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KURDISH AND ARMENIAN LAND DISPUTE IN THE SECOND CONSTITUTIONALIST PERIOD AND A SOLUTION SUGGESTION

II. MEŞRUTİYET DÖNEMİNDE KÜRT VE ERMENİ TOPRAK ANLAŞMAZLIĞI VE BİR ÇÖZÜM GİRİŞİMİ

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Abstract

During the majority of 19th century and at the beginning of 20th century, one of the conflicts encountered by the Ottoman Empire is the land grabbing problems between Kurdish and Armenians. The reason of this problem results from Kurds spread in the Armenian territory, Armenian migration and Kurds' transition from nomadic to settled life. As this was not based on mutual consent of the parties, it brought some conflicts along with it. Therefore in the 2nd Constitutionalist Period, Ottoman Empire established a committee with the participation of the members of Kurdish nationalists and Armenian Dashnak Party (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), and tried to reconcile the parties by ensuring that Kurds return the land and commodities that they grabbed from Armenians. For this purpose, this committee was even given the authority of dismissing soldiers and administrative officials. Having heard of this initiative of Ottoman Empire, Armenians and Kurds gave petitions to the government about how this committee should be formed. However, this initiative was revoked and failed as a result of opposition from the Kurds. This paper analyzes the general situation before the formation of this committee and the events experienced thereafter.

Keywords: Armenian, Kurdish, Ottoman Empire, Land Dispute

Özet

XIX. yüzyılın büyük bir bölümü boyunca ve XX. yüzyılın başlarında Osmanlı Devleti'ndeki başlıca sorunlardan birisi de Kürtler ve Ermeniler arasında meydana gelen toprak gasları meselesidir. Bu meselenin ortaya çıkışında Kürtlerin Ermeni topraklarına yayılmaya başlaması, Ermeni göçleri ve Kürtlerin göçebelikten yerleşik hayata geçişleri etkili olmuştur. Bu durum tarafların karşılıklı rızasıyla meydana gelmediğinden beraberinde çatışmayı da getirmiştir. Bu nedenle Osmanlı Devleti, II. Meşrutiyet döneminde bu sorunu çözebilmek için Kürt milliyetçileri ile Ermeni Taşnak Partisi üyelerinin katıldığı bir heyet kurarak, Kürtlerin gasp ettiği Ermeni toprak ve mallarını geri verilmesini sağlayarak tarafları uzlaştırmaya çalışmıştır. Bu amaçla bu heyete askerleri ve mülki idare memurlarını dahi azl edebilme yetkisini de vermiştir. Osmanlı

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Devleti'nin bu girişiminden haberdar olan Ermeniler ve Kürtler, oluşturulacak heyetin nasıl olması gerektiği konusunda hükümete dilekçeler vermişlerdir. Ancak bu girişim Kürtlerin karşı çıkması sonucu akamete uğramış ve sonuçsuz kalmıştır. Bu çalışmada bu heyetin oluşturulmasından öncesindeki genel durum ve sonrasında yaşanan olaylara değinilmeye çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ermeni, Kürt, Osmanlı Devleti, Arazi Anlaşmazlığı

THE REFLECTION OF ARMENIAN AND KURDISH LAND DISPUTE ON POPULAR CULTURE

Today, one of the most disputed events all over the different parliaments of the world is the incidents and losses by Armenians. However, historical, political and sociological aspects of these events are basically ignored. Armenians try to keep the agenda busy with life and land losses that they experienced in that period on different political platforms. Especially their claims relating to land involve the regions where the great majority of Kurds live today. This naturally brings opposing claims to the agenda and results in various belonging claims between the parties. This case consequently is the main point of conflict between Kurds and Armenians, which was brought to agenda once again with the preplacing the old village names again with their previous names. Today, it is known that many villages and towns in Hakkari, where there is the most active Kurdish nationalism, belong to Christian minorities.

With the growing Kurdish nationalism, some scholars including Cemsid Bender claim that the Anatolian region was home to Kurds since the beginning of the history by making deliberate, incomprehensible and baseless propaganda and establishing links with ancient civilizations (Bender, 1991: 11,12,17,21,44-45, 189, 191). Additionally, putting forward such claims even goes further to ignoring the existence of Armenians and Assyrians living in the same territory for centuries. This also leads to counter-arguments by Armenians and Assyrians and brings mutual discussions ongoing. According to Assyrian Hirmis Aboona, Kurds coming from Iranian region disseized the land of Assyrians and Armenians by the difficulties and chaos throughout the centuries. He also suggested that Shah Ismail's Shiite policy and his mistreatment of Kurdish leaders by jailing them caused them to establish an alliance with the Sunni Ottoman and mainly spread around the soils where Armenians lived. This incident has also damaged the activities of Turkmen tribes in the region (Aboona, 1973: 18). According to Armenian author Vahan, although the argument that the eastern part of Anatolia belongs to Kurds is advocated by many chauvinist Kurdish nationalists with great enthusiasm, original homeland of Kurds is located in Iranian regions and this argument was formed subsequently and it is an artificial idea which is inconsistent with any historical facts. He claims that the Kurdish population was intensified in this region with the arrival of Turks. Despite this fact, completely political and diplomatic reasons have role in monitoring this situation and policies (Baiburtian, 2008:6-7).

As before, today's contemporary authors and historians also have different arguments about Kurds' arrival from Iran and grabbing the soils that they live now in the period (McDowall, 2004:30-31; Brunissen, 2006: 26,41; Tozer, 1881:258). Of these scholars, Denise Natali expresses that Kurds and Iranians have the same ancestry linkage and even Iranians perceive Hawraman Kurds as the purest and most unspoiled Iranians. However, denominational differences are among the factors that block and end the convergence between the two communities (Natali, 2005:25).

Lynch, on the other hand, went even further and suggested that the Battle of Chaldiran was the breaking point of Kurdish-Armenian relations. He additionally claimed that while the activity of Kurdish tribes taken into the country by their increased population in the border of Iran started to grow, this was further liberalized with the threat of Russian invasion in the 19th century (Lynch, 1901:420-421). According to him, Armenians maintained their presence in eastern Anatolia including particularly Van region since the Urartus. In the Anatolian region, various tribes of Kurds started to settle down in different plains in Van (Lynch, 1901:58,84). Similarly, Mehrdad Kia alleged that Armenians living in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia began to migrate into more

inland areas and commercial centers with security concerns as a result of the Ottoman campaigns in 17th century and Jelali Revolts. In the meantime, Ottoman Empire helped Kurds who took sides with them in their battles against Iran and provided them with gaining more power in those soils (Kia, 2013:127). This case started to increase and intensify especially in the second half of 19th century. Due to pressure from Kurds, the majority of Armenians emigrated to foreign countries and big cities, leaving their land. Because Armenians in Tekman region evacuated their villages during the Russian advance in 1829 and the retreat of General Paskevich, Kurds settled in these vacant villages. The Kurds of Khedonun were said to belong to the Jibranlı tribe – a tribe which is strong in the caza of Varto, but among the Kurdish population some have been brought from the distant vilayet of Diarbekir, at the head of the Mesopotamian plains (Lynch, 1901:249). On the other hand, this tribe furnishes three regiments of Hamidiyeh cavalry, recruited in Varto and these tribesmen spend the summer on the pastures of the Bingöl Dagħ, and the winters in the villages of their own in the plains as far as Syria and Aleppo (Lynch, 1901:184). Population in Hasankale region, involving Armenians and Muslims, gave petitions to the government to protect themselves when they were given damage by these nomadic Kurds (Lynch, 1901:219; Baiburtian, 2008; 11-13) Lynch states that Kurdish nomads who settled in Van in the 1900s hindered agriculture, horticulture and trade in this region (Lynch, 1901:12). Kurds did not only troubled Armenians but also the Molokans who were settled into the province of Kars by the Russian (Lynch, 1901:19). In a similar way, The Bekiranlı [Bekran] Kurds who come from Diarbekir to pass the summer on the Antogh Dagħ [Mount Andok] where there are several large Armenian villages, made a raid on the Armenians, and carried off cattle and other plunder (Dennis, 2008:101). Although the Ottoman Empire had banned these activities from time to time, they continued to their offensive tribal activities (Dennis, 2008:103). As in the above example, Major Trotter confirmed the fact that especially Kurdish nomads greatly damaged Armenian population in the region (Dennis, 2008:67-68). This damage of Kurdish nomads was not only limited to the region where Armenians live and it even spread to the other land as well. Therefore, even though the Ottoman Empire tried to prevent damage to the nomadic people, they were insufficient in this regard (İ.MVL. 639/90; İ.MVL. 473/21440; İ.MVL. 722/21.).

While interpreting the reasons why Armenians lost their land in the eastern and southeastern Anatolian, historical, religious, political factors are discussed. The first reason of this is that Kurds gradually penetrated into their land due to the decline of the state's authority and Armenians consequently abandoned their land (Wigram ve Wigram, 2004:224; Dedeyan, 2007:425). Based on this fact, because the Ottoman Empire was relatively stronger in the initial periods, there was a certain balance between Armenians and Kurds, and therefore less numbers of land grabbing incidents were experienced. With the end of 18th century and beginning of 19th century, influence and the central authority of the Ottoman state in the region was shaken, and Kurds strengthen their rule area against Armenians and caused them troubles (Kia, 2013:127). Thus, Erickson states that the Ottoman Empire had difficulty in preventing the Kurdish raids due to the geographical conditions of the state and reduced the central authority (Ericson, 2015:37). Based on these statements, the periods when Kurds expand their power and influence against Armenians are usually the centuries when Ottoman Empire dealt with major difficulties internally and externally. During this period, the Kurds had an advantage by increasing their pressure. In this way, the central authority was shocked because of the revolt of Cavallan Mehmet Ali Pasha after the Greek Revolt, and the Kurds in Tunceli region troubled and harassed the Armenians in the same region. Reşid Mehmed Pasha came to the region in the year 1834 gained great appreciation of the Armenians when he protected them and has enabled them to be comfortable even for a temporary period of time (Gencer, 2015:217-242). Armenians who lived in that period still commemorate and long for Reşid Mehmed Pasha's period even in 1888 Antranik, 2014, 42-46).

Other than this exceptional period, Kurds gradually started to settle down in Armenian villages in the periods of chaos and unrest, and while they were initially minority in these villages, they took the majority of the population in those villages. Kurdish villages Van's Vustak region (Lynch, 1901:123-124, 142) and Mush Plain were populated in this way

(Lynch, 1901:165). It is interesting to compare British Consul Brant's account of Kulli/Gülli village in Tekman region in 1838. He says that this village formerly contained a great many Armenian families but 200 immigrated to Georgia and only about 15 Mohammedan families reside among extensive ruins. In 1893, the transformation was completed, and Kulli became a Kurdish village (Lynch, 1901:190). In addition, he expressed that the Kurds inhabiting the Erzurum district, with exception of Hakkari, were originally immigrants from the vicinity of Diarbekr in 1838. And there is only one tribe, the Mamakanlu –said to be descended from the Armenian Mamikoneans- who are natives of the soil (Lynch, 1901:421). Moreover, Armenians tried to live in cottages buried under the ground in Mazgirt region in 1888 as they wear slovenly in order to escape from oppression of the Kurds. According to the statements of 95-year-old Giro Kehya's father, who lived in Mazgirt in 1888, Kurds arrived to the region where Armenians lived and established predominance on them (Antranik, 2014:41). This land gains continued to increase with the impacts of decreasing central authorities in the next period, armament of the Kurds and the Armenians who escaped from them (Lynch, 1901:426, 431).

Secondly, there are arguments defending that the Ottoman Empire deliberately supported the activities of Kurdish population to spread Islam in Anatolia and Islamize the east. The underlying reason of naming the regions where the majority of the population are Kurdish people as Kurdistan is perceived as the deliberate policies of Abdul Hamid II by Filian who was a local Protestant missionary. He also adds that Abdul Hamid II banned the use of the word of Armenia and he tried to name the regions where the population is mainly consisted of Kurds as Kurdistan. In fact, the name of the "Armenia College" had to be urged to change the school's name to "Euphrates College" (Filian, 1896:21). While developments especially after the 1877 Ottoman-Russian War resulted in the domination of Kurds in the region and the passive situation of Armenians (Dennis, 2008:75), Abdul Hamid II called in Kurds to settle in the midst of Armenians, and confiscated Armenian lands for them to settle on (Filian, 1896:75). According to Bayram Kodaman, the Ottoman Empire also did not favor the idea of allocating Kurdish regions to Armenians as they cooperated with the Western Powers after the 1877-1878 War. This led to prioritizing the Kurds in the region in this regard (Kodaman, 2010:133).

Thirdly, there is the argument which defends that Russia supported the Kurds in this region to rein Armenians by providing weapons and ammunition to take the advantage of Hamidiye regiment policies as a means of Russian interest in the region since the beginning of the 19th century which resulted in the forced migration of Armenians. Based on this idea, some of the Armenians have fallen into the dream of founding Armenia, and therefore they tried to act in coordination with Russia's policy. This also led Abdul Hamid II to establish the Hamidiye regiments against Armenians and resulted in the escalation of fighting (Y.PRK.ASK, 37/35; Kia, 2013:129-130). The main reason of constantly using the term of Kurdistan is to create a set against Russia's interest in Armenians and manipulate them as a political argument against Ottomans (McDowall, 2004:28-29). According to Vahan Baiburtian, the underlying reasons of demanding Armenian separation from the Ottoman government or gaining autonomy even in the later periods are Kurdish spread over the region against Armenians especially in the beginning of 1880s and gaining more power by increasing their superiority. On the other hand, there are no common problem of Armenians with the Ottoman Empire (Baiburtian, 2008:187). Fearing they would be minority among Armenians, Kurds massacred Armenians during the World War I. Inability of Ottoman Empire to control this aggravated the situation (Kia, 2013:131).

In addition to this, Kurds starting from the mid-19th century controlled the borders of two countries, namely Ottoman Empire and Iran, in which their population are mostly dense, and they centralized their political influence and tried to take measures to prevent unauthorized access in these borders (Sarıkçıoğlu, 2013:33-34; HR.SYS. 683/15; DH. MKT. 1558/83; Termen, 1910:26-27)². The reason of this is that tribes occasionally use border regions to plunder apart from spring and winter quarters (Millingen, 1998:194-

² The Ottoman Empire wanted to control the passage of not only tribes but also missionaries across the border. See. (DH.MKT.1588/85; DH. MKT.: 2261/79; Mehmet Hurşid, 1997: 2-3)

195), and they even involved different countries in this conflict as well as some other foreign countries (Anderson, 1872: 35360; Marsh, 1865: 124; Report of the American Board, 1853: 86-87). In this context, Herki and Şikak Tribes immigrated to Iranian land in summer and came back to Ottoman land for winter quarters. Therefore, they are famous for their raids on nearby villages of Christians and settled Kurds ((Wigram ve Wigram, 2004:224; Şimşir, 2007: 117). In 1894, Iranian government provided Nasturis like Mevana living in the border of Ottoman-Iran with modern weapons and ammunition in order to defend themselves against Kurdish looters (Mildred, 1894: 67-69; Heazal and Margoliouth, 1913:188; I., 1897:165-173). This eventually led to changes in the directions of nomad tribes passing between two countries and to be inhabited in a certain area. Similarly, as Russia blocked the passage in North Caucasus and some parts of Iran (A. MKT. MHM, 640/26) had parallel impacts on this situation.

Fourthly, there is a less expressed argument that most of the nomads in many geographies began settling anthropologically and sociologically as of 19th century or they were forced to settle as in the American Indians. Before the boundaries between Kurds and Armenians were made definite and the certain border lines between Iran and Ottoman Empire were drawn, there was a natural economic life cycle. As Armenians used to work as metal workers, saddlers, and tinsmith and therefore they would produce or supply some products that nomads could not in trade and agriculture sectors. In return, they would obtain animal products that they need from nomadic people. In this exchange, while Kurds would use mountains and highlands, plains and wetlands were ruled by Armenians and some other minorities (*this paper focuses on these groups as it is concerned with Kurdish-Armenian relations*). In the following period, Kurds experienced a transition from nomadic life to settled living, and they tended towards plains abandoning or forced to abandon the mountains. Thus, Kurdish tribes had less flocks of animals that are not sufficient for their livelihood with the processing of boundaries, and they had to head towards agricultural plains (Brunissen, 2006:33-38). However, there was already a group of people populated and living in these plains. For this reason, both parties initially engaged in minor controversies, one not to leave the plain while the other to settle down in these plains, and then they had more serious conflicts together with other arguments (Lynch, 1901:420-421). According to Raymond H. Kêvorkian and Paul B. Paboudjian, Abdul Hamit II adopted the activities of nomadic Kurdish tribes which grabbed the land of Armenians by provoking them(Kêvorkian and Paboudjian, 2013:16). Lynch also discusses about the gradual transition of these former nomads to agricultural production and the problems they encountered in this process (Lynch, 1901:250).

Results of the Propagation of the Kurds and Opposite Reactions

Throughout the 19th century, some of the Armenians living in rural areas of Anatolia, as in the case of Elazığ-Ağın, immigrated to various towns because of the underdeveloped trade and agriculture in their land³. From east to west shift of the Ottoman trade power had impact on the migration of Armenians from the eastern regions for trading purposes. Trade was mainly conducted with eastern countries until the 19th century (Braudel, 2004:135;Dalyan, 2014: 31; Dalyan, 2011: 13135; Faroqhi, 2007: 196-197). However, it is underlined by British Consul Trotter that merchandise in all of the towns and stores on Trabzon-Erzurum road was dominated by Armenians (British Documents, 1989: 258; Dalyan, 2014: 100). Due to the deterioration in security in 19th century, robbery activities of Turkmens, Kurds and Arabs on caravan routes led to the immigration of some of the Christian, Jewish, and reputable traders to Izmir, Istanbul, Baghdad and Mosul (Dalyan, 2014:101-102; Eroğlu and Babuçoğlu, 2012;60). Especially at the end of 19th century, Kurdish Hemavendis robbed the caravans on the routes of Dogubeyazit, Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. Almost quarter of the archived document on the robbery of caravans are related to this tribe (Y.PRK.UM. 16/123; Dalyan, 2014: 183). The effect of the weakening of the authority of government is basically related to this issue (Y.PRK.UM. 16/123; Nikitin, 1976: 289-290) . One of the other significant city apart from Istanbul that

³ Armenians from Elazığ immigrated to Istanbul seasonally to work in jobs such as architecture, carpentry, joinery and masonry, and returned to their homeland with their earnings. See. (Natanyan, 2010:142; Dalyan, 2011:124)

Armenians emigrated permanently to gain wealth and money is İzmir (Minassian, 2009;92-93).

One of the reasons for Armenian immigration to bigger towns in Ottoman land permanently or temporarily is that small-scale producers wanted to keep their merchandise ongoing based on their inability to compete with European goods due to industrialization. In this regard, Karakin Vartabed (Priest) Sirvantsdyants states that businesses belonging to Armenians were closed in Diyarbakır, Malatya and Tokat (Sirvantsdyants, 2010: 361). Again in the same years, there were intense migration from the inner parts of Anatolia such as Van, Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Mus, and Kayseri to mainly Istanbul and the other major cities and towns, and the Armenian population in these regions had increased (Sirvantsdyants, 371). This was also resulted from the immigration to big towns because of Armenian Kurdish struggle (Dennis, 2008:84). In this regard, while Armenians in Tunceli-Munzur migrated to the villages of Tekirdag and Gallipoli, Armenians in Egin region migrated to Izmir (Sirvantsdyants, 397). The main reason of this migration are the economic difficulties of life, more attractive features of city life among Armenians, and some security issues experienced in eastern regions (Küleççi, 2010:85). However, those who continued to live in the region could not maintain their trade activities and even stopped because of repression from Kurds as well as their own organization named Dashnaks (HR. SYS, 2776/65). Armenians living in Palu-Elazig region started to abandon their land and villages as a result of Kurdish and neighboring oppression. Because of this migration wave, Armenian Patriarch sent Priest Karakin to the region to stop the migration and tranquilize the population (Natanyan, 2008:145).

Community leaders and patriarchs had begun to take measures to stop migration after 1865 when Armenians started to leave their land in the second half the 19th century. Additionally, this pioneering action of going back to the Armenian provinces, a movement known as *Tebi Yergir* (Back to the Interior, i.e. the eastern provinces) was a direct result of this reformist agenda (Moumdjian, 2012:23) and they tried to complain Kurds in the perspective of state (Nalbadyan, 1973:26,79-80). From the mid-1870s, Armenians formed various organizations (i.e. *Defenders of Fatherland*) in different provinces to protect themselves from attacks (Moumdjian, 2012:23). In 1881, Armenian villagers and settlers began to arm themselves in Erzurum in order to withstand the Kurdish attacks (Nalbadyan, 1973:83-84; Dennis, 2008: 76). In September 1890, around 100 Fedailer group (Fedayeen) attached to Hinchaks arrived at the Eastern Anatolia and wanted to train the public against Kurdish attacks (Kévorkian and Paboudjian, 2013:18). Thus, one of the goals and the purpose of establishment of the Armenian organizations and institutions of separation is to protect those living in rural areas from the attacks of Kurds (Nalbadyan, 1973:101). In a similar way, Hinchaks collected money from Armenians and recruited men for protection against Kurds (Nalbadyan, 1973:121). Armenians' reactions against Kurdish presence in their land continued in the following period, and Armenians in Istanbul organized various aid campaigns and established commissions to stop migration of Armenians from Van, Hizan, Bitlis, and Mush in even 1912 and 1913.

Solution Initiative of the Ottoman Empire

Ottoman Empire wanted to establish a commission and resolve this conflict with the participation of both parties to avoid increasing the Armenian Kurdish conflict and to bond these communities through citizenship ties. It was thought that this conflict in eastern regions could lead to unrest among communities. According to the ruling Unionists, this conflict is rooted in those who were given titles and medals by the previous government leader Abdul Hamid II. Moreover, not only Armenians but also Kurds who were engaged in agriculture were affected by Kurdish-Armenians land grabs and complained about it (Ahmet Şerif, 1999:341-345). In fact, this initiative was also pioneered in the last periods of Abdul Hamid II, and if Armenians could prove the land that were disposed by Kurds and it belongs to them, they were given the opportunity of taking it back as in the example of Van in 1907 (A. MKT. MHM, 625/30). After the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy II, these initiatives had tremendous impact on Armenian population, and therefore they discussed about the different possibilities of

this issue. According Kirkor Zohrab who was Armenian parliament member in 1908, it was stated that investigation committee consisting of Turks and Armenians and with executive power must be established, Vali (governors) and Hamidiye regiments officers who collected unfair taxes in the past should be dismissed, looters and murderers must be prosecuted in a court of justice in Istanbul, and usurped lands should be returned to their legitimate owners. Additionally, people in exile desiring to return to their villages must be given similar rights and exemptions to emigrants, agha and landlords should not racketeer Armenian villagers, people in famine must be supported with wheat and grain to spend the winter, troops must be given orders to implement the decisions taken by the joint committee. These suggestions by Armenians were accepted by the majority of Armenian Parliament. Some of the members believed that this would not happen and claimed that Armenian protection can only be possible by armament. On the other hand, one of the leading figures of Hinchak Fedais Simon Zavaryan suggested negative opinions about these reforms. According to Armenian representatives, privileges granted to Kurds in Abdul Hamid II period settled into Armenian villages mainly in Mush and Siirt regions and forced them to migrate from this land. Therefore, nomadic Kurds grabbed Armenian land. Even after the proclamation of 2nd Constitutionalist Period, Kurds continued to expand their land against Armenians without breaking their habit in Abdul Hamid II period. For this reason, immigrated Armenians were requested to go back to their land in big cities like İstanbul by providing no support to them. Consequently, the demands of Armenian Parliament were decided to be represented by Kikor Zohrab, Hrant Asadur and Doctor Torkomyan in accordance with the decisions taken with government (Kévorkian and Paboudjian, 2013:29-30).

After the proclamation of 2nd Constitutionalist Period, Armenians were hopeful about resolving the conflicts encountered with Kurds regarding their land and borders returned back to them, and they appealed to Kamil Pasha Government on this issue. Especially with the proclamation of 2nd Constitutionalist Period and the Ottoman Basic Law, initially it was expressed that former robbers, killers, and grabbers were imprisoned and this encouraged them to keep living on their land, but however after a while it was emphasized that all these people were released out of prison and went on their previous grabbing and illegal activities. In their requests, they have demanded that Armenians who went abroad with the proclamation of Constitutionalist Period could be come back to their land and their forcibly-grabbed houses and land shall be given back to them, and those officials who overlook, initiate or refuse to the practice of the Ottoman Basic Law shall be dismissed from official positions. Otherwise, Armenians who returned back and request their rights were faced with the danger of massacre despite the warnings of Dahiliye Nezareti (*Ministry of Interior*). The basic reason for writing this letter is to resolve Armenian-Kurdish land grabbing conflicts in Ottoman Empire. Delegating committees for the solution of this problems by Ottoman Empire was welcomed by Armenians (BEO. 3454/258998.). Thus, Armenians became hopeful about taking back their land using various evidences such as land titles, but they could not be successful in doing so despite the evidence (Antranik, 2014:53).

Solutions Delegation and the Demands of Delegations

Armenian Patriarchy suggested that this delegation to be sent to Anatolia in Abdul Hamid Period shall be consisted of persons who are from different nations and renowned in the region under the leadership of an experienced vizier or marshal instead of officials. They also requested that the delegation to be appointed shall have the authority to dismiss officials and soldiers who are working in military and official positions in the region. Additionally, Patriarchy had the following items:

- 1- Persons working in Hamidiye regiments shall not be employed as officials or military officer except for their military duty
- 2- Those who are under arrest for murder and criminal tyrants shall be judged fairly in İstanbul
- 3- Armenian grabbed land, goods and regions shall be returned back to previous owners

- 4- Housing and subsistence of Armenians who does not actually have housing but have grabbed housing shall be given back in a similar way to emigrants, and municipalities and property managers shall be ordered to ease this process by the order of Istanbul (BEO.3454/258998.).

In the same period in September 1908, *Society for Support and Progress of the Kurds* (“*Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti*” in Turkish) which was founded by leading Kurdish families from Şemdinli and Cizre held activities to give voice to the government in the quest for political support and to be recognized as the sole representative of the Kurds, and focused on land dispute between Armenians and Kurds. The sons of Sheikh Ubayd, Abdullah's son Syed Abdul Qadir was selected the president of this organization for perpetuity Özoğlu, 2004:102-103). On 4 November 1908, Society for Support and Progress of the Kurds in Istanbul knowing about a committee (BEO.3454/258998) to be founded by Ottoman Empire for conflicts between Kurds and Armenians sent an article on 6 December 1908 to Dahiliye Nezareti (*Ministry of Internal Affairs*) and informed them about the fact that they know about this committee and the opinions of Armenian Patriarchy. In order to resolve land cases between Kurds and Armenians in a fair way and not to get negative reactions of Kurdish tribes and chiefs, “*a committee consisting of one officer of the civil service and military from each one of Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Sivas, Mamuretü'l-aziz (Harput-Elazığ), and Diyarbakır provinces, and two persons from Kurdish side and Armenian side who are competent on the issues in the regions, and five persons in all was demanded to be founded (DH.MKT. 2716/65).*”

Considering the each parties' opinions and suggestions, Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha wanted to resolve land dispute between Armenians and Kurds in Anatolia in a fair manner in his articles on 8 December 1908. For this purpose, he appointed one person from civil service and military, who has not been involved in these conflicts beforehand, in Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Sivas, Mamuretü'l-aziz (Harput-Elazığ), and Diyarbakır provinces in order to examine the issue in an impartial way and to prevent Kurdish tribe and chiefs' possible provocative activities towards Armenians. Moreover, it was decided that advice delegation consisting of two persons from Kurdish side and Armenians side, who are knowledgeable about the conflicts in the region, and the other representatives, adding up to five persons, shall look for possible resolution on the conflict. Additionally, a deputy commission chaired by an experienced vizier and a marshal to help the committee's activities in the region was demanded to be founded. However, it was taken care taking into account the concerns of Armenians that Abdul Hamid's officers and military officers from Hamidiye Regiments were not selected for this commission, and these persons were not employed in public administration in addition to military duties. In this way, a committee consisting of Thessaloniki Governor Daniş Beg, Konya Chief Clerk Suleyman Nazif Beg, Diran Effendi as the member of the court of first instance in Beyoğlu, Major Vehib Beg from general staff, and Senior Captain Fahreddin Effendi. One experienced accountant and one goods officer were appointed to provide support for this committee, and it was decided that this committee was decided to be supported by a clerk who closely recognizes the region (DH.MKT. 2716/65). However, this committee was dissolved due to various reasons on 16 January, 1909, and a new committee was formed. Galib Beyefendi was appointed as the president of this committee, and Agob Babekyan Efendi was ordered under his leadership as a member. Also, Zihni Pasha, Cemal Bey from Thessaloniki, and senior captain Zeki Bey were involved in this committee (DH.MKT. 2716/65).

As in the example above, the authorities of these committees involve dismissing managerial and military posts who have problems, those who have committed crime in the past but released later on are to be arrested again, and those who have grabbed land and do not return them back are taken into custody and brought to court. To realize this process, the right to apply to the courts was entitled. Additionally, the procedures that is applied for immigrants coming from abroad are to be used for Armenians who do not own any land or could not take back their grabbed land as well, and municipalities were ordered to provide dwelling and support from treasure house for among those who are in Istanbul. Similarly, grain distribution was ordered to meet public demand for the grain need of people experiencing famine and drought in Bitlis, Mamuretü'l-aziz, Van, and

Kozan regions, and their tax debts were excused. Lastly, Armenians who fled the Ottoman Empire and came back with the declared general amnesty were not oppressed regarding their military obligations (DH.MKT. 2716/65).

Activities and Results of the Delegation

It can be understood from the following quotation of Seyyid Abdulkadir on November 23, 1908 that Kurds are suspicious of these kinds of initiatives: “It is not appropriate to radically form a committee which does not realize the real meaning of freedom towards the administration” ... mana-yı hakikat hürriyeti henüz idrak etmemiş olan bir heyet-i ictimaiyenin böyle birden bire bir teşebbüs-i idare karşısında bulundurulması caiz olmasa gerektir. Hükümet-i seniyyece halen ve maslahaten çare-i şart selamet ise masebak sui idare-i istibdadı herkese unutturmak ve bu nifakları bu sevimsiz bürudetleri izalle ile esbab-ı hüsn-i itlafı temin etmektir.” In this statement, he shows that the Kurds do not yet have enough understanding and desire for such a compromise. Moreover, he stated that the terms of the provincial and Istanbul population shall not be considered equal, and he boldly underlined that officials who were in that region during the despotism era cannot get away from the influence of the period (DH.MKT. 2716/65). On the other hand, İstanbul Society for Support and Progress of the Kurds (“*Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti*” in Turkish) and Dashnak Society petitioned to that this process shall be initiated fairly reaching a consensus that there is a problem in this issue (DH.MKT. 2716/65). This committee experienced some difficulties while continuing their initiatives involving some persons and events such as The 31 March Incident. Despite this, Armenians did not give up on their agenda of taking back their grabbed land (Kévorkian and Paboudjian, 2013:35).

American missionary McDowell, who was living in the region in that period, stated that Constitutional Period administration’s activities to provide security troubled Kurdish leaders and nobleman’s pressure and intimidation policies towards Christians. On the other hand, these new arrangement and practices were welcomed especially by Christians and non-tribe member Kurds (The Seventy-Fourth Annual Report, 1911:327-328).

In 1911, as a result the support of Kirkor Zohrab and his allies, it is expressed that Ottoman Empire appointed Celal Bey to Erzurum, Bekir Sami Bey to Van, İsmail Hakkı Bey to Bitlis, and Cemal Bey to Adana in order to prevent activities aimed against Armenians by Kurds. Kirkor Zohrab stated that these governors Kurds threatened the other races whenever they are blocked from their raids by claiming that they will emigrate from the region of revolt against the government. Again, Kirkor Zohrab expressed that part of the purposes of the Union and Progress Committee was to enable Armenians to take back their grabbed land and goods from Kurds (Kévorkian and Paboudjian, 2013:36). Looting and rape that took place between Kurds and Armenians in 1910 were referred to the courts (Ericson:2015, s.59-60). However, this attempt failed regarding Kurds’ threat of revolt and drawback of some members (Kévorkian and Paboudjian, 2013:36). This information is verified in memories of İbrahim Avras in his book “*Tarihi Hakikatler (Historical Truths)*”. Of these governors, Bekir Sami Bey was invited for a breakfast by Seyh Hamid Pasha, father of İbrahim Avras, during an inspection visit, but he replied that he would not agree for a breakfast with them nor drink coffee unless they return the Armenian land. This is significant in showing how Union and Progress Committee governors approach the issue (Avras, 2005: 18). Additionally, Ericson quoting from Kiligian states that Muslim judges favored Kurds in courts and this supports the fact that the courts were not fair (Ericson, 2015:59-60).

On the other hand, it is claimed that Kurds even wanted to buy the land that Armenians sold to them. They thought that Armenians were in search of freedom and Union and Progress Committee was supporting them, which undoubtedly they did not like. İbrahim Avras’s father expressed that they would need support of local people in the wake of events to be occurred, and therefore people should not be oppressed by such demand (Avras, 2005:17-19). Similarly, a landlord (*ağa in Turkish*) in his meetings with missionaries in Bohtan region, where the majority of public is Christian, stated that he

would not hesitate to massacre all Christians at the first occasion after the end of Constitutional Period(The Seventy-Fourth Annual Report, 1911:327-328)..

In 1912 during the popular period of Freedom and Accord Party (*Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası in Turkish*), disputed territories were wanted to be bought and given to Armenians with no land to resolve land dispute between Kurds and Armenians. However, Kurds threatened that they would respond by an armed opposition. Even more, this suggestion was interpreted as that the government was favoring the Armenian side by Kurds. These suggestions resulted in the fact that Kurds troubled Armenians more during the Balkan Wars (Baiburtian,2008:189-910). Villages, gardens and agricultural sites that were grabbed by Kurdish side began to become barren because of unfinished land disputes as they were not knowledgeable enough about these land (Bruninessen, 2006:37). Lastly, the founder and permanent chairman of Society for Support and Progress of the Kurds Seyyid Abdulkadir and his friends like Emin Ali Bedirhan propagated during and after the 1st World War that “Kurdistan is for Kurds, and it not the right of any other party except for Kurds” (Jin,1985:117).

CONCLUSION

It is quite invaluable that Ottoman Empire initiated such efforts for the resolution of long-lasting land and commodity disputes between Kurds and Armenian just before the 1st World War. This occasion is significant in showing opposition to the argument that Armenians were deliberately resettled or massacred through Tehcir Law (*or Deportation/Relocation Act*), and it represents the point where the government positioned themselves on this issue.

Kurds obtained some achievements to a greater extent in Abdul Hamid II period, but however when they were demanded to return the land that they grabbed from Armenians, they had a problematic period with even for a short time between Union and Progress Committee and Ottoman Empire. The underlying reason of this is the fact that they were requested to give back the land and commodities that they grabbed from Armenians. Moreover, the reasons of why Kurds behaved oppressively towards Armenians in Tehcir (*relocation*) occasions considering that period’s conditions and land ownership.

In this way, that day’s disputed land and regions are where the majority of today’s Kurdish population live. This leads to the conclusion that the problems encountered by Armenians during the Tehcir (*relocation*) occasions in Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolia are largely based upon the financial concerns of the Kurdish. In addition to the fact that the project of renaming the villages and towns with their previous names has brought this topic to the agenda, it is widely known that the real truth can only be revealed through the scanning of Ottoman archives and travel notes of travelers.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Today, one of the most disputed events all over the different parliaments of the World is the incidents and losses by Armenians. However, historical, political and sociological aspects of these events are basically ignored. Armenians try to keep the agenda busy with life and land losses that they experienced in that period on different political platforms. Especially their claims relating to land involve the regions where the great majority of Kurds live today. This naturally brings opposing claims to the agenda and results in various belonging claims between the parties. This case consequently is the main point of conflict between Kurds and Armenians, which was brought to agenda once again by renaming the villages with their previous ones.

Until the nineteenth century, Armenians continued their existence in the Ottoman Empire by doing trades in the cities and agricultural activities in the rural areas. The Kurds, on the other hand, lived in cities, but a significant part of them continued their livelihood with animal husbandry in the nomadic tribal life style. For this reason, while nomadic Kurds came to the forefront with animal production until XIX. century, Armenians came to the forefront mostly with craftsmanship and farming. The increase in the population, the emergence of the borders between the states and the difficulties of economic life forced the Kurds to settle down. During the majority of 19th century and at the beginning of 20 th century, one of the conflicts encountered by the Ottoman Empire is the land occupation problems between Kurdish and Armenians. The reason of this problem results from Kurds spread in the Armenian territory, Armenian migration and Kurds' transition from nomadic to settled life. As this was not based on mutual consent of the parties, it brought some conflicts along with it. Therefore in the 2 nd Constitutionalist Period, Ottoman Empire established a committee with the participation of the members of Kurdish nationalists and Armenian Dashnak Party (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), and tried to reconcile the parties by ensuring that Kurds return the land and commodities that they grabbed from Armenians. For this purpose, this committee was even given the authority of dismissing soldiers and administrative officials. Having heard of this initiative of Ottoman Empire, Armenians and Kurds gave petitions to the government about how this committee should be formed. However, this initiative was revoked and failed as a result of opposition from the Kurds. It can be assumed that the Kurds' unwillingness to lose their territorial and economic gains effected that. This paper analyzes the general situation before the formation of this committee and the events experienced thereafter. Thus, studies on the Kurdish-Armenian conflicts will be contributed and a new perspective will be brought to today's political debates. Finally, before the First World War, a different perspective of the Ottoman Empire towards the Armenians will be presented and a different perspective will be presented for the parties to evaluate the events that took place.