



International Journal of Eurasia Social Sciences
Vol: 10, Issue: 35, pp. (282-312).

Research Article

Received: 20.10.2018 Accepted: 13.03.2019

AN ASSESSMENT OF A. GESAR'S BOOK: 'AINTAB'S STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE AND THE ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR OF ANTEP ARMENIANS DURING THE INVASIONS' -THE ANATOMY OF A PARADOX-

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to reveal the attitudes and behavior of Armenians during the invasions, and the consequences of these attitudes and behavior in the context of "Aintab's Struggle of Existence", a book written by Asadur Khederian, who spent most of his life in Gaziantep. Khederian was born in Kayseri in 1893. He used the pen name, "A. Gesar", in his works. He lived in the USA for quite some time, and was the editor of an Armenian newspaper during the short period of time that he resided in California. He translated the English works of some Armenian writers into Armenian. As well as working for the Armenian newspaper, Hayrenik, Khederian also compiled a book in 1953 of the memoirs of Misak Torlakian, a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation who is considered to be a prominent figure in Armenian national history. In his book titled "Aintab's Struggle of Existence", Khederian, who passed away in 1955, explained the events that took place between April 1920 and December 1921 from his own point of view as someone who was in the Armenian defensive line. As stated by those who translated the book into Turkish, comparisons are obviously important for scientific purposes so that different and alternative points of view can be appreciated. However, while memoirs are quite useful in analyzing historical events, they are also a type of source material that must be treated in caution. For this reason, events must be relayed not only through personal points of view, but also through official documents. While it is helpful to hear from active participants of the events, the information they provide must certainly be compared to documents and official records. It is to be expected in memoirs that there will be a significant level of nationalism in the language that is used and in the emotional perspectives that are portrayed by both sides. As also highlighted by the translators, what is important is to capture the truth by answering the question of "how" the events of the same date which took place in the same location and perpetrated by the same individuals are told.

Keywords: Gaziantep, Armenians, Deportation, National Struggle, France

INTRODUCTION

Constituting a significant phase of the Turkish War of Independence, the Defense of Antep, which is considered to be similar to the French Verdun (Abadie, 2012) even by the figures leading the French occupation forces, was defined quite differently in literary works written by Antep Armenians, and this is the main reason for the resistance against the invasions deflecting from the truth. The absolute truth on this can surely be reached by comparing the documents of the occupation forces, the documents in the Turkish archives and memoirs. In fact, the most important issue is to identify the purpose for events to be distorted rather than simply accepting the truth as it is presented and the extent of the impact on today's policies. Such events need to be assessed objectively in order that the primary purpose of some Western states, who somehow keep the Armenian Issue on their agenda by twisting the nature of some of the events that took place in that period, can be revealed and the discussions held due to this distortion can be resolved.

The claims of Gesar on the origination of the resistance organization, called the Representative Committee and which was established in Antep against the invasions, do not really correspond with the truth. According to Gesar (2015), many of the people who joined the resistance movement that took shape around this organization, were the well-known local elites of Antep who had been involved in the exile of the Armenians and seized many of the estates, properties and possessions left by the Armenians. However, while the British took their time with this process, an organized and armed resistance was not undertaken against the British. Underlying Gesar's point of view is the notion that the community of Antep was content with the British invasion. Articulating such an opinion is nothing more than a far-fetched allegation. Not wanting the British to leave the area for a while due to the attitudes of the Armenians, which caused disruption of the peace and their attempts for disrupting peace by causing some events to take place upon the arrival of the French in the area, (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2543-4/9-12) should not be construed as being content with the British invasion. Besides, the instructions of the Government of Istanbul, which were sent to the governorships in Antep and the neighboring areas, stipulated that good relationships be built with the British (BOA.DH.\$FR.nu.95/55). In a telegram sent to the Antep Governorship from the Public Police Department, it was particularly emphasized that the forces led by General Allenby would not act against the provisions of the armistice and that there was therefore nothing to worry about (BOA.DH.\$FR.nu.95/66). The mindset of the public, including the public officials in the areas of invasion, which led them to act cautiously against the events that took place, must also be considered in light of the circumstances of the armistice. As a result, it is necessary to evaluate with caution Gesar's assessment of the behavior and attitudes that were demonstrated due to the circumstances as satisfaction with the British occupation.

For the community of Antep, the real invasion began when the French, who had started to replace the British forces, arrived in the city. When the presence of the Armenian legion within the French forces was discovered, the invasion forces were considered to be Armenians by the community of Antep. Tensions between Muslims and Armenians started to rise as the Armenians entered the city. Gesar points out the role of local prominent

figures of the community in this rising tension. These figures were concerned that they would lose the properties of the Armenians they had seized during their exile. According to him, these concerns had an impact on the decision of local prominent figures within the community to provide financial and logistical support to the national forces in Anatolia and to undertake an armed resistance. These local elites had refrained from providing support to the national forces until then, and had in fact demonstrated their contentment with the British invasion. What therefore lies behind the war that is described as the Antep-French battle by the official historical records, and is presented as an epic display of heroism which led to Antep being provided with the title of "Ghazi" (veteran) is actually a struggle to make it impossible for Armenians to ever return to Antep, and to thus wipe out the Armenian presence in Antep(Gesar, 2015). Again, according to Gesar, there were clashes between some local groups who actively fought in this war, and who considered themselves to be true locals of Antep in this sense, and other local groups who left Antep at the beginning of the war without providing any support, and who came back to the city after the Armenians and the French left and seized the properties and possessions left by the Armenians. It can therefore be said that there was a fight for property and possessions, and it's possible to assess the History of Antep between 1919 and 1921 from this point of view (Gesar, 2015).

What Gesar specifically points out is that his book, in which he alleges to have included all of the events and to have written in line with the notion of "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's", is based on the truth with no misrepresentations. However, an analysis of his sources reveals that they mostly consist of Armenian memoirs, and that while there are references to Armenian correspondences, Turkish publications are not included. A more healthy interpretation of events in the name of achieving the truth would include comparisons and critiques of events.

ARMENIANS IN ANTEP

Since providing detailed information on the demographic structure of the region throughout history is beyond the scope of our area of interest, it makes sense to briefly address the findings on the population ratio of Armenians in Gaziantep. During the occupation, one of the commanders of the French forces, Abadie (2012) provided information, including the changes in population, in a study he conducted. Essentially, the population of Antep, which consisted of Turks, Kurds and Armenians, varied significantly over time. In 1914, the city had reached a population of 80,000, 30,000 of whom were Armenian. This number fell as low as 40,000 or so during the war, with the departure of a large number of Turks from the city and the deportation of the Armenians. In 1919, the number rose to 55,000, which included 18,000 Christians who moved to the city as part of the mass return of Armenians to their homeland. In 1920, the population fell to 28,000, of whom 8,000 were Christian, due to the fact that many Armenians had to evacuate the city. This was a result of Turks leaving the city because of the adverse conditions caused by the siege(Abadie, 2012). Figures on the general population from another source are almost the same (Ünler, 1969). Gesar, on the other hand, states that the population of Antep before World War I was 80,000, of whom 35,000 were Armenians, and of these Armenians, 4,000 were Protestant while 400 were Catholic (Gesar, 2015). Kemal Karpat (2003)suggests that the

total population was 110,810, consisting of 89,769 Muslims and 19,494 Armenians, whom he further classified as Gregorians, Catholics and Protestants, with respective populations of 14,466, 393 and 4,635.

For Antep, Gesar (2015: 25) states: "While it is not a place where Armenians originated from, the same is also true for Turks". According to Gesar, Antep has been an Armenian city since the beginning of time, long before the establishment of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. Armenians were involved in trade in a vast region encompassing Cilicia and Egypt. There were nearly 300 Armenian Christian villages around Antep during the first years of the 10th century (Gesar, 2015). In fact, the Turks who arrived in the region in the 11th century saw that Armenians had already settled there (Yetkin, 1970). It is known that the Turkish presence in the region increased rapidly with the settlement policy. While this was a requirement of the conquest policy and the concept of statement-jihad for Turks, the developments in the region were considered as assimilation by the non-Muslims. Gesar, and others who think like him, consider the conversion (religious conversion) movements as being oppression and cruelty by the Turks. They emphasize that, as a result of these pressures, Turkish increasingly replaced Armenian as the main spoken language in Antep, and eventually there were no Armenians left who spoke Armenian. As a matter of fact, it can be observed that many Antep Armenians speak Turkish, and that the clothing, cuisine, culture and the music and literary approach of these locals, whose accent and dialect of speech are in harmony with those of the city they live in, show great similarities with the Muslim Turks (Güngör, 2004).

While whether there was an attempt of assimilation through oppression and coercion remains a topic of discussion, there are also other findings that attract attention to another issue. In 964, Byzantine dominance was observed in the area. In the areas they conquered, the Byzantines either exiled the Muslim population or forced them to convert to Christianity (Yetkin, 1968). In the Byzantine period, the Christian groups in Anatolia were usually members of the Greek and Armenian Orthodox Churches. In the South, Assyrian and Nestorian Churches were more active. Some Turkmen groups, with a significant population in the area, who maintain most of the Shamanist and Animistic elements that they had practiced in their homeland, were settled in this region, named Cilicia and Avasim by both Muslim Arabs and Byzantines, especially during the period of the Abbasids, due to their power as warriors. Turkic tribes, who came from Iran and were settled in Avasim, frequently launched raids against the Byzantines. Many epic stories were written on this topic (Yetkin, 1968). A notable point in these findings is the fact that these Turkmen, who were considered by both the Orthodox Christian and the Muslim Turkmen state to be groups who would provide the safety of the region, were the same Turkmen who were described as having switched sides in the Battle of Malazgirt (Güngör, 2004). It is observed that during the Crusades, the Muslim Turkmen presence in the region weakened, while the Cukurova and Avasim Christian Turks became increasingly strong under the authority of the Armenian Churches. During the period of Anatolian Seljuks, as well as that of the Mamluks and the post-1516 Ottoman period, these Christian Turkmen were called "Armenians" by the aforementioned states due to their membership of Armenian Gregorian Churches. They considered these Turkmen groups to be the same as the Armenian ethnic community in East Anatolia who spoke Armenian (Güngör, 2004). However, this would provide a basis for

significant political, social and economic issues in the following centuries. It is possible to suggest that great chaos occurred, especially considering what happened during the Population Exchange that took place during the Republican period. This complex and chaotic situation also applies to eastern and southeastern Christians. Therefore, the issue of ethnicity and non-Muslim groups in the Republic of Turkey, which has been raised by the Western world, must be examined in accordance with historical facts and analyzed according to scientific criteria by distinguishing between the issue of assimilation and the bigotry of the Crusaders. Opinions addressed by Gesar from a linguistic point of view, where he refers to Armenian words adopted into Turkish, can be assessed in terms of if it is “cultural interaction or assimilation?”. Cases highlighted by Gesar, such as the visits of large crowds of Turks to Armenian churches on Easter days; their listening of the Bible reading and even participation in the mass; and their praying in Christian cemeteries also require attention. The issue of Turkish Christians who were considered to be Armenians, which we have mentioned earlier, can be addressed from a point of view that is opposite to that of Gesar: namely (2015) the opinion that a dense population of Islamized Armenians was present in the region, and that Armenians were coerced to accept Turkish as their language. Gesar suggests that those who perform the above-mentioned rituals were the secret Christian residents of the city who were engaged in confessions as a half-Islamized community.

The Armenians residing in Antep were sent near the Eastern Anatolian Armenians who were deported to Syria and Iraq following the Deportation Law issued due to World War One. The Orthodox community in particular was subjected to deportation (Güngör, 2004). The Armenians who were deported to Syria in World War One took the opportunity to return to Antep, along with the British, during the British invasion. These Armenians included those originally from Sivas, Erzurum and other cities who could not get back to their homelands due to the lack of peace and security. Hence, the Armenian population, which had experienced a rapid fall in numbers, instantly exceeded the Turkish population due to the inclusion of foreign Armenians (Ünler, 1969).

Preserving the idea of being a Loyal Nation until the final periods of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians continued to have a significant influence on the social and economic life in Antep. It can be said that they dominated the area of handicrafts in particular. Before World War One, many forms of crafts such as copperwork, shoemaking, tailoring, painting, jewelry making, metal arts, furniture making and photography were dominated by the Armenians. There is a prevailing idea that Armenians who were active in many areas of businesses did not want to employ Turks, even as apprentices, since the Armenians did not want the Turks to learn a craft. Turks, on the other hand, were only active in a very few crafts. Construction workers were Turkish, while skilled laborers and architects were mostly Armenians. All of the workers at the almost 7,000 weaving looms located in Antep were Turkish, while the majority of the designers, investors and bosses were Armenians. Almost all owners of capital and gold, as well as exchangers and bankers, were also Armenians. The source of funding for Turkish traders who suffered financial hardship and had to borrow money at high interest rates, happened to be the Armenians (Yetkin, 1968).

In an environment brought about by the 1856 Edict of Reform, the Armenian traders started operating in foreign markets through the guidance and administration of the American and French missions. The ports of Beirut, Latakia and Iskenderun began subsequently to be used by these traders. Ethnic Eastern Anatolian Armenians, who also wanted to benefit from the opportunities that were on offer in Antep, rapidly began immigrating to the city. Turks in Antep had a difficult time economically during the period of 1840-1918. While Turks were being enlisted in the military, young Armenians started to become dominant in commerce and industry. Turkish villagers had to borrow money from the Armenian elites (Yetkin, 1968). However, it would not be right to attribute the conflicts in the region exclusively to the framework of this economic rivalry. It can be observed that there was the desire to impose a semi-autonomous status quo under the governance of France, as in Lebanon, during the events of Zeytun that broke out in 1895 and the subsequent developments (Güngör, 2004). As such, it is understood that France closely monitored these incidents, misrepresented them, and subsequently tried to guide the separatist movements through those who had started the events. Evidence of this is in the news articles of the La Matin newspaper (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2748/12). It is seen that the French particularly tried to protect and focus on the Catholics (BOA.A.MKT.MHM.nu.651/10). In the period when the relations were good between Turks and Armenians, the French safeguarded the Catholic citizens, while the Russian did the same with the Orthodox citizens and so did the Austrian with the Albanian and Macedonian Catholic citizens (Uygur, 2016: 185). The fact that the regional policies of Europeans were independent of each other led to divisions in the Christian communities of the region. In addition to the competition of the Orthodox Russia and Catholic France in this matter, the American Churches tried to incorporate the Christian Turks in the region into the Protestant Church. In fact, the members of the Assyrian Holy Church and the nearly 500 Antep Jews comprised a quite colorful non-Muslim community (Güngör, 2004).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF ARMENIANISM IN ANTEP ARMENIANS

Antep has been considered by the Armenians to be the "Athens of Cilicia". The Armenian minority founded many schools based on this idea. These schools spread the idea of an independent state within the Armenian public. Living under the governance of Turks until 1840 without having any political identity, the Armenians showed a political reflex reaction after 1840 (Yetkin, 1968). The Tankaran Association was established as early as 1858, while the Association of Usumnasirats (Lovers of Education) was established in 1863. Work on the development of Armenian nationalism had begun with the Association of Usumnasirats (Gesar, 2015). The Central High School of Turkey (American High School), founded by the missionaries in 1876, became not only a center of education, but also a place where the "Armenian Spirit" took root (Gesar, 2015). It can be seen that the American diplomatic sources place great importance on this school, in which all the administrators are American while all of the teachers are Armenian. The fact that the American ambassador, Terrell, issued a memorandum to officials for the release of teachers who previously worked at schools in Antep and Maras, and were arrested due to their propagandist actions (BOA.Y.A.HUS.nu.328/60), is significant as it represents the extent of the relationship.

After 1890s, the Evangelist concept has rapidly become prevalent among young Armenians. The Central High School of Turkey was certainly not outside the scope of this concept, with 99% of the students being Armenians. Even though the majority of the population in Antep consisted of Turks, few Turkish students wanted to attend this high school and they were only able to go there under certain conditions. One of these students was Mahmut Soylemez, who achieved the first place in his school, and later on lost his life during the fight against the French Forces in the Defense of Antep(Solmaz, 1966). Asaf Erkilic, one of the classmates of Mahmut Soylemez, indicated during an interview that the reason for the closure of the High School was World War One, and that the Armenians were happy that this war had broken out(Solmaz, 1966). He emphasized that while he was still a young student of the school, he sensed that Armenians had other ideals in their hearts, but did not demonstrate their happiness at first. The nature of their ideas slowly became clear as the war went on. According to Cemil Alevli, who was also another classmate of Mahmut Soylemez, nationalist and intellectual young Armenians educated in this school where all the teachers were Armenian, began to distinguish the Armenian public from the Turkish public even more, and the Armenians who spoke Turkish earlier began to pay more attention to speaking Armenian (Solmaz, 1966).

The intense efforts of the Armenian Church and the Dashnak and Hunchak Parties on teaching Armenian to the Christians in the region as part of the activities to gain independence, did not yield the desired results at first. The published newspapers and books, as well as the scripts of masses in the churches, were printed in Turkish by using either the Ottoman alphabet or the English alphabet. Even the name of the college included the word "Turkey" (Güngör, 2004). In 1908, along with the beginning of the 2nd Constitutionalist Period, there was extreme interest and development of Armenian nationalism, particularly in the learning Armenian. In this period, young Armenians became organized and made serious plots against the use of Turkish.

In an environment influenced by the Constitutionalist Period, conservatism began to gain solid ground in Armenian society. Work was undertaken predominantly under the leadership of Dashnaksutyun, while Hunchaks and other groups were expediting their activities. As a result of the opportunities brought about by the administration of the Constitutionalist Monarchy, along with the loss of the administrative concept of the period of Sultan Abdulhamid the 2nd, Antep of that period was replaced with a city that included sources of the revolutionary party. Young Armenians began intensely participating in secret meetings, revolutionary literary readings, military training sessions on the mountains, clubs, events held in meeting halls, and other activities (Gesar, 2015). The Armenian Catholic Priest Vartan was one of the first to support an Armenian language course established for young people in 1914. According to him, "one could only be an Armenian by speaking Armenian" and Armenian was in a key position for raising the nationalistic awareness of the Armenians(Gesar, 2015: 35).

THE ISSUE OF DEPORTATION AND THE ANTEP ARMENIANS

It can be seen that the Antep Armenians became highly interested in the matter of the Armenian independence during this time. They first became interested in this issue through the Ottoman-Russian War of

1877. The reflections of this interest would soon be seen in the events that took place in Anatolia. A group of the representatives in the Zeytun event in 1895 comprised of Antep Armenians. Bilemciyan Kircil, Ohanyan Hagop, Tabakyan Artus, Kazanciyan Nerses and the son of Tahtaci Setig, Hagopcan Zeytun were among those who participated in the clashes (Gesar, 2015). As Maras and Antep Armenians coordinated the events, this resulted in them being subjected to deportation together as well (Solmaz, 1966). What the American Charles Babikyan, one of the high school mates of Mahmut Soylemez, said to Mehmet Solmaz during his visit to Antep on April 18, 1966, could be considered as being significant for shedding light on the discussion of deportation during that time: "Some Armenians were at fault for our deportation from Turkey. We otherwise loved Turkey, and Antep in particular" (Solmaz, 1966: 109).

While the impact of the events of 1895, which are referred to as the Battle of Balta, were still fresh, the events of March 31st in Istanbul led to some serious developments in the region. As a result of the civil war in Adana, over 10,000 Ottoman citizens lost their lives. The fact that the majority of the casualties were Christians, caused the administration to find itself in a somewhat difficult position in terms of foreign affairs. As a result of the investigations conducted during the Governorship of Cemal Pasha in Adana, many Muslim Turks, who were considered to be responsible for the events, were prosecuted and executed. Even though this action was taken to relieve the Armenians and the international public, it would not be reasonable to expect any other action from the Committee of Union and Progress, who had allied themselves with the Armenians for the fight for freedom against Sultan Abdulhamid the 2nd. The fact that these Armenian committee members who had acted with the Committee of Union and Progress quickly began operations by taking part in the Hunchak and Dashnak parties, would be conducive for the members of the Committee of Union and Progress to understand how they had been deceived. Hence, a significant deviation in terms of ideology would be experienced and the Committee of Union and Progress would begin implementing an effective Turkism policy as the developments became of great concern. Therefore, this led to precautions being taken regarding non-Muslim groups, primarily the Greeks and Armenians in Anatolia. Developments such as the distribution of the Armenian separatist movements, the increase of demands for liberation in the eastern provinces, and strong international support for the Armenian cause, led the Ottoman government to find themselves forced to unwillingly accept these demands. Facing a dilemma on which course to follow, the administration of the Committee of Union and Progress wanted to solve the issue, upon the start of World War I, through the Deportation Law . However, the problems experienced during the enforcement of the law caused severe segregation between the two communities, who had up to that point been living together for centuries (Güngör, 2004).

The fact that the Antep Armenians were subjected to deportation and sent to Iraq gave rise to a whole other discussion. The explanation for the rationale of this deportation being the security of the front was not found to be believable by many as Antep was quite a way from the Russian front. In fact, the deported Armenians were sent directly to the British forces in nearby Iraq (Güngör, 2004). In any case, the process of deportation of the Antep Armenians started on July 30, 1915, which is quite late compared to Armenians living in other

Anatolian cities(Gesar, 2015). Until that date, Antep had been a kind of transit area for Armenians exiled particularly from regions such as Zeytun, Maras, Sivas, Elbistan, Gurun and Furnuz. Armenians were transferred to Halep through the Akcakoyun and Katma train stations located in the region(Gesar, 2015). Gesar claimed that attacks and incidents, such as the looting of property, perpetrated against the exiles who were kept waiting on these train stations were organized by Ali Bey, who was a member of the Special Agency (Gesar, 2015). According to Gesar, the opposition of the Governor of Antep, Sukru Bey, and the military commander of the district, Hilmi Bey, to the exclusion of Antep from the regions where deportation would be implemented until the end of July, played a part in that exclusion decision. Despite this attitude of the administrators, it was claimed that Ali Cenani and Fadil Bey, who are prominent figures of the city, had begun working against the Armenians as of March 1915 and made attempts to convince the government for the need for exile (Gesar, 2015). They sent telegrams to the government informing them that Armenians had attacked mosques in Antep, and had made plans to kill Turks, rape women and harm houses that belonged to Turks. Following these developments, the Naval Minister, General Cemal, sent General Fahri to the region so that he could inspect the situation. General Fahri reported that he did not come across any evidence to back up the incidents mentioned in the telegrams¹(Gesar, 2015). Meanwhile, Sukru Bey and Hilmi Bey, who opposed the deportation of Antep Armenians, resigned. After the announcement of the order of exile on July 30, 6 convoys, including mostly Apostolic Armenians from Antep, were exiled until the 13th of August. This would be followed by the deportation of Catholic Armenians and Protestant Armenians in September and December, respectively (Gesar, 2015). Ali Cenani and Ahmed Bey, who was appointed in place of the Antep governor Sukru Bey, played an active role in the deportation of all Antep Armenians. According to Gesar (2015), these two people were also influential in the process of the transfer and looting of the properties, possessions and wealth that the Antep Armenians had to leave behind following their exile. Ahmed Bey, in particular, incorporated local actors in this process on the promise that they would become the owners of these properties and possessions left by the Armenians. An execution committee was established to confiscate the properties of around 15.000 Armenians(Gesar, 2015). In Antep, initially the followers of enlightenment (Lusavorcaganar), and then those from other congregations, were exiled to Der Zor and Syria. Gesar described the defeat of the Ottoman Empire as a clarion call for the salvation of the surviving Armenians, and stated that the environment of armistice would give rise to hope and freedom for the Armenians (Gesar, 2015). In this way, a new period would begin for the Armenians, and their actions and attitudes in this period would be the sole criterion that would define their position in the years to come.

THE ARMENIANS AND THE BRITISH DURING THE PERIOD OF INVASIONS

Based on article 7 of the Armistice of Mudros, Antep was invaded by troops located in Halep, and led by General Allenby, on December 17, 1918. However, considering that Urfa and Maras were also invaded in addition to Antep, this action was against the provisions of the armistice. This is because no circumstances that

¹ However, no documents could be located in Ottoman Archive of the Prime Ministry which related to the mentioned report.

would threaten the security of the allied states were present in the above-mentioned areas (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2542-3/24-25). The first thing that the British did was to seize public organizations and institutions. On January 14, 1919, the commander of the Occupation Forces, General McAndrew, provided some advice in the American High School, which had been turned into the British headquarters, to a group of locals and young intellectuals, including the cadı and the mayor, on the safety of the city. However, his speech was of a threatening nature rather than merely providing advice (transferred from Akgol by Gullu). Many documents were confiscated during the invasion of the government office on January 23, 1919. These documents were the records of the deportation. The real purpose of the confiscation of the documents was to use these documents to arrest the members of the Committee of Union and Progress(Gesar, 2015). General McAndrew ordered the arrest of some important people in Antep, consisting of local officers and prominent figures, on the grounds that they had actively participated in the looting of the Armenian possessions and had provoked the public. These people were: Accountant Nesim, officer of the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre, Eyup Sabri, officer of the General Directorate of Foundations Hakki, Deputy President of the Committee of Union and Progress of Antep, Tascizade Abdullah, one of the owners of the Antep News newspaper², Kethudazade Huseyin Cemil Gogus, Mennanzade Mustafa, Imamzade Mustafa, Incozade Hasan, Patpatzade M. Bahtiyar and Disikirikkoglu Hulusi from Urfa. These people were held temporarily at the American High School, and then exiled to Egypt to await their trial(Gesar, 2015). On the other hand, according to a report which includes the affirmative testimonies of the British sent from the Governorship of Antep to the British Communications Office dated November 2, 1919, the rights of many Armenian families who stayed in Antep after deportation were protected, and the government's performance of its duty was evidenced by the economic improvement of the Armenian community(BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2542-9/36). Essentially, it can be observed that the government took a number of precautions that would ease the lives of those who would return to Antep at the end of the deportation period. An example of these precautions would be the transfer of 2,000 liras to Antep on January 9, 1919. The purpose of this money was to cover the expenses of the Armenians (BCA.yer:68.37.5/fon:272.0.0.74). The value of the goods sold during deportation were refunded to their owners by the Derelict Commission. It is stated that the complaints filed by the Armenian immigrants on this issue did not reflect the facts (BCA.yer:14.51.15/fon:272.0.0.11).

The Armenians were quite content with the British invasion. They demonstrated this contentment by singing British and Armenian songs in a concert held in the Apostolic Church (transferred from Katchadourian by Gullu). Many of the Armenians who were previously exiled to Syria and the neighboring areas returned to Antep upon the British invasion, based on the guarantee of security provided to them. The number of these Armenians were around 20,000-22,000. 12,000 of them were locals or from nearby areas, while nearly 8,000 were refugees from Sivas (Gesar, 2015). Uzel (1952) indicated that the number of arriving Armenian

² These accounts began to be published by Celal Kadri Barlas, Ali Kemal Gogus and Huseyin Cemil Gogus, right before the occupation of Antep by the British in November 1918. Published until January 1921, this newspaper continued to be openly published initially, despite the British occupation, but then it was printed and distributed secretly following the French invasion in November 1919. The newspaper tried to perform its duty as an element of the Antep press by being published intermittently within the period between April 1920 and the Antep War(Barlas, t.y.).

immigrants was 25,000, and he emphasized that almost all areas of Antep were filled with these immigrants. It was stated in some memoirs that the immigrants who arrived at the city were full of confidence. This was based on their belief in the British and they acted as if they had defeated the Ottoman army(Enç, 2013).

The Armenians tried to convince the British to set up a harsh administration against the Turks by influencing the British authorities. They started to buy the goods that the Turks were selling, thinking that they would be "Armenian goods". The city was kept under pressure for days under the pretext of searching for guns. During this time, houses were searched and a curfew was enforced (Büyükoğlu, 2012). The British gradually, but rapidly, raised the level of their reactions to the Turks following their invasion of Antep. This was provoked by the Armenian translators they had employed, and was especially due to the provocation of Levonyan Ador from Antep. Taking advantage of this, some local and foreign Armenians immigrants also engaged in provocative actions against any Turks they encountered. Complaints filed by Turks to the command post of the occupation forces on these issues were inconclusive. The British confiscated all of the documents and certificates related to deportation in the government office they had raided, and took them to Egypt (Lohanizade, 1989). The British authorities have still not disclosed the majority of these documents they took from Antep. Their own officials admitted that they could not identify any information that would justify accusing the Ottoman Government in the limited number of documents they did subsequently disclose. As a matter of fact, if they were able to identify any information that could be used against the Ottoman Government, it would be more reasonable to expect them to disclose and announce that information immediately (Güllü, 2010). This oppression and state of siege lasted for 18 days. Meanwhile, a cavalry company was sent to the Lohan region located in the west of Antep. This was due to the report of a person named Somon, who was a local of Antep. The British translator, Levonyan Ador³ collected the weapons found in the village as the leader of his company(Lohanizade, 1989).

The general attitude of the British against the Turks, and especially, their collection of the weapons that the Turks had, instilled confidence in the Armenians. However, this action did not exactly please the Armenians, who indicated that the majority of the weapons collected by the British were old and unusable(Gesar, 2015). The Armenians also, apparently, took back the Armenian children located in Turkish houses following the guarantee provided by the British. According to some opinions, this was an Armenian lie. The Armenians had forcibly separated Turkish mothers from their Turkish children by claiming that they were "Armenian"(Solmaz, 1966). The Armenian schools which were closed off after the deportation were reopened, and the Armenian National Association began operation. The Armenians regained the high level of economic status that they had had in 1915. They reinvigorated their businesses and trade by rapidly restoring their houses and shops (Gesar, 2015). However, this period would not last very long for the Armenians. European diplomacy would soon change and this would result in the British, on whom they relied, to abandon the occupation and leave the city. This sequence of events led to the Armenians feeling great despair and desperation. The Antep Armenians

³ Levonyan Ador, who came to be known as General Ador, actively managed the entire Armenian front in Antep throughout the process.

were upset by the commencement of the National Struggle all across Anatolia, and the prevalence of the resistance movements against the invasions. As the thought of being annihilated in Antep began to prevail, they soon felt the need to urgently arm themselves (Gesar, 2015).

THE ARMENIANS AND THE FRENCH DURING THE PERIOD OF INVASIONS

The Syrian Agreement was signed as a result of the discussions held between the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, and the French Prime Minister, Clemenceau. As per this agreement, the British withdrew their troops from the entire southeastern region in October 1919 to be replaced by the French (Budak, 2002). The French settled in areas previously held by the British, beginning with Cilicia, as a result of the handover that was initiated on October 29, 1919. A declaration was issued that was co-signed on November 1, 1919 by the Commander of the French Military Forces in Antep and the District Governor, Felix Saint-Marie, as well as Weir, the Commander of the British Military Forces. According to this declaration, the handover was described as below:

1- The British military forces who invaded the city of Antep shall be replaced by the French military forces, as per the Paris Allied Forces Council.

2- These French military forces represent all the Allied forces, such as the British military forces, and have the same duties and authorities that the British military had during their invasion of Antep. Their duty would simply consist of maintaining the peace in the invaded area, as the British military forces had done previously. It was ensured that the public of Antep, Maras and Kilis, whether Muslim, Christian or believers of other sects, were able to live without fear and concern and in comfort while maintaining their day to day lives.

3- The occupation forces designated by the armistice shall allow the Ottoman Government to stay in charge in areas that they have occupied. The duty of the military forces is only to control the government. Since these two military administrations receive their authorities from the same source, those who suspect the accuracy of this declaration are the only ones who are the enemies of peace (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2542-9/26-28).

The Armenians were the most pleased about the French invasion, and held a welcoming ceremony for the occupation forces when they first arrived in the city. Turks meanwhile were grabbing their weapons and heading to the streets. Armenians left their shops and stores open and ran away towards the headquarters of the French. Armenian majority neighborhoods thought that the Turkish gangs were after them, and so sided with the French (Karabay, 1961). The concern and despair felt after the withdrawal of the British ended when the French invaded Antep. Almost all of the French military unit of 200 soldiers who arrived at Antep on the first days of November consisted of Armenians of the 3rd Armenian Legion. The presence of many Armenian volunteers within the French forces were especially highlighted by the Turkish press (Hakimiyet-i Milliye, 1920a). The presence of many local Armenians within the occupation forces was not only not mentioned in the armistice, but it also indicated that it was not a well-meaning initiative (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2555-2/69-70). The

movement of Armenians who voluntarily wanted to enlist in the French army from Halep under the protection of the British soldiers was also a part of the British plan. Around 1,500 of the Armenians who had started to leave Halep were sent off with the slogan, "Seek Revenge" (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2602-1/22). Volunteers who did just that joined the French in their invasion of Adana and the neighboring area. Although certain acts of violence, starting from Adana, perpetrated by the Armenians in French uniforms were also validated by Americans, it was seen that they spread lies about Armenians being massacred by Turks, and showed untrue propaganda movies (Hakimiyet-i Milliye, 1920b). Most of them were fugitives that ran off to the enemy army with their weapons in the Baghdad and Palestine fronts. This also raised the level of frenzy of local Armenians who were on the lookout for such an opportunity. The Armenians who fought against the Turks underneath and committed to the French uniform killed thousands of innocent people. It is generally known that the number of people burned in the ovens in Kozan is not less (Uygur, 2016: 188). In memoirs, it has been suggested that the Armenians who engaged in these acts insulted the Turks they came across by blaspheming God and the Prophet (Lohanizade, 1989). According to the collection of biographies addressed to General Franchet D'Esperey, dated November 11, 1919, as well as memoirs, troops consisting of local Armenians made attempts to insult the sacred beliefs and practices of the Muslim community in the region. It is notable that the public of Antep was very concerned that the various forms of attacks engaged in by the Armenian soldiers in Adana against the Muslim community would also be directed towards them (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2542-5/11). A complaint was filed to the French Emergency Commissariat of Istanbul, due to the inappropriate behavior of Armenian soldiers in Adana and the neighboring areas who were members of the French occupation forces (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2555-3/50). However, this was clearly a futile attempt.

Another comment on the process of the commencement and development of the relationship between Armenians and French, belongs to Abadie. One of the commanders of the French Forces, Abadie (2012: 16-17) has made the following observation on the general outlook of the Antep Armenians:

The Armenians have learned to use their mercy and compassion in return for the miseries of the civilized world that they have experienced. They were shown mercy and provided with assistance, especially by France. The Armenians see this country as an instrument of their revenge. Their spite for Turks is deep and violent... The feeling of nationality is a misrepresentation rather than a fact. The idea of gathering Armenians under a homeland has not been successful at all. Many intellectual Armenians agree that a piece of land that houses only Armenians is in fact unperceivable. These people only exclusively engage in trading and making money. This is why major states are not so keen on the idea of taking Armenians under their protection and managing them. Armenians are not inclined to war. However, their desire to get revenge led many of their volunteers to perform in the Armenian National Regiment.

When the handover of the occupation forces was complete, the idea that these invasions were for the establishment of Armenia and that the invasion was Armenian, and not French, began to prevail in the minds of the Turkish public. Before the French took over the region, they had established Armenian legion camps in Egypt, with the permission of the British, and had established a regiment consisting of soldiers from Palestine and the neighboring area, as well as the deported Armenians. They had also prepared 10,000 Armenians, 2,500 of which were from Antep, to be used near their own troops. 250 of these fought amongst the French forces

during the Battle of Antep (Güngör, 2004). However, while the arrival of the French gave hope to the Armenians, the concerns of the Armenians were still present. The low number of the French forces, compared to the British ones, made a bad impression on the Armenians. Provision of supplies were also poor. The state of the French troops, compared to the British forces that consisted mainly of cavalry troops, caused the Armenians to remain uncommitted. It can be stated that their negative impression of the French forces, compared to the British and French forces, was highly influential in their decision to remain impartial at the beginning of the War between Antep and France. The final decision, taken as a result of intense discussions in the Armenian Assembly, was to unite around the slogan of "Either Armenia Or Gravia" (Lohanizade, 1989). Hence, the Armenians would find themselves in the position of co-conspirators, along with developments that occurred in a very short period of time, and thus realize what a conundrum they had positioned themselves in terms of the success of the National Struggle.

In a speech he gave in a military meeting, Colonel Flye Saint Marie of the French occupation commanders said, "Peace under the French flag shall be without segregation, discrimination and fair". The point that received an extremely negative response from the Turks was the phrase, "under the French flag", as well as the fact that these troops consisted mainly of Armenians (Gesar, 2015). In a letter of warning by the Minister of War, General Cemal, to the Office of the Prime Minister, it was stated that the French were interfering with the administration of the government, trying to extend the scope of their invasion and, what is more important, were trying to eliminate the Muslim majority and replace it with Armenians (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2543-7/43-45). During the incidents that began with the French lowering the Turkish flag at the outpost of Akyol, locals made complaints to the French commanders of Armenians tormenting, killing and oppressing people. The reactions of the public focused on the Armenians. The feelings of security that the Armenians had had started to fade away. However, the French were indifferent to the situation (Gesar, 2015). By 1920, the French had begun to demonstrate attitudes that would relieve the concerns of the Armenians, and had once again instilled confidence in them. This attitude of the French gave rise to an emboldening of the Armenians. The Armenians' point of view of the events, the environment that they felt secure in, and thus their attitudes and behavior, has never been stable. Withdrawing from Maras, the French left the Armenians alone to fend for themselves. The national resistance initiated in Maras in January 1920 had succeeded and the French forces had left the city without even informing the Armenians. With the abandonment by the French, the Armenians found themselves in a desperate situation against the National Forces. These developments taking place in Maras led the Armenians into a hopeless situation once again. The Antep Armenians, whose communication with the outside world had been cut off, also had issues in arming themselves. Gesar (2015) assessed this point as an indication that the French and Turks were getting ready for war, and that they would deliver the first blow on the Armenians. The actions that the Armenians engaged in by relying on the French in Maras had cost them the lives of approximately 10,000 people. Gesar (2015) describes the process of the resistance of national forces in Antep against the invasions as a return to the days of the Committee of Union and Progress and, in a sense, refers to the deportation and the allegations of genocide. The accuracy of the news received regarding the extension of the invasion territory was confirmed on March 29. A French unit consisting of 3,000 soldiers, and

commanded by Colonel Andrea, reached Antep. The happiness of Armenians who had thought their security would be provided would be short lived. In fact, this unit would soon have to leave the city. In a statement signed by the Commander of the General French Forces of Northern Syria, General De La Motte, which was sent to be urgently announced to the public, states the following:

Our duty is only to build and maintain the peace in the region and hopefully, this reconciliation shall very soon come true. Until then the public shall calmly engage in their day to day work, and those who disturb the public shall most certainly be punished as harshly as possible (Gesar, 2015: 53).

Posting of this statement on walls in the Turkish neighborhoods received negative reactions. Gesar (2015) criticizes this action of the new troops who were ordered to leave the city on 31st of March, and argues that this was a result of the deceitful policies of the European powers. Therefore, claiming that the policy of the French during the invasion fully and clearly satisfied the Armenians does not seem possible. The cautionary approach of the Armenians towards this inconsistent policy was completely justified, and this would be realized at the end of the Battle of Antep.

CREATION OF THE ARMENIAN CENTRAL MILITARY BOARD AND THE BEGINNING OF CONFLICTS

Known by his membership of the Dashnaksutyun party in Antep, Avedis Kalemkeryan, who engaged in arms trading in Halep and elsewhere, and gained experience in bomb-making, was a very influential figure in the organization of the Armenians (Gesar, 2015). The Armenians had, up until the beginning of the Antep War, no military organization before the initiatives of Kalemkeryan. In a short period of time, the areas of the city where Armenians lived were divided into regions, and appropriate people were appointed as leaders of these regions, just as the Turks had done when they created resistance troops against the invasions. Khoren Varjabed was assigned to create a board that would consist of appropriate people who would manage conflicts with the members of political parties and associations. Hence, the Armenians took the first step in getting organized. According to Gesar, this initiative has been the foundation of the survival struggle in Antep for Armenians (Gesar, 2015).

Many boards that went on to organize Armenian activities were also created as part of the organization efforts. Adur Levonyan, who is a member of the Usumnasirats, was one of Khoren's assistants. As the child of a rich, wealthy and prominent family in Antep, Levonyan had completed his education in the Central High School of Turkey. He had served as an officer in the Turkish army, and participated in the Egyptian offensive of General Cemal where he was taken prisoner by the British. The British took advantage of Levonyan during his captivity by assigning him the duties of espionage and archiving (Gesar, 2015). As a result of the decisions that were taken, Avedis Kalemkeryan, Adur Levonyan and Khoren Varjabed were selected to be the managerial staff. When Khoren became bedbound due to tuberculosis until his death on August 5, 1920, he was replaced by Migirdic Araratyan. This is how the Armenian Central Military Board became active. It remained operational until the end of conflicts. The first order of business for the Central Military Board was to order gunpowder and

explosive materials by collecting donations. A large portion of the money required for the hand grenades that were prepared was provided by the National Association and Dashnaktsutyun. 40 bombs that were contracted by Hunchaks were also delivered to the board.

Having heard that the Turks would engage in an attack on the French on Friday, April 2, the Central Military Board placed guards at some points and immediately started working on making barricades. All Armenians, including children, played an active role in these preparations. At this time, the Armenians had 50 guns, nearly 4,000 bullets, 100 shotguns, a few old martin rifles and other similar old weapons and were in a pathetic condition, according to Gesar (2015). However, the problems experienced by Armenians would be corrected rather quickly by the French who would provide the necessary weapons and ammunition. Before the conflicts became more violent, the Turkish national forces had succeeded in cutting off the communication network of the occupation forces. It was not possible to communicate by any means other than the communication capabilities provided by the French planes that arrived regularly in March. Meanwhile, many Armenians were sent to Kilis by the French.

The Armenian National Association had taken some precautions, including the prohibition of the trade and use of alcoholic drinks among Armenians, in order to ensure order(Gesar, 2015). The intense and collective work of Armenians was appreciated by the President of the American High School, John E. Merrill. The high school principle Mr. Bevit, and the chief physician of the Hospital, Dr. Sheppard, had initially indicated that they would remain impartial in the conflicts. However, there were many local and foreign Armenians who were particularly sympathizers of America and members of the Young Christians Society. Both the school principal and the chief physician had always protected these people (Üzel, 1952). Given the tradition of the high school, the maintenance of their impartiality in such a state of war was not very believable. As a matter of fact, as it can be understood from the content of the seized letters of Fuller who was a principal of the high school in previous years, these people have always encouraged and provoked the Armenians, Doctor (Father) Shepard⁴ and their friends(BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2834/32).

Merrill, who was the president of the high school at the time said the following in one of his speeches:

The behavior and spirit of the Armenians deserved credit since the first days of this initiative. I hope the Armenians provide their own safety and live in peace with the Turks after what I've seen in the three-month period before the first day of April. I hope the Armenian leaders adopt a management style that will allow them to immediately respond to any threats and sudden attacks, whose occurrence and perpetrators cannot be known in advance, and to be able to defend themselves on their own without feeling the need to get revenge. Thanks to their

⁴ Dr. Fred D. Shepard came from America in 1882 to Antep to teach at the Central College of Turkey. He was involved in missionary activities in the region until his death due to typhus in Antep in 1915. Working for the American Board Missionary organization, the Shepards are American missionaries who have provided health services in Gaziantep, Beirut and Istanbul for three generations. Dr. Fred D. Shepard, his wife Dr. Fanny A. Shepard and their son Dr. Lorrin A. Shepard worked at the Antep American Hospital. The young Shepard followed in the footsteps of his father and always maintained strong relationships with the Armenians in the area.

protective behavior, the Armenians have demonstrated great talent, skills and also a great deal of heroism in their defense. There was no gunpowder and it was made somehow, there were no bombs and they were manufactured, there were no bullets but they were produced. Even two cannons were manufactured (Gesar, 2015: 59-60).

The fact that the Americans raised the American flag at the hospital and the High School for Girls when the conflicts began, instilled confidence in the Armenians. Therefore, the above statements of Merrill and his feelings for Armenians were put in practice. When the invasion of the French forces gained speed, the Armenians, including children, men and women, started reinforcing their barricades by carrying stones, bringing lumber, etc. Inner connections were made by drilling the walls of the houses and thus providing a passage among them. On April 10, 1920, a manufacturing plant consisting of four sections, namely, the iron works, armory, foundry and the primer preparation workshops, started operations immediately at the 2nd Protestant Church. They were able to produce hand grenades, bayonets, cartridge primers, bullets, bombs and repair rifles (Abadie, 2012). Gunpowder was also produced in this manufacturing plant. Pieces of iron located at various places were used to make bombs. Bottles were filled with poison so that they would harm people at the point where they exploded. The canon produced at the foundry was named "The Armenian's Revenge". On April 10, 1920, this revenge canon performed its first shot on Turks. Manufactured from water pipes that were melted in the foundry, the canon became unusable after a few shots. However, it was very loud and had briefly caused panic in the city. The main point that the Armenians were proud of was their engagement in conflicts at this initial phase without the help of the French. In other words, they had prepared their own weapons, supplies and ammunition, rather than relying on the French. They ended up having enough ammunition for a war that would last more than two years (Sarafian'dan akt. Güllü). Barsumyan School, the General Administrative Center and the 1st Protestant Church of Kayacik, were turned into meeting halls, while the Gregorian Church was turned into an ammunition warehouse before the inner-city conflicts turned more violent (Gesar, 2015).

The French, who chose not to be involved at all in some incidents that occurred between the Armenians and the Turks, intervened in some Armenian actions that could potentially put them in a difficult position in the future and could cause the resistance movement to intensify. One of these was the incident that occurred on April 12, 1920 as a result of the occupation of Seyh Mosque by the Armenians. While the occupation of the mosque was considered to have been a great success, there was talk among Armenians that the men of Mr. Kilic Ali could not defend the mosque. While the collapse of the minaret during the conflicts upset the Turks, it led to other concerns for the French. The French officers quite firmly expressed their opinion to Priest D. Nerses and Hagop Muradyan, whom they had asked to come to the headquarters, that the religion of Islam had been insulted with this action (Gesar, 2015). However, it can be considered that the French had this attitude due to tactics, rather than their sensitivity for another religion, and that the Turkish resistance against them could only get stronger due to incidents like this. While all these preparations were going on, some incidents escalated the present tensions even further. A group of Armenians who wanted to procure their requirements by going to the Arasa Bazaar, killed a mail distributor and a porter who had to pass by them as part of their

work. The environment of conflict was leading both sides to act without thinking. The psychological tension had given rise to new incidents and led to the idea that it would never be possible to maintain peace. When the source of the argument that a French soldier had with the Turkish grocers was perceived to be Armenians, ten Armenians were injured and one Armenian lost his life during the fight that broke out. Looking at Gesar's examples, the claim that the reasons that some ordinary cases were misrepresented and turned into motives for attacks on Armenians gains credit (Gesar, 2015). A Commission of Reconciliation, consisting of Armenians and Turks, was established following incidents such as the robbery of an automobile that belonged to the American Aid Committee⁵ on the Kilis road on February 11, the murder of a few Americans⁶, which Gesar (2015) states to have been committed by Mr. Sahin and his forces, and the disappearance of three Armenians on the same day. The mission of this commission was to alleviate the misunderstandings between the two communities, and to repair the relationships between the two nations through their bond of citizenship. However, these initiatives failed to provide the desired atmosphere of peace and cases with unknown assailants, in particular, completely destroyed whatever mutual trust was left between the two communities and escalated the already present tension to unavoidable levels. Turks who perceived the gun shots fired at a prisoner who was being chased by the gendarme on April 1, 1920 as the use of weapons by Armenians, immediately took action. This was how the inner-city war began. While the Armenians had willingly sided with the French earlier, Jews, whose numbers were low, remained by the side of the Turks (Karabay, 1961). While there is no detailed information on this in most sources on the incidents related to the Antep defense, food service and hospital records clarify this issue. In some books it is emphasized, in the form of memoirs, that the Jews sided with the Turks (Yakar and Pusat, 2014). While it is clearly stated that the Armenians, rather than the Jews, who engaged in traitorous actions, it is highlighted that the feelings of revenge, of whose source are questioned, surfaced through the collaboration with the French (Toksoy, 1938).

When inner-city conflicts began, Turks living in the Armenian neighborhood had to leave their homes and belongings and seek shelter in the Turkish neighborhoods. Armenians living in the Turkish neighborhoods also fled to their own territories. It was observed that some Armenians living in the residential areas of Turks insisted on not leaving their homes. Eventually, they had to do so, which led to the homogenization of the neighborhoods. The belongings of the Armenians who previously lived in Turkish neighborhoods were secured by the Property Protection Commission by being collected and sent to Kurkcü Han. None of the houses were destroyed, but loopholes were opened at locations that were appropriate for firing. Despite all of this, it was being said that the Turkish houses in the Armenian neighborhoods were being destroyed and the belongings looted (Türk İstiklal Harbi, 2009). In some memoirs, it has been stated that the Armenians harmed the houses more in comparison to the Turks. Due to the damage, there were almost no habitable homes left in Kozanlı,

⁵Some of these aid committees were founded through the encouragement of the Christian Herald newspaper to provide monetary aid to Armenians (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2834/32).

⁶Bodies found buried where the Americans had been murdered, were later brought to Antep and buried at the American High School. While the number of the Americans who were murdered was stated as being two in Ottoman records and other Turkish sources, it was stated as being four by Abadi (Gullu, 2010). The fact that the American Aid Committee was there with the knowledge of the government does not resolve the matter. There are no issues with the Americans, but the problem is the assistance of this committee to the Armenians.

Akyol, Pasa Street and the Kurdish neighborhoods, which included more than 2,000 households. According to the provided reports, the costs of damage caused in this way is generally higher than those caused by war. It was reflected in the reports of the special commission that the cost of the destruction caused by the Armenians and the French had reached 40 million metal coins, and that 2,657 homes had been completely destroyed in the Kozanli Neighborhood alone (Lohanizade, 1989).

A number of initiatives were put in practice in order to rebuild the close relationships between the two communities, who had managed to live together in peace for centuries, so that the conflicts did not lead to bigger problems and would not fall victim to the exploitive policies of the Western world. In this respect, many letters were sent to the leaders of the Armenian Congregation by the Turks, warning them not to believe the French. In a letter sent to the Armenian Assembly, the following was outlined:

Citizens, our fight is not with you. Our enemies are the French. Don't be fooled by the French; the French are deceiving you. Do not believe in them. You have lived with us for six hundred years and can be sure that you will continue to do so (Gungor, 2004: 132).

The declarations were not only handed to the Armenians. Mr. Kilic Ali, in particular, would send declarations to the people of Antep, as well to prevent potential conflicts. In one of these declarations, the following was stated:

The national forces have no ill-will and intention of abuse against the Armenians, the Muslims and Armenians, who have no responsibility for the war that has begun in the city in the last few days. There is no reason for these two communities to be hostile towards each other, everyone should just open up their shops and be busy with their work, while those who breach the peace in the city shall be severely punished... (Gungor, 2004: 132).

However, such letters emphasizing that the Turks have no animosity towards the Armenians were not only insincere, according to Gesar, (Gesar, 2015: 60) but also manipulative and nothing more than the reiteration of "Turkish cunningness and hypocrisy". This is certainly an extreme interpretation and assessment. Gesar's display of a populist approach is obviously apparent in this assessment. During the days of the armistice, it was the Turks turn to not believe in the decision of the Armenians to have good relationships with the Turks and not to cooperate with the French. Even though old Armenians were sincere in their decision, the desire of the young members, who made up the majority of the population, to err on the side of conflicts became the precursor of the incidents to follow. Unler (1969) writes that Armenians were expected to make a move, even though they looked docile. He also considers the failure to collect the arms of the Armenians, and the condonation of their accumulation of supplies during the armistice period, even if it was required by the conjuncture, as being extremely unwise. These comments can be considered as evidence that both sides had completely lost faith in each other. One of the most noteworthy allegations that Gesar (2015) made was the underhand sale of arms to Armenians by the Turks. According to this allegation, arms dealers not only consisted of ordinary soldiers and officers, they also included high-ranking officers. The reason for the disappearance of a proportion of the many weapons and ammunition that were procured from the regular army was this secret arms sale. This allegation is far from the truth. The failure of the national forces, who were

in great need of weapons and ammunition, to monitor the weapons in such a time, does not appear to be wise. Hence, one of the most noteworthy issues in the correspondences of the figures who commanded the national forces, particularly Mr. Ozdemir, is the insufficiency of weapons and ammunition. Ammunition was the main commodity that was requested by the overseas military forces. If the significant level of risk that must be taken by the people who had the potential to engage in such misconduct is acknowledged, it can be concluded that these allegations are far from the truth. Improper provision of weapons to Armenians by the Turks would be outside the knowledge of the high-ranking commanders, and could also only be done on an individual basis. It is also known that the required care was shown and that the necessary precautions were taken against such misconduct (Üzel, 1952). However, it is also argued that some people who were prone to such misconduct were approached by the Armenians, and some of those attempts were successful (Sarafian'dan akt. Güllü).

Mr. Kilic Ali brought a delegation to persuade (two Armenian priests and a few prominent Armenian figures) from Maras on April 9, 1920 and sent them to the Armenians on April 11 (Büyükoğlu, 2012). However, all attempts to convince the Armenians to be at least impartial remained inconclusive. The Armenians subsequently decided to side with the French following pressure of the young Armenians in the national assembly. Abadie (Abadie, 2012: 75) would clarify this as follows:

The Turks are exerting great pressure on the Armenians and are asking them to cooperate with themselves for banishing the French through soft and sweet promises, and by threatening them with a massacre. But the Armenians remain loyal to us and move on by being committed to defending their position until their last breath.

Meeting with Mr. Kilic Ali, a committee including the American High School Principle Mr. Merrill, asked Mr. Kilic Ali to remove his headquarters from the city in return for his proposal for the Armenians to lay down their weapons. Mr. Kilic Ali responded positively to this request, though unwillingly. The concern to enable the impartiality of the Armenians was influential in this decision. Hence, his headquarters were transferred to Kizilhisar. However, as soon as this transfer took place, the Armenian and French attacks on the Turkish positions began. Therefore, it was understood that the real purpose of such maneuvers was to remove Kilic Ali and his forces (Güllü, 2010). In one of the meetings between the Turks and the Armenians, Mr. Merrill did not allow an Armenian to speak after Mr. Ahmet Muhtar, who spoke on behalf of the Turkish side. Mr. Merrill also used remarks that would drive a wedge between the two parties. After this, another Armenian speaker spoke and felt the need to correct Merrill's words. As can be understood from these examples, the conflict between these two communities was directly beneficial for the Western states, who were able to take concrete actions in order to realize their goals in the growing environment of distrust. Some, although only a few, Armenians were aware of this game⁷. It is for the reason of seeing all Armenians as co-conspirators leads to a conundrum where the historical facts are distorted or ignored. This, in turn, provides opportunities for the exploitive policies which benefit from the wedge that is driven between the two communities. In addition to the

⁷ An Armenian citizen, who was known as Artin the Physician in Antep where he had served as a doctor and a pharmacist for a long time, had preferred to side with the Turks even though the majority of his congregation was on the side of the French. He was even assigned to work as a postman by the National Forces for correspondence with the French. He was murdered by his own son due to his significant closeness with the National Forces (Güzelhan, 1959).

ultimatums sent by the French to the Turkish forces, the Armenians also sent ultimatums to the Turks from time to time. On the August 15, 1920, in addition to the three ultimatums previously sent by the French, a fourth ultimatum was sent by the Armenians. This ultimatum, signed by Fistikciyan Ador, included the following statement:

If you Turks do not unconditionally surrender your weapons to the French occupation forces by tonight, we, the Armenians, consider it necessary to initiate a total conflict as of tonight in order to make you accept these terms of surrender (Lohanizade, 1989: 116).

The French organized raids on Turkish villages from time to time with the Armenian soldiers they had brought along with them. This French unit of assistance, consisting mostly of Armenians, organized a sudden raid on the village of Arapdar and kicked people with no weapons out of their homes, despite it being a cold winter day. (Toksoy, 1938) Gesar (2015) indicated that the incident of Arapdar was unfairly pinned on the Armenians. However, a committee, including two French officers, which was established for the examination and investigation of the incident, saw the resulting destruction on the site and validated the incident (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2543-11/19-24). Chaired by the Governor, Mr. Celal, the committee consisted of the Gendarme Commander, Major Talat; one of the members of the Administrative Council, the son of the Mufti, Haydar; the son of Landowner Haji Halil, Landowner Ahmed; the Mufti from the Muslim community; Mr. Nuri; Mr. Emin; Mr. Hamdi; Mr. Mahmud; Mr. Haci; Mr. Mehmed Al; Landowner Serif; Captain Renoir, whom Colonel Felix Sainte Marie authorized to act on his behalf due to his health issues; Monsieur Valtan and the Gendarme Company Commander, Captain Mr. Esad. A report, including the list of the casualties, was prepared as a result of the investigation (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2544-17/25). Mr. Kilic Ali indicates, in the information below which he provided during the following years, how the Armenians knowingly and willingly played an active role in such raids:

The main helpers of the occupation forces were unfortunately the Armenians. I will be part of the policy of the patriarch and the patriarchate at the time, as well as the documents we obtained in my Maras and Aintab memoirs. You will see how the Armenian Patriarchate and the French commanders have operated in our country, and what their state of mind was during this time. You will also learn how they attacked the Muslim community with the mentality of a Crusaders' alliance (Kilic, 1963: 11).

The Armenians were not only digging trenches and preparing weapons for the French, they were also engaging in espionage activities. Sensing that the Turks were preparing, the French tried to reinforce their military presence in Antep by preparing new forces from the Cilicia territory, while also reinforcing their espionage organizations. The French took advantage of the Armenians for this purpose as they knew the area very well. Although most of these spies were captured by the Turkish forces, the French had succeeded in becoming aware of the actions of the Turkish forces on a day to day basis (Doğanay, 1965). One of the groups positioned in the city by the Armenians was assigned with a mission of arson (Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi, 2012). There were a number of arson incidents in the first years of the occupation as well. In these incidents, the French did not refrain from intervening in the judicial process when the perpetrators were caught. For example, the French were both insistent and threatening in securing the release of the three Armenians who were caught

red-handed while they were about to start a fire in the Antep bazaar (BOA.HR.SYS.nu.2543-6/30). It was indicated that some Armenians looked upset and remorseful because of the deceit and tricks of the French, despite their obvious cooperation with them (ATBD, 1997a).

Positioned on the hills located at the east and south of Antep, the French artilleries heavily bombarded the Turkish neighborhoods on April 16. This incident was the first conflict that brought the French army and the Turkish forces face to face. The Armenians hung French flags on their houses during the conflicts. In this way, they were taking a form of precaution by showing their location to the French artilleries (ATBD, 1997b). Forces under the command of the French commander, Bremont, started the siege by arriving at Antep from Kilis and positioning themselves in the west and the north on April 17. On the same day, the Armenians organized an attack on, and took control of, the house of the Muslim Community's leader, Mr. Bulbulzade Abdullah, which was located in an area between the Armenian and Turkish districts. They procured supplies such as wheat, flour and peanuts from the house of Bulbulzade, which would last until an expected supply of 12 vehicles would arrive from Kilis. These were approximately worth 700 gold coins. Providing the narratives of Levonyan, Gesar (2015) indicated that Mr. Arslan was present during the conflicts at Bulbulzade's house, but that he could not be captured even though he was pursued. While the conflicts were continuing, General Gauraud issued a report stating that the national forces are not legal, and that they should stop all their activities within eight days by referring to a fatwa which was one of the measures taken by the Government of Istanbul against the National Forces. This report was distributed as a notice published in Turkish. In the aforementioned fatwa, it was stated that the national forces were betraying their own country and also acting against God. Even though the Armenians and the French expected these notices that were distributed in the Turkish neighborhoods to create differences of opinion and cause divisions among Turks, they were only mocked by the Turkish troops. The responses to the ultimatums sent by the Turkish forces to the Armenians can be considered as being very useful in understanding the intentions of the Armenians. In fact, in these responses, the assessment style of the Istanbul Government, with respect to the incidents taking place in Anatolia was also referred to. The following statements from one of the responses require attention:

We are not rebels revolting against the Ottoman Empire. We are only protecting ourselves from the gangs you call the National Forces. We are ready, with the help of God, to fight against the gangs and protect our existence until our last breath (Gesar, 2015: 83).

On April 26, Colonel Flye Saint Marie would issue a notice addressed to the Armenians. The following were highlighted in the notice:

Armenians of Antep! I'm happy because of the bravery and heroism you have demonstrated and I'd like to offer you my deepest gratitude. I congratulate your military bravery and your faith in being united. Now you have to demonstrate two more of your attributes; these are calmness and solemnity. I will do my best to alleviate your concerns for nearly a month (Gesar, 2015: 79).

The Armenians had gained self-confidence. However, sometimes Gesar indicates this self-confidence in an exaggerated way. According to the narratives, based on the memories of Nerses Bagdoyan who was the leader

of the 3rd Armenian District, Colonel Normand and his company, who wanted to visit the Armenian territories, were prevented from doing so by an Armenian who was on duty there. The rationale for this was the lack of a permission from the district leader. This was interpreted by Normand as evidence that the Armenians were disciplined soldiers committed to their duty, which led Normand to appreciate them (Gesar, 2015). An important reason of this self-confidence that the Armenians came to possess needs to be linked with some news that had been spread, even though its accuracy has not exactly been confirmed. This news was attracting interest among the Armenians, and was spreading quickly by word of mouth. According to this news, if the French troop withdrew from Beirut, the Greeks and the Armenians would unite and deliver a big blow to the Turks in Mersin. Also according to this news, an army of 150,000 Greeks and Armenians had launched an assault against Mustafa Kemal's army. Another suggestion was that volunteers had declared the Armenian Republic of Mesopotamia at Amanos, and 10,000 soldiers sent by the American President were on their way there (Gesar, 2015).

While most of the Armenians served in the conflicts against Turks, some were organizing entertainment parties with the French soldiers, having decided that this adventure would not lead anywhere, and were in fact making plans to leave with the French. It is known that the French commanders organized these entertainment events and dinner parties at the houses or mansions of Armenians (Oğuzcan, 1966). Officials of the National Association and the Central Military Board would ask Colonel Abadie to prevent such parties so that such actions would not spread among the Armenians. Upon this, Abadie promised them that such events would not be organized without the permission of the National Association and the Central Military Board. There are some anecdotes indicating that the lives and integrity of vulnerable Armenians, as opposed to those who side and collaborate with the occupying French, were protected by the Turkish forces. In an anecdote on this, Lohanizade (1989: 89-90) states the following:

A French officer who was under the influence of the entertaining time he had with the Armenian girls, and his subsequent dreams, refers to our guard to pass to the Armenian neighborhood. The guard pushes him away with his bayonet saying, "It's forbidden". Finally, the matter is referred to the 2nd Company Commander, Lieutenant Okkes Bahri. The Armenian translator does not want to directly translate the remarks of the French officer, but the officer's behavior reveals the translator's lie. Upon this, Mr. Okkes says, "Oh God! All we care about here is our country and look what these guys are after!" and he continues: "Come on Monsieur! Go back. We'll be protecting the dignity of Armenians today. We are not one of those nations who contaminate the war zone with their sensual desires... Learn to control your urges before occupying a land."

One of the noteworthy cases in the Antep War was the hunger that arose in the city. Hunger put not only Turks, but also Armenians, in a very difficult position. Armenian soldiers could only be provided with two ladles of soup in the morning, and 275 g of bread with 75 g of raisins or 150 g of peanuts for other meals. The required salt could only be obtained by destroying bakeries, since the bakers hid the salt underground. Since it was required to enter gardens in order to be able to find green vegetables, onions, garlic and beans, the risk of facing the Turkish forces positioned in these gardens had to be taken. For this reason, very few of the Armenians who entered the gardens were able to come back. Mentioning that an Armenian soldier had the

right to eat seven or eight beans and an onion or garlic, Gesar (2015) emphasizes that anyone who obtained those rights was one of God's beloved subjects. These remarks display the severity of the hunger that was experienced. The Antep Armenians did not have a chance to stock their annual supplies when they returned from exile. In addition, Turks were banned from selling supplies to them, as the tensions between them and the Turks rose. The bans did not exclusively include the Armenians. The French's purchase of poles and lumber in large amounts from the Direkci bazaar had attracted a lot of attention. When it was realized that these were to be used for fortification, their sale was also banned just like the food items. This incident put a significant strain on relationships which were already tense (Ünler, 1969). The sale of goods to French and Armenians was an issue that the Turks were particularly careful about. As a matter of fact, since trading with the Armenians was considered to be treason, no Turk in Antep took the risk of selling supplies to the Armenians. For this reason, their source of supplies was either Armenian neighborhoods, French army warehouses or looted Turkish houses (Gesar, 2015). Abadie had provided 2 tons of flour on one occasion to the Armenians from the French warehouses, and gave them the heads and feet of a large number of cattle that had been slaughtered for the French soldiers. Such logistical support provided by the French gave Armenians confidence and provided an important contribution in their fight against hunger. Nearly 15 tons of food supplies were also delivered to the Armenians during the transportation of the French military unit. The Turkish forces were organizing attacks from time to time to stop these aids, and the Armenians were proceeding to obtain what was left of the supplies. Through the arrangements made by Abadie at the end of May, it was decided that around 5,000 Armenians would be sent out of the city along with the French so that they would not suffer from the food shortage. Gesar (2015) interpreted this arrangement as a form of escape after two months of combat, and expressed his concern for the possibility of the fate of Antep being similar to that of Maras. After the third group of Armenians were sent away from the city, the level of disappointment among the Armenians was quite high. They had started selling their goods that they could not carry. While comparing these experiences to the events of 1915, Gesar indicated that the only difference was the fact that the Turks bought the Armenian goods more cheaply compared to the prices of 1915. These events and developments are, in a sense, the harbinger of the end.

Arriving at Antep by plane, Commander Gauraud explained in the meeting at the National Association that a ceasefire agreement was signed with General Mustafa Kemal as a result of the meetings held, and that a ceasefire which would last for 20 days was declared, according to this armistice. According to the provisions of this armistice, Antep would be evacuated. The French had promised that they would look out for and protect the Armenians in this area, even if it would be discreet. Another complex issue arose for Armenians after the ceasefire. During the conflicts that lasted for 60 days, the Armenians were in a very difficult position because of the food shortage. During the armistice (May 30 - June 18), the Turks did not intervene in any of their attempts to obtain food items, and their weapons were also not collected. Although the French commanders proposed leaving the city under the protection of the French convoys to the Armenian leaders during the implementation of the sections of the armistice regarding Antep, this proposal did not gain acceptance among the Armenians. Turks were hoping that the French would evacuate Antep. The French were concerned about having a new

problem on their hands in Antep. The Armenians were gravely concerned as they suspected that the armistice would turn into permanent peace. The Armenians would either have to immigrate or live under the governance of Turks. According to Gesar, (2015) there was a misunderstanding between the French and the Turks. The Turks were insisting that what General Mustafa Kemal wanted was for the French to leave Antep completely and not just its center, while the French were stating that what they were notified of was only the evacuation of the city center. On the other hand, the Armenians did not want the French to completely leave the city, and were thinking that it would be enough for them to just leave the city center. At the same time they were also afraid that the Turks could breach the Armenian barricades and reach the Armenian neighborhoods. The board representatives proceeded to notify Colonel Abadie of the decision they took among themselves. The Armenians indicated that their current position would need to be maintained, or otherwise they would need to be evacuated from the city in three groups. Abadie knew that it was impossible to maintain the current position, and that it was hard to evacuate people in three groups. Most of the Armenians would have to walk because of the insufficiency of the number of transportation vehicles. This was a point of disappointment, amazement and uncertainty for the Armenians (Gesar, 2015).

The prevalent opinion among the Armenians was to go ahead with the immigration. The National Association had provided the Armenians with the liberty to make their own decisions. As a result, it was decided that a referendum would be held. The discussions led to the decision to not go through with the immigration and to continue the fight. Hence, the Armenians and Turks were now solely against each other and the French had disappointed the Armenians once again (Gesar, 2015). This was actually a result of the traditional European policy. It was known, especially in the colonial policies of the French, that they used the groups who were close to them in areas where they conquered, and only engaged in conflicts where necessary, without shedding any French blood. Therefore, it can be said that the Antep Armenians were directly sacrificed for the French policy. As a matter of fact, despite the telegram that the Kilis Armenians sent to General Mustafa Kemal on June 17, 1920, indicating their loyalty - either genuine or not - the Antep Armenians preferred not to end their relationships with the French (Üzel, 1952).

WHAT DID THE ARMENIANS WANT AND WHAT HAPPENED?

The discussions that the Armenians had among themselves concentrated on impartiality. No matter what the decision to be taken at that point would be, it would determine their destiny. The French were obviously not happy at all with the impartiality decision that was taken initially and communicated to the Turks. The French reacted adversely to the fact that Armenians were maintaining good relationships with them on one hand, while collaborating with the Turks on the other hand. For this reason, the French always tried to draw the Armenians into the war. They finally succeeded, and the French who were provocative in terms of actions that would disrupt, impartiality positioned themselves in important locations in the Armenian districts and fired shots at the Turks. Hence, the Armenians were drawn into the war. When the conflicts were over and the city was surrendered to the French, the Armenians and Turks did not contact each other for 20 days. A major part

of Antep was destroyed, and only a small population was left in the city. People hit by hunger took miserable shelter in caves without food or water. Many Armenians came from Halep to Antep hoping to be assigned to a position or an official role. Dr. Mecit was appointed as the interim governor and the rebuilding of the city began. After a period of conflicts, efforts concentrated on trying to erase traces of the past. This period would not last for long for the Armenians. As a matter of fact, a draft of the agreement signed between the French Government and Mr. Bekir Sami would be announced by being posted on walls on March 20. Everyone knew that this meant that the French forces would leave Antep, and that the management of the city would be transferred to the national forces. Therefore, this development, which led to a great deal of panic among the Armenians, would cause those who came from Halep with whatever dreams they had to try to return as quickly as possible. The state of immigration that came about was irreversible (Gesar, 2015).

When the French announced in a statement on October 6th that they would completely evacuate the northern part of the Baghdad railway until January 1, 1922, the fate of the Armenians was sealed. While the French were leaving the region of Cukurova along with Antep, 30,000 Armenians left the region with them (McCarthy, 2018). When the last French troop left the city on December 25, 1921, there were only 3,500 Armenians left, and most of them did not have enough money to immigrate. The French forces on whom they had leaned on for 2 years were no longer in the city and so no Armenian felt safe. Although the entry of the national forces in the city for the first time caused inevitable panic for the Armenians, the Turks treated them kindly and politely. The fields in the village and the produce in the orchards and vineyards were bought from their owners and transferred to their Armenian owners. During this time, no one wanted to speak of what had happened in the past.

Persisting for around three months, this period would eventually bring about a number of bans, reactions and isolations. The Central Board prohibited doing business and engaging in commerce with the Armenians. The Turks who were in partnerships with Armenians were pressured into ending these partnerships. The Armenian schools were not permitted to be reopened. Most Armenian houses were destroyed. Articles targeting Armenians were published in the Gaziantep Newspaper dated October 9, 1922. When attacks against Armenians escalated through a number of isolated incidents, the remaining 3,000 or so Armenians were forced to leave town. It is also argued that the Armenians' feelings of shame, rather than a fear of massacre against them, were influential in their decision to leave Antep. However, the prevailing opinion among Armenians on this issue is the likelihood of a massacre. Svazlian (Gullu, 2010: 387) describes this mentality as follows:

The French Government did not fulfill the responsibility of an ally, and handed Cilicia over to the Turkish army through the treaty signed on October 20, 1921 in Ankara. This exposed the Cilician Armenians to the danger of a massacre.

As a result, after the signing of the Treaty of Ankara, the social and economic relationships between the two communities came to an end with the effect of the dynamics of the society at the time. The Armenians collectively left Antep and moved to Halep, where the Central College of Turkey and the Boarding School for Girls, founded with the collaboration of the Syrian Protestant Mission, were located (Çukurova, 1999).

According to the 1927 Census, there were 55 Christians in Antep. 45 of those were Armenians (Umumî Nüfus Tahriiri, 1929). Within the 9-year period between 1930 and 1939, properties in various areas of Antep that belonged to the Armenians were cheaply sold to Muslims through auctions (Çukurova, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The Ottoman Empire included communities of different ethnicities and religions as required by the lands it owns and the geographical regions it dominated. While it regulated the socio-economic relationships between these communities and the Muslims in line with Islamic Law and Customary Law, it enabled the survival of these different ethnic and religious groups who were subject to its authority. Although its diplomatic relationships can be a matter of discussion, these groups did not create any problems during the periods when the empire was strong. However, along with the beginning of the collapse and the policy change of the European diplomacy for dismembering the Ottoman Empire, the non-Muslim population was turned into a trump card that was always used against the Ottoman Empire. The European diplomacy felt the need to frequently intervene in the internal politics of the Ottoman Empire through a number of impositions, including the Edict of Reform, with the notion of a fellowship of Christianity. Both the European States and Russia were influential in the deadlocks of the Ottoman Empire in its national and international policies through their consideration of themselves as the protectors of the non-Muslim groups living within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. The agendas of these states were actually shaped by the requirements of colonial policies, rather than a religious sensitivity for the ethnic structure of the Ottoman Empire.

In this context, the Armenians, who are referred to by the well-known expression as the Loyal Nation, became an instrument that shaped the policies of the European Diplomacy for the Ottoman Empire, and this is an issue that must be considered as part of these colonial policies. Even though the European States acted with the slogan of an autonomous or fully independent Armenian state, this was not an issue of primary significance for them and the real matter was the coverage of the Ottoman territories with the colonial policy. The Treaty of Berlin, dated July 13, 1878, was a precursor of how the military actions of the European forces would develop in the future, in terms of the diplomatic momentum it provided.

Implementing serious policies on the groups who were subjects of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of World War One, which in itself was initiated by the colonial competition, Western diplomacy began taking advantage of the non-Muslim groups whom they enchanted with the promise of freedom and from a military perspective. In addition to the Russians deploying Armenians on the eastern front, both the British and the French have most certainly, as their invasions began, taken advantage of the Armenians in their actions in locations that are close to oil fields. Maintaining their existence as the subjects of the Ottoman Empire until the beginning of World War One, the Armenians were dominant in almost all economic activities in the territories where they were present, and their level of welfare was at a very high point. They had almost gained an even more favorable position than that of the Muslim Turks with the advantages that the Edict of Reform provided. They were also dominant in international trade since they had economic dominance and were able to move

quite freely in these activities. They were able to raise their level of financial wealth day after day through overseas commerce by expanding their activities to trading areas such as Lebanon and Beirut. They also had no significant social problems in the areas that they lived, and particularly in Gaziantep which this article concentrates on. They were an integral part of the social fabric along with the Muslims. The state had no negative point of view or attitude on their high living standards. The state provided the necessary support, including the repair of their places of worship and the opening of their schools, at a level that was even higher than what was required by the law for subjects. Whether this was related to foreign policy or not could be a separate matter of debate; however, the system was no different than the policies implemented by the Turkish State for years. In fact, it was more than that. There were extensive rights granted to the non-Muslims at the cost of being accused, because of those of the Muslim subjects of the empire.

The question of why the Armenians walked away from such an environment and embarked on an unfathomable adventure did not only occupy the minds of the Turks. The catastrophes caused by the events led to questions such as how the Armenians were used as instruments in the colonial policies of the Western States, why the atmosphere of peace was disrupted for no reason, and how the distrust against the Armenians could be resolved. It also caused a conundrum in the way the elements of the society view each other. The fact that the Armenians who had been considered to be the Loyal Nation for centuries became/were led to become co-conspirators and traitors in an instant, actually harmed the state which they had directly been a part of for many years and the country they live in. Put simply, in Gaziantep, which they had to completely evacuate, there was no one left to lead the sectors that they had dominated. As they could not be replaced, this resulted in significant volatility, especially in the economy. The hostile view of both societies towards each other has maintained its presence for a long time through the psychological deviation experienced over time by both societies in terms of social dynamics. This provided benefits for the policies of the “foreign powers”, which is an expression that is frequently articulated in both political and populist discourses.

The attitudes of the British and the French towards the Armenians during the time of the invasions varied within their general policies that had the purpose of dismembering the Ottoman Empire and erasing it from history altogether. It is for this reason that the Armenians did not feel safe until later on when they realized they had been used. Actually, this was also related to the paradoxical maneuvers of the occupation forces that changed rather quickly over very short periods of time. When it was all over, they had no explanations for what had happened. This feeling of guilt was also influential in the fact that they had to leave their country, Turkey, where they had lived in peace for centuries.

Gesar is aware that the Turkish Armenians, especially on the basis of Antep Armenians, were tricked by Western diplomacy. It is possible to see this in various sections of his book by reading in between the lines. However, it is generally observed that he is not able to rid himself of the effect of populism, and a strict sense of nationalism, while he conveys the events. In memoirs, the predominance of the feelings of nationalism from time to time for both parties while conveying the events can be understandable, but the extreme intensity of

the emotions expressed make it difficult for the subject matter to be understood. These kinds of narratives are taken as references for both populist and political discourses, and hence events are distanced from their plain state and shaped into whatever is tried to be conveyed. While political concerns prioritize the distortion of the events in line with internal and external paradigms, some publications completely change the facts, going beyond editing the events with the sole intention of financial gains. Perhaps Gesar did not write this book with financial concerns and simply put his intense emotions on paper. Perhaps he addressed the issue in line with the political view of the state that he was a citizen of during the time he lived. These questions can be discussed separately, but the works of Gesar and other writers who wrote their memoirs in his style are usually considered as suitable references today and the matters of debate are only revived from time to time. However, the following question can be asked: "Who benefits from discussions which consider the issue from the point of view of both societies?" A response which is free from subjectivity would allow the varied psychological obsessions among the two societies who are the focal points of the discussion to be removed. This would in a sense, and on a higher level, remove the powers who manipulate the issue for their political gains from the field. Hence, the notion of "looking for a reason related to the Armenians for any problem" for the Turkish society, and the psychosis of "deportation" for the Armenian society would be alleviated, and a reconciliation would be made possible. Some incidents, primarily the deportation incident that created a deep division between the societies bothered/continue to bother the loyal Armenian citizens of the Republic of Turkey who have not been deceived by the separatist policies of any power, as such incidents are referred to by western diplomacy. The issue can be resolved by enabling social reconciliation through staying away from populist approaches, and maintaining an open mind during the search for a culprit. The peaceful environment that had been shared for almost a millennium covers a period that is much longer than the one where these unwanted incidents took place.

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