although we do not know whether he was indeed brought to justice.⁴³⁷ In the weeks following, the Bitlis authorities also took relatively quick action to capture and arrest some of the leaders and perpetrators of the attack as well as to recover the plundered goods.

In a letter sent from the Interior Minister to the Grand Vizier, we see that against official criticism voiced at their negligent and derelict conduct, the officers in charge of the security forces during the attack on the town of Çapakçur defended themselves by claiming that the given directives had only required them to admonish the Kurds. In other words,

⁴³⁶ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 620/7, 9 N. 1313 (23 February 1896). Telegram from the Governor-General of Bitlis dated 8 Şubat 1311/20 February 1896. Also see, in this file, another telegram from the Governor-General of Bitlis dated 5 Şubat 1311/17 February 1896. For other copies of these telegrams, see BOA. DH.ŞFR. 188/8, 5 Şubat 1311 (17 February 1896), and BOA. DH.ŞFR. 188/19, 8 Şubat 1311 (20 February 1896).

⁴³⁷ BOA. İ.HUS. 45/120, 22 N. 1313 (7 March 1896). Imperial decree dated 22 N. 1313/7 March 1896; and, BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 676/8, 26 N. 1313 (11 March 1896). Cipher note from the Grand Vizier to Inspector-General Şakir Pasha in Erzurum dated 28 Şubat 1311/11 March 1896.

they maintained that they had avoided using force against the attackers for lack of authorization to apply lethal violence against the Kurds. By offering this as a legitimate excuse, the officers may simply have tried to cover up their negligent failure or unwillingness to combat against the assailants. Yet it is also safe to suggest that in some cases, even if the civilian and military officials were willing to carry out their duties as required, ambiguous orders or the overall lack of determination for firm action against Muslim offenders restricted their response to rapidly unfolding conditions that they confronted. Of course, this cannot nevertheless totally account for their inaction; neither does it relieve them of responsibility for violence. As a result, the civilian officials in the province of Bitlis, the Interior Minister also wrote, had requested that updated orders be issued to the military officers in the district of Çapakçur. Importantly, the provincial government had also warned that it would be impossible to put an end to conflicts and assaults if the authorities passed over the matter by resorting only to admonition, instead of showing “the might of the military [forces]” (*satvet-i askeriye*) to offenders in order not to allow such events to occur again in the future. On his part, the Interior Minister noted that the hesitancy shown by the military officers was unacceptable since they had previously been sent instructions, along with imperial decrees, on how to act against those who ignored admonitions and committed criminal offences. He therefore suggested that the Grand Vizierate advise the *Serasker* to send instructions to the required (military) authorities in no uncertain and unquestionable terms.⁴³⁸

As a consequence, blatant unwillingness and hesitancy on the of part the government authorities to resort to heavy-handed action and deadly force in the repression of violence had a decisive effect on the performance of the authorities during the events of 1895-97, which was already characterized, in most cases, by a combination of negligence, leniency, and ineffectiveness at best. The fact that the government refrained from taking on Muslims at the cost of life and property of Armenians certainly enhanced the boldness of the rioters and assailants. It can be suggested that the imperial authorities avoided creating the impression that Armenians were under the special protection of Muslim

⁴³⁸ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 611/4, 24 L. 1313 (8 April 1896). Letter from the Interior Minister to the Grand Vizierate dated 14 L. 1313/17 Mart 1312/29 March 1896.

officials and law enforcement agencies, or the image that the imperial troops shedding “Muslim blood” for the Christians. Indeed, the main reason behind this policy, or attitude, was undoubtedly that an image of the Sultan ordering or allowing his troops to inflict wholesale violence on the empire’s Muslim subjects would certainly run counter to the strategic considerations of the Hamidian regime vis-à-vis the “Armenian Question” as well as to its policy of strengthening Muslim solidarity. Indeed, from the very first, the Yıldız Palace and the Sublime Porte clearly—and repeatedly—warned the governors-general, the military commanders, and the imperial commissioners sent to the affected regions to make sure that the authorities avoid any measures that might “upset” the Muslims and make them “resentful” or “indignant” towards the government.⁴³⁹

There is another crucial aspect of the official reluctance to use violence and deadly force against Muslims during the period in question: The Hamidian regime was rather anxious that such measures might cause the Kurdish tribes to turn against the government. For instance, on November 8, 1895, the authorities at the palace wrote to the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps that according to a telegram received from the province of Mamuretü’l-Aziz, the Kurds of Dersim were attacking everywhere while the armed troops, being scattered all over the province, were not able to control the situation. Also, in some places, the troops were naturally using weapons against the offenders to stop their assaults. The concern of the palace authorities was that the situation might take a different turn if these “brigands” revolted against the government as a result of such drastic measures.⁴⁴⁰ The following day, in another telegraphic order to the Field-Marshal, the Yıldız Palace unambiguously declared:

While the authors of the ongoing disturbances are Armenians, it is seen from the telegraphic reports received [from the locales] that weapons are being used against the Kurds in some places. The [wrongful] use of weapons [against them] unless they do not actively put their guns [on the security forces] can, however, cause the Muslim population to be upset (*ahali-i Müslimenin me’yûsiyetini dâî*) afterwards

⁴³⁹ See, for instance, Y.A.RES. 77/21 (9 November 1895). “The instructions to the military and civil officials who will be dispatched to the provinces where Armenian disturbances/riots occurred” (*Ermeni ihtilali zuhur eden vilayâta cihet-i askeriye ve mülkiyeden i’zâm olunacak memurîne talimatdır*), n.d.

⁴⁴⁰ Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/10 (15 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the *Mabeyn* (palace secretariat) to the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Imperial Army Corps dated 27 TE 1311/8 November 1895.

and consequently lead them to rise up against the Imperial Government (*Hükûmet-i Seniyye aleyhine kıyamını bâdi olabileceğinden*).⁴⁴¹

Therefore, the policy-makers at the palace warned that the application of lethal force against the Muslims in a situation where they have not pointed their weapons against the instruments of law and order would be politically inappropriate and unjustified.⁴⁴² As of mid-to-late-November, when the Hamidian administration became much more anxious about the ongoing disorders, troops opened fire at Kurdish crowds in several places and the use and threatened use of deadly force against them was applied with greater frequency. Yet it is safe to say that the prevailing attitude throughout the period under scrutiny was to use “admonition” and “persuasion,” rather than firm action and punishment, with the Kurdish tribes, while it goes without saying that the regime employed the most repressive methods and instruments when suspected “Armenian seditionists” were concerned. There are numerous reports from local civilian and military officials indicating that the power of advice and admonition to the Kurdish tribes and plundering crowds was ineffective or very low in most instances.

6.5. Lack of Effective Prosecution and Severe Punishment: Criminal Investigations and post-Violence Justice

As should be evident by now, even if the Ottoman authorities did not organize or actively instigate the anti-Armenian violence, they nevertheless “understood” and empathized with the perpetrators. A common feature of collective violent actions directed against certain population categories is that in the aftermath of the conflict, the government authorities usually fail to take necessary steps to identify and try the perpetrators or the judicial agencies often take an indulgent, lenient, and sympathetic attitude towards members of the majority group prosecuted and put on trial for the alleged crimes. Indeed, Horowitz suggests that among the reasons why “ethnic riots are so widespread is that the activity is so rarely punished.”⁴⁴³ Within a particular country or case, lack of proper

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., cipher telegram from the *Mabeyn* (palace secretariat) to the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Imperial Army Corps dated 28 TE 1311/9 November 1895.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 366.

prosecution or a low probability of punishment also makes it more likely for new rounds of violence to occur and spread.

The absence of post-violence justice is another crucial aspect of the anti-Armenian pogroms of the mid-1890s as the Ottoman government did not take proper and vigorous action to bring the Muslim perpetrators to justice and punish them appropriately. Archival evidence unequivocally indicates that most of the masterminds, instigators, and actual perpetrators of the pogroms escaped prosecution and punishment altogether or were given exceptionally light sentences in view of the seriousness and enormity of their crimes. Besides empathy towards the perpetrators of the pogroms, the systematic policy of avoiding measures that might antagonize Muslim notables and wider segments of the Muslim population against the government led to almost complete impunity and lack of accountability for collective violence.

Except for a small number of cases, the Ottoman judicial and police authorities did not conduct proper and diligent criminal investigations with regards to the acts of violence and vandalism committed against a large number of victims throughout the events of 1895-97. From the beginning of the wave of violence in late September to late November 1895, a period already covering the majority of the events under study, the number of the Muslim rioters arrested on the scene or in the immediate aftermath of incidents were especially low. In many cases, not a single Muslim was arrested afterwards despite the extreme and indiscriminate nature of the harm inflicted upon an untold number of civilians and properties. And it is not surprising that most of those who were arrested and put on trial either went unpunished or were meted light punishments.

On the other hand, an aggressive prosecution and punishment campaign mainly targeted the Armenians. Almost in every instance, especially at major riot centers, numerous Armenians, including community leaders, notables, and clergymen, were detained and arrested immediately or afterwards, with many being tried in martial courts and sentenced to death and life imprisonment for the crimes of rioting, instigating and organizing sedition, murder, arson etc. However, on 22 December 1896, the Sultan proclaimed an amnesty to all Muslims and Armenians who had been convicted,

imprisoned, or indicted for participation in “the disturbances,” except for the Armenian convicts condemned to death. Their death sentences were nevertheless commuted to imprisonment in a fortress until “giving proofs of self-reformation/repentance,” while all Muslims imprisoned for crimes associated with the events of 1895-96 were pardoned and released unconditionally.⁴⁴⁴

With the sole exceptions of the Istanbul 1896 and Tokad 1897 cases, in the aftermath of which extraordinary tribunals were established for the prosecution and trial of the suspects connected with the events, the Ottoman authorities did not prepare comprehensive reports on the number of Muslims charged, arrested, tried, convicted, or acquitted of offences related to the riots. Neither do we have statistical reports or tabular statements on the sentences given to those Muslims found guilty for these crimes. Furthermore, except the two aforementioned cases, unfortunately I have been unable to identify in the Ottoman archives full interrogation records, court documents, and associated litigation materials of any case in which Muslims were tried for participation in killing, looting, arson, or any type of criminal activity during the events.⁴⁴⁵

On the other hand, in the face of growing diplomatic pressures from European powers criticizing the Ottoman government for not taking strong steps to bring the promoters and perpetrators of the violence to justice, the Interior Ministry compiled a

⁴⁴⁴ An amnesty for the Armenian political prisoners was originally pleaded by the Armenian Patriarch in late 1896. After negotiations, the Sublime Porte made substantial modifications in the conditions of the proposed amnesty for the Armenian prisoners and recommended to extend the pardon to all the Muslim prisoners who had been convicted or arrested for participation in the disturbances. Thus, a general amnesty was granted to all those who were convicted, arrested, or suspected for taking part in the events of 1895-96 that took place in the capital and in the provinces, with the exception of those Armenian prisoners under sentence of death. For the amnesty and its conditions, as recommended by the Council of Ministers, and for its approval by the Sultan, see BOA. Y.A.RES. 84/16, 15 B. 1314 (20 December 1896). The written supplication by the members of the Ecclesiastical and Lay Councils of the Armenian Patriarch for amnesty; the resolution or protocol (*mazbata*) of the Council of Ministers dated 15 B. 1314/8 KE 1312/20 December 1896; the Grand Vizier's letter to the palace, dated 15 B. 1314/8 KE 1312/20 December 1896, bearing the note declaring the Sultan's approval of the recommendation made by the council, dated 16 B. 1314/9 KE 1312/21 December 1896. The following day, amnesty was proclaimed. See Turkey No. 7 (1897), No. 127. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, December 22, 1896; “Latest Intelligence,” *Times* [London, England] December 23, 1896, 3; and, “Latest Intelligence,” *Times* [London, England] December 24, 1896, 3.

⁴⁴⁵ Further research is needed to determine whether the records, reports, or verdicts of any of the trials were published in the *Ceride-i Mahâkim*, or Journal of the Courts, an official periodical published by the Ottoman Ministry of Justice and Religious Sects, which contains, among other information, trial reports, litigation documents, case summaries, statistical accounts, and court verdicts.

simple statistical report in April 1896 based on information provided by the authorities in nine Anatolian provinces regarding the number of Muslims arrested for crimes associated with the disturbances. The following tables were drawn upon this official statistical report. The officials at the Sublime Porte hoped that these figures would demonstrate to the representatives of European powers that the government was sincere in combating the disorders and punishing Muslims who took part in the violence.

Table 6 Number of Muslims arrested or convicted for crimes associated with the riots in nine Armenian-populated provinces by April 1896⁴⁴⁶

Province	Location [Penal institution]	Number of arrested and convicted	Explanations
BİTLİS	Central Prison of Bitlis	8	Awaiting trial
	Siird Prison	2	Awaiting trial
	Muş Prison	1	Awaiting trial
	Bulanık Prison	1	Awaiting trial
	Çabakçur [Çapakçur] Prison	1	Awaiting trial
	Mutki Prison	1	Awaiting trial
	Hizan Prison	2	Awaiting trial
	Subtotal		16
MAMURETÜ'L-AZİZ	Central Prison of Mamuretü'l-Aziz	20	Each sentenced to three years' imprisonment
	Central Prison of Mamuretü'l-Aziz	4	Awaiting trial
	Malatya Prison	6	Awaiting trial
	Çarsancak Prison	5	Awaiting charge/under criminal investigation
	Subtotal		51
TRABZON	Central Prison of Trabzon	6	5 convicted by a court martial, 1 awaiting trial

⁴⁴⁶ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 536/33, 23 L. 1313 (7 April 1896), folio 3, “İslam Mevkuf ve Mahkumlarının Cedveli” (Table of [the Number] of Muslims Arrested and Convicted [for Crimes Associated with the Past Disturbances in Anatolia]), n.d.

Province	Location [Penal institution]	Number of arrested and convicted	Explanations
ANKARA	Kayseri Prison	21	Accused of serious crimes/felonies (<i>cinayet</i>) and less serious crimes/misdemeanors (<i>cünha</i>)
	Kayseri Prison	17	Awaiting charge/under criminal investigation
	Çorum Prison	5	3 accused of felony and 2 of less serious crimes
	Yozgad Prison	13	Accused of felony
	Yozgad Prison	15	Accused of less serious crimes; trial in progress (sub judice)
	Kalecik Prison	15	Case handed over to the prosecutor-general, awaiting trial
	Subtotal		143
ERZURUM	Central, Refahiye, and Bayburd prisons	42	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
VAN	Central and other prisons	18	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
ADANA	Haçın [also known as Haçın] Prison	7	Under arrest; from the district of Aziziye in the province of Sivas (apparently awaiting trial)
	Bulanık Prison	3	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
Subtotal		213	
DIYARBEKİR	Central Prison of Diyarbakir	20	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
	Mardin Prison	41	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
	Salvan [<i>sic</i> , Silvan] Prison	17	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
	Maden Prison	2	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
	Subtotal		293

Province	Location [Penal institution]	Number of arrested and convicted	Explanations
HALEB/ALEPPO	Maraş Prison	4	Convicted
	Maraş Prison	15	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
	Maraş Prison	5	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
	Birecik Prison	3	Under arrest (apparently awaiting trial)
TOTAL		320	

Table 7 Total numbers of Muslims arrested or convicted by province by April 1896⁴⁴⁷

Name of province	Number of Arrested
Bitlis	16
Mamuretü'l-Aziz	35
Trabzon	6
Ankara	86
Erzurum	42
Van	18
Adana	10
Diyarbakir	80
Haleb (Aleppo)	27
TOTAL	320

Table 6 shows a total of 320 Muslims arrested and put into prison by the authorities for crimes related to the anti-Armenian events in all the affected Anatolian provinces, except Sivas, by April 1896. As is seen, the table is not based on a comprehensive statistical account containing important details such as the type and exact location of crimes, time and place of arrests, convictions (if applicable), and similar legal information. It is

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

understood that some provincial officials simply submitted to the Interior Ministry the number of Muslims arrested in their provinces while others provided some small details on prosecution and trial processes. Only looking at the table, one may, for instance, think that the town of Mardin must have witnessed a major episode of violence during the period in question given that it shows 41 Muslims in Mardin Prison arrested in connection with the disturbances. Yet the arrests were probably related to the acts of murder and widespread plunder committed in the villages of the *sancak* of Mardin rather than any events in the center of this *sancak*, which was well defended by the troops and the inhabitants of the town against the attacks of Kurdish tribes during the wave of mass killings in the autumn/fall of 1895.

As can be seen in the table, of 320 Muslims, only 29 were convicted for serious and lesser serious crimes by April 1896. As already mentioned, we have no further data that can be drawn from archival records to determine convictions rates on the part of Muslims brought to trial for participation in killing, looting, and other offences. It is notable that the province of Ankara had a relatively high number of Muslims arrested even though the events in this province, except those in the town of Kayseri, were minor when compared to several other provinces in East Anatolia where the most lethal and destructive massacres took place. These high figures must be related to the comparatively—but not absolutely—energetic response of the Ankara authorities to the violence. Indeed, we also know that in the immediate aftermath of the riots of November 30, 1895, the authorities in Kayseri made perhaps the highest number of arrests of Muslims up to that time. On the other side, the number of Muslims tried for taking part in the events that unfolded in the provinces of Diyarbekir, Mamuretü'l-Aziz, Bitlis, Erzurum, and Trabzon, where the majority of killings and other serious crimes were committed, were especially low. Likewise, it is important to note that, as can be seen from the table and official Ottoman reports, not even a single Muslim was arrested for the acts of mass killing and vandalism carried out in the town of Urfa (Aleppo, December 1895).⁴⁴⁸ As a result, one clear conclusion to be drawn from these figures and other official accounts is that the ratio of arrests to the magnitude of human and

⁴⁴⁸ In addition to the table, see BOA. DH.ŞFR. 188/40, 13 Şubat 1311 (25 February 1896), in which the Aleppo authorities reported to the Interior Ministry that there were no Muslims arrested in Urfa for being involved in the disturbances.

material destruction that took place during the events of 1895-96 was extremely low, which can be taken as a significant indicator of the overall unwillingness and, to some extent, incompetence of the Ottoman government to punish Muslims for violence against Armenians.

The investigation and prosecution of the crimes committed during the events of Istanbul 1896 involved the highest number of Muslim and Armenian suspects in a single case. Even before the incidents in different parts of the capital city came to a complete end, the Sublime Porte instituted an Extraordinary Tribunal, composed of highest Muslim and Christian judicial functionaries, in order to expedite prosecution and trial processes. At the same time, a special commission at the Department of Police of the Ministry of Justice conducted preliminary investigations on all the cases involving a total of 1877 suspects detained by the law enforcement agencies for participation in the “Armenian incidents” that unfolded following the seizure of the Ottoman Bank by a group of Armenian revolutionaries in late August. Of 1877, 999 were Armenians, 730 Muslims, 122 Jews, and 26 Greeks. Working every day from August 28 to November 7, the commission regularly investigated interrogation reports and other related documents and resolved that 728 Armenians, 199 Muslims, 12 Jews, and 3 Greeks stand trial on various charges. In other words, approximately 73% of the Muslim detainees (a total of 531 persons) were freed while about third-fourth of the Armenian suspects subsequently went to trial.⁴⁴⁹

Many of these Armenian and Muslim suspects were tried by the Extraordinary Tribunal from early September until its dissolution in mid-November 1896. According to British sources, a total of 432 prisoners were brought before the tribunal up to the date of its closing. Of these, 260 were Armenians, 164 Muslims, 2 Greeks, and 6 Jews. Before transferring the remaining cases to the ordinary courts, the Extraordinary Tribunal found 98 Armenians, 54 Muslims, and 5 Jews not guilty of any crime. Most of the Armenians found guilty received especially heavy punishments, including 15 condemned to death and 18 sentenced to fifteen years’ imprisonment, on charges of sedition, firing upon troops,

⁴⁴⁹ BOA. Y.MTV. 148/38, 12 C. 1314 (18 November 1896). Letter from the Minister of Justice to the palace dated 12 C. 1314/18 November 1896, and the *mazbata*, or protocol, of the commission dated 31 TE 312/12 November 1896.

throwing bombs etc., while the vast majority of the Muslims found guilty were sentenced to a few months' imprisonment despite the fact that even the official figures show a great number of human and property loss on the part of Armenians.⁴⁵⁰

A tabular statement drawn up by British Embassy official George P. Devey, who followed most of the court hearings throughout the period in question, shows 74 cases decided by the tribunal between October 14 and November 10, in which 89 Muslims and 196 Armenians were tried. From the table, it can clearly be seen that most of the Muslim suspects were charged with possession of stolen goods and that they were either acquitted or sentenced to three to five months' imprisonment. On the Armenian side, even those who were charged with using "seditious language" and carrying "seditious documents" were sentenced to three years' imprisonment or hard labor. Devey also made remarks on the circumstantial nature of evidence against Armenian suspects as well as on the problematic use of police testimony in most cases.⁴⁵¹ Although these figures must be verified by final official court reports, a number of daily trial summaries submitted by the judicial authorities to the palace show similar findings and patterns.⁴⁵²

Given that armed Armenian revolutionaries took an active part in the incidents of August 1896, especially in certain parts of the city, it may not be surprising that a high number of Armenians received heavy punishments. Yet it is evident that clear anti-Armenian biases and prejudices on the part of the Ottoman officials characterized the investigations, prosecutions, and trials, and that the Hamidian administration treated the prosecution of Armenians alleged to be implicated in the events as an apt opportunity to suppress Armenian political ambitions. More important is that Muslim suspects were meted with ridiculously light punishments despite the indiscriminate attacks on a great number of people and property at the very heart of the empire as the policy makers and judicial authorities obviously took a lenient and empathetic attitude towards the

⁴⁵⁰ Turkey No. 7 (1897), No. 84. Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, December 1, 1896.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. Inclosure 1 in No. 84, "General Tabular Statement of Cases tried before the Special Court," and Inclosure 2 in No. 84, "Memorandum of Cases heard by the Special Court," G. P. Devey, Constantinople, November 28, 1896.

⁴⁵² See, for instance, BOA. Y.PRK.AZN. 17/1, 14 C. 1314 (20 November 1896).

perpetrators of violence. It is for this reason that foreign observers often raised questions about the fairness and impartiality of the preliminary investigations, police indictments, and court trials throughout the period in question.

One last and particularly crucial point about post-violence justice is that almost in every instance, the chief instigators, organizers, and authors of the anti-Armenian violence went unpunished altogether. In the case of Urfa, the local authorities (specifically the acting military Commander and *Mutasarrıf* of Urfa, Ahmed Lutfi Pasha, who was sent from Aleppo following the dismissal of the former *mutasarrıf* and the military commander to restore order and apparently made particularly energetic efforts to this effect in the aftermath of the massive violence in Urfa) categorically and repeatedly reported that certain powerful local notables—namely, Hüseyin Pasha, his nephew Bedii Efendi, and Ramazan Hocasade Abdurrahman Efendi—were the authors of the incidents in this town. These persons were, however, only sent to Aleppo upon the demand of the acting military Commander and *Mutasarrıf* of Urfa, and several months later, the government authorities in Istanbul allowed them to return to Urfa after being “admonished” without facing any prosecution, let alone punishment of any sort.⁴⁵³ The sanction imposed against these notable figures cannot even be regarded as a typical exile.

In Diyarbekir (Diyarbakır), a similar—or even a more lenient—measure was taken against Pirinççizade Arif Efendi, one of the alleged prominent instigators of the popular violence against Armenians in this provincial capital. In late February 1896 (during Ramadan), in a joint telegram to Istanbul, the Governor-General of Diyarbekir, members of the Commission of Inspection, and the military commander suggested that two notables of Diyarbekir—Arif Efendi, a former member of the Council of Provincial Administration, and Cemil Pasha, a former *mutasarrıf* of Hudeyde—be removed from the province on a

⁴⁵³ See BOA. BEO. 735/55088, 11 Ş. 1313 (26 January 1896). Cipher telegram from the office of the Grand Vizier to the office of the Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo dated 11 Ş. 1313/14 KS 1311/26 January 1896; BOA. Y.MTV. 136/7, 18 Ş. 1313 (2 February 1896). *Mazbata*, or resolution, of the General Staff (*Erkan-ı Harbiye*) dated 12 Ş. 1313/15 KS 1311/27 January 1896; BOA. MV. 86/48, 18 Ş. 1313 (2 February 1896). Resolution/discussion protocol (*zabit varakası*) of the Council of Ministers dated 18 Ş. 1313/[21] KS 1311/2 February 1896; BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 649/15, 25 Ş. 1313 (9 February 1896). Correspondence among various offices dated variously; BOA. MV. 87/79, 28 Z. 1313 (10 June 1896). Resolution/discussion protocol (*zabit varakası*) of the Council of Ministers dated 28 Z. 1313/10 June 1896.

temporary basis to be a deterrent to others since they were exciting and agitating the minds of the people by spreading false rumors, thereby threatening public security and tranquility. In return, the Council of Ministers resolved that these two notable figures be first sternly warned by the authorities in Diyarbekir that they would face necessary measures if they continued to act in such a way as to agitate and incite people. If they did not come to their senses, the council suggested, then the provincial government authorities would inform the Sublime Porte of the situation with details of their actions. Nine days later, the same officials from Diyarbekir reported that unlike Cemil Pasha, Arif Efendi paid no attention to the warnings. The officials also made even more serious and more concrete allegations against the latter, such as being the author of the false rumors that the Christians were going to be massacred again upon the Sultan's order on the fifteenth day of Ramadan and on the second day of Ramadan Feast, thereby causing excitement and a small-scale stir in the town. Upon this report, the Sublime Porte decided that Arif Efendi be asked to remove himself temporarily to Mosul, which should, however, not take the form of exile (*nefy suretinde olmayub*). As a result, he was immediately sent off to Mosul under gendarmerie escort in early March. After a couple of months' stay in Mosul, he succeeded in obtaining permission to proceed to Istanbul where he stayed for a short period of time before the palace approved the suggestion allowing him to return to Diyarbekir in late August 1896. It seems that he was back in Diyarbekir in late September or early October.⁴⁵⁴

In the case of Bitlis, as will be mentioned in the following chapter, the notorious Sheikh Emin was not even banished by the authorities from this province, let alone being brought to justice and punished. By the same vein, it is hardly surprising that the chiefs of the Haydaranlı and Hasananlı Kurds, like leaders of many other powerful Kurdish tribes or

⁴⁵⁴ The information above concerning the case of Arif Efendi draws from the following sources: BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 637/10, 19 N. 1313 (4 March 1896); BOA. MV. 86/62, 12 N. 1313 (26 February 1896); BOA. Y.A.HUS. 347/58, 23 N. 1313 (8 March 1896); BOA. MV. 86/69, 23 N. 1313 (8 March 1896); BOA. DH.ŞFR. 192/50, 19 Mart 1312 (31 March 1896); BOA. İ.HUS. 49/34, 15 Ra. 1314 (24 August 1896); Gustave Meyrier, *Les Massacres de Diarbekir: Correspondance Diplomatique du Vice-Consul de France, 1894-1896*, eds. Claire Mouradian and Michel Durand-Meyrier (Paris: Editions L'Inventaire, 2000), various official communications between the French Vice-Consul at Diyarbekir, Gustave Meyrier, and the French Ambassador at the Ottoman capital, Paul Cambon, on pages 170-172, 185-186; TNA: FO 424/187, No. 26. Inclosure No. 26, Vice-Consul Hallward to Consul Cumberbatch, Diarbekir, March 17, 1896 (for another copy of this report, see Turkey No. 8 [1896], Inclosure in No. 140. A shortened version of the report has also been reproduced in two publications. For citations, please refer to the following chapter); and, Turkey No. 3 (1897), No. 107. Inclosure in No. 107, Vice-Consul Hallward to Currie, Diarbekir, September 29, 1896.

tribal federations associated with the Hamidiye Regiments, easily managed to escape prosecution and punishment for the crimes that they themselves and their cohorts committed against an untold number of Armenian villagers throughout the period in question.

In the above-mentioned cases of Urfa, Diyarbekir, and Bitlis, as seen in several other instances, the provincial and central government authorities, on the one hand, admitted that those notable persons were agitating Muslims and inciting violence in their respective places, thereby endangering public order and peace; but, on the other hand, the government resorted to most palliative solutions like banishing such powerful local actors from their places of habitation provisionally, instead of taking firm and fair disciplinary action against them. Indeed, the primary motivation of the imperial administrators in taking such measures was to prevent the reoccurrence of violence, but not certainly to punish the alleged mastermind or perpetrators of killings and vandalism. It is important to note that the government authorities also made no inquiries into the possible roles that these powerful elites may have played in the first, actual outbreaks of violence in the fall of 1895-96. In consequence, the findings presented above clearly show that those who were highly instrumental in instigating, facilitating, abetting, and masterminding the anti-Armenian pogroms simply escaped justice as the Hamidian administration totally failed its most basic obligation to properly and justly prosecute the most serious crimes committed against a large number of civilians during the years 1895-96.

Chapter 7. Exploring the Identity, Agency, and Motivations of the Perpetrators of Violence

7.1. Introduction

Scholars of mass violence directed against particular ethnic, racial, or religious population categories have recently become more attentive to the social background, behavior, and motives of perpetrators, whether in uniform or not. Even in studies of carefully-planned, centrally-administrated, and highly systematic mass murders and genocides, a particular attention is now given to the role, position, and agency of killers and ordinary masses who implement genocidal intent, participate in violence, or actively support state policies. As an emerging field, Perpetrators Studies emphasizes the agency, motives, and responsibility of even rank-and-file perpetrators who are supposed to simply fulfill “killing orders.” Without underestimating the role of government authorities, political leadership, and exclusionary ideologies, these studies examine the conditions that make murderers out of ordinary people.⁴⁵⁵

Given the absence of state organization, direction, and coordination in the anti-Armenian massacres of 1895-97, it is an inevitable task for the historian to investigate the identity, social background, motives, and agency of those who took active part in violent collective action. In a sense, scholars who tend to conceptualize the events of 1895-97 as centrally-organized, state-led massacres reduce the perpetrators to cogs in the machine or mere executioners of the state directives. Such perspectives leave little room for the agency

⁴⁵⁵ For a brief discussion of new perspectives in genocide and mass violence studies, see Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, “The Study of Mass Murder and Genocide,” in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, eds. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, 3-26 (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For detailed theoretical discussions and sophistications, see, among many others, Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of Genocide* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK; New York, NY: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008). For a few recent, remarkable interventions in the analysis of perpetrators, whether state actors or civilians, see James E. Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007); Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, eds., *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Abram de Swaan, *The Killing Compartments: The Mentality of Mass Murder* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015). For a psychological/socio-psychological perspective, see Donald G. Dutton, *The Psychology of Genocide, Massacres, and Extreme Violence: Why "Normal" People Come to Commit Atrocities* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007).

of ordinary people who deliberately committed most heinous crimes against Armenians. Nor do they pay sufficient attention to the feelings, perception, and decisions of perpetrating groups. As already implied before, in most cases of ethnic violence on such massive scales, the encouragement, instigation, and tacit or open support of political authorities—at central or local levels—play a significant role. Indeed, as we have emphasized in the previous parts of this study, without incitement, leadership, or inspiration by social superiors and government agents, or without a sense of official support or approval, the sheer scale of popular participation and violence would not have been possible. It should also be reminded that the actual killers and large crowds who participated in anti-Armenian violence believed they were acting with government approval and in favor of the state.

It is, however, extremely important to underscore that they were not rank-and-file perpetrators who simply carried out those atrocities by following official orders in good faith. Nor they were exclusively mercenaries, a paramilitary group, or members of a special organization acting on behalf of government agencies. Therefore, the perpetrators cannot be considered as agents of the state but actors driven by certain concerns, feelings, motives, interests, and aspirations. They reacted to the circumstances in which they lived from a certain perspective and acted in the belief that they would have something to gain from violence. Even if Muslim notables, religious leaders, tribal chieftains, and in certain cases, government officials played a crucial role in mobilizing people for violence, they must nevertheless have had a reason to follow their leaders and to kill their Armenian neighbors or fellow citizens. We should remember that provocateurs and agitators need willing crowds. And rumors may mobilize people for a certain action only when they find “willing ears” to receive them and “willing tongues” to spread them. The willingness of masses to participate in collective action against Armenians cannot be neglected for the sake of emphasizing the constitutive role of political authorities and Muslim notables in the making of anti-Armenian violence.

It is also certainly misguided to suppose that the perpetrators were so easily manipulated or exploited by authoritative figures. In other words, they should not be construed as puppets or the unwitting dupes of conspirators. Nor can we dismiss them as a

criminal, degenerate, helpless minority. On the other hand, this does not mean that the massacres of the mid-1890s were the work of individuals or groups acting solely on their own cause or for their own purposes. It is highly likely that personal animosities, family feuds, or business rivalries may have motivated some to participate in violence against Armenians. It is also accurate that the motivating force that drove some groups—specifically peasants, immigrants, and certain nomadic populaces—to participate in the events was the desire to take a share from plunder. Yet it is safe to suggest that the vast majority of participants operated in groups and as a collective, considering themselves to be acting in the interests (and in lieu) of the state and the larger Muslim community.

Certain individuals and groups may have been more active on the spot than others; but, as an important attribute of the anti-Armenian riots, killings and other crimes against civilians were committed with *the support and approval of the wider society* in most cases. Evidence also suggests that those who participated in anti-Armenian carnages and the wider local community that approbated these excesses believed, not half-heartedly but altogether, the violence was *necessary, appropriate, and justified*. This may also account not only for the sheer magnitude of mob violence, but also for why there was *no remorse* for the killings on the part of the local Muslim population afterwards. Importantly, from Horowitz's incisively-argued, inspiring study, we clearly understand that these three aspects, like many others, observed in the anti-Armenian massacres—that is, the approbation of the wider community, a strong belief in the necessity and legitimacy of violence, and a lack of moral responsibility and contrition in the aftermath of the events—are also widely seen in most cases of large-scale, lethal ethnic riots across the globe.⁴⁵⁶

Consequently, an examination of these episodes of collective violence should address such fundamental, and somewhat perplexing, questions: Who were the authors, instigators, and actual perpetrators of anti-Armenian violence? What determined the participation of large segments of the local Muslim population in vicious acts against a large number of people? What were the underlying rationales, motivations, and objectives of the masterminds, agitators, and participants? How can we explain the concerns,

⁴⁵⁶ See Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 366-373.

apprehensions, feelings, and interests of participating groups? What meaning (or excuse) did they invest in and ascribe to their extremely violent behavior? How did Muslims seek to justify their murderous and destructive activities? This chapter will attempt to answer these crucial questions.

7.2. The Identity and Social Background of Instigators and Perpetrators: Elites, Chieftains, and Crowds

The identity of perpetrators is usually more difficult to be determined than the identity of victim is. Indeed, studies of ethnic killings reveal more about the victims of violence than about those who victimize them. Scarcity of relevant source materials poses a particular challenge for historical studies that aim to document the identity of the perpetrators, instigators, accomplices, collaborators, and bystanders involved in a specific specimen of violent intergroup conflict or in a genocide. Drawing “perpetrators stories” from state archives is strenuous and challenging, if not unlikely—leaving aside the methodological problems that such an effort may raise. Even if there were criminal investigations in the aftermath of events, reports of arrest, interrogation, and prosecution and litigation documents may not be available or abundant. Likewise, biographical sources are often scarce even for perpetrators of the highly-organized and systematic genocides of the twentieth century.⁴⁵⁷ Particularly, men and women of the lower-classes and low-ranking officials who supervise, aid, carry out, or participate in killings on the actual spot leave few personal, written materials that would otherwise help the historian dealing with the topic of perpetrators.

It is therefore not surprising that available sources do not allow us to determine with precision the individual identities and social composition of the perpetrators of the 1895-97 events. Archival records are not particularly helpful in this regard, let alone for the purpose of reconstructing the experiences and perspectives of those who

⁴⁵⁷ See Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, “Perpetrators of the Holocaust: A Historiography,” in *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 46. In this study, Szejnmann provides a detailed assessment of the development and current state of research on perpetrators of the Holocaust.

participated in the events. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I was able to find only very few interrogation reports and court records that might shed light on the social backgrounds of the Muslims prosecuted for their participation in killing and looting. It is also noteworthy that, as we have already seen, most instigators and ringleaders escaped prosecution in the aftermath of the events. The official inquiries conducted by the investigatory commissions dispatched from Istanbul to the provinces provide no information about the identity of instigators, ringleaders, and participants unless they were alleged Armenian provocateurs.

Yet government documents, a number of police and court records, foreign consular reports, eyewitness accounts, and petitions of Armenian community leaders, town dwellers, and villagers reveal that the rioters and attackers were a mixture of ordinary Muslim citizens from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, which included local townspeople, nomadic/semi-nomadic Kurds, tribesmen, Caucasian immigrants, peasants, and, partly, soldiers. As I argue below, local Muslim notables, religious leaders, Kurdish chieftains, and, in certain cases, government officials played significant roles in organizing and instigating violence. The identity of killers and pillagers had very much to do with location but generally speaking, no ethnic group (e.g., Turkish-speaking Muslims, Kurds, Arabs, Lazes, Circassians etc.) had a monopoly on inciting and committing killings. In other words, participants—like rescuers and bystanders—came from all strata of the local Muslim population regardless of ethnic/communal background.

Nevertheless, the nomadic/semi-nomadic Kurds constituted the most critical mass in the riots. They attacked numerous towns and villages to either begin killing and looting or to join the local rioters who were already involved in the conflict. In several major towns, such as Harput and Gürün, it was the armed Kurdish hordes from the surrounding areas that committed those excesses exclusively. Kurdish tribal forces also sought to enter a dozen of towns to attack the local Armenians but they were driven off by the troops and local authorities, who succeeded in protecting their areas of responsibility throughout the period in question. Tribal assemblies also attempted to participate in the riots that already broke out in Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Urfa, and many other places; but the authorities prevented them from entering. Like peasant groups and Caucasian immigrants, the Kurds who

previously came to the towns for buying-and-selling or with a view to participating in possible anti-Armenian activity filled the ranks of attackers in many cases. Preexisting social/communal ties and networks, especially among tribal groups, obviously facilitated participation in collective action against the Armenians.

Unsurprisingly, there is evidence to suggest that those who carried out the actual killings on the spot were predominantly male, young, and “lower class,” which reflects almost a universal pattern in ethnic riots. Although large crowds seem to have frantically taken part in violence, the urban “rabble,” the so-called rowdies or the local “riffraff,” peasants from the nearby villages, tribal groups, and immigrants were at the forefront of killers, arsonists, and looters. Almost everywhere, peasants flocked into the towns to share the plunder. Yet it is important to note that participation in killing and looting was never confined entirely to these segments of the local Muslim population.

Merchants, officials, artisans, and religious leaders appeared to function more as organizers, instigators, supporters, onlookers, or, in certain cases, rescuers, rather than active perpetrators. In other words, they incited, promoted, or justified the killings even if they themselves did not actively participate in them on the spot. Nevertheless, it seems that during the riots in a number of major centers, which usually lasted for a day or longer, artisans, shopkeepers, and traders actively participated in the conflict. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Kurdish porters, migrant workers, and medrese, or Islamic theology school, students were the most active groups during the riots in Istanbul in 1895. In August 1896, as well, Turkish and Kurdish speaking seasonal laborers and porters took a prominent part in the conflict, especially in certain parts of the capital city. There is no evidence that migrant workers or unskilled day laborers were active participants of the urban riots that broke out in the provinces. Due to a lack of extensive studies analyzing labor profile in the cities of eastern Anatolia in the nineteenth century or in any period of Ottoman history, we do not even know whether the provincial capitals and major district towns attracted sizable migrant labor communities during the period in question.

A wide range of groups and individuals were involved directly or indirectly in anti-Armenian violence. Certainly, some groups participated only for acquisitive purposes or

simply followed the popular “trend.” Especially certain peasant groups, pastoral nomads, and tribal populations who raided and sacked countless Armenian villages were mainly in pursuit of loot and spoil. As implied above, it is, however, misleading to think that the majority of the perpetrators were simple, ignorant people who had no idea of what they were really doing.

In a significant number of cases, massacres and other crimes were committed exclusively by the armed tribal forces, rather than local people, who organized attacks on Armenian-populated towns. Yet they probably had local contacts in several places and Kurdish attacks were not spontaneous expressions of outrage by the rank and file acting only on their behalf. Most of them were premediated, organized, and coordinated by tribal chieftains and usually in collaboration with powerful notables in provincial centers or district towns. Indeed, the events of 1895-97 also displayed that the Kurdish-speaking tribal populations, or *Ekrad* (the plural form of *Kürd*, or Kurd, a word referring, in the language of Ottoman officials and foreign observers, to the nomadic/semi-nomadic/tribal Kurdish populations) in general, had strong socioeconomic ties with provincial capitals and major district centers. Specifically, the outbreaks that unfolded throughout the provinces of Diyarbekir, Bitlis, and Mamuretü'l-Aziz proved that local urban elites had a considerable degree of influence over tribal populations and could stir up crowds of rural populaces under favorable conditions.

As already noted in the first chapter of this study, the claim that Hamidiye commanders, officers, or soldiers were the primary perpetrators of the mass violence against Armenians during the years 1895-1897, or that they widely participated in the killings during this period, is totally mythical. Like many claims that can be found in most narratives of these events, it is not based on research, let alone convincing evidence. However, certain Hamidiye forces committed acts of looting, plunder, and murder in certain—and clearly identifiable—areas during the wave of anti-Armenian massacres. In what follow, I provide a brief—and accurate—account of where and how these forces were involved in collective violence against Armenians and their property during the period under review. This list may not contain isolated or relatively minor cases of looting, plunder, or murder in rural areas conducted by Hamidiye militia forces. Yet the careful

research that I have done in a variety of archives unambiguously indicate that the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments did not participate or play a visible background role in the vast majority of the urban riots and the attacks on Armenian-populated towns, where most of the killings and property destruction occurred during the years 1895-1897.

First, according to official sources, during the first episode of violence in the town of Urfa (October 1895), a certain Hamidiye lieutenant-colonel led to the looting of shops in the market area by raiding a swordsmith's shop and looting it with a group of about 40-50 people (his men), thereby encouraging others to do so. A couple of weeks after the second—and much larger—incident in this town, the acting military Commander of Urfa demanded that this Hamidiye lieutenant-colonel be banished from the region for their share in the violence, along with another Hamidiye commander, Reşid Bey, the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Fifty-First Cavalry Regiment (accused of a different crime against an Armenian merchant), and certain civilian notable figures in Urfa (accused of masterminding the violence and disturbing the peace in Urfa), whose names have been mentioned in the previous chapter.⁴⁵⁸ On 25 March 1896, the Governor-General of Aleppo reported that no legal action had been taken against this Hamidiye Commander, noting that it was inappropriate that he, holding an official capacity (as a Hamidiye commander), still freely roamed around without facing any sanction.⁴⁵⁹ There is no sign that the lieutenant-colonel was banished to Aleppo or faced any legal punishment during this period. The Lieutenant-Colonel Reşid Bey, along with 2 Hamidiye officers in his regiment, was

⁴⁵⁸ In Ottoman government documents, there is unclear information regarding the name of this Hamidiye Lieutenant-Colonel. A few documents refer to the alleged offender as “Hamid Bey” and “Hamdi Bey” without mentioning the number of his regiment while others report that it was the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Fifty-First Hamidiye Cavalry Regiment, Sheikh Muhammed, who committed the crime in question. For this case, see BEO. 735/55088 (26 January 1896). Cipher telegram from the office of the Grand Vizier to the office of the Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo dated 11 Ş. 1313/14 KS 1311/26 January 1896; Y.MTV. 136/7 (2 February 1896). *Mazbata*, or resolution, of the General Staff Department (*Erkan-ı Harbiye-i Umumiye Dairesi*) dated 12 Ş. 1313/15 KS 1311/27 January 1896; MV. 86/48 (2 February 1896). Resolution/discussion protocol (*zabit varakası*) of the Council of Ministers dated 18 Ş. 1313/[21] KS 1311/2 February 1896; A.MKT.MHM. 649/15 (9 February 1896). Correspondence among various offices dated variously; BOA. Y.MTV. 141/21, 14 Za. 1313 (27 April 1896). *Mazbata*, or resolution, of the General Staff Department dated 12 Za 1313/13 Nisan 1312/25 April 1896; BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 111/34, 26 Za. 1313 (9 May 1896). The *mazbata*, or resolution, of the Department of Judicial Affairs (*Muhakemat Dairesi*) of the General Staff dated 15 Za. 1313/16 Nisan 1312/28 April 1896.

⁴⁵⁹ A.MKT.MHM. 649/15 (9 February 1896). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Haleb/Aleppo dated 13 Mart 1312/25 March 1896.

arrested in the spring of 1896 and stayed in prison for 7 months but not because he or his men participated in the killings or looting in the town of Urfa (indeed, there is no evidence about their participation) but for seizing the highly valuable goods of an Armenian merchant (from Aleppo) somewhere between Urfa and Birecik.

Second, as already noted before, tribal forces within the Haydaranlı and Hasananlı confederations, which were enrolled in the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments, attacked, raided, and sacked numerous Armenian villages throughout the provinces of Van, Bitlis, and Erzurum, particularly across the districts of Gevaş, Erciş, Adilcevaz, Ahlat, Bulanık, Malazgird, Bayezid, and Eleşkird in the fall of 1895 and the ensuing winter, as was the case before and after the anti-Armenian massacres of 1895-97. The damage that they created in these places was massive. It is safe to say that although a few other tribal groups (certainly not many) associated with the Hamidiye plundered Armenian villages and committed various other crimes against Armenian civilians, the Haydaranlı and Hasananlı Kurds were the most active and aggressive Hamidiye groups during this period.⁴⁶⁰ As mentioned before, plunder, seizure of livestock, and, in certain cases, destruction of Armenian private and communal property were seldom accompanied by outright murder during these attacks as the primary goal of tribal chieftains and their cohorts was not to kill Armenians *en masse* but to rob and terrorize them. Once, Inspector-General Şakir Pasha spoke of the “disgrace” (*leke*) that Hüseyin Pasha of Haydaranlı brought upon the Hamidiye organization, obviously referring to his reported crimes during this period, and contrasted his behavior with those of two Hamidiye lieutenant-colonels who were reported to have effectively protected Armenian villages in the districts of Malazgird and Hınıs.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶⁰ For cases of pillage, robbery, seizure of livestock, and attack on Armenian communal property reported to be committed by tribal forces associated with Haydaranlı chiefs (such as Hüseyin Pasha, Emin Pasha, and Hacı Timur Pasha) and Hasananlı Kurds in the above-mentioned places, see, among many archival sources, BOA. Y.A.HUS. 338/92, 14 Ca. 1313 (2 November 1895). Correspondence among various offices dated variously; BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 619/12, 14 Ca. 1313 (2 November 1895). Correspondence among various offices dated variously; BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/43, 18 Ca. 1313 (6 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Erzurum dated 25 TE 1311/6 November 1895; BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/53, 19 Ca. 1313 (7 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Van dated 26 TE 1311/7 November 1895; BOA. Y.PRK.AZN. 14/8, 19 Ca. 1313 (7 November 1895). Telegram from the Catholicos of Ahtamar Monastery, Haçator (or Haçador), to the *Mabeyn* (Palace Secretariat), the office of the Grand Vizier, and to the Armenian Patriarchate dated 26 TE 1311/7 November 1895.

⁴⁶¹ See Y.PRK.MYD. 17/27 (7 November 1895). Telegram from Şakir Pasha to the palace.

The efforts of Şakir Pasha and high-ranking provincial government officials in East Anatolia to discipline Hüseyin Pasha and other Haydaranlı chieftains yielded no serious results. In most cases, Zeki Pasha explicitly or implicitly advocated and favored such powerful chieftains as Hüseyin Pasha during this period and the subsequent years, countering strong allegations against chieftains on the part of provincial governments or creating excuses for them.⁴⁶² During this period, as Janet Klein has already pointed out, especially Haydaranlı and Hasananlı chiefs also considerably increased their land-grabbing activity across these regions as the bloodshed and chaos prevailing all over the eastern provinces presented a perfect opportunity for practices of land appropriation and occupation.⁴⁶³ Due to fear of being killed, some Armenian villagers also had to sign their lands over to these tribal chieftains through special legal agreements in exchange for protection against other tribal groups' attack and abuse.⁴⁶⁴

Third, to briefly summarize, the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Forty-Fifth Hamidiye Cavalry Regiment, Reşid Bey (the chief of the Kiki, or Kikan, tribe), and a Hamidiye Major, Osman Agha, first raided the Catholic Armenian village of Tel-Armen (a large, prosperous village within the administrative borders of the *sancak* of Mardin, Diyarbekir) with a group of 50-60 tribespeople, forcing the villagers to pay 400 liras in exchange for protection. A couple of hours later, a large number of tribespeople (according the Armenian Catholic Patriarch, thousands of cavalries and Kurds) directed by Reşid Bey raided the village, plundered all the houses and shops there, and killed ten villagers. Before leaving the demolished village, the assailants had sacked the church and carried off thousands of sheep. Later on, Reşid Bey and his men would also be accused of occupying the lands of Catholic Armenian Tel-Armen villagers. Although the military authorities decided to try

⁴⁶² For an example, see BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 639/26, 4 L. 1313 (19 March 1896). Correspondence among various offices dated variously.

⁴⁶³ As already noted, for land-grabbing activities of Kurdish Hamidiye chieftains, specifically in the Haydaranlı case, see Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, pp. 128-69.

⁴⁶⁴ For only one clear example of this kind of land appropriation by Hamidiye chieftains who targeted vulnerable Armenian villagers during and after the wave of anti-Armenian massacres, see A.MKT.MHM. 620/15 (31 March 1896). Correspondence among various offices dated variously. Klein also mentions such "legal" methods of land appropriation by Hamidiye chieftains in the aftermath of mass killings: *ibid.*, 144-45.

Reşid Bey and Osman Agha in Mardin, there is no sign that they were ever arrested or brought to justice. At least, we know that they were still free and untried in late 1897.⁴⁶⁵

Lastly, the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Fortieth Hamidiye Cavalry Regiment (assembled from within the Turkic-speaking Kapapaks—Caucasian immigrants settled in central and east Anatolia in the second half of the nineteenth century), Mihrali Bey, Hamidiye officers in this regiment, and their people actively engaged in acts of plunder and, occasionally, murder in many Armenian-populated villages in the southwestern part of Sivas Province, specifically in the districts of Tonus (today Altınyayla), Aziziye (today Pınarbaşı), and Bünyan-ı Hamid (today Bünyan), near the border with the province of Ankara.⁴⁶⁶ Despite the serious attempts by the provincial government officials in Sivas to have Mihrali and Hamidiye officers in the Fortieth Regiment tried in accordance with the law to which these militia forces were subject, there is no evidence that they were prosecuted or brought to justice.⁴⁶⁷

As already mentioned, material incentives had a significant motivational effect on the behavior of certain tribal groups such as the Kurds of Dersim. One brief example from the province of Mamuretü'l-Aziz may be germane to our discussion. In mid-November 1895, the palace authorities notified the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps and Inspector-General Şakir Pasha that a cipher telegram from the *Mutasarrıf* of Dersim reported that two Dersim chieftains, Zeyto-zade (?)⁴⁶⁸ Muhammed/Mehmed and Zeynel Aghas, were

⁴⁶⁵ For this case, see, primarily, BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 636/31, 1 C. 1313 (18 November 1895). Correspondence among various offices dated variously, from November 1895 to May 1896; A.MKT.MHM. 637/38 (9 February 1897). Correspondence among various offices dated variously, from early 1896 to late 1897.

⁴⁶⁶ See, for instance, BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 660/53, 3 C. 1313 (20 November 1895). Correspondence among various offices dated variously; BOA. Y.PRK.DH. 9/8, 7 C. 1313 (24 November 1895). From the Acting Governor-General of Ankara to the Interior Ministry, 13 TS 311/24 November 1895; BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 660/62, 8 C. 1313 (25 November 1895). Letter from the Grand Vizier to the office of the *Serasker* dated 8 C. 313/14 TS 311/25 November 1895; BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 34/15, 15 C. 1313 (3 December 1895). From the Governor-General of Sivas, 21 TS 1311/3 December 1895.

⁴⁶⁷ For these attempts, see, for instance, A.MKT.MHM. 660/53 (20 November 1895). Correspondence among various offices dated variously, from November 1895 to January 1896.

⁴⁶⁸ The name written in the document is clearly “Zeyto-zade Muhammed/Mehmed;” but a colleague, Yalçın Çakmak, with good knowledge of the history of the Dersim region and its inhabitants, has suggested that it was probably Zeyno-zade Mehmed, the chief of the Aşağı Abbas Uşağı tribe. I would like to thank him for his suggestion.

speaking straight out about some of the notables of Harput being cognizant beforehand of the Dersim Kurds' plundering in the [Armenian] villages of Harput. According to the same report by the *mutasarrıf*, the chieftains also claimed that afterwards they had been given honorific gifts and weaponries by some individuals (probably the same notables), obviously as a reward for the job they did. Moreover, rumors were circulating among the people that a Gendarmerie Major in Harput, Mehmed Agha, dressed his soldiers as Kurds and collected some of the usurped properties. The Yıldız Palace ordered the Field-Marshal and the Inspector-General to make an inquiry into the matter and bring the offenders involved to justice. Yet what is remarkable is that the authorities at the palace also noted that since it was known that some of the groups in the Dersim region were *rafizî* (a pejorative term meaning "heretics" in the language of Ottoman officials⁴⁶⁹) and that they "had relations with Armenians" (*Ermenilerle münasebetde buldukları*), it was not unlikely that the said gifts had been sent to the chieftains by the Armenians themselves.⁴⁷⁰

The identity of those who made raids upon on the center of Harput and the neighboring villages is still unclear. Official reports and foreign consular accounts mostly identify them as the Kurds of Dersim or only as the Kurds (*Ekrad*) without providing precise information. It is understood that from late October to early December 1895, different tribal forces and groups were involved in anti-Armenian activities across the district of Harput, where numerous Armenian villages were raided, sacked, and ravaged by armed crowds from the surrounding areas. It is certain that tribal forces from the Dersim area were very active in the region over the period in question and their primary motivation was to have a share in the booty. Yet it also seems that Kurdish groups from other areas throughout the province of Mamuretü'l-Aziz carried out innumerable village attacks and participated in the killing and looting in the center of Harput on November 11-12, 1895.

⁴⁶⁹ Traditionally, the Ottoman Sunni ulema and officials identified Shiite individuals and groups as *rafizîs* who rejected the Sunni Caliphs Ebu Bekir and Ömer (Abu Bakr and 'Umar). And they often referred to *Kızılbaş* groups in Anatolia as *rafizîs* in a pejorative way.

⁴⁷⁰ BOA. Y.PRK.BŞK. 44/26, 4 C. 1313 (22 November 1895). Cipher telegram from First Secretary Tahsin Pasha to the Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps and Marshal Şakir Pasha [Inspector-General] dated 10 TS 1311/22 November 1895.

In May 1896, for instance, the British Acting Consul at Harput, Rafael A. Montana, obtained two interesting written statements in Ottoman Turkish, one by “seven Kurds of Ziva,” a *nahiye*, or sub-district, in the province of Mamuretü’l-Aziz, with regard to the Kurdish attacks on Harput and its villages in the fall of 1895; and the other regarding an attack made by Ottoman troops and tribal groups upon the *Kızılbaş* Kurds of the Akçadağ district who had reportedly refused to take part in the attacks against the Armenians of the town of Malatya (November 1895, Mamuretü’l-Aziz). The Acting Consul transmitted the two statements, along with English translations, to the British Ambassador at the Ottoman capital. It is not clear why especially those “seven Kurds” made such a written statement in Fontana’s presence at their own request, but what they claimed is nevertheless noteworthy. According to the seven men, who seem to have all been village leaders in their own region, it was Hacı Halil Agha (Hadji Khalil Aga) of Kızıl Uşağı (Kizil Ushaghi), a village in the sub-district of Ziva, who assembled some 2,000 Kurds of his clan and, “hoisting his flag,” carried out a raid on the district of Harput and the neighboring villages five months ago. The statement, which they made “in the name of common right and justice,” continued as follows:

He set fire to houses, killed, plundered, and did other evil; and he afterwards openly gave out to the villagers he met with that he had himself cut to pieces with his own hand Artin Effendi Atnalian, a prominent Kharput [Harput] trader, adding, ‘Such is the command of our Padishah; see that you do likewise.’ By thus exciting the Kurds he had given rise to the recent troubles. From among 360 oxen and cows, together with plunder of all sorts, impossible to specify here, collected by him from the villages of Zerki, Derijan, and Berete, in the Caza [*kaza*] of Keban, and from other places; he handed over only 216 head of cattle to the authorities; the remainder are retained by his associates.⁴⁷¹

Despite the active participation of outsiders, such as peasants, immigrants, and nomadic Kurds, in urban riots, it is important to note that in many cases, the majority of the participants were local Muslim townspeople and Muslim communities from the neighboring areas, not people transient or seasonal. By the same token, they were neither homeless, desperate crowds nor gangs of criminals employed by the political authorities or

⁴⁷¹ TNA: FO 424/187, No. 165. Inclosure 2 in No. 165, “Statement bearing Seals of Seven Kurds of Ziva” (Translation), dated May 7, 1896. Fontana transmitted the statement to Ambassador Currie in a dispatch dated Kharput, May 19, 1896. Also see Turkey No. 8 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 237.

urban elites as “contract killers.” Horowitz has observed that the ordinariness of most participants (but certainly not all ordinary people participate) is a common phenomenon in ethnic violence.⁴⁷² And the anti-Armenian riots do not seem to be an exception. “The ordinariness of the mob,” Horowitz also suggests, “is testimony to its reflection of the norms and feelings of the group from which it springs.”⁴⁷³ Indeed, it was not outside agitators that incited or triggered the anti-Armenian violence. As we have already seen, most alleged organizers, instigators, and agitators were from within the local/provincial Muslim population.

Indeed, the local Muslim notables, tribal chieftains, religious leaders, and urban upper classes were prominent elements at every stage of anti-Armenian violence in most instances. The willingness of such authoritative figures to incite, support, or condone anti-Armenian activity directly determined or influenced the course of events and the severity of violence almost everywhere. Their statements and actions were usually interpreted to signal approval or disapproval of violence against Armenians. As we have seen or implied in the previous chapters, they spread, or helped to spread, anti-Armenian rumors, made provocative statements and acts, placed placards calling for anti-Armenian action, directed or assisted rioters on the spot, and played various organizational roles in many places. Furthermore, powerful Muslim notables, some of whom previously took part in the provincial administration, played significant roles in the rationalization and justification of violence, convincing larger segments of the local population that violence was necessary and could be perpetrated without the risk of punishment and reprisal. Yet, in many other cases, they also proved highly instrumental in preventing or minimizing damage by actively opposing violence or, at least, by remaining bystanders.

To the previously-mentioned cases of Diyarbekir, Urfa, and Bitlis, where certain powerful local notables and community leaders clearly appeared to be the principal organizers and instigators of intercommunal conflict, we can add the case of Malatya (Mamuretü'l-Aziz, November 1895). Various sources identified several individuals,

⁴⁷² See Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 264-265.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 266.

besides government officials, as the chief protagonists of the collective violence against the Armenians in this town. For instance, the Catholic Armenian community leaders, who often avoided confronting the government, focused on keeping their community safe throughout the events of 1895-97, and emphasized their identity as distinguished from Apostolic Armenians, claimed that the primary individuals responsible for the damage in Malatya were the *mutasarrıf*, the commander Pashas, the judge, or *naib*, “who ruled [that] the killing and destruction of the Christians [was permissible] (*Hristiyanların katl ve itlafına hüküm veren*),” and notables of Malatya Sülün oğlu Mehmed Efendi, Halıcı oğlu Abdullah Efendi, Cebeci(?) oğlu Ali Bey, Harahaş(?) oğlu Hacı Mustafa Efendi, and a certain Hacı Paşa.⁴⁷⁴ The Governor-General of Mamuretü'l-Aziz reported that, in response to the Catholic Armenian Patriarch's official representation, the Malatya authorities denied the allegations against the notables of this town as well as the claim that the local government officials were negligent in their response to the events.⁴⁷⁵

As mentioned above, in May 1896, Acting Consul Fontana was given a written statement sealed by an inhabitant of the village of Bekir Uşağı, İbrahim oğlu Halil, who claimed that people of twenty-five villages, including his own village, in the sub-district of Akçadağ were persecuted by Harirci-zade Abdullah Agha (also referred to as Hacı Abdullah Efendi in several archival sources), member of the Administrative Council of the *Sancak* of Malatya, and his men for their refusal to participate in the attacks against the Armenians of Malatya. According to the statement, some days before the events in this town, Abdullah Agha sent the villagers a letter inviting them to attack Armenians. The villagers, Halil claimed, however disregarded the invitation “knowing the contents of the letter to be contrary to common justice.” After the disturbances in Malatya, Abdullah Agha declared that the villagers had made an agreement with the Armenians, and sent a Captain, named Şükri Efendi, with his followers to take the letter back. Indeed, they returned the letter without hesitation. A couple of days later, however, a battalion of troops and several chieftains accompanied by their cohorts and 3,000 Kurds they had gathered from other

⁴⁷⁴ A.MKT.MHM. 658/30 (15 April 1896). Letter from the Armenian Catholic Patriarch to the Grand Vizierate dated 17 KS 1311/29 January 1896.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. Letter from the governor of Mamuretü'l-Aziz dated 2 Za. 1313/15 April 1896.

places attacked those twenty-five villages, plundering everything the villagers had and slaying 900 inhabitants including children. Halil also claimed that eighteen survivors had been arrested afterwards and they were kept in prison ever since, “hungry and shivering.”⁴⁷⁶

Ottoman archival records show that a woman villager, named Medine, petitioned the Sublime Porte two times in the spring of 1896 about the same events, claiming that 800 people, including her husband, were killed and their property plundered during the attack organized by Abdullah Agha and his followers. We also see that in June 1896, Halil sent a petition to Istanbul requesting the release of 18 villagers prisoned and demanding justice against Abdullah Agha and his cohorts.⁴⁷⁷ In addition, it seems that some of these villagers also approached a group of Christian missionaries in the region to state their grievances and to request sympathy and assistance. According to a letter by Helen B. Harris, a British Quaker minister, who travelled to the affected areas with her husband from March to late November 1896 to undertake a relief work among the destitute Armenians and other suffering Christian populations on behalf of the *Friends’ Armenian Relief Committee* in London, Caroline E. Bush, an American Protestant missionary from the Harput station, encountered a number of poor Kurdish women begging for help in the town of Malatya during a relief mission in August 1896. Miss Bush told Harris that those women were from a nearby village “which, for some reason, had refused to help with the massacre (the only one out of a hundred who did refuse).” On their refusal, or in Harris’s words, “because of this humanity,” regular troops had been sent to destroy and pillage their village, “as if it had been a Christian one!”⁴⁷⁸ The full truthfulness of the claim made by these villagers regarding the origins of the assault may be open to question even though Acting Consul Fontana also reported that an official of rank in Harput had essentially confirmed the details put forward in the statement during their conversation about the events in Akçadağ.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ FO 424/187, Inclosure 2 in No. 165, “Statement bearing Seal of a Kizil-bashi [*Kızılbaş*] Kurd from the Village of Bekir Ushaghi [Bekir Uşağı], in the Nahie of Agcha Tagh [Akçadağ],” (Translation), dated May 12, 1896. Fontana transmitted the statement to Ambassador Currie in a dispatch dated Kharput, May 19, 1896. Also see Turkey No. 8 (1896), Inclosure 2 in No. 237.

⁴⁷⁷ BOA. DH.MKT. 2075/50, 11 M. 1314 (23 June 1896). From the Interior Ministry to the province of Mamuretü’l-Aziz, dated 11 M. 1314/11 Haziran 1312/23 June 1896.

⁴⁷⁸ J. Rendel Harris and Helen B. Harris, *Letters from the Scenes of the Recent Massacres in Armenia* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1897), 174.

⁴⁷⁹ FO 424/187, Inclosure 1 in No. 165. Acting Consul Fontana to Currie, Kharput, May 19, 1896.

Although a number of official Ottoman documents provide details about the persecution of the *Kızılbaş* villagers in this sub-district by officials and the tribal forces from the nearby areas in late 1895, further research is needed to establish a clear relationship between the attack and the reported refusal of the villagers to participate in the crimes committed against the Armenians of Malatya. Nevertheless, it is safe to note that different sources point to Abdullah Agha's chief role in the mass killing of Armenians in the town of Malatya.

As a result, a crucial aspect of anti-Armenian violence was that elites and authoritative figures played pivotal roles whether as instigators or supporters of the violence in many cases. If they did not openly condone killings or find them justified, the violent behavior of those who were willing to resort to violence was mostly likely to be inhibited. "An important, neglected reason for the frequency of riots," Horowitz inspiringly argues, "is that the activity is so commonly approved in the wider of which the rioters are a part."⁴⁸⁰ Indeed, even if it was a crowd of urban "lower classes," ordinary townspeople, peasant groups, and tribal populations who did much of the rioting, violent activity was openly supported and approbated by the local Muslim community in most cases. Without this legitimation, support, and approval from the wider community (first and foremost from elites), embryonic violence between Muslim and Armenian communities or the attack of a small group would have been far less likely to transform into a massive event. Therefore, the responsibility of the local community as a whole should be stressed. Not all Muslims agreed though, as we have seen in a number of cases. There were those who opposed violence, helped responsible officials in suppressing what might otherwise have been serious riots, defended their towns together with Christian inhabitants, and gave protection and shelter to their Armenian neighbors threatened or already targeted. But many saw no reason to "tolerate" and safeguard Armenians; rather, they believed that violence was legitimate and that they had a lot to gain from it. It was in this climate that the perpetrators of anti-Armenian violence acted without a fear of punishment, moral restraint, and a sense that what they did was a cruel act.

⁴⁸⁰ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 366-7.

7.3. Religious Leaders as Instigators of Violence: The Case of Sheikh Emin of Bitlis

In most places, anti-Armenian riots broke out on Fridays, usually right after the Friday prayers. Contemporary foreign sources almost invariably claim that in the sermons delivered during Friday prayers people were imbued with the idea that shedding Armenian blood was permissible, and that the massacres were started and ended with a bugle call.⁴⁸¹ Although there is no conclusive evidence that people were encouraged in Friday sermons to kill and plunder Armenians, archival materials show that local religious leaders, most notably sheikhs and Muslim clergymen, played a significant role in mobilizing Muslims against Armenians and in provoking mob attacks in many places. They delivered inflammatory speech and fatwas; they declared that killing and plundering Armenians was lawful; they called for Muslims to take action against Armenians as the enemy of the religion and the state. In what follows, we take a look at the case of an influential religious leader from Bitlis, named Sheikh Emin (also known as Sheikh Emin Şirvanî), who seems to have played a major organizational role, together with a number of senior officials and local notables, in instigating and promoting anti-Armenian violence in the province of Bitlis. Moreover, official reports and British consular accounts imply that the instigators of the Bitlis riots were working under the presidency or influence of Sheikh Emin Efendi.

Several days after the riots that broke out in the town of Bitlis (Bitlis, October 1895), the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis, Ömer Bey, and the Commander of the 8th Division, Lieutenant-General Ahmed Şemsi Pasha, sent a joint telegram to Istanbul, reporting that it was heard from authentic sources that a certain Sheikh Emin of Bitlis made provocative statements, declaring that “Armenian blood is of no account [that is, it is unrevenged] and [injuring] their property and chastity is [canonically] permissible” (*Ermenilerin kanı heder ve mal ve ırzı mubahdır*). Ömer Bey and Ahmed Şemsi Pasha noted that such agitating speeches were most likely to produce perilous consequences, such as the recurrence of assaults and effervescence, at a time when the authorities in Bitlis were striving, day and night, to quell the excitement existing among the inhabitants of the town

⁴⁸¹ See Kieser, *Iskalanmış Barış*, 219, 336, 761; Walker, *Armenia*, 171.

following the “Armenian incidents.” The acting governor-general and the commander suggested that, “given the [potential] horrendous effects of such statements,” the sheikh be banished from Bitlis as immediate as possible, in order to protect “the minds of the populace” from such agitating speeches. Yet, on the other hand, Ömer Bey and Ahmed Şemsi Pasha implied that his banishment might lead to a popular reaction in the region. They therefore suggested that the sheikh be *invited* to Istanbul [as a guest] and sent off from Bitlis “being honored” (*muazzezen*).⁴⁸² In other words, the Bitlis authorities clearly avoided creating an image of the sheikh being banished from the town by the local government, considering the popular mood and Sheikh Emin’s influence.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the central government authorities requested further information from Lieutenant-General Ahmed Şemsi Pasha about a number of individuals in Bitlis, including Sheikh Emin Efendi, whose banishment was recommended by the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis. In response, Şemsi Pasha confirmed that the sheikh was indeed presenting obstacles to the local government’s actions with respect to the suppression of excitement and unrest. Importantly, the commander also wrote that during the events in the town of Bitlis, the sheikh had locked himself in the lodge after leaving the mosque, instead of proceeding to the market area to make an attempt at stopping plunder and fight, which would have exercised a positive effect in the way of quelling the riots. As a result, the sheikh had failed to render the service that the authorities hoped and expected from him. Like the acting governor-general, Commander Şemsi Pasha considered the presence of Sheikh Emin Efendi in Bitlis at such a time harmful, on the one hand. But, on the other hand, he expressed his concern that the sheikh was the successor of Köprülü Muhammed (or Mehmed) Efendi of Bitlis, who must have been an important local religious leader, and had followers (*müridân*) among the Kurdish tribal populations across the provinces of Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, and Diyarbekir. It was therefore not improbable that “a second excitement” (i.e. the repetition of violent events) might take place if the sheikh was banished from Bitlis by force. As a result, Şemsi Pasha suggested that Sheikh Emin Efendi

⁴⁸² BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/75, 13 Ca. 1313 (1 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis Ömer [Bey] and Commander [of the 8th Division] Ahmed Şemsi [Pasha] dated 20 TE 1311/1 November 1895.

be taken to Istanbul “under the cover of reward” (*taltif namı altında*).⁴⁸³ Indeed, the Special Council of Ministers, which gathered at the Sublime Porte to discuss the matter, upheld the Bitlis authorities’ suggestion and resolved that the Bitlis authorities be instructed to send the sheikh from Bitlis to Istanbul for a temporary stay.⁴⁸⁴ However, it seems that the palace did not give approval to this suggestion and asked the Sublime Porte to find another solution to the problem.

In the meantime, on 10 November 1895, the Grand Vizier sent a cipher telegram to Bitlis, stating that the banishment of Sheikh Emin Efendi from Bitlis was likely to “break the [local] Muslim people’s heart,” which would be a dangerous situation at such a [sensitive] time. Thus, the Grand Vizier asked the acting governor-general: If Sheikh Emin was explained “the existing political conditions” in a suitable way, would he then follow the advice and abstain from acting in such a way? Would this method be convenient in terms of time and place?⁴⁸⁵ By “the existing political conditions,” the policy-makers in Istanbul apparently referred to the serious political and diplomatic danger that the ongoing anti-Armenian events posed to the imperial state, the sensitivity of the existing political situation, and, perhaps, to the government policies with respect to the current state of the so-called “Armenian Question.” In response, the acting governor-general stated that “the existing political conditions” were already explained to the sheikh multiple times; but, he continued to make harmful statements. Moreover, recently, he had almost caused a serious incident in the town but it was quelled thanks to the prompt measures taken by the government authorities and the commander. As a result, the acting governor-general emphasized, once again, the need to remove Sheikh Emin Efendi and the other ill-minded people like the sheikh from Bitlis, asserting that nobody would presume Emin Efendi was banished [by force] if he was taken to Istanbul “under a [certain] pretext” and sent off from

⁴⁸³ Y.A.RES. 77/62 (25 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Commander of the 8th Division, Lieutenant-General Ahmed Şemsi Pasha, dated 8 TS 1311/20 November 1895.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. The resolution or protocol (*mazbata*) of the Special Council of Ministers dated 8 B. 1313/13 KE 1311/25 December 1895.

⁴⁸⁵ A.MKT.MHM. 619/13 (2 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Grand Vizierate to the province of Bitlis dated 29 TE 1311/10 November 1895.

the town “being honored.”⁴⁸⁶ Oddly, upon these correspondences, the Sublime Porte requested more information about the sheikh, his hometown, and his profession.⁴⁸⁷

As a consequence, despite repeated demands and complaints from the provincial authorities in Bitlis, the policy-makers at the Sublime Porte and/or the Yıldız Palace refrained from removing Sheikh Emin from Bitlis, let alone prosecuting him for inciting a group of people against another group or for any other crime. In early January 1896, the Grand Vizier notified Acting Governor-General Ömer Bey of the government’s decision about Yasin, Yusuf, İbrahim, and Sheikh Emin Efendis. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the central government authorities decided that no sanction was required to be taken against the first three. Regarding Sheikh Emin Efendi, the Grand Vizier wrote that his banishment from the province would “break the [local] Muslim people’s heart” and might lead to “a series of undesirable circumstances” (*bir takım arzu edilmeyecek ahvali*) given that the sheikh had many followers among the Kurdish tribal populations across the provinces of Bitlis, Van, Erzurum, and Diyarbakir. And it was obvious that the Kurds had reverence for and adherence to the sheikhs. The policy-makers in Istanbul considered that Sheikh Emin would provide a service suitable to “the goals and interests of the state and the country,” if he was invited to the government office to be rewarded and advised that the imperial government trust “men of power and esteem” like him. Rather than resorting to measures like banishment that might lead to unfavorable consequences, it would be more appropriate to “make him [the sheikh] inclined towards the government,” thereby capitalizing on his power and influence, in a manner that would not lead to complaints and objections from any parties (i.e. Muslims, Armenians, and the representatives of foreign governments) and would not harm “the gravity and dignity of the provincial government.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Y.A.RES. 77/62 (25 December 1895). Cipher telegram from the Acting Governor-General of Bitlis dated 30 TE 1311/11 November 1895. It seems that on the same day, the acting governor-general sent another telegram to Istanbul, insisting that Sheikh Emin’s presence in Bitlis might cause new incidents and that his banishment from this place was therefore crucial. See A.MKT.MHM. 619/13 (2 November 1895).

⁴⁸⁷ A.MKT.MHM. 619/13 (2 November 1895). Telegram from the Grand Vizierate to the province of Bitlis dated 31 TE 1311/12 November 1895.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. Confidential letter from the Grand Vizierate to the province of Bitlis dated 16 B. 1313/21 KE 1311/2 January 1896.

The central government's suggestion was not only too abstract to be meaningful or readily applicable but also "naïve," being emblematic of the ways in which the authorities dealt with the powerful Muslim notables, chieftains, and religious leaders who were alleged to be involved deeply in the events as instigators and organizers of the anti-Armenian violence. We do not know what action the provincial authorities in Bitlis took after having received this communication from the Grand Vizier. What is certain is that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, over a year later, the Governor-General of Bitlis requested, once again, authorization to banish from Bitlis a number of individuals, including Sheikh Emin, who were accused of spreading new anti-Armenian conspiracies and engendering public order and peace in the town in late 1896 and early 1897. But again the sheikh did not have to face any sanctions, let alone prosecution. Acting Governor-General Ömer Bey (acting as principal governor-general as of early 1896) and Lieutenant-General Ahmed Şemsi Pasha seem to have been sincere in their efforts to restore order and prevent new clashes in the province throughout the period in question. On their part, the central government authorities, especially those at the Yıldız Palace, were clearly averse to imposing sanctions on such powerful local figures at the cost of the lives and property of their Armenian subjects. The case of Sheikh Emin does not only demonstrate the significant role that religious leaders played in inciting and promoting the collective violence against Armenians but also reveals the significance of the interplay between local forces and central policies. It can be said that a combination of the fear of popular reaction and the Hamidian policy of avoiding firm action against Muslim notables and chieftains in the eastern provinces characterized the official attitude towards this case. As a result, Sheikh Emin of Bitlis, like many other alleged instigators and masterminds of violence, remained practically untouchable and immune from the legal repercussions of his reported behavior.

7.4. Fear of Armenian Ascendancy: "Anatolian Reforms," Local Opposition, and Popular Violence

Stringent anti-reform sentiment and a sense of loss of domination among the local Muslim populations were underlying motivations for collective violence directed against Armenians in the 1890s. From the very beginning, reforms debates and prospects were a

major source of anxiety and discontent for the Muslim populations inhabiting the eastern Anatolian provinces, which were the main setting for the projected reforms. Especially local Muslim notables and Kurdish tribal chieftains regarded reform as threatening their sociopolitical and economic interests as well as their traditional power and prerogatives in the region. The reform was also perceived as a significant alteration in the status of Christian Armenians who were conceived as a subordinate group living among a Muslim majority. The more dreadful scenario for many Muslims was the establishment of an autonomous or independent Armenian entity owing to European intervention, which they believed would displace the local Muslim populations and turn them into immigrants. Consequently, territorial concerns, a sense of loss of Muslim ascendancy, and the prospect of status modifications guaranteed by foreign powers plagued intercommunal relations between Armenian and Muslim populations on the eve of the massive riots.

As reform debates intensified over the spring and summer of 1895, anti-reform—hence, anti-Armenian—sentiments gained further strength among the local Muslim populations. There were signs that Muslim masses would oppose by violence the introduction of reforms in favor of the local Armenian population. For instance, in late August 1895, the British Vice-Consul at Muş reported to Consul Graves at Erzurum that lately, he frequently been warned by what he believed “to be trustworthy sources” that there existed “a [secret] Society amongst the worst characters of the Moslems of this town for violent action against the Christians, especially in case the projected reforms are accepted by the Government.” Vice-Consul Hampson also noted that the threats of these elements of the local Muslim population were particularly directed against himself—if true, it was perhaps because the Muslims usually regarded the British as the chief force behind the idea of reform on the part of Armenians. While he personally gave little importance or credence to “these stories,” it seems that Hampson informed the *Mutasarrıf* of what he had heard, leaving it to him if an extra guard was needed for his camp at night. In return, the *Mutasarrıf* had informed the vice-consul that an extra *zabtiye* would be sent to his camp every night.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁹ TNA: FO 424/183, No. 339. Inclosure 2 in No. 339, Vice-Consul Hampson to Consul Graves, Moush [Muş], August 26, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 20.

On his part, Consul Graves at Erzurum informed his superiors at the British Embassy that the [Protestant] missionaries in Bitlis had “repeatedly alluded to the existence of a similar Association” in that town, while in Erzurum, similar threats had been expressed within the past few months by “bad characters” among the Muslim townspeople, who were being encouraged by some of the lower-ranking local officials and religious sheikhs. The British Consul concluded by noting, “No present apprehension need be felt, provided the civil and military authorities do their duty in repressing any outward manifestation of such ideas, but any failure to do so on their part would be attended by imminent danger of grave disorders, for which local Governors and *Commanders* should at once be held personally responsible.”⁴⁹⁰ Although the existence of such formal secret organizations was not likely, it was evident that Muslims strongly opposed the acceptance of Armenian reforms and were prepared to respond to it aggressively.

Similarly, the British Vice-Consul at Van, Cecil Marsham Hallward, reported that the Kurds in the province of Van had declared that they would not accept any reforms, “whether approved by the Sultan or not.” Hallward wrote, perhaps naïvely, that he did not believe for a moment if a serious attempt were made to carry out reforms, the Muslim population would exert “real resistance” to them as they would largely take advantages of any step taken to bring greater security for life and property and a better administration for them.⁴⁹¹ In other words, the British Vice-Consul meant that anti-reform sentiment in this country stemmed from a lack of awareness of the benefits of reform. By “Muslim population,” Hallward obviously referred to Muslim townspeople, as opposed to “the Kurds.” Indeed, British consular official tended to think that the real threat to the prospect of reforms came from the nomadic/semi-nomadic Kurdish populations. It is, however, clear that the local urban Muslim populations, as well, were hostile to the idea of reform that they believed would be implemented exclusively in favor of Christians. It can even be said that local Muslim elites, as well as tribal chieftains, were especially instrumental in stringing up anti-reform sentiment and efforts across the whole eastern provinces.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., Inclosure 1 in No. 339. Consul Graves to Currie, Erzeroum, September 3, 1895.

⁴⁹¹ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 540. Inclosure 3 in No. 540. Vice-Consul Hallward to Consul Cumberbatch, Van, October 30, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 310.

The introduction of internal reforms for the Six Provinces in mid-October 1895 had a dramatic and profound impact on the escalation of anti-Armenian violence. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that in the central and eastern Anatolian provinces, riots erupted just a few days after the acceptance of the scheme of reforms designed to be implemented first in the Six Provinces. Evidence exists indicating that before and during the events, rumors circulated among the local populations to the effect that Armenians were, or would be, granted privileges or autonomy. In certain cases, it seems that agitators stirred up to mount collective action by spreading the rumor that Armenians had been granted privileges under the name of reform. Especially local notables, religious leaders, and tribal chieftains could easily play Muslim masses off against Armenians amid these rumors of foreign intervention, concessions, and Armenian principality. In fact, as we have seen in Chapter 4, the Commander-in-Chief of the Fourth Army Corps, Field-Marshal Zeki Pasha, reporting briefly on the origins of the events, noted that the rumors to the effect that the Armenians had been granted concessions had adverse effects on the mood of the Muslim population.⁴⁹² On many occasions, the Ottoman authorities also claimed that it was the Armenians who had spread malicious rumors about the nature of the declared reforms in order to provoke the local Muslim population.

Confusions and misleading news about the nature and direction of reform were also accompanied by constant rumors that an Armenian principality would soon be established in East Anatolia. In Diyarbekir, for instance, the provincial authorities blamed Armenians of spreading fabricated rumors to the effect that the governance of the Six Provinces would be left to the Armenians. On 11 November 1895, the Grand Vizier notified the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that according to a telegram received from the provincial authorities, the dragoman of the French Consulate at Diyarbekir, an Ottoman Armenian citizen named Kasabyan, had spread the news among the local Armenians that “some provinces,” including Diyarbekir, had been left to the Armenians. The Dragoman was reported to have stated that the said news had reached the consulate by telegraph. As can be seen in the Grand Vizier’s letter, the aforementioned telegram from the Diyarbekir authorities was

⁴⁹² Y.PRK.ASK. 109/61 (17 January 1896). Cipher telegram from the Field-Marshal of the Fourth Army Corps, Zeki Pasha, to the First Secretary dated 5 KS 1311/17 January 1896.

dated November 10, 1895.⁴⁹³ Official sources do not provide clear information as to whether such false rumors were circulated before the events in the town of Diyarbekir. Yet, two days later, the Governor-General of Diyarbekir claimed that the origins of the events that occurred in this provincial capital lay in Armenians who had staged a series of [protest] actions [in early October] such as gathering in the churches and closing shops without cause or reason, and attempted to spread the above-mentioned type of provocative rumors, which sprang from the French Consulate at Diyarbekir.⁴⁹⁴ However, neither prior to the outbreak of violence nor its immediate aftermath, the Diyarbekir authorities reported about the existence of such rumors circulated by Armenians or any other group. In any case, it is evident that various fabricated rumors about the nature of reforms and the imminence of a so-called Armenian principality prevailed before and during the events in this town. And, notwithstanding official claims, there is reason to think that Muslim elites and rumor-mongering networks might have played a key role in the circulation of fictitious reports in an attempt to incite anti-Armenian sentiment in Diyarbekir, or that they at least capitalized on the confusing rumors for the purpose of stimulating masses into a rapid reaction to the events unfolding. We will turn back to the case of Diyarbekir below.

Vice-Consul Gerald Henry Fitzmaurice, who was the British delegate in an official commission of inquiry that was sent to Birecik (near Urfa, Aleppo) in February 1896 to investigate cases of the forced conversion of Armenians in that district, penned detailed reports on the events in Urfa and its environs during his investigatory work on the spot. Regarding the effects of the introduction of reforms on violence, he put the case with definite terms: “the telegraphic news of acceptance of the reforms was interpreted to the Mussulmans [Muslims] as the granting of autonomy to the Armenians, an interpretation which must have come from the Government officials, and which had a disastrous effect

⁴⁹³ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 636/21, 23 Ca. 1313 (11 November 1895). Letter from the Grand Vizierate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs dated 23 Ca. 1313/11 November 1895. Also see BOA. HR.TH. 164/110, 11-11-1895 (11 November 1895).

⁴⁹⁴ BOA. Y.PRK.UM. 33/78, 24 Ca. 1313 (12 November 1895). Cipher telegram from the Governor-General of Diyarbekir, Enis [Pasha], dated 31 TE 1311/12 November 1895.

on Moslem [Muslim] feeling towards Armenians.”⁴⁹⁵ It is likely that in certain cases, local officials helped to circulate such dangerous rumors and misinformation to promote anti-Armenian sentiments among the local populaces. However, the claim that the government pursued a policy of “interpreting reforms” to its Muslim subjects in this way is unsubstantial.

On the contrary, the central government authorities feared that the declaration of reforms would exacerbate Muslim exasperation. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the decree of October 17, 1895, which declared the introduction of administrative reforms to be implemented in Anatolian provinces, made no mention of Armenians or any other group obviously because, among other reasons, they anticipated Muslims’ possible reactions to the acceptance of the scheme of reforms. For the same reason, Sultan Abdülhamid stayed reluctant for a long time to have the projected reforms published in the Ottoman press despite the insisting demands from the British government to this effect. According to British sources, on 5 November 1895, the Sultan had sent a message to the Secretary of the British Embassy, Herbert, promising, among other things, that the reforms would be published in the papers the next day. Since they did not appear in the papers of either the 6th or 7th, Herbert sent the chief dragoman of the embassy to the palace to express his astonishment and regret at the Sultan’s failure to carry out his promises. In reply, the Sultan stated that he had intended to initiate the announcement of the reforms in the press, yet he was now afraid that it would lead to “an increase of jealousy” on the part of his Muslim subjects, “who would perhaps visit their resentment on the Christians.” Therefore, the Sultan had decided that it was not the moment to do so while disturbances were still ongoing in the provinces. According to Herbert, the Sultan also added:

Even were they published, what good would it do? A résumé had been published in the press, and the Armenians should thus know that reforms would be given them. What advantage would it be to the Armenian peasant to know that such and such an Article of the law would be carried out? People could not go about with the

⁴⁹⁵ Turkey No. 5 (1896), *Correspondence Relating to the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey: Reports by Vice-Consul Fitzmaurice from Birejik, Ourfa, Adiaman, and Behesni*, No. 3. Inclosure 2 in No. 3, Vice-Consul Fitzmaurice to Currie, Ourfa, March 16, 1896.

‘Destour’ [*Düstûr*, or compilations of laws, legislations, and regulations] open searching for various Articles of the Law.⁴⁹⁶

Aware of the dramatic effects of the introduction of reforms on intercommunal relations, the Hamidian administration also made a variety of efforts to explain to the Muslim populaces across the troubled regions that reforms would not target the Armenian population exclusively. Nor was it the case that Armenians had been granted concessions. As we have seen in Chapter 5, one of the measures taken by the central government to suppress the outbreaks and restore order and tranquility in the provinces was to dispatch two separate commissions of inspection to the affected regions, one of which was *de facto* led by Lieutenant-General Saadeddin Pasha, and the other by Major-General Abdullah Pasha. Besides applying and supervising a series of security measures taken for the pacification of the region, the two pashas and the civilian members of the commissions were expected to take necessary steps to quell the minds of the local Muslim populations. The instructions given to the commissioners noted that the declaration of reforms for the Armenian-populated provinces had resulted in an “unreasonable” misunderstanding on the part of the Muslim populaces to the effect that the state had granted concessions to the Armenians and favored their rights and interests over those of the Muslims. On the contrary, it was the empire’s Muslim subjects that would benefit the reforms more than the Armenians as the former constituted the population majority in the region. The commissioners were therefore instructed to make all kind of efforts to eliminate such popular convictions and considerations, issuing public proclamations to this effect in required places and among tribal populations. As a result, the officials at the Sublime Porte advised that the members of the commissions of inspection devote perseverant energy and rigor to “correct the misconceptions that led to mutual slaughter (*mukatele*) and assaults.”⁴⁹⁷ Indeed, official reports and Saadeddin Pasha’s diaries show that the

⁴⁹⁶ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 457. Herbert to Salisbury, Constantinople, November 8, 1895. Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 219.

⁴⁹⁷ Y.A.RES. 77/21 (9 November 1895). “The instructions to the military and civil officials who will be dispatched to the provinces where Armenian disturbances/riots broke out” (*Ermeni ihtilali zuhur eden vilayâta cihet-i askeriye ve mülkiyeden i’zâm olunacak memurîne talimatdır*), n.d.

commissioners delivered speeches to gatherings of urban Muslim notables and tribal chieftains in the areas they visited in accordance with these instructions.

The central government authorities also sought to legitimize the projected reforms in the eyes of its Muslim subjects by stressing that the declared reforms should not be regarded as introducing special rights to the Armenians or to any other group. Nor were they to be based on novel laws and legislations. Rather, it simply meant the application of the already existing imperial laws and regulations in the Six Provinces in the first place, and then in other parts of the empire, for all subject populations. Remarkably, the officials in Istanbul wanted the Muslim populations to know that the origins of these existing laws and regulations lay in the *Gülhane* and *Islahat* (Reform) edicts. For instance, the British Consul-General at Beirut (Beyrut), Robert Drummond Hay, transmitted to his superior in Istanbul a translation of a telegram from the Grand Vizier addressed to the Governor-General of Beirut, dated as early as October 21, 1895, the day after the Sublime Porte informed the local government authorities in the Armenian-populated provinces of the acceptance by the Sultan of the scheme of reforms. The consul-general reported that this communication had also been published in the provincial newspapers. According to this telegram translated by British consular officials in Beirut, the authorities in Istanbul heard that Armenians had circulated misleading rumors about the reforms to be introduced “in some provinces.” However, the action taken by the government for the introduction of reforms was not “intended exclusively for the Armenians;” instead, it aimed to apply within the Six Anatolian Provinces “the Laws and Regulations contained in the *Destour* [*Düstûr*], and the useful Decrees and Articles promulgated in the Imperial Order of *Gulhane* [*Gülhane*; of 1839] and in the *Firman* of reforms [i.e. the *Islahat Fermanı* of 1856].” Furthermore, the reforms would be implemented for the benefit of all subjects, Muslim or non-Muslim alike, and “with the view of generalizing them throughout all the Imperial provinces as far as they are required.”⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁸ TNA: FO 424/184, No. 369. Inclosure 2 in No. 369, “The Grand Vizier to the Vali [Governor-General] of Beyrout [Beirut],” Constantinople [Dersaadet/Istanbul], October 21, 1895. The translation of the telegram was transmitted by Consul-General Drummond Hay to Currie in a dispatch dated Beyrout, October 24, 1895 (Inclosure 1 in No. 369). Also see Turkey No. 2 (1896), No. 234.

7.5. “We Ask for Justice too!”: Anti-Reform Backlash in Diyarbekir

Examination of affairs in the town of Diyarbekir throughout the fall and winter of 1895 further enables us to understand the close nexus between the question of reform and anti-Armenian violence. Specifically, the discursive content of a lengthy telegram, reportedly sent by a large number of signatories from among Diyarbekir’s local Muslim population to Istanbul just before the massive outbreak that occurred in this provincial capital, is crucial for understanding how Muslim elites and townspeople defined/articulated their visions, concerns, apprehensions, and expectations vis-à-vis a series of political developments connected with the “Armenian Question” in the autumn of 1895. Jelle Verheij has already written a detailed account of the events that occurred in the town of Diyarbekir in early November 1895.⁴⁹⁹ Therefore, I will not reiterate his findings here. However, the aforementioned telegram and the reaction of the local Muslims to the news that a series of administrative reforms began to be implemented in this province in December 1895 deserve singling out.

On 30 October 1895, French Vice-Consul Gustave Meyrier reported to Ambassador Paul Cambon that the news of the acceptance of reforms had produced a great deal of excitement among the Muslims of Diyarbekir, and that multiple meetings were held in the presence of, in Meyrier’s words, “the most influential and dangerous people” in the region, including the Sheikh of Zilan and Cemil Pasha, the former *mutasarrıf* of Hudeyde, “known for his fanaticism.”⁵⁰⁰ Later, in a detailed report on the events, dated 18 December 1895, the French Vice-Consul would claim that “the most disturbing projects” had been discussed during these meetings.⁵⁰¹ The next day, Meyrier wrote that the situation was

⁴⁹⁹ See Verheij, “Diyarbekir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895.”

⁵⁰⁰ Meyrier, *Les Massacres de Diarbekir: Correspondance Diplomatique du Vice-Consul de France*, 82-83, cipher telegram from Gustave Meyrier to Paul Cambon, dated Diarbékir, 30 October 1895. On Meyrier’s reports, see Claire Mouradian, “Gustave Meyrier and the Turmoil in Diarbekir, 1894-1896,” in *Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006), 209-250.

⁵⁰¹ Meyrier, *Les Massacres de Diarbekir: Correspondance Diplomatique du Vice-Consul de France*, 127-8, report from Gustave Meyrier to Paul Cambon, entitled “Massacre à Diarbékir” (Massacre in Diyarbekir), dated Diarbékir, 18 December 1895. Also see Verheij, “Diyarbekir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895,” 103.

becoming more and more serious in Diyarbekir, and that Muslims no longer hid their intention to take revenge on the Christians for the reforms accepted by the Sultan. They had also sent a telegram of protest to the Sultan—which was apparently the telegram we will examine below. The local Christian population was in extreme fear and had closed their shops earlier than usual the previous day, being convinced that only energetic and immediate action on the part of the provincial government authorities could save their lives.⁵⁰²

On the other hand, a well-known local historian, Şevket Beysanoğlu, has written that a week prior to the events, “the Muslim people” gathered in the library of Diyarbekir’s Grand Mosque, where they formed a committee that would act on their behalf in response to the developments unfolding. Among the members were several provincial notables such as Pirinççizade Arif, Müftüzade Fazıl, Talat Efendi, and Süleyman Nazif. According to Beysanoğlu, Süleyman Nazif was the author of a telegram, dated November 4, which was sent to the *Mabeyn*, or Palace Secretariat, during the events that occurred in the town of Diyarbekir.⁵⁰³ Beysanoğlu also provided a complete transliteration of this significant text although there are a number of wording differences between this version of the telegram published by Beysanoğlu and another copy of it stored in the Turkish National Library (*Milli Kütüphane*).⁵⁰⁴ There is also a clear confusion regarding the date the telegram was supposedly wired to Istanbul. As explained in the following footnote, if the telegram in question was indeed wired to the place and/or the Sublime Porte, it seems more likely that the Muslim notables of Diyarbekir sent it before the events of November 1-3.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² Meyrier, *Les Massacres de Diarbekir: Correspondance Diplomatique du Vice-Consul de France*, 84, cipher telegram from Gustave Meyrier to Paul Cambon, dated Diarbékir, 31 October 1895.

⁵⁰³ Şevket Beysanoğlu, *Anıtları ve Kitabeleri ile Diyarbakır Tarihi*. Vol. 2: *Akkoyunlular’dan Cumhuriyete Kadar* (Ankara: Neyir Matbaası, 1990), 702-703.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 703-5. The author’s source is a manuscript written by his father, Beysanzade Molla Ahmed, *Mir’at-ı Hayatım*, folio 105a-106b.

⁵⁰⁵ As mentioned above, a copy of this telegram can be found among a 27-page manuscript stored in *Milli Kütüphane* (the Turkish National Library), in Ankara, under the introductory title “A copy of the telegram sent by the people of Diyarbekir to the Sultan and the Sublime Porte three days before the Diyarbekir incidents, bearing four hundred signatures” (*Diyarbakır vuku’âtından üçgün evvel atebe-i felek-mertebe-i hazret-i zıllullahîye ve Bab-ı Ali cânib-i sâmisine dörtyüz imza ile Diyarbakır ahâlisi tarafından keşide olunan fi 21 Kânun-ı Evvel sene [1]311 tarihli telgraf-name suretidir*). See Milli Kütüphane, El Yazması ve Nadir Eserler Koleksiyonu (Manuscripts and Rare Collection), 06 Hk 2749/3, “*Diyarbakır Hâlkı* [sic]

There is however no clear evidence among available Ottoman archival records that such a telegram was indeed sent from Diyarbekir, let alone an original copy of it. It should also be noted that it is too long to be a standard telegram; but this alone could not be a legitimate reason to doubt whether the said telegram was sent as reported. Nevertheless, the content of the telegram itself is more important than the question of whether it was received by the palace or the Sublime Porte. Indeed, it is one of the rare immediate documents that allow us to reflect upon the expressed concerns, apprehensions, and motivations of the alleged chief instigators and those who seem to have taken a prominent part or had a paramount interest in the collective mass violence committed against Armenians in the town of Diyarbekir although it should not be regarded as a pure expression of the perspective and aspirations of those who had something to gain from the violence. In what follows, I will analyze what I consider the key passages of the telegram.

Ahalisinin Padişaha Telgrafı” (Telegram from the People of Diyarbekir to the Sultan), folio 13b-14a. It seems that the date on the manuscript, that is, 21 KE 311/2 January 1896, was mistyped given that the events in Diyarbekir broke out on November 1, long before January 1896. It is also probable that the unknown copyist of the telegram confused the date of the telegram with that of a second telegram which is said to be penned by seemingly the same individuals in Diyarbekir to be sent to the Sultan and/or the Sublime Porte in late December 1895 following the rumors that the government began to apply a series of administrative reforms in the province of Diyarbekir as part of the Anatolian Reform. Alternatively, the copyist mistyped the date 21 *Teşrin-i Evvel* 1311 (2 November 1895) as 21 *Kânun-ı Evvel* 1311, which means that it was sent to Istanbul during the events. However, as I have already mentioned, the introductory title says that the telegram was sent three days before the incidents. This copy of the telegram stored in the Turkish National Library has been transliterated into Latin script, with some significant errors, and published by Muhittin Eliaçık in his article “Ermeni İsyancıları Karşısında Bölge Ahalisi ve Diyarbakır Ahalisinin Tavrı,” *Yeni Türkiye* 60 (2014): 1-8. The author of the article is, however, completely ignorant of the facts and context of the violent events that occurred in the town of Diyarbekir in November 1895. Taking the date on the manuscript granted, he writes “it is remarkable that these events [in Diyarbekir] took place during the Armenian [Apostolic] Christmas (noel) celebrated on January 5th-6th [*sic*]” (p. 3). Regarding Beysanoğlu, as already mentioned, he says that the telegram was sent to the palace during the events; but, oddly, he also notes that it is dated November 4, that is, the day after the riots of Diyarbekir gradually came to an end. See Beysanoğlu, *Anıtları ve Kitabeleri ile Diyarbakır Tarihi*, 703. Verheij has translated the full telegram into English, see “Diyarbakır and the Armenian Crisis of 1895,” 124-126. Limited by the sources available to him, specifically Beysanoğlu’s work, Verheij writes that the telegram was sent to the Sultan on November 4th. Yet he expresses his astonishment that the text by no means referred to the massive outbreak of violence that had erupted in the town, and therefore aptly speculates whether the telegram was prepared even as the events were ongoing. He nevertheless notes “the telegram appears more as a justification, as the testimony indeed, apology even, of individuals who have decided to take matters into their own hands...” (p. 126). As a result, given the above-mentioned copy of the telegram in the Turkish National Library, Meyrier’s reports, and the content and language of the text itself, it can be surmised that the authors of the telegram wrote it and sent or attempted to send it to the Yıldız Palace and/or the Sublime Porte prior to the events that occurred in the town of Diyarbekir.

The telegram begins by stating that in order not to burden the government with a moral responsibility, they [the Muslims of the region] had shown *clemency* and *tolerance*, to an extent that astonished even their “enemies,” towards the Armenians who had made their [Muslims’] homeland an arena for foreign intrigue for [the past] 4-5 years. To Europe, and particularly to England (i.e., Great Britain), which proclaimed that the Muslims of the region were disposed to do all kinds of evil out of fanatical impulses, they were ready to show, as evidence, the many still intact Armenian monasteries scattered throughout the mountains of Kurdistan. In other words, had they been driven by fanaticism, none of those shrines would have existed in a region dominated by Muslims for almost four centuries. In earlier times, Europe was trembling at “the victorious sound and crushing might” of the Muslims. Thus, how could it have prevented Muslims from “razing those shrines to the ground” at those times? From the circulating rumors and the [official] transactions being conducted, the signatories continued, it was understood that the Six Provinces would be relinquished to the Armenians with the granting of privileges called, *for the time being*, “reform.” The prospect of the Six Provinces being separated from the imperial domains had filled all Muslims with deep sorrow and anguish. The signatories defiantly stated that there was no reason or necessity for reforms, and they therefore “earnestly” requested that these reforms not be seized by “the seditious grip of a small people/nation (*kavm*) who took up the weapon of rebellion with mischievous intentions and loathsome inducements (*âmâl-ı muzırı ve ilkâ’ât-ı menfûre*).” According to the signatories, it was clear that the Armenians currently led a life more prosperous and happier than the Muslims’ and, contrary to what was claimed, they were not a people destitute and worthy of mercy [i.e. miserable]. Rather, they owned wealth and many industries in the region. The fact that Armenians nevertheless stood up for more privileges, the signatories asserted, could well reveal that they were discontent with their current advantages and seeking greedily to gain even more benefits contrary to Islamic law. This “illegitimate plan” on the part of Armenians was not based on demand for reform and justice. As clearly shown by official records and routinely-observable evidence, the signatories maintained, the Muslims [in the eastern provinces] were superior than Armenians in terms of population and power, and, putting aside those allegations and slanders [on the part of foreigners], they had never attempted to commit unjust and merciless acts against the Armenians. Therefore, it was

incompatible with the notion of justice, upon which European political dignitaries harped continually, to destroy the express rights of Muslims, on the one hand, and to grant privileges available only to minority populations, on the other. The signatories continued by declaring:

We ask for justice too! The goal of the Armenian traitors is to break the sacred bond between the great Caliphate and the Muslim people of this region—the bravest and the most devoted subjects of the state. We cannot tolerate this! Like our ancestors, our paramount goal is to endeavor to magnify the fame and power of the Caliphate. We are willing to sacrifice our lives on this path.

[...]

Since this region [i.e. the Six Provinces] has been under the domination of Muslims for fourteen centuries, it is impossible to accept Armenian rule [i.e. dominance]. [...] We declare unanimously that we will spoil, with our blood, the lines and pages of the privileges which will be granted by munificent Europeans to the Armenians, who are much smaller in numbers in comparison to the Muslims, and are being indulged by malicious foreigners with every moment.⁵⁰⁶

In late December 1895, the news that administrative reforms began to be applied in the province of Diyarbakir produced significant resentment and anger among the local Muslim population and led to a minor trouble that was suppressed by the authorities in short order. On 1 January 1896, the members of the Commission of Inspection in Diyarbakir wrote to Istanbul that when they arrived in this provincial capital (in mid-December), the market and the churches were closed, and the people were in a state of great fear and dismay because of the presence of a large number of armed Kurds and tribesmen in the town. The commissioners reported that they had taken the necessary measures for the restoration of public order and security, had the shops reopened, and enforced, in a serious manner, the imperial order prohibiting “vagrant” (or transient) and unknown people (Kurds and tribes from outside the town in this specific case) from going about armed in urban spaces. (Also, it seems that in the atmosphere of relative confidence secured by the commissioners and possibly several other responsible officials, including the military commander of

⁵⁰⁶ Milli Kütüphane, 06 Hk 2749/3, “*Diyarbakır Halkı* [sic] *Ahalisinin Padişaha Telgrafı*,” folio 13b-14a; Beysanoğlu, *Anıtları ve Kitabeleri ile Diyarbakır Tarihi*, 703-705; Eliaçık, “Ermeni İsyancıları Karşısında Bölge Ahalisi ve Diyarbakır Ahalisinin Tavrı,” 5-7. For an alternative, near-complete translation of the text, see Verheij, “Diyarbakır and the Armenian Crisis of 1895,” 124-126.

Diyarbakir, the churches were reopened, and the church bells started to ring again in the town.) While everything seemed to be in order, the commissioners continued, a group of “wicked/mischievous” people from the local [Muslim] population had attempted to send a collective protest telegram to the highest quarters on 31 December 1895 on the grounds that they heard the government had appointed a Christian, named Vahan Efendi, as Deputy Governor-General (*vali muavini*), and a certain Yorgaki Efendi (again a Christian as the name implies) as Judicial Inspector, apparently as part of the administrative reforms being implemented. A further reason for their annoyance was that the Commission of Inspection had “upheld the Christians,” having the churches reopened and the church bells ring. The group had declared that this situation was “insufferable” for the Muslim people and they therefore must take a stand against it. As a result of this attempt on the part of a group of Muslims, “an excitement” had occurred in the market area; but the prompt measures taken by the authorities had prevented it from turning into a serious disturbance. The authorities had also persuaded several (probably more than several) shopkeepers who had closed their shops for fear of attack to reopen their businesses. It is important to note that the commissioners also suggested that this kind of turmoil/conflict would not come to an end unless those who dared to stir up such excitement and take “mischievous” actions were punished in order to deter others.⁵⁰⁷

Before continuing with further details about this event, it is also important to note that as part of the reform program introduced in the fall of 1895, the government had indeed appointed a Greek official, Vagleri (or Vegleri) Efendi, as Deputy Governor-General of the Governorate of Diyarbakir, as was the case in the whole Six Provinces.⁵⁰⁸ Yet the appointment of non-Muslim deputy governors-general and *mutasarrıfs* did not take immediate effect perhaps because of the disturbances as well as of the overall slowness of the Hamidian Administration in implementing reforms. Yet it seems that they arrived in their districts gradually in the spring and summer of 1896. It is also noteworthy that on 28

⁵⁰⁷ Y.PRK.UM. 34/33 (1 January 1896). Cipher telegram from Sami Efendi, member of the Council of State, Major-General Abdullah Pasha, an aide-de-camp to the Sultan, and Rüşdi Efendi, member of the Court of Cassation, in Diyarbakir [members of the Commission of Inspection] dated 20 KE 1311/1 January 1896.

⁵⁰⁸ See BOA. İ.DUİT. 146/88, 14 B. 1313 (31 December 1895); BOA. ŞD. 3192/63, 16 B. 1313 (2 January 1896); BOA. İ.TAL. 89/40, 17 Ş. 1313 (2 February 1896).

December 1895, the Governor-General of Diyarbekir repeated his recommendation (first made in November 1895) that the implementation of the decided reforms be postponed until the complete restoration of public order and security in Diyarbekir, apparently considering the popular mood and the tense atmosphere that prevailed in the town in late December.⁵⁰⁹

In their above-mentioned report, the commissioners did not mention any individuals responsible for or involved in the incident of December 31, but they claimed that the names of a few of those “wicked/mischievous” figures were supposed to be known by the local government. As Verheij has already pointed out, French and British consular officials in Diyarbekir identified several notables of Diyarbekir, particularly Cemil Pasha, Pirinççizade Arif, Talat Efendi (Mayor of Diyarbekir), and Süleyman Nazif, as chief organizers and instigators of the violence committed against Armenians in this town and claimed that they were actively involved in the events that followed.⁵¹⁰ As we have seen in the previous chapter, the commissioners, the Governor-General of Diyarbekir, and Military Commander Ziya Pasha made serious allegations against Pirinççizade Arif and Cemil Pasha in February 1896, which resulted only in the “banishment” of the former from Diyarbekir for several months.

Like the local government officials in Diyarbekir, the commissioners did not provide detailed information about the exact nature of “the excitement” that occurred in the town on December 31. Nor do available sources reveal the full content of the reported telegram. Nevertheless, French Vice-Consul Meyrier’s reports contain small details. On 29 December 1895, Meyrier telegraphed Ambassador Cambon that the news of the appointment of a Christian Deputy Governor-General had caused agitation among Muslims, who then signed a telegram/petition of protest to the Sultan.⁵¹¹ The next day, the French Vice-Consul wrote that in their telegram of protest, which was similar to the one

⁵⁰⁹ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. 609/22, 18 B. 1313 (4 January 1896). Two separate telegrams from the Governor-General of Diyarbekir, Enis [Pasha], to the Grand Vizierate dated 12 TS 1311/24 November 1895 and 16 KE 1311/28 December 1895.

⁵¹⁰ Verheij, “Diyarbekir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895,” 127-129.

⁵¹¹ Meyrier, *Les Massacres de Diarbekir: Correspondance Diplomatique du Vice-Consul de France*, 141, cipher telegram from Gustave Meyrier to Paul Cambon, dated Diarbékir, 29 December 1895.

they had sent before the events, Muslims declared that they did not accept the appointment of a Christian official [i.e., the employment of high-ranking Christian officials in provincial administration in accordance with the provisions of the reform program], and that, if the reforms were implemented, they would no longer recognize the authority of the Sultan and would commence a fresh round of massacre. Meyrier also noted that a large number of armed Kurds were reported to have entered the town.⁵¹² According to the French consul's reports, at noon on 31 December 1895, when Abdullah Pasha, the governor-general, and Military Commander Ziya Pasha were in the French Consulate, a great panic occurred in the town and Christians left their shops in panic, taking refuge in the churches and huddling around the consulate. Abdullah Pasha and Ziya Pasha had immediately proceeded to the town center to intervene in the turmoil, beating Kurds with their whips and taking steps to prevent a further disturbance. Praising Abdullah Pasha's handling of the situation, Meyrier implied that no government official had acted before in such an energetic way during these occasions.⁵¹³ Several days later, Meyrier also reported that it was only the energetic conduct of Abdullah Pasha that had averted the danger. On January 1, the pasha had gathered Muslim notables and *softias* and warned them that he was "well-determined" to execute any disturbers of public order and peace.⁵¹⁴

As a result, French, British, and Ottoman sources indicate that the vigorous efforts of Abdullah Pasha, assisted by Ziya Pasha, played an important role not only in quelling the minor trouble that took place on December 31 but also in keeping order and tranquility in the town of Diyarbekir until he left for Mosul in mid-April 1896. (After his departure, the forces under Ziya Pasha's command, as well, would successfully prevent the repetition of mob violence against Armenians in particular instances.) On many occasions before and after December 31, Meyrier emphasized how trustable, energetic, and well-mannered Abdullah Pasha was and how important his presence in Diyarbekir was for the maintenance

⁵¹² Ibid., 141-142, cipher telegram from Gustave Meyrier to Paul Cambon, dated Diarb kirk, 30 December 1895.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 142, cipher telegram from Gustave Meyrier to Paul Cambon, dated Diarb kirk, 31 December 1895. Also see Verheij, "Diyarbekir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895," 108-109.

⁵¹⁴ Meyrier, *Les Massacres de Diarb kirk: Correspondance Diplomatique du Vice-Consul de France*, 147, cipher telegram from Gustave Meyrier to Paul Cambon, dated Diarb kirk, 5 January 1896. Also see Verheij, "Diyarbekir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895," 109.

of public order and security. British Vice-Consul Hallward, who arrived in Diyarbekir in February 1896 to take his post, shared a similar view of Abdullah Pasha, attributing the maintenance of order to him and Ziya Pasha while claiming that Governor-General Enis Pasha was deeply involved in the violence and therefore a threat to public peace.⁵¹⁵ As French and Ottoman sources suggest, the local Christian population was reassured by the presence of Abdullah Pasha and the other commissioners, while Muslims seem to have been very irritated. Once Abdullah Pasha had told Meyrier in a confidential way that Muslims made a complaint against him, accusing the pasha of doing “too much” for the Christians and of establishing a good relationship with the French consul.⁵¹⁶ As seen in other cases, when the authorities took effective measures to keep order and prevent further disturbances, the Muslims often felt offended, thinking that the Armenians were under some special protection of Muslim officials at the cost of the interests of Muslims.

7.6. Reasserting Muslim Dominance through Violence

During periods of intercommunal tensions, conflicting parties tend to redefine, reify, and reinforce the boundaries between “us” and “them.” Collective perceptions intensify. Categories of “the self,” “the other,” “friends,” “enemies,” and “foreigners” become more important than other times. The parties begin to assert their identity more strongly and aggressively than usual. Group identity also affects quotidian encounters between members of the opposing communities. Furthermore, in almost every instance of ethnic rioting, attackers have a certain idea of who they will inflict harm. They usually attribute unchanging, evil characteristics to the targeted group and stigmatize their would-be victims. The behavior of the target group is conceived in partisan terms and often believed to be enormously dangerous, which helps to persuade potential rioters, and usually

⁵¹⁵ See, for instance, TNA: FO 424/186, No. 270. Telegram from Currie to Salisbury, Constantinople, March 9, 1896; TNA: FO 424/187, No. 7. Inclosure 2 in No. 7, Vice-Consul Hallward to Consul Cumberbatch, Diyarbekir, February 25, 1896; FO 424/187, Inclosure No. 26, Vice-Consul Hallward to Consul Cumberbatch, Diyarbekir, March 17, 1896. For other copies of these reports respectively, see Turkey No. 8 (1896), No. 80, No. 122, and No. 140. A shortened, published version of the last report can also be found in Meyrier, *Les Massacres de Diarbekir: Correspondance Diplomatique du Vice-Consul de France*, 215-217, and in Mouradian, “Gustave Meyrier and the Turmoil in Diarbekir,” 242-244.

⁵¹⁶ Meyrier, *Les Massacres de Diarbekir: Correspondance Diplomatique du Vice-Consul de France*, 141, cipher telegram from Gustave Meyrier to Paul Cambon, dated Diarbékir, 29 December 1895.

the wider community, that violence is necessary and inevitable. Indeed, it is very common that the threat believed to be posed by the targeted group is nonetheless conceived in an exaggerated manner. Research also clearly shows that when the other's identity is perceived as a deadly threat, violent conflict is more likely to erupt.⁵¹⁷

As we have seen, the telegram signed reportedly by a large number of Muslims in Diyarbekir reiterated the image of Armenians as “mischief-makers,” “the fifth column of the European powers,” and, therefore, as a harmful minority. The signatories also implied that Armenians had lately become obstinate/recalcitrant (*hod-ser*), extreme, and impudent, while Muslims still stayed silent and tolerant towards them owing only to their patriotic and religious feelings. The authors and signatories of the telegram portrayed Armenians also as a people seeking pragmatic benefits and more privileges only, while Muslims would be the victims of these privileges and concessions given to a minority group as a result of “foreign intrigues.” It is also remarkable that the signatories laid a great deal of emphasis on the matter of population size. Muslim elites were aware that the reform project would be implemented on the basis of population ratio in a particular administrative area. The Muslims who constituted the population majority in the Six Provinces must remain as the dominant group. Their supremacy—in terms of population size and power—was incontestable.

From the evidence presented above, one may conclude that Muslim elites, tribal chieftains, and ordinary masses considered the introduction of internal reforms for the Six Provinces as unnecessary privileges accorded to a minority population and as a prelude to further concessions that might lead to an Armenian principality with dire consequences for the local Muslim populations. The application of reforms was a threat to and a betrayal of “a fourteen-century Muslim dominance” in East Anatolia. Perhaps, it was also interpreted as the harbinger of a new political calculus that was set in motion in the Armenian populated provinces. Not only the above-mentioned telegram, but also a host of government documents clearly reveal the official and popular perception that the Armenians wanted to get their hands on the whole eastern provinces with the support

⁵¹⁷ See Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*.

provided by the Great Powers, particularly by the British. In the eyes of Muslim elites, the threat posed by Armenians was too great to be tolerated. Under such circumstances, a sense of group disadvantage, loss of control, or outrage may evoke feelings of collective hostility, anger, and reprisal; thereby motivating community leaders and ordinary masses to swing into action.

The existence of armed revolutionary organizations, no matter Armenian revolutionaries were a very small minority in Armenian communities, “confirmed” the feeling that negotiation was off the table and that violent action was necessary and legitimate. Muslims must have felt the need to give a prompt—and much more violent—response to Armenian revolutionary political actions that they considered to be threatening. Also, the Armenians were pursuing sinister behavior and gaining privilege without enough punishment from the government, whose actions, the Muslims supposed, were restricted by foreign governments. It would be misleading to assert that Muslim notables and tribal chieftains everywhere had the impression that the Hamidian administration failed to take necessary steps against the “Armenian sedition.” They must have been aware that the government’s options were limited by a variety of factors, such as the Great Power diplomacy, socioeconomic and fiscal concerns, and state capacity. Therefore, the policy-makers in Istanbul could not have taken the “most radical” steps that the Muslims populations deemed necessary to eliminate the “Armenian Question” without a suitable context.

Muslim notables, religious leaders, tribal chieftains, agitators, rumor-mongering networks, and ephemeral leadership played a significant role in the crystallization of anti-reform and anti-Armenian feelings as well as in the mobilization of hostility and violence against a particular population. The mobilization of anti-reform and anti-Armenian sentiment, and, as we have seen in the case of Diyarbekir, the “counter-protest” actions led by Muslim notables further convinced the wider Muslim community that violence against Armenians was an appropriate, justifiable, and purely defensive act.

Government officials and Muslim elites also justified the collective mass violence in terms very similar to those used by the perpetrators, supporters, or bystanders of

collective violence committed against particular population categories across the globe in the twentieth century: The Armenians needed to be taught a lesson!⁵¹⁸ “Without justification in these terms,” Horowitz has astutely observed, “there would be much less need for rumors confirming the malicious intentions and actions of the targets and less need for specific precipitating events as well.”⁵¹⁹ This formulation is also crucial for understanding how the perpetrators linked themselves discursively to the state by considering their act of mass killing as a retaliatory, punitive, and corrective response to the Armenian political ambitions and actions deemed extremely menacing and perilous. In other words, the advocates, authors, instigators, and perpetrators of anti-Armenian violence imagined themselves as the extended arm of the state teaching a lesson to the Armenians for the sake of imperial unity and the survival of the empire’s Muslim community. As can be seen in Lieutenant-General Saadeddin Pasha’s diaries, for instance, a certain tribal chief from the province of Van sought to justify their treatment of Armenian civilians by declaring that they (i.e., Kurds/Kurdish tribes) could not simply stand by as “this tiny nation/people” (*şu küçük millet*, i.e., the Armenians) dared to raid the Sultan’s palace (a misrepresentation of the events at the capital in September 1895), attack two pashas [in Trabzon], and kill many Kurds.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁸ For various examples, see *ibid.*, 368-369.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁵²⁰ Sadettin Paşa, *Sadettin Paşa'nın Anıları*, 22.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This study has questioned views and opinions that have previously been taken for granted by scholars. Contrary to commonly held views and often repeated claims, the present study has demonstrated that the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 were not planned, instigated, or authorized by the Hamidian regime. Nor did the Ottoman central government devise and pursue a deliberate policy aimed at encouraging and promoting lethal attacks against its Armenian subjects on massive scales. First of all, the very sporadic character of the anti-Armenian riots disabuses us of the notion that these violent events were orchestrated by an organization acting in accordance with a clear and predetermined plan. Also, in a number of important locations, responsible governors and military commanders, often assisted by Muslim notables and other influential figures, promptly suppressed embryonic violence or attempted assaults and made sure that Armenians did not become the targets of mob violence or outside attackers by taking timely, energetic, and effective actions. The foresight, energy, and firmness shown by the authorities in these places limited damage considerably, preventing small quarrels from transforming into widespread riots. As we have seen in Chapter 5, several such responsible officials were rewarded by the Sultan upon the recommendations of foreign consular officials, the members of the Commissions of Inspection sent by the government to the affected regions in November 1895, or other civilian functionaries. In several other towns, vigilant officials succeeded in keeping the peace in their areas of responsibility throughout the entire period under investigation despite hostile intentions and preparations on the part of some local Muslims. Moreover, a dozen of other towns were successfully defended by the imperial troops, local civilian authorities, and Christian and Muslim inhabitants against attempted attacks from armed tribal forces in large numbers. Likewise, local government agencies quickly suppressed attempts at fomenting a new round of violence in several major Anatolian towns, such as Diyarbekir, Erzurum, and Kayseri, in 1896. Local variation in the characteristics of conflict during the events under scrutiny was not considerable but this does not mean that the local context was insignificant. On the contrary, evidence clearly indicates that the specific actions, decisions, and behaviors of local officials and Muslim notables largely influenced the course of events and the severity of conflict in each episode of violence.

This study has also provided an extensive documentation of the hitherto unknown efforts, measures, policies, and actions of the central government to suppress and prevent disturbances and, thereby, to put an end to a growing crisis. To review, these efforts and measures included, for instance, a colossal military mobilization involving virtually tens of thousands of reserve troops sweeping across the affected areas as of late October 1895—even from regions as far as western Anatolia and Kuds [Kudüs/Jerusalem] *redif* (second reserve) battalions were transferred to the areas under the responsibility of the Fourth and Fifth Imperial armies. In order to expediate military intervention in the event of disturbance, the central government also authorized the *mutasarrıfs* temporarily to call for military assistance when needed. The central government authorities devised various instruments to routinely monitor the vigilance and performance of the local authorities with respect to categorical anti-disorder measures clearly identified in circulars regularly issued by the Sublime Porte as of late October 1895. These circular instructions were accompanied by repeated orders reminding provincial administrators and military commanders of their clear obligation to prevent disturbances and to quell them promptly when they occurred. The highest echelons of imperial authorities in Istanbul warned local officials that they would be held gravely responsible for any failure to prevent conflict. Indeed, as we have seen, after the Sultan's decree of November 17, the number of the officials who were removed from office for misconduct, negligence, or failure to suppress the riots in the areas under their authority considerably increased. In accordance with the instructions sent by the Sublime Porte, the local governments also made frequent efforts to explain to the local populaces, especially tribal groups, the harmfulness of disturbances to the state and the economy through the mediation of Muslim notables and clergymen. Likewise, in an attempt to alleviate agitation among the local population and to deter people from violence, the imperial commissioners sent from Istanbul delivered admonitory speeches to influential Muslims, Christian community leaders, and tribal chieftains in most of the towns they visited throughout the winter of 1895-96.

Consequently, a careful examination of the official response to the outbreaks of violence reveals a different mood and a different set of concerns among the governing elite in Istanbul and most high-ranking provincial officials in the affected regions than the state-sponsored massacres narrative suggests. However, this is not to say that the above-

mentioned actions and many others taken by the central and local government authorities were entirely energetic, timely, decisive, and effective. Indeed, this study has also highlighted a series of complexities, paradoxes, contradictions, and dilemmas surrounding the efforts of the Ottoman officials—both on central and local levels—to handle the popular violence of a great magnitude. More importantly, these efforts were not accompanied by two fundamental measures for the reasons addressed earlier: (1) using maximum force against attackers in a decisive and systematic manner; and (2) imposing strict punishment on the masterminds, instigators, and perpetrators of violence. Indeed, perhaps it was not a coincidence that anti-Armenian riots ceased to exist only when the Hamidian administration showed its categorical determination to prevent a new wave of conflict throughout late 1896 and early 1897 by taking firm actions against those who sought to incite violence against Armenians (including some local Muslim notables) in a variety of locations and against the local officials found guilty of dereliction of duty in dealing with the incidents in their districts.

That the anti-Armenian riots of 1895-97 were not state-orchestrated or government-inspired events cannot absolve the Hamidian administration from direct responsibility for the violence. A substantial body of empirical evidence establishes an inextricable nexus between the state and the making of anti-Armenian violence during these two years. The previous chapters have found that the central and local government authorities did not take the exceptional precautionary steps required by the extraordinary circumstances present in the empire on the eve of the anti-Armenian riots. They completely failed to anticipate the large-scale disturbances, although there were many signs that outright conflict was imminent and particularly threatening. The central government made the maintenance of order a special priority in the summer and autumn of 1895; yet what they were really concerned about was “Armenian sedition,” but definitely not intergroup hostility and violence. They were also grossly negligent in taking the kind of effective preventive measures that would have communicated clearly to the local populations that the local authorities would never allow any hostilities to occur and would punish indiscriminately those who attempted to disturb public order and peace. Public proclamations to this effect were made in provincial capitals and district centers but this measure was neither timely nor effective; nor was it accompanied by decisive and firm government actions. The central

and local governments' response to the incidents were extremely weak and ineffective especially by the first quarter of November 1895 when the wave of riots was already in full swing. In many cases, the authorities were also guilty of dereliction of duty for failing not only to prevent the outbreaks of violence but also to suppress them at the first sign through the use of maximum and effective force against the Muslim mobs.

In a variety of cases, the local civilian and military officials might have been unable to prevent, stop, or inhibit violence for reasons and due to circumstances beyond their control. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapters, the local authorities encountered many challenges, dilemmas, and logistical problems throughout the period in question, particularly at the beginning of the wave of riots. However, instances where incipient violence or attempts at a new round of conflict were immediately averted by timely interventions and the overall course of events in other places suggest that the inadequacy and incompetence of the security forces at the command of the local authorities or overall shortages of manpower and resources cannot wholly explain the unrestrained nature of mob violence. As implied before, the fundamental point is that when state actors do not give green light for violence or when they show their determination not to tolerate any hostility or aggression, it is less likely that violence escalates into a massive scale.

Especially at the initial stages of the events, many local administrators and military commanders tended to belittle the significance and severity of violence in order to reduce their own responsibility and, perhaps, to protect their own careers as officials in the service of the Ottoman state. Even the most responsible governors and military commanders, who openly spoke about the gravity of the situation and made genuine efforts to suppress the incidents, blamed only Armenians for the outbreaks of violence and were inclined to make unsubstantiated, and even conspiratorial, claims about the origins of the disturbances. In so doing, they clearly attempted to absolve themselves of all responsibility for the violence before their superiors in Istanbul.

Given the anti-Armenian political climate prevailing during the spring and summer of 1895, it was only natural that in many cases, the local authorities felt little or no incentive to protect Armenians who they suspected collectively to be disloyal and seditious. Besides

the extreme reluctance and often unwillingness of local officials to use violence against their local co-religionists, the lack of clear, timely, and consistent orders from Istanbul regarding the application of deadly force and harsh measures against the Muslim mobs further complicated the matter, even for those civilian and military functionaries who were inimical to disorder and violence in the districts under their responsibility. Yet, with respect to the role of local authorities, it should also be noted that even if the governors, police officers, and military commanders not organized the riots or nor even possessed prior knowledge of them, they tolerated the violence and sympathized with the actions of the perpetrators in many cases. More importantly, as we have seen, several senior administrators and military commanders went beyond empathizing with the perpetrators by inciting, directing, mobilizing, or abetting the mob. As a result, Chapter 6 of this study has stressed the culpability, responsibility, and involvement of local officials—as well as of their superiors in the central government—in the anti-Armenian violence with varying degrees and types.

The Hamidian administration never launched any comprehensive, serious, and diligent investigations into the reasons for the violence as well as into the conduct of the local officials and specific individuals alleged to be instigators and ringleaders during the riots. Moreover, this study has also shown that most of the leaders, instigators, and perpetrators of the massacres went unpunished, as there was little effort on the part of the Ottoman authorities to appropriately prosecute and punish the enormous crimes committed against thousands of civilians during the years 1895-97. That the government failed to make sure that punishment be inflicted on the perpetrators and instigators of violence in most cases meant that, in practice, the primary victims of the violence, i.e. Armenians, were at the mercy of Muslim offenders. The Ottoman governing elite in Istanbul, local government officials, the forces of law and order, and the judicial authorities all tolerated violence against Armenians and sympathized with its perpetrators. Unsurprisingly, there was no unequivocal condemnation of anti-Armenian violence among the Ottoman ruling circles. The Ottoman authorities were concerned about the negative diplomatic, economic, and financial repercussions of the events rather than about their humanitarian aspects. They also shifted the blame away from the actual people who committed those crimes onto their victims. The lack of sufficient sympathy and concern for the victims of violence in the

governing circles and the absence of contrition on the part of many Muslims were striking features of the events contained in this study. This situation in turn helped to perpetuate a climate that promoted violence against Armenians until firmer and harsher measures were taken by the government.

Was it possible for the perpetrators to commit such excessive crimes without the encouragement and approbation of the Sultan and the policy makers around him? Before discussing this crucial point, I would like to raise another question: Did the Hamidian administration desire the anti-Armenian riots from beginning to end? That the authorities sympathized with the perpetrators does not automatically mean that the Ottoman ruling elite wanted such dramatic events to take place or that the authorities countenanced and applauded the epidemic of collective mass violence when it occurred and spread. Otherwise, the government and its local agents would simply have done nothing to put an end to the wave of riots—virtually none of the steps, measures, and actions documented in Chapter 5 would have been taken by the authorities. Also, literally hundreds of government documents show that the highest officials at the palace and the Sublime Porte deplored the diplomatic, economic, financial, and military price that the events exacted—and could have exacted—from the empire. As we have seen in Chapter 5, when delivering admonitory speeches to the gatherings of Muslim notables and tribal chieftains, the local authorities and the members of the Commissions of Inspection emphasized the profound diplomatic and financial consequences that the Sultan and his government had to face because of these events, and therefore “advised” them to refrain from such excesses.

Above all, the Ottoman Empire was threatened with diplomatic and military intervention by the Great Powers. The fear of foreign intervention became especially heightened among the highest-ranking officials as of mid-November 1895. At this point, it is important to note that during the 1821 Greek insurgency and the 1876 massacres in the Danube Province, the empire had experienced massive European imperial intervention in support of local communities. This experience might well have been at the back of the minds of the Sultan and his advisers in the 1890s.⁵²¹ Also, the anti-Armenian massacres

⁵²¹ I would like to thank Dr. Thomas Kuehn for reminding me of this crucial point.

caused a great upsurge of grief and anger outside the empire and led to public protests against and condemnations of the Ottoman imperial government across Europe and the U.S. The military capacity of the empire was called into question during these events. The violent disturbances brought about a great deal of material destruction and paralyzed the local economy, trade, and commerce. The government was not able to collect taxes from Armenian taxpayers throughout the affected regions for over two years. Furthermore, the mobilization of a great number of regular and reserve troops put a huge burden on the state treasury. The Hamidian administration also had to organize a fund-raising campaign to bring relief to thousands of Armenian survivors. In short, it is evident that these dramatic events represented a profound danger and crisis to the government. Simplistic narratives of state-led massacres fail to take into account this aspect of the anti-Armenian events.

It is therefore crucial to understand that even if the representatives of the Ottoman state viewed the riots simply as the reaction of angry Muslim masses to the provocative and importunate actions of Armenians and as understandable acts or legitimate self-defense against communities deemed politically unreliable at best, they nevertheless found the violent outbreaks disproportionate, undesirable, and dangerous. To be clear: On the one hand, it is undeniable that the Hamidian regime often banked on the political and economic fears and resentment of Muslim masses in order for putting an end to the “Armenian Question” once and for all. Also, especially since the formation of the Armenian revolutionary parties in the late 1880s, the government became increasingly prone to resorting to violence due to amplifying domestic security concerns. It should be reminded that the Hamidian administration came to suspect its Armenian subjects as a whole to sympathize with or actively support these revolutionaries. Likewise, both the central and local government authorities often looked the other way or belittled when facing routine violence and abuse against Armenian civilians by Hamidiye commanders and officers, certain local groupings, and officials both before and after the events of 1895-97. They even adopted a lenient and neglectful (if not completely *laissez-faire*) attitude towards the perpetrators of this mundane violence. It is also true that, when required, the authorities went as far as threatening the Armenians and the representatives of the Great Powers with popular violence and mobilization. Hence, the Hamidian administration could, and indeed *did*, tolerate violence against Armenians to a certain degree, especially when the governing

elites feared that the Armenian revolutionary movement had become too visible, too impudent, and too threatening (as in the cases of Istanbul 1895 and 1896, for instance).

Yet, on the other hand, the evidence presented above suggests that the governing factions at the Yıldız Palace and the Sublime Porte certainly were not eager to cede the streets to the wanton violence of random mobs for over 18 months, even though this violence was directed against “enemies within” by the masses believed to be loyal to the Sultan and acting in support of the state. For a regime with limited state capacity, weak governance, and insufficient resources, popular violence and mobilization from below to such a large extent was extremely difficult to control.

Nonetheless, it is safe to suggest that after it occurred, the Hamidian regime treated the collective violence as a “good lesson” that the Muslims masses had taught both the Armenians and the European Great Powers, and perhaps as a “blessing in disguise.” For the governing circles, the outbreaks of mass violence carried clear messages to the empire’s Armenian subjects and their foreign sponsors, namely that the introduction of internal reforms under diplomatic pressure had caused disturbances and violent conflict; that aggressive diplomatic and military measures on the part of European governments might further complicate the matter in the future; and that the Muslim population would not allow the Armenians and the Powers to assume privileges and exercise dominant influence over the governance of the empire’s eastern Anatolian provinces beyond internal reforms. Indeed, the actual perpetrators, the crowds supportive of violence, and the elite segments of the local Muslim populations who instigated, abetted, or condoned the mass killings attempted to display their ultimate power and influence over the victims, thereby communicating to the survivors that they were able and willing to do anything whenever they sensed that the basis for their dominance, as the “real owners of the empire,” was being threatened.

As should be evident by now, the Ottoman government cannot, however, be considered only indirectly responsible and liable for the mass violence primarily because the Hamidian regime paved the way for it. As the previous parts of this study have suggested, the internal security policies and anti-Armenian measures of the Hamidian

regime served to create an atmosphere that engendered collective violence against Armenians. On the one hand, it is misleading to think that the popular anti-Armenian violence was the logical culmination of state-produced Armenophobia since such a perspective draws a clear distinction between officials and citizens and renders ordinary Muslim populations merely passive receivers of government policies and messages. It also presupposes a set of anti-Armenian sentiments, ideas, and practices that rested in the history and deep fabric of ethno-religious relations between Armenian and Muslim communities. It should be noted that elite, popular, and governmental anti-Armenian views among Ottoman society, which had come to the fore in the mid-1890s, reinforced each other in an interactive way at a particular moment of the history of the “Armenian Question.”

On the other hand, overwhelming security policies and alerts on the part of the government authorities helped to create an escalating pattern of acute and disproportionate concern in response to perceived political threats posed by a minority population acting in collaboration with hostile foreign powers. These security anxieties suggested that the Armenians began to use extreme manifestations of sedition and unrest, thereby reinforcing the impression that the threat was imminent and immediate. Particularly, on the eve of the riots, a fear of widespread insurrection and revolts on the part of Armenian revolutionary committees, which was disseminated via official channels, contributed to an already toxic climate, affecting the mood and attitude of both the local authorities and Muslim populaces towards their Armenian fellow citizens. When these fears were combined with the popular resentment of internal reform negotiations, increasing Armenian political activism, and widespread rumors of impending foreign intervention, violence became a clear necessity and a legitimate response from the perspective of many Muslims inhabiting the Armenian-populated provinces. Also, I believe that these security considerations and policies imbued—consciously or unconsciously—the Muslim populations with the idea that Armenians should be punished if they attempted to display any signs of extreme disobedience, aggression, and rebellion against the imperial government.

A crucial consequence of these government policies was the emergence of a culture of impunity that helped further anti-Armenian violence as local Muslim state- and non-

state actors could assume that any actions they took against Armenians would not be prosecuted. This point also enables us to answer the question of how the authors and perpetrators of violence dared to commit such excessive crimes even though they knew that, under normal circumstances, they would be punished for what they had done. At this point, it is important to repeat that the mass killings took place in an environment in which many Muslims sensed that the Armenians were unprotected and perhaps even outlawed. Indeed, not only the general anti-Armenian outlook and atmosphere prevailing over the period preceding the events but also the ways in which the Ottoman authorities responded to the riots at their initial stages provided the instigators and potential perpetrators with a sense of impunity for violence, encouraging them to think that their actions against Armenians would go uninhibited, unchecked, and unpunished by the authorities. As a conclusion, the findings presented above suggests that the Ottoman policy-makers in Istanbul, the imperial administrators, the local civilian and military authorities, and the Sultan's law enforcement agencies were deeply involved in the genesis, manifestation, escalation, and justification of anti-Armenian violence in the mid-1890s.

If the mass killings had been orchestrated by the government in Istanbul, it would be less challenging for researchers to conceptualize, explain, and interpret the anti-Armenian violence. Lack of state authorship, orchestration, and directive behind these events requires us to address a series of perplexing questions regarding the origins, outbreak, and spread of violence as well as the agency, motivations, and justifications of those who participated in it. This study has attempted to shift the focus away from mythical conceptions and conspiratorial mechanisms to the complex origins and nature of anti-Armenian violence and to its agents that came from multiple backgrounds. It has addressed the underlying conditions, motivating factors, facilitating mechanisms, human agency, and sentiments involved. While the political and socioeconomic context of these events have usually been prone to explanations that generally rely on fixed religious and national categories, the present study has emphasized the effects of global and empire-wide sociopolitical transformations on group formation, the ethnicization of resource competition, and intercommunal tensions in the Ottoman Empire. By doing so, it has challenged the ethnocentric, culturalist, deterministic, and teleological interpretations of intercommunal conflict in the late Ottoman Empire.

On the eve of the riots, for instance, a series of urban protests, such as staging mass rallies or closing down shops, either directly precipitated violent conflict or intensified the tensions between the Armenian and Muslim communities in several cities, most notably Istanbul and Diyarbekir. The expression of socio-political grievances through urban political action is a double-edged sword: Although protest is a powerful tool to put pressure on the central government, it simultaneously mobilizes other segments of society that are in favor of the status quo. In that respect, it is even possible to conceive the “Armenian Question” as the other face of the “Muslim Question,” given the fact that Muslim communities of the Ottoman Empire became heavily politicized at the turn of the century amidst reports of special privileges reserved for Armenians, imminent foreign intervention in the affairs of the state, and a general sense of impending doom signaling the end of what they believed to be the bastion of Islam. Hence, even though intercommunal strife had never been at the core of ethno-religious relations between Armenians, Kurds, and Turks, the convergence of multiple factors—the empire’s political and economic troubles, seemingly unceasing issuance of reforms targeting its non-Muslim communities, the intensification of struggle over economic resources, and modernization triggering new modes of political protest, mobilization, and communication—contributed to the emergence of a polarized atmosphere in the empire’s Armenian-populated regions.

The local Muslim population in East Anatolia was not, of course, a monolithic entity. Nor did those who participated in anti-Armenian violence come from the same sociopolitical background. On the other hand, fear, resentment, agitation, and the idea of acting on behalf of, and for the sake of, the state and its Muslim communities bound many social groupings together in the violent enterprise. Particularly, many Muslims feared that the basis for their domination as the majority in this part of the empire was in jeopardy and would be undermined by the application of reforms, which might, in turn, lead to further concessions and eventually an autonomous Armenian entity. Fear of Armenian/European dominance in East Anatolia, the prospect of a radical alteration in the balance of power relations between a Muslim majority and a Christian minority, and material incentives provided powerful motivations for mobilization and participation in collective action. The image of Armenians as a collective threat also constituted a premise for the legitimization of anti-Armenian violence. However, while underlying the significance of political

concerns, socioeconomic forces, and calculable interests as underlying motivations for violence, we should note that the violent conflict of this nature and scale also involved heightened emotions such as passion, anger, and jealousy.

As a result, the masterminds, instigators, and perpetrators of anti-Armenian violence sought to reduce the whole existence of the Ottoman Armenian population to a demographically and politically weak entity by means of severe damage. They attempted to eliminate the “Armenian Question” by weakening the ability of Armenians to demonstrate political will, to organize for political action, and to achieve power. Through extremely violent means, they reasserted Muslim supremacy and demanded that the Armenians stay in a subordinate political position. Put differently, Ottoman Armenians were well advised to know their place as obedient, second-class subjects of the Sultan, below their Muslim neighbors as it were, or be ready to face the direst of consequences. Those who masterminded, supported, and exercised violence against Armenians also intended to demonstrate both the Armenians and the Great Powers that the Muslim populations in the Six Provinces would not allow them to achieve power, influence, and control in this region. Through the threat of violence as a repressive political method, they instilled fear, insecurity, and anxiety in the whole community. Lastly, the perpetrators of anti-Armenian violence also sought to destroy the material/economic base of Ottoman Armenians by killing adult males as well as through property destruction, plunder, and seizure.

One central conclusion that can be drawn from the findings presented above is that the intercommunal tensions and violence between the Armenian and Muslim populations at the turn of the century were not caused by age-old ethnic and religious hatred, but rather by the convergence of the Hamidian regime’s security concerns and anti-Armenian policies that increasingly branded the Ottoman Armenians as a fundamental threat to imperial unity with the sociopolitical fears, concerns, and interests of local Muslim notables and Kurdish chieftains, who sought to expand their control over people and land in the region.

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